Research Article

RELIGIOUS MODERATION PERSPECTIVES AND PRATICES IN MUSLIM YOUTHS WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

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Abstract

RELIGIOUS MODERATION PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES IN YOUTHS WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE. Travel across border give opportunity to people to immerse in a diverse groups and societies. It is hoped to enrich life experiences that lays the groundwork for the creation of more harmonious and tolerant societies. Religious moderation, especially in Indonesian context, require tolerance, anti-violence, the sense of nationality and local culture acceptance from its citizen to maintain the harmonious, moreover, the unity of Indonesia as a country. Unfortunately, some Muslim youths were found to have low tolerance toward different religion groups. This study aims to assess if Muslim youths with international exposure have good moderation perspectives and practices in religion, including tolerance. This study is a quantitative descriptive with the help of survey tool to collect data from Muslim youths with international experiences. The analysis was carried out using univariate analysis. The results depict that more than 90% of the 155 respondents have good perspectives and practices toward religious moderation. Only practice of tolerance has slightly lower percentage which is 89%. More international programs for Muslim youths are encouraged to help them increase the level of tolerance toward differences.

Keywords*: Religious Moderation; International Exposure; Tolerance; Muslim Youth*

INTRODUCTION

Based on Indonesia Ministry of Religion, religious moderation must be understood as "*a balanced religious attitude between practicing one's own religion (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of other people with different beliefs (inclusive)*". The application of religious moderation exists in areas with diverse ethnicities, customs, languages, and religions. Indonesia has more than 740 ethnic groups or ethnicities as well as 583 languages and dialects from 67 main languages used by various ethnic groups. Then there are various religions such as Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as the possibility of other religions and local beliefs that have become local culture. Religious moderation is important in the practice of people's attitudes to take a middle path regarding diversity of opinion to avoid extreme attitudes and excessive fanaticism. (Badan Litbang Kementerian Agama RI, 2019:18).

Faiz (2023) in his article stated that there are four pillars of religious moderation in Indonesia context. The first pillar is national commitment. It is an effort to create a safe atmosphere for various religions and for them to develop and coexist safely. Examples of national commitment to celebrating major holidays, such as Eid al-Fitr or Christmas. The government and society involve themselves in interfaith to show a sense of unity that can create an atmosphere of togetherness and convey a sense of pride as a nation that has diversity. Second aspect of religious moderation is tolerance. Tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect, helping each other, and working together to create an atmosphere of peace and harmony, thus gives the ability to respect the differences in other people's beliefs and religions and gives the freedom to voice one's beliefs without fear and pressure. Examples of tolerance are respecting the celebration of holidays of other religions without participating in worship. Third is anti-violence. No religion teaches hatred and violence. The sample can be seen from the collaboration between the government, religious leaders, and the community in overcoming potential conflicts between religions. Education, mass media, and information technology are also important for teaching tolerance and diversity as well as providing accurate information about religious issues, avoiding provocative reporting, and triggering conflict, thereby creating a peaceful and harmonious environment for the entire community. Fourth, respect for culture or local wisdom. Each religion is unique in carrying out religious practices related to local traditions and culture. For example, the Vesak celebration in Borobudur with Buddhist religious rituals and Javanese culture in welcoming Ramadhan holy month. These practices are a tribute to culture because the religious context accepts local traditions and culture.

Unfortunately, Khalwani (2019) in his article explained that survey conducted during 2017-2019 found 27 cases of inter-religious conflict, 12 cases of intra-religious conflict and one case of conflict on the issue of terrorism. The fact is followed by a trend among youth towards intolerant and segregated attitudes. The trend is influenced by educational, economic, and social media factors (Convey Indonesia, 2018). Social media is used to spread content that propagates extremist and radical ideologies by radical groups. This is used because social media is considered something that is popular within the younger generation (Manuain et al, 2022:215). Educational setting also contributes to intolerant issue among youths. A survey conducted by *Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat* (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah (2021a) indicates that student from Islamic universities have higher vulnerability to intolerant act because of minimum interaction with different religious groups compared to student from public universities, private universities, and official colleges.

The government has implemented several measures to prevent radicalism and maintain religious moderation among youth. For example, the idea of implementing religious moderation is officially carried out in the National MediumTerm Development Plan (RPJMN) which asks all Chancellors of State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) to establish and organize Religious Moderation Houses as a space for seeding, educating, mentoring, and strengthening the religious moderation movement surrounding campuses (PPIM Survey, 2021b). The government also prohibits the spread of information about hatred between individuals or groups of people based on ethnicity or religion. Under the Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE) Law, individuals can be sentenced to a maximum of six years. Indonesia Ministry of Communication and Informatics also blocks sites containing radical content in order to limit the spread of radicalism on websites and social media, as well as providing awareness to young people to be more critical in choosing content in cyberspace (Aisy et al, 2019:3). Usually, these activities are carried out in the form of seminars or workshops and unique content material on social media. Furthermore, cited from NU Online article (2019), the government also formed the Diaspora Network Driving Religious Moderation (JDPMB), which is a networked community of awardees or lecturers abroad who prioritize religious moderation for the Indonesian diaspora. The aim of this network is as an effort to nation-brand Indonesia abroad, especially in the fields of religion and harmony between people, to build the resilience and abilities of awardee students, and to help prevent and ward off extreme transnational ideas that could threaten the nation's ideology.

The use of diaspora networks to promote religious moderation is not without reason. International exposure or international experience is believed to have a positive impact on religious moderation. As stated by Agniezka et al. (2016) that interfaith contact can improve attitudes towards diversity and ethno-religious outgroups and increase cooperation. This is in line with the PPIM survey (2021a) which states that students who have experience of social interaction with different groups show a high level of religious tolerance. Through communication with a global community with diverse religions, races and cultures, it is hoped that international experience can help someone develop tolerance based on broader knowledge and experience about diversity throughout the world. It is also hoped that international experience can be used to build the nation's religious and ideological resilience in fighting transnational extremist ideologies. However, there are also negative impacts from international exposure, namely the threat of the ideology of liberalism and radicalism which can arise from globalization or the ease of interacting with the global community.

Research's Objective

Based on *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS), in 2023, the number of youth (16-30 years) reached 23.18% of the total population in Indonesia or the equivalent of 64.16 million people. Unfortunately, the IDN Research Institute report (2022) revealed that only 2% of Gen Z (aged 12-27 years) and 5% of millennials (aged 28-43 years) can travel abroad. In fact, exposing oneself to the international community is believed to increase one's practice of religious tolerance based on the knowledge and experience one encounters. Therefore, this research looks at whether young Indonesian Muslims who are exposed to the global community through international travel tend to have a trend towards moderation in religion.

Problem Formulation

Based on the background above, this research assesses whether Indonesian Muslim youths who have been exposed to the global community through international travel tend towards moderation in religion. The decision to take Muslim youth as a research object was based on the results of the PPIM survey (2021a), which showed that the cross-social interaction of Muslim students was lower than that of students with religions other than Islam. Additionally, in cases of defamation against religion during 2011-2021, *Mahkamah Agung RI* revealed there were 60 cases in which the perpetrators came from Muslim, then the rest came from other religions. Meanwhile, the selection of youth, apart from the threat of digital media, was also based on data from the IDN Research Institute report (2022:36), which showed that only 2% of the more than 74 million Gen

Z youth could afford to travel abroad.

There is still a large gap between the number of young Indonesian Muslims and their ability to expose themselves on an international scale. Based on the introduction above, the research question for this study is as follows: what are the practices and perspectives of religious moderation among Indonesian Muslim youth with international experience?

Theoretical Framework

To assess the perception and practice of religious moderation among Muslim youth with international experience, this research uses the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour from Fishbein et al (1972:487-544) and Ajzen (2005:117). The theory of reasoned action explains that attitudes toward subjective norms form an intention to behave in a certain way. A person will act if he views the action as positive and believes others want him to do it.

Meanwhile, the theory of planned action develops the theory of reasoned action by adding elements of internalized behaviour or perceived behavioural control. These two theories still place a person's intentions as a determinant of behaviour, where beliefs influence attitudes towards something in expected or unexpected results.

The framework of thought used is a triadic scheme. Namely, attitudes are responses and constellations of cognitive, affective, and conative components, which interact with each other in understanding, feeling, and behaving towards an object. The cognitive component is what the individual holding the attitude believes. Cognitive is a response that reflects perceptions and thoughts towards an attitude object. Meanwhile, the affection component is a feeling related to emotional aspects. According to Saifuddin (1997), affection is related to a person's evaluation and feelings towards an attitude object. Finally, the conation component is the behavioural tendency, intention, commitment, and action about the attitude object. In each of these components, verbal responses are separated from non-verbal responses.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

The research was carried out using a quantitative descriptive design with the help of a questionnaire as a tool to collect the primary data from sample population.

Study Sample

The target of the study sample size is 100 young people aged 16-30. The age is according to the youth criteria in Law No. 40 of 2009 concerning youth. Apart from that, young people who

are Muslim and have experience going abroad are also criteria for sampling. For this research, international experience is defined as activities that include travel, study abroad programs, international work experiences, conferences, etc., that allow individuals to become exposed to different cultures, traditions, and ways of life in the international community.

Analysis Techniques

The analysis used is univariate analysis, where the characteristics of each variable were examined. Univariate data consists of sex, age, occupation, level of education, and international experience in the form of countries visited, reason for visits abroad, and total time spent abroad as independent variables. Meanwhile, perceptions and attitudes of religious moderation appear as dependent variables whose outcomes can be influenced by international experience and other independent variables. The dependent variable question uses a Likert scale in its measurement, which was scored and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The score was then calculated to find its average or mean score. The presentation of the analysis was presented in a table divided according to four domains of religious moderation based on the Indonesia Ministry of Religion, which are Nationality, Anti Violence/Radicalism, Tolerance, and Appreciation for local culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 155 respondents were gathered to fill in the survey. They are according to the inclusion criteria for this study. They are aged 16-30, Muslim, and have experienced travel abroad. More detailed characteristics of the respondents are in the tables and graphs followed

Table 1. Respondent's characteristics

No.	Categories	Characteristic	n	%
1.	Sex	Male	46	29.7%
		Female	109	70.3%
2.	Age	16-20	8	5.2%
		21-25	68	43,9%
		26-30	79	51%

3.	Education	Junior High	2	1.3%
		Senior high	35	22.6%
		Bachelor	81	52.3%
		Master	37	23.9%
4.	Occupation	Student	55	33.5%
		Teacher/Educa	19	12.3%
		tor Fresh	13	8.4%
		graduate	12	7.7%
		Private	11	7.1%
		employee	45	29%
		Entrepreneur		
		Others		

From the total number of 155 respondents, the survey was dominated by females (70.3%) and young people aged 26-30 (51%), followed by young people aged 21-25 (43.9%). Most of the respondents were bachelor's degree holders or equivalent (52.3%), while 23.9% and 22.6% were master's degree graduates and senior high graduates, respectively. Regarding professions, 33.5% were students, 12.3% were teachers, 8.4% were fresh graduates, and the rest came from various occupations, such as private employees (7.7%) and entrepreneurs (7.1%).

Table 2. Reasons for traveling abroad.

Question	Answer	n
Reasons for traveling abroad	Study	67
	Vacation	55
	Student	24
	exchange	14
	Work	7
	Bussiness trip	43
	Others	

The data from the survey provided information on the reasons for respondents traveling abroad. Respondents could choose more than one reason. It is clear that study was the most common reason for youths to travel abroad (67), followed by vacation (55), student exchange (24), work (14), business trip (7), and others, such as visiting relatives, conference, and fieldwork practice (43).

Table 3. Countries visited by respondents.

Countries	N
Malaysia	43
Singapore	33
Saudi Arabia	33
Thailand	18
Turkey	10
England	8
USA	7
Japan	6
Egypt	6
South Korea	5
China	5
Germany	4
Netherland	3
France	3
UEA	2
Yaman	2
Belgium	2
Oman	2
Italy	2
Taiwan	2
Maldives	2
Australia	2
India	2

Philippines	1
Georgia	1
Jordania	1
Austria	1
Czech	1
Sudan	1
Pakistan	1
Denmark	1
Maroko	1
Switzerland	1
Vietnam	1
Qatar	1
Scotland	1
Sweden	1
Greece	1

Table 3 shows the countries visited by respondents. They could write in more than one country. Malaysia (43) was the most visited country by Indonesian Muslim youths in this study. It was then followed by Singapore (33) and Saudi Arabia (33) in second place. Thailand and Turkey came in third and fourth place with 18 and 10 visitors, respectively. Countries such as England, the USA, Japan, Egypt, South Korea, and China have visitors between 5-8 respondents. Other countries, such as Germany, Netherlands, France, UEA, and Yaman, have only one to five visitors in this study. There were 38 countries ever visited by 155 respondents in this study.

Table 4. Characteristic of respondent's experience abroad

No.	Categories	Characteristics	n	%
1.	Frequency of traveling abroad	1x	53	34.2%
		2x – 3x	44	28.4%
		> 4x	58	37.4%

2.	Total time spent abroad	<1 week	23	14.8%
		>1 week – 4 weeks	29	18.7%
		>1 month – 6 months	7	4.5%
		> 6 months – 12	3	1.9%
		months > 12 months	49	31.6%
		Missing data	44	28.4%
3.	Currently live abroad	Yes	33	21.3%
		No	122	78.7%

Further, we surveyed the frequency and total time spent abroad by respondents. Fifty eight respondents (37.4%) answered that they have traveled abroad more than four times. Similarly, 53 respondents (34.2%) said they only traveled abroad once. Regarding total time spent abroad, there were 44 data missing, however, data available revealed that most respondents spent more than 12 months abroad (31.6%). It then followed by 18.7% who said they had spent between one to four weeks abroad. Furthermore, from the survey, it is known that there were 33 respondents (21.3%) who were currently living abroad.

Perception on Religious Moderation

Perceptions were built based on several variables in the triadic scheme. Respondents were asked about their perception of Indonesian religious moderation, which covers four domains. They are nationality, anti-violence or radicalism, tolerance, and appreciation for local culture. Overall, each domain has a good perception result of more than 90%. The highest percentage of good perception was in the tolerance domain, which reached 98.7%.

1. Perception on Nationality

Table 5. Perception on Nationality

Perception on Nationality	n	%
Good	144	92.9%
Poor	11	7.09%

Questions were asked of respondents regarding their perception of nationality and their perception of Pancasila as an Indonesian ideology. Most of the respondents (92.9%) had a good view of nationality in Indonesia. However, 7.09% of respondents still needed to gain a better idea about Indonesian ideology.

2. Perception on Anti Violation/Radicalism

Table 6. Perception on Anti Violation/Radicalism

Perception on Anti Radicalism	n	%
Good	142	91.6%
Poor	13	8.4%

Questions asked to respondents regarding anti-violence/radicalism were about their perception of honouring the flag of Indonesia. Although 91.6% of respondents believe that honoring the Indonesian flag is not a shirk, 8.4% have an opposing view.

3. Perception on Tolerance

Table 7. Perception on Tolerance

Perception on Tolerance	n	%
Good	153	98.7%
Poor	2	1.3%

Several questions regarding respondents' perspectives on tolerance with non-Muslim groups, such as daily social interaction, were questioned. In general, the majority of the respondents (98.7%) had a good perspective tolerance toward non-Muslim communities, and only a minority of them (1.3%) had a poor result.

4. Perception on Appreciation to Local Culture

Table 8. Perception on Appreciation to Local Culture

Perception on Appreciation to Local Culture	n	%
Good	146	94.2%
Poor	9	5.8%

Questions surrounding the respondents' views on Indonesian local cultures that are not similar to Islamic culture were asked. Although most respondents (94.2%) appreciate the local culture and believe they are not considered shirk, 5.8% still think that it is not an Islamic value and is close to shirk.

Practice on Religious Moderation

Based on the theory of reasoned action, practice or action may be built due to ethics or norms and personal beliefs. It is believed that people consider what benefits them or not. These two aspects resulted in the act of a person. Regarding religious moderation practice, respondents were asked about the frequency of their practice of the four domains of Indonesian religious moderation: nationality, anti-violence or radicalism, tolerance, and appreciation for local culture. Moderate and high frequency of practices was classified as good practice, while never being involved was considered poor practice.

Most of the respondents practice religious moderation, especially in the domains of nationality, anti-violence or radicalism, and appreciation for local culture. However, 17 people were still found to have a poor practice of religious tolerance, even though compared to the total number of respondents (155), it is still considered a low number.

1.   Practice on Nationality

Table 9. Practice on Nationality

Practice on Nationality	n	%
Good	152	98.06%
Poor	3	1.94%

Most of the respondents (98.06%) have good practice in the domain of nationality. The survey asked respondents about their frequency of attending national ceremonies and honoring the Indonesian flag.

2. Practice on Anti Violence/Radicalism

Table 10. Practice on Anti Violence/Radicalism

Practice on Anti Violence/Radicalism	n	%
Good	148	95.5%
Poor	7	4.5%

In practicing anti-violence or radicalism, 95.5% of respondents have a good result in practicing the domain. It means they never leave racist comments regarding ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup in social media. However, there were 4.5% or seven respondents admitted that they once left violent comments on social media.

3. Practice on Tolerance

Table 11. Practice on Tolerance

Practice on Tolerance	n	%
Good	138	89.03%
Poor	17	11%

Questions asked to respondents regarding their practices of tolerance were about how often they interact with non-Muslim friends, such as attending their weddings, funeral, or having a transaction with them. Unfortunately, even though 98.7% of respondents have a good perspective on tolerance in the tolerance perspective domain, only 89.03% use the viewpoint in practice. As much as 11% or 17 respondents had poor practices in the tolerance domain.

4. Practice on Appreciation to Local Culture

Table 12. Practice on Appreciation to Local Culture

Practice on Appreciation to Local Culture	n	%
Good	151	97.4%%
Poor	4	2.6%

Like the nationality domain, 97.4% of respondents have good practices in the local culture appreciation domain. It means they have a moderate to high frequency of introducing or using Indonesian culture or heritage and do not consider it a shirk. Only 2.6% or four respondents admitted that they never embraced the culture.

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Discussion

Most respondents were students and went abroad for study reasons. It is a pleasure to know that many youths could study and experience life abroad since they may develop various skills beneficial for religious moderation practices. They are cultural understanding, global awareness, adaptability, and flexibility. In summary, international exposure has the potential to positively impact individuals by broadening their perspectives, fostering understanding, and equipping them with skills essential for thriving in an interconnected and diverse world. This, in turn, contributes to the creation of more tolerant, inclusive, and harmonious societies.

However, despite the high percentage of youths having good perspectives and practices in the four domains of religious moderation based on the multi-religion, multicultural, and multiracial in the Indonesian context, several youths were found to have a poor view and practices on the issues. There is an explanation that could be the reason behind the findings. The survey showed that most countries visited by the respondents were Malaysia, followed by Singapore and Saudi Arabia. The two countries (Malaysia and Singapore) were located not far from Indonesia and thus share similar cultures, languages, and religions. The international exposure that was expected to bring robust life experience with the global community was less likely to be achieved, moreover, if the visit was only done once in less than a week. Similar to Saudi Arabia, which is dominated by a Muslim population, though it has quite a different culture and customs, the study is afraid that the travel experience would not bring significant learning in interaction with religious communities.

Another finding to highlight is the difference between the tolerance perspective result and the practice. In the perspective domain of tolerance, only two respondents have a poor view, which is a very low number. Surprisingly, in practice, there are 17 respondents with poor practices in the tolerance domain. It implies that viewpoint and practice do not always mesh well. The difference between perspective and practice in people can arise from various factors, including societal influences, personal experiences, external pressures, and ethical dilemmas. Individuals may face ethical dilemmas that challenge their perspectives. Balancing personal beliefs with ethical considerations and real-world complexities can lead to a gap between what one believes is right and what one is able or willing to do in practice.

Religious moderation in Indonesia plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony, fostering tolerance, and ensuring national unity in this diverse and multi-religious country. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority country, but it is also home to significant populations of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and various indigenous belief systems. Poor practices

and perspectives of religious moderation can lead to increased social tensions and conflicts between religious communities. Extremist views and practices may contribute to polarization, intolerance, and violence, undermining the fabric of a diverse and pluralistic society. A lack of religious moderation may also erode the sense of national unity, violation of human rights, like discrimination, persecution, denial of basic rights, and economic instability. Social unrest and conflict can negatively impact economic stability. Investors may be hesitant to invest in a country with a reputation for religious tensions and lack of moderation, hindering economic development and prosperity.

Addressing these issues requires a commitment to promoting religious moderation, fostering interfaith dialogue, and implementing policies that safeguard the principles of tolerance, respect, and diversity within society. It involves efforts from religious leaders, policymakers, educators, and the broader community to build a more inclusive and harmonious environment. The Indonesian Ministry of Religion has facilitated Muslim youths' involvement in international exposure through several programs, such as *Beasiswa Indonesia Bangkit.* A similar program, designed for Muslim youths, should be added, and well implemented as it can have a positive impact on religious moderation practices. The percentage of Indonesian Muslim youths who interact with people from other religions is less than that of other religions youths, according to the PPIM survey. The findings should encourage policymakers to develop programs for Muslim youth that can enable them to expose themselves to multiple religions and multicultural communities. This study's attempt to assess religious moderation perspectives and practices of Indonesian Muslim youths, hopefully, could add a consideration to facilitate Indonesian Muslim youths with more international exposure.

Limitation

Many factors influence the perspectives and practices of religious moderation, especially in young people. This study does not assess confounding factors that may impact the perspectives and practice of religious moderation, such as the family's educational and economic background and the psychological factors of young people in making decisions. Thus, this study expects a future study to assess a more profound relationship between international exposure and religious moderation practice in Indonesian Muslim youths.

CONCLUSION

The study was followed by 155 respondents, which are dominated by female respondents, youths aged 26-30, and youths with bachelor's degrees. Most respondents also work as students, and many are fresh graduates. In the context of international exposure, study and vacation are the major reasons for respondents traveling abroad. Malaysia, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia are the most visited countries. Most respondents travel abroad more than four times and spend time abroad more than twelve months if accumulated.

Each domain of Indonesian religious moderation (nationality, anti-violence or radicalism, tolerance, and appreciation to local culture) gain more than 90% good perspective results from 155 respondents. In practice, three domains (nationality, anti-violence or radicalism, and appreciation to local culture) also gain more than 90% good results. Meanwhile, the tolerance domain received an 89.03% good result.

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