



# Leadership of Religious Leaders in the Framework of Religious Moderation in Strengthening Community Social Cohesion

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to describe the leadership of religious leaders who are members of the Religious Harmony Forum in strengthening religious moderation and strengthening social cohesion of the community in Jombang district. The research subjects were 17 religious leaders who were members of the Religious Harmony Forum in Jombang Regency, East Java. The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a case study approach. It was found that religious leaders in Jombang district have a moderate view in religion and have a strong commitment to increasing social cohesion between religious communities. However, there are several needs that must be met to strengthen the role of these figures, such as adequate budget support, a strong legal umbrella, increased frequency of socialization and education, and better appreciation and support from local governments. By meeting these needs, it is hoped that their leadership will be more effective in carrying out their duties and achieving the goal of religious moderation in Jombang Regency in creating harmony between religious communities.

## INTRODUCTION

Religious differences are something that is common in society, and will enrich the treasures of knowledge and understanding (Bayu, 2021; Hadi & Bayu, 2021). However, religious differences can also be one of the factors that cause security and order disturbances in society (Hartanta, 2019). Indonesia is a plural nation, both in terms of language, ethnicity, and religion, which is very vulnerable to social conflicts because of this problem. And it is undeniable that the nation's wealth in the form of community plurality can potentially become a major conflict if it is not managed properly and constructively in advancing and prospering the community (Ambarudin, 2016; Mukmin, 2021; Santoso et al., 2023).

History proves that the attitude of tolerance and mutual respect in the country is not fully good. There are 7 cases of conflict and riots in the name of religion that have occurred, namely the conflict in Situbondo in 1996 AD, the

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Poso conflict in 1998-2001 AD, the conflict in Ambon in 1999-2002 AD which claimed at least 5.000 people, Tolikara in 2015 which occurred during the Eid holiday, the conflict that occurred in Singkil Aceh in 2015 which resulted in 1,900 people being displaced, the conflict that occurred in South Lampung in 2012 and the Sampang conflict case in 2012 as well as several other conflict cases that were not exposed (Anzaikhan et al., 2023).

In the latest Setara institute report in April 2023, it is stated that there are still acts of intolerance carried out in certain cities that receive low tolerance rankings, such as the cities of Mataram and Medan. Although this has decreased from the previous Setara institute's reports in previous years such as in 2018, there were 222 incidents of violations of freedom of religion/belief with 292 forms of action spread across 20 regions. As the results of monitoring in previous years, the highest number of violations occurred in West Java. West Java is a thriving place for violations, with 80 incidents in 2016. Followed by 5 other regions with the highest level of violations, namely; East Java (29), Jakarta (20), and Central Java (19) events, and North Sumatra and South Sulawesi (15 and 12 events, respectively). Thus, despite the decrease from the previous year's number, the number of violations is still very high, with 185 incidents and 24 actions per month. Then from the last report in 2015 there were 196 incidents of violations of freedom of religion/belief with 236 forms of action spread across 26 regions in Indonesia.

From the data above, in terms of the distribution of the location of the conflict, it can be assumed that it is evenly distributed on several islands in Indonesia, and can represent the location of the community's population so that these events will continue to be recorded in the history of the nation's journey. But on the other hand, this opinion must be refuted by highlighting that there are still many areas in the country that are peaceful and peaceful even with a very pluralistic structure of society in some ways such as ethnic, religious, cultural, political and others. In this regard, the researcher wants to highlight a social cohesion in a plural society to be researched as part of efforts to maintain harmony between religious communities in Indonesia within the framework of religious moderation. This study will ethnographically examine the role of the religious harmony forum in Jombang district, its members consist of all religions recognized in Indonesia and Javanese beliefs that are still adhered to today. As an overview of the location of the research, Jombang is a district that is nicknamed the city of santri because there are many Islamic boarding schools, it is said that Jombang itself is taken from the Javanese word "ijo" meaning green which is identified with religious people, and the word "Abang" meaning red which is identified with *abangan/kejawen* people (Rahmawati & Indrarini, 2022). According to Central Statistics Agency data in Jombang district, there are 42 Islamic boarding schools with a number of more than 40 thousand students. But there are also old Christian churches, namely the GKJW Mojowarno church which was established in 1881 AD and GKJW Bongsorejo which was established in 1898 AD. From this data, the researcher wants to focus on how the role of the Religious Harmony Forum in guarding and strengthening tolerance and the framework of religious moderation in Jombang district. As well as how the pattern of social cohesion of the religious community.

Research on the leadership of religious leaders has often been carried out, such as (Aniah et al., 2023; Firmando, 2021). Then research on religious moderation has also been carried out a lot, such as Fahri & Zainuri, (2019), then Nurdin, (2021); Prakosa, (2022) but this research has different goals. This study aims to identify the leadership of religious leaders who are members of the Religious Harmony Forum in strengthening religious moderation in the

framework of social cohesion among different religious communities in Jombang Regency. Based on the questionnaire distributed, various suggestions and inputs were found by the informants to strengthen religious moderation carried out by the Jombang Regency FKUB. These findings are expected to contribute to showing several important aspects that need to be analyzed and discussed further.

## METHODS

The research method in this study is qualitative research with an ethnographic approach. This qualitative research is in accordance with the topic being researched, because qualitative research is used to explore and understand meanings that a number of individuals or groups of people consider to be derived from social or humanitarian problems (Engkizar et al., 2021; Kaputra et al., 2021; Samnani & Singh, 2013). The ethnographic approach is very suitable to be used because ethnographic research is a qualitative research procedure to describe, analyze, and interpret a pattern of various cultural groups that are carried out together in both behaviors, beliefs and languages that develop from time to time (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Naeem et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2021). The subject of the research in this study is religious leaders in the forum of Religious Harmony (FKUB) in Jombang Regency, East Java. A forum for communication and religious harmony activities whose members are religious leaders from all religions and beliefs in Jombang Regency totaling 17 figures.

In collecting data in this study, the researcher believes that the appropriate technique in this study is a questionnaire to find out the initial perception of the informant then conduct an in-depth interview, observation to the research location and finally conduct a focus group discussion as a form of validation submitted by the informant and looking for additional data to corroborate the research findings. Initially, the researcher developed an instrument to determine the perception of the informant, the researcher distributed a Likert scale questionnaire with the following research instruments: the first need to interact with neighbors of different religions frequently. The second need good relationships between religious people in your neighborhood. The third the role of the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) is important in maintaining harmony between religious communities in Jombang Regency. The four the leadership role of figures is effective in resolving conflicts related to religious issues. The five the leadership role of figures has had a positive influence on religious moderation in society.

The six religious leaders must set an example in terms of religious moderation. The seven religious teachings teach religious tolerance and moderation and at the end of the instrument ask for advice and input from informants The last do you have any suggestions to improve the role of FKUB in strengthening religious tolerance and moderation? Furthermore, from the incoming answers, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with informants who represented these answers. After that, observations were made and then a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held as the final consolidation in matching data between informants as a form of data validation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the research findings obtained from the questionnaire to find out their perception of interaction and solidarity as well as the leadership role of religious leaders to strengthen religious moderation in the framework of social

cohesion in the interfaith community in Jombang district. The results of the questionnaire given to religious leaders in FKUB Jombang Regency on the interaction, solidarity, and leadership role of religious leaders in the Religious Harmony Forum to maintain religious harmony and moderation. This data is represented by the percentage of respondents who agree or disagree with some statements on the questionnaire. Regarding Interaction with Neighbors of different religions, the majority of respondents strongly agree on the importance of interaction with neighbors of different religions. Many respondents also agreed, showing a high awareness of the importance of interfaith interaction. None of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

About good relations between religious communities in the Environment: The majority of respondents strongly agree that good relations between religious communities in the environment are very important. The approval rate is also high, indicating strong support for religious harmonization in the community. About the leadership of religious leaders in maintaining harmony: Many respondents strongly agree that the leadership of religious leaders is important in maintaining harmony between religious communities. The approval rate is high, indicating great trust in the leadership of religious leaders. On the Effectiveness of Religious Leadership in Resolving Conflicts: The majority of respondents believe that religious leadership is effective in resolving conflicts related to religion, although there are some doubts. A small percentage of respondents felt that the leadership of religious leaders was less effective, indicating that there was room for improvement.

Positive Influence of Religious Leadership on Religious Moderation: Many respondents strongly agree that the leadership of religious leaders has a positive influence on religious moderation. Agree: Support for the positive role of religious leaders' leadership is also high from respondents who agree and strongly agree, none of the respondents feel that the leadership of religious leaders has not provided enough positive influence. About the Role Model of Religious Leaders in Religious Moderation: Many respondents strongly agree that religious leaders must be role models in religious moderation. Agree: The percentage of people who agree is high, indicating public expectations for religious leaders (Novebri & Pratiwi, 2021; Tangahu & Muda, 2020; Ulfah et al., 2021). None of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. In terms of Religious Teachings Teaching Religious Tolerance and Moderation Most respondents strongly agree that their religious teachings teach religious tolerance and moderation. Many agreed, affirming that the values of tolerance were embedded in their religious teachings (Imelda, 2018; Syekh, 2020).

Overall, this data shows that the people of Jombang Regency have a positive perception of the importance of interfaith interaction and the role of religious leaders in maintaining religious harmony and moderation. However, there are several aspects that still need attention, such as increasing the effectiveness of religious leaders' leadership in resolving conflicts and strengthening their positive influence on religious moderation. In addition, the role of religious leaders as role models in religious moderation is also very important to continue to be encouraged. The government and the leadership of religious leaders need to pay attention to this input to increase harmony between religious communities in Jombang Regency.

From the informants, suggestions and inputs were sent for strengthening religious moderation carried out by the leadership of religious leaders of Jombang Regency. These suggestions include: The government must intensely provide adequate budget policies and a definite legal umbrella. FKUB is also expected to conduct socialization more often to regions to

provide education on the importance of harmony between religious communities. Mutual respect and mutual respect and remain consistent in worship according to their respective beliefs, other religions also need to understand and respect other people's beliefs, therefore the figures should communicate and discuss harmony more often. And religious leaders convey to their respective religious people.

The government is obliged to encourage the strengthening of the leadership role of religious leaders in the regions through funding by providing sufficient budgets. It is time for regional officials (regents/mayors) to see the role of religious leaders in helping local governments in a clear way. because so far there has not been an adequate role between the burden of duties carried out by FKUB and the awards received, for example the provision of office facilities, transportation equipment, office equipment, including a Our suggestion is how to establish good communication with several religious leaders so as to reduce misunderstandings between religious leaders. Continuing to socialize religious tolerance and moderation must always establish good cooperation. To further strengthen tolerance, FKUB must increase the framework of community activities. In addition, FKUB must be at the forefront of strengthening tolerance and moderation in Indonesia. The suggestions given by the informants highlighted the importance of the government to provide adequate budget policies and a clear legal umbrella to support FKUB activities. This shows that FKUB needs strong financial and legal support to carry out its duties effectively. The government is expected to allocate budgets from the State Budget, provincial budgets, and district/city budgets, as well as ratify policies in the form of Presidential Decrees (Keppres) that give stronger legitimacy to FKUB dequate honorarium for FKUB management.

Many informants suggested that FKUB conduct socialization and education to regions more often to increase public awareness about the importance of harmony between religious communities. This reflects the need to expand the reach of FKUB and make socialization activities a top priority. In addition, religious leaders need to communicate and discuss harmony more often and convey this message to their respective people.

There was also input on the importance of local governments to provide more adequate awards and support to FKUB. Some informants suggested that FKUB be provided with adequate office facilities, means of transportation, and human resources. This recognition and support is important to increase the motivation and effectiveness of FKUB in carrying out its duties. The importance of establishing good communication between religious leaders was also emphasized by the informants. Good communication can reduce misunderstandings and increase cooperation in strengthening religious tolerance and moderation. FKUB needs to be an effective mediator in bridging communication between religious leaders. Increasing the frequency of community activities is also proposed to strengthen tolerance between religious communities (Mardiana et al., 2021; Nursyda et al., 2021). FKUB is expected to be more active in holding activities involving the wider community so as to create a harmonious and tolerant atmosphere. FKUB needs financial support from the government so that it can be more flexible in carrying out activities to strengthen religious tolerance and moderation. This financial support is very important to ensure the sustainability and success of the programs run by FKUB.

## Leadership of religious leaders in the framework of religious moderation in Indonesia

Moderation comes from the Latin *moderatio*, which means "no excess and no shortage". The word also means self-mastery (from an attitude of extreme strengths and weaknesses). In KBBI there are two explanations of the word moderation, namely: reduction of violence, and avoidance of extremism. If it is said, "the person is moderate," it means that the person is being reasonable, ordinary, and not extreme. In English, the word moderation is used for average, core, standard, or non-aligned. Meanwhile, in Arabic, moderation is known as *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, which has the equivalent meaning of the words *tawassuth* (middle), *i'tidal* (fair), and *tawazun* (balance) (Arifand et al., 2023; Lessy et al., 2022). People who apply the principle of *wasathiyah* can be called *wasith*. Thus, religious moderation can then be understood as a way of view, attitude, and behavior that always takes a position in the middle, always acts fairly, and is not extreme in religion (Shalahuddin et al., 2023; Syachrofi & Alam, 2023).

In creating an atmosphere of peace and tolerance, religious moderation is the main key, both at the local, national, and global levels. To be able to formulate measures, limits, and indicators to determine moderate religious views, attitudes, and behaviors, clear indicators are needed. For this reason, the Ministry of Religion in the book on religious moderation determines four things as indicators. Four things, are: i) national commitment; ii) tolerance; iii) anti-violence; and iv) accommodating to local culture. These four indicators can be used to recognize how strong religious moderation is practiced by a person in Indonesia, and how much vulnerability it has (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019; Siregar & Rohman, 2023).

Considering that it is a plural country, clear efforts and strategies are needed in creating peace and security in its society. Lapatin et al., (2022); Skydan et al., (2021) put forward the theory of Peace Architecture which states that in the management of religious differences, a number of conditions are needed, namely; First, the existence of effective and harmonious communication channels so that there is a process of discussion, clarification, and correction of the dissemination of information or rumors that have the potential to cause tension between social groups; Second, the work of problem-solving institutions, both formal such as courts or informal such as customary and religious institutions; Third, the existence of pro-peace figures who have influence, resources and effective strategies in preventing mass mobilization by pro-conflict figures; Fourth, a socio-political structure that supports the realization of justice in society; and Fifth, a just sociopolitical structure for the survival of social integration. The leadership of religious leaders is the key to strengthening the moderate behavior of the community (Mahmudah, 2015; Muthohirin & Suherman, 2020).

In the empirical field Kadri, (2020); Kholidi, (2018) who examines the relationship between Hinduism and Muslims in Indonesia, especially in Lombok, which takes place in a harmonious atmosphere, concludes that the process of harmony and social integration will be formed if there are three things, namely: First, an inclusive understanding of religion; Second, obedience to the law; Third, forgive the past, trust, and bonds between citizens. Suprpto also added that the communal conflicts that occurred were caused by the fading of local wisdom and the lack of public space, two things that weakened the bonds of residents. The findings indicate the importance of fostering peace through dialogue between individuals, groups and interfaith communities by building harmonious associations through cooperation in community activities, visiting religious day celebrations, and getting along without any

burden of differences (Kadri, 2022). This interfaith cooperation can be practiced in associations based on common interests such as in the fields of health, education, economy, politics and culture. A good practice in the Indonesian context is the existence of a community that embraces all religious believers, namely the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) which has now been established in 34 provinces and districts (Amri, 2021; Dalyono & Agustin, 2017; Fahmi et al., 2021; Handoko et al., 2022).

In building harmony between religious communities in society, leaders have a very important role (Agung et al., 2024). There are two types of leadership in society: formal and non-formal. Formal leadership (leader) refers to those who have power based on law (legal), namely the party who runs or manages the government with the legitimacy of the state. In contrast, informal leadership is rooted in charismatic or personal strength, which is based on "devotion to the purity, heroism, or certain exemplary qualities of a person, as well as the pattern of order that he exemplifies it" (Foppen & van Saane, 2024). This type of leader is often known in the community as a community leader or religious leader (Von Bergen, 2013). According to Mintzberg's theory, every leader, regardless of level, plays three main roles. For example, humans with the noblest leadership are The Prophet Muhammad is a leader who appreciates differences, from various al-Hadith histories, among which we can exemplify how great the Prophet's morals are in treating people, both in Islam and non-Muslims, especially when he leads the multicultural society of Medina. The Prophet Muhammad succeeded in developing the principle of tolerance and mutual respect for the existence of other religions (Nuramini, 2022).

#### **Strengthening social cohesion in a plural society through the interaction of religious leaders**

In this study, to read the pattern of social cohesion of the community, a theory is needed that can be used as a starting point in dissecting the empirical field at the research site. Cohesiveness is the force, both positive and negative, that causes members to remain in the group. Cohesion is a force, both positive and negative, that causes members to remain in the group. However, etymologically, cohesion means the ability of a group to unite, social cohesion is often characterized by social closeness. In sociology's grand theory of social closeness, we know the term solidarity. The theory of solidarity was popularized by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), and divided this solidarity into two, namely mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity is the social integration of members of society who share the same values and beliefs.

These common values and beliefs constitute a "collective conscience" that works internally within individual members that cause them to work together. Since, in Durkheim's view, the forces that cause members of society to work together are like the internal energies that cause molecules to fuse in solids, he drew on the terminology of the physical sciences in coining this term mechanical solidarity. Meanwhile, organic solidarity is a social integration that arises from the needs of individuals for the same services, one another. In a society characterized by organic solidarity, there is a comparatively greater division of labor, with individuals functioning like interdependent but distinct organs. Society relies less on the application of uniform rules to each person and more on the regulation of relationships between different groups and people, often through the use of contracts and common legal rules (Karmilah, 2019).

In solidarity there is an element of interaction between individuals, this theory of interaction was further initiated by George Harbert Mead (1863-1931) which is based on the basic idea that forms the meaning that comes from

the human mind (mind), about yourself (self) and its relationship in the midst of social interaction, and the ultimate goal is to mediate, and interpret the meaning that exists in society (Society) where each individual settles (Saraswati & Manalu, 2023). Broadly speaking, this theory has three basic ideas. That is mind, self and society mind it is termed as a person's ability to use symbols that have the same social meaning, where each individual is required to develop his mind through interaction with other individuals. Then self which is identified with the ability to reflect on each individual from the point of view or opinion of others. While society intended as a network of social relations that is created, built, and constructed by each individual in the midst of society in which in the end each individual can take on his or her own role in society.

For a deeper discussion of this interaction theory, there is a theory of structural functionalist from Talcott Parsons who developed a functional system in society based on the A.G.I.L. scheme, namely Adaptation, Goal, Integration, and Latency. Adaptation what Parsons meant was a system that could adjust between the environment and its needs (Maula, 2020). Goal intended as the main goal of an existing system. Next Integration is the arrangement of the relationships of the parts of each system into one whole component. Lastly, latency, meaning that the maintenance of patterns from existing systems must be maintained (Sulaiman, 2016). The last latency it means maintaining the pattern of the existing system so that it can be maintained (Adami & Lubis, 2024; Kamal, 2022; Mahmudin, 2021; Rambe & Sari, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Religious leaders in Jombang district have a moderate view in religion and have a strong commitment to increasing social cohesion between religious communities. However, there are several needs that must be met to strengthen the role of these figures, such as adequate budget support, a strong legal umbrella, increased frequency of socialization and education, and better appreciation and support from local governments. By meeting these needs, it is hoped that their leadership will be more effective in carrying out their duties and achieving the goal of religious moderation in Jombang Regency in creating harmony between religious communities. The leadership of religious leaders who are members of the Religious Harmony Forum is able to strengthen religious moderation in the framework of social cohesion among different religious communities in Jombang Regency. In addition, this research also contributes to showing several important aspects that need to be analyzed and discussed further regarding the suggestions given by religious leaders.

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