

# A Study of Nusantara Islam in the Context of Multiculturalism in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

This study will focus on the peculiarity of Nusantara Islam amidst the setting of Indonesian multiculturalism by studying the content analytically based on 21 documents indexed by Scopus. For that reason, Islam is seen harmoniously merged within the variances of the Indonesia cultural setting for religious tolerance to meet societal peaceful coexistence. The findings prove Nusantara Islam is inclusive, and flexible, and hence has emerged pivotal in unifying the highly fractionalized populace along unifying bonds of unity over diversity. It struggles for sustainability amidst the growing transnational ideologies, globalization, and digital dissemination of radical discourses. This paper underlines the value of Nusantara Islam as a model of religious moderation and provides recommendations on how to meet contemporary challenges. The research enriches the body of knowledge dealing with the interrelationship between religion and multiculturalism in ways that benefit the global discourses of interfaith harmony and cultural pluralism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nusantara Islam, multiculturalism, religious tolerance, Indonesia, cultural adjustment Introduction Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world and symbolizes a magnanimous proposition of cultural diversity and richness. With over 1,300 recognized ethnic groups and hundreds of local languages, pluralism and multiculturalism hallmark the social landscape of Indonesia [1], [2]. In this respect, Nusantara Islam-the term used to describe the uniquely Indonesian interpretation and practice of Islam-has increasingly represented an

important model of religious moderation and cultural adjustment. Unlike more rigid interpretations of Islam often identified with the Middle East, Nusantara Islam has managed to merge Islamic teachings smoothly with local culture for cohesive coexistence within a multi-ethnic society [3], [4].

Indonesian multiculturalism presents perhaps the most dramatic and singular backdrop against which to understand the interpretation and integration of Islamic principles within a socio-cultural ethos marked by ethnic and religious diversity. The

coexistence of various belief systems, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and that of indigenous peoples, influenced how Islam evolved within this country and turned it into a critical case for those interested in religion and cultural diversity [5]. It has great relevance today, given the scenario of religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue in the current world. First and foremost, Nusantara Islam must touch on modern-day problems of society, such as religious extremism, social fragmentation, and eroded traditional values. Nusantara Islam guarantees, within a world filled with inclusive thoughts, tolerance, and a pertinent cultural bearing, Indonesia's multi-ethnic spirit, acting as an international model that Islam adapts to other socio-cultural landscapes of the world. However, academic studies on Nusantara Islam within the framework of multiculturalism are highly fragmented, and this calls for a systematic review that will synopsise prior knowledge and point out the research gaps that need to be filled [6], [7].

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definition of Nusantara Islam

Nusantara Islam is generally understood to be the Indonesian expression of Islam, which was to integrate Islamic principles and values into local cultural traditions. Scholars argue that this Islam has been developed through centuries of interaction between Arab traders, local rulers, and indigenous communities [8]. It preaches the values of moderation, inclusivity, and adaptability, which enable Islamic teachings to coexist in harmony with the wide variety of cultural and religious practices found throughout Indonesia. Several studies highlight how rituals, arts, and social customs unique to Indonesia, such as the Javanese slametan or Acehese meugang, embody this synthesis [5], [9]. These practices illustrate how Nusantara Islam aligns with the cultural identity of its adherents, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

### 2.2 Multiculturalism in Indonesia

Multiculturalism in Indonesia is deeply rooted in the country's Pancasila ideology, which promotes unity in diversity (Bhineka Tunggal Ika). This is the philosophy underlying, to a large extent, Indonesia's balancing efforts between religious plurality and national integration. In their works, scholars like [10] and [11] have identified those societies that recognize policies and practices in respect for diversity in culture and religion as favorable for the realization of multiculturalism. The Indonesian experience symbolizes this balance of accommodating different belief systems towards an Islamic society. Literature shows that interfaith dialogue, education, and government policies promote social harmony in diversity. [11], [12].

### 2.3 Research Gaps

Despite the available literature on the cultural and historical underpinning of Nusantara Islam, there is limited research with regards to its role in contemporary issues facing the world today, such as radicalization and religious intolerance. This also means that a set of profound, critical summaries of previous literature in the form of review articles on the topic at hand is relatively scant. It is within such gaps that the rationale for the study presented in this paper, based on findings from 21 Scopus-indexed documents, lies, leading to deeper insight into how Nusantara Islam interfaces with multiculturalism.

### 2.4 Theoretical Framework

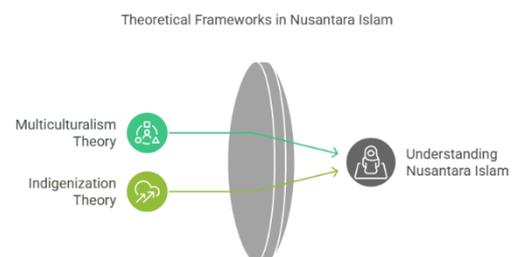


Figure 1. Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework of this research integrates multiculturalism theory by [13] and indigenization theory by [14]. In the context of this research, multiculturalism theory helps to conceptualize the co-existence

of several cultural and religious identities within a single society. Indigenization theory explains the internalization of external religious influences and localization of ideas in order to harmonize these ideas with local traditions. An integration of the two frameworks provides a basis to analyze how Nusantara Islam functions in Indonesia as a religious and cultural phenomenon in a multicultural context.

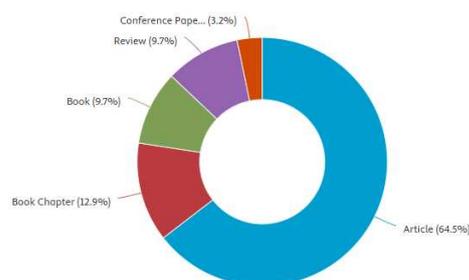
### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research is based on a qualitative, descriptive design to investigate the association between Nusantara Islam and multiculturalism. It therefore seeks to highlight the main themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature. By integrating information from various sources, this paper endeavors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject and offer practical recommendations for further research.

#### 3.2 Data Sources

Data in this research involve 21 Scopus-indexed documents between 2000 and 2024. These were then selected by taking into consideration those closely related to the subject of Nusantara Islam, multiculturalism, and religious studies in Indonesia. Materials used are based on reputable publisher sources: international journals, proceedings of conferences, and book chapters.



Most of the documents analyzed, 64.5%, are journal articles, indicating the importance of this type of document as the main medium of scholarly discourse on Nusantara Islam and multiculturalism. Journal articles present high-quality, peer-reviewed insights into the subject matter; therefore, they are of great importance for academic communication in this field. Book

chapters account for 12.9% of the documents, reflecting their role in providing in-depth discussions and contextual analyses of particular themes related to Nusantara Islam and multiculturalism. These are often chapters included in edited volumes, adding to the richness of the knowledge base. Books account for 9.7% of the documents and reflect their importance in providing extensive coverage in depth on subject matters. Many of these publications cover historical, cultural, and theoretical aspects that cannot be captured by the shorter formats.

On a related note, reviews (9.7%) serve a very important role in synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying gaps, and outlining future directions, signaling an attempt at consolidation of the literature on Nusantara Islam, which is growing rapidly. Conference papers represent 3.2% of the documents, contributing preliminary findings and discussions to the academic discourse, although playing a less central role than journal articles, books, and chapters. Data were collected by structuring a search string with keywords: "Nusantara Islam," "Multiculturalism in Indonesia." The search in the Scopus database covered works up to the years 2000-2024 and was restricted to peer-reviewed material. By strictly applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, out of 48 identified documents that underwent screening, 21 quality publications qualified for analysis.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Careful analysis of the 21 Scopus-indexed documents showed that there were some relevant outputs on the relation of Nusantara Islam to Indonesian multiculturalism. These will be categorized into themes for better understanding.

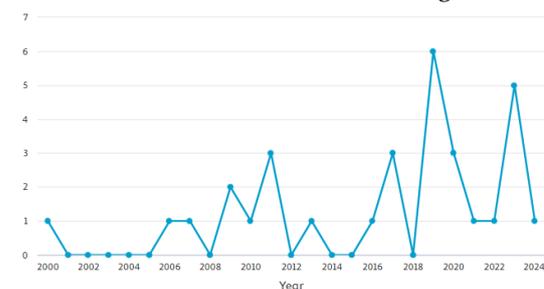


Figure 3. Trend Research

The chart shows the publication trend on Nusantara Islam and multiculturalism in Indonesia from 2000 to 2024. During 2000–2012, publications were sparse, reflecting limited academic interest in the topic. From 2013 to 2018, steady growth occurred as awareness of Nusantara Islam's role in promoting tolerance and multiculturalism increased. The peak in 2019, with the highest number of publications, was likely driven by discussions on extremism and moderate Islam. Post-2019, fluctuations were observed, with a decline in 2020 and stabilization in later years, potentially influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

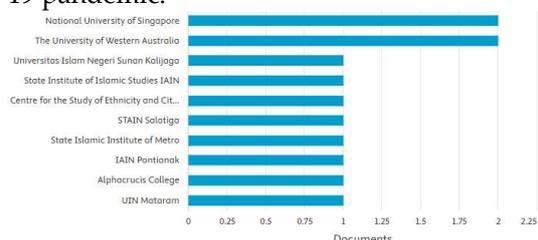


Figure 4. Affiliation Contributions

The figure shows institutional contributions to research on Nusantara Islam and multiculturalism. The National University of Singapore and The University of Western Australia lead, reflecting global interest in Nusantara Islam as a model for multiculturalism. Indonesian institutions, including UIN Sunan Kalijaga and IAIN, consistently contribute, highlighting local efforts to explore its cultural and societal aspects. The diverse representation of institutions, such as the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, indicates interdisciplinary interest across Islamic studies, sociology, and political science.

#### 4.1 Historical Evolution of Nusantara Islam

The reviewed literature highlights the historical development of Nusantara Islam as a distinctively Indonesian interpretation of Islam. The historical development of Nusantara Islam in Indonesia is defined by its unique adaptation to local customs, resulting in a syncretic form of Islam that emphasizes inclusivity and tolerance. Emerging through peaceful propagation via trade and cultural exchange rather than military conquest, Nusantara Islam integrated Islamic teachings

with local traditions, such as the slametan ritual and wayang (shadow puppetry), fostering a culture of moderation and mutual respect [3]. Maritime trade played a pivotal role in its spread, enabling the blending of Islamic and indigenous practices, which created a harmonious coexistence [4]. This cultural integration is evident in regions like Lampung, where Islamic values enrich local traditions, promoting religious moderation and harmony [8]. Furthermore, the use of local rituals and cultural expressions highlights the syncretic nature of Nusantara Islam, which prioritizes inclusivity and tolerance [15]. In Indonesia's multicultural society, these values act as mediators in conflicts arising from cultural and religious differences, fostering tolerance, social solidarity, and ethics [4].

#### 4.2 Role of Nusantara Islam in Promoting Multiculturalism

The literature underscores the centrality of Nusantara Islam in fostering religious tolerance and social harmony. Nusantara Islam plays a vital role in fostering religious tolerance and social harmony in Indonesia, aligning closely with the national philosophy of Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity). Characterized by its integration with local culture and emphasis on moderation, it promotes coexistence among diverse religious and cultural groups. Islamic educational institutions and organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) advocate for values of tolerance and mutual respect. Islamic education incorporates multicultural principles, fostering respect for diverse cultures and religions, which is crucial for promoting social cohesion [1]. Pesantren, traditional Islamic boarding schools, emphasize tolerance, justice, and peace in their curricula, contributing significantly to these efforts [16]. Nusantara Islam is deeply intertwined with local cultures, such as in Lampung, where it bridges religious diversity through a unique form of religious moderation [17]. This cultural adaptation creates a distinct identity that supports religious harmony and tolerance [18]. Additionally, national insight emphasizing

religious tolerance strengthens social cohesion through educational programs that promote moderate attitudes among the youth [19]. Interfaith dialogue and inclusive policies, supported by national insight, are essential strategies for reducing conflicts and enhancing societal cohesion [8].

#### ***4.3 Challenges Facing Nusantara Islam in a Globalized World***

The rise of transnational Islamic ideologies, such as Salafism and Wahhabism, poses a significant challenge to Nusantara Islam. The rise of transnational Islamic ideologies, such as Salafism and Wahhabism, poses significant challenges to Nusantara Islam, which is defined by its moderate, peaceful, and tolerant approach. These ideologies often criticize local Islamic practices, creating ideological tensions within Indonesia's Muslim communities [8]. The digital age exacerbates these issues by amplifying extremist narratives through social media, where extremist groups exploit these platforms to propagate exclusivist ideologies [8]. Globalization further introduces challenges like individualism and cultural homogenization, threatening traditional practices of Nusantara Islam [9]. Transnational Islamic movements gain traction by addressing social dynamics but struggle to internalize religious moderation and adapt to local cultures [7]. These movements often promote exclusivism and extremism, undermining social harmony and religious moderation in Indonesia [20]. To address these challenges, promoting Nusantara Islam's values and religious moderation is essential. Strategies include fostering inclusive religious behavior and leveraging Nusantara Islam's emphasis on democracy and human rights, positioning it as a global leader in advancing a moderate and peaceful Islamic civilization [6].

#### **DISCUSSION**

##### ***The Relevance of Nusantara Islam in Contemporary Multiculturalism***

The findings reveal that Nusantara Islam continues to play a vital role in maintaining Indonesia's multicultural harmony. Its principles of inclusivity and

cultural adaptation make it a model for addressing contemporary issues such as interfaith conflicts and religious extremism. For example, Islamic organizations like NU have spearheaded initiatives to foster interfaith dialogue and reduce religious tensions in regions such as Central Java and Aceh.

This adaptability demonstrates the potential of Nusantara Islam to contribute to global discourses on religious tolerance. By positioning itself as a model of moderate Islam, Indonesia can play a leadership role in promoting peace and coexistence in other multicultural societies.

##### ***Addressing Global Challenges***

To sustain its relevance, Nusantara Islam must address challenges posed by transnational ideologies and digitalization through a multipronged approach. Strengthening Islamic education by revitalizing the role of pesantren and other institutions is crucial for promoting values of moderation and inclusivity. Leveraging digital platforms to effectively disseminate Nusantara Islam's principles and counter extremist narratives is equally important in the digital age. Additionally, enhanced government initiatives are needed to preserve Indonesia's multicultural heritage and support community-based religious practices, ensuring that Nusantara Islam continues to foster harmony and tolerance in a rapidly evolving society.

##### ***Integration with National Policies***

The alignment of Nusantara Islam with Indonesia's multicultural framework, as enshrined in Pancasila, highlights its importance as a unifying force. However, the literature suggests that stronger collaboration between religious organizations and government institutions is needed to ensure the continued promotion of these values. Policies that support cultural preservation, interfaith dialogue, and community engagement are critical for maintaining social harmony.

### Opportunities for Future Research

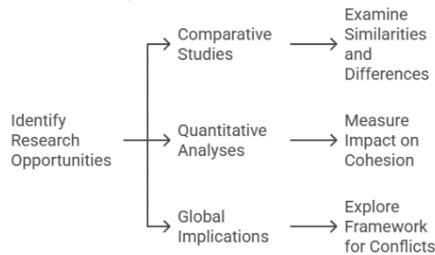


Figure 5. Future Research

It indicates certain opportunities for further research: comparisons that can explain the similarities and differences of Nusantara Islam with other forms of culturally embedded Islam in Southeast Asia might offer greater insight into regional variation. There is a need for quantitative analysis in order to measure the impact of Nusantara Islam on social cohesion and religious tolerance for empirical evidence of its contribution. Moreover, the research on Nusantara Islam's impact on the world would give it a new standing in religious conflicts and harmonies around the world and serve as a model of moderate and inclusive Islamic practice.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Nusantara Islam is a kind of Indonesia-specific interpretation of Islam, combining the principles of inclusivity, tolerance, and cultural adjustment; thus, it is

an integral part of Indonesia's multicultural landscape. Its historical development underlines a peaceful integration of Islamic teachings with the local tradition, while its contemporary relevance is an assurance that it may be able to respond to global challenges such as extremism and cultural homogenization. Nusantara Islam is still a strong model for social harmony and interfaith dialogue amidst the challenges from transnational ideologies and the digital age.

The research synthesizes findings from 21 Scopus-indexed documents that contribute to the full understanding of Nusantara Islam and its relation to Indonesian multiculturalism. This paper argues that this model should be sustained amidst modern challenges, including cooperation between religious organizations, policymakers, and educational institutions. It would, therefore, be important that future research investigates the implications of Nusantara Islam at a global level and its potential to be a framework that advances peace and coexistence among diverse societies. Drawing on the strengths of this variety, Nusantara Islam can act as a continued beacon for religious moderation and cultural pluralism, both nationally and internationally.

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