

DEVELOPMENT OF VARIOUS MODERATION-ORIENTED COUNSELING A: CASE STUDY AT THE AJUNG RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS OFFICE, JEMBER

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of religious moderation at the Ajung Jember Religious Affairs Office (KUA), using a qualitative approach with a case study type, data obtained through key informants, including the head of KUA, the religious section, and the community section. Data collection through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that the Ajung Jember KUA has successfully utilized the Bimwin program to educate prospective brides and grooms about the importance of respecting differences in marriage. The religious counseling program also targets various levels of society to overcome radicalism and strengthen national values. However, this study also identified several challenges, including limited human resources and resistance from some people to the idea of religious moderation. Opportunities found in this study include increased public awareness of the importance of social harmony and the use of information technology to expand the reach of the program. This study contributes to the understanding of the implementation of religious moderation at the local level, with recommendations for strengthening human resource capacity and cross-sector collaboration in supporting the sustainability of religious moderation programs.

Keywords: *Religious moderation, KUA, Counseling.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country with religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity which is a national identity. (Luthfia & Dewi, 2021) . However, social dynamics show that there are challenges that threaten this harmony, such as increasing cases of intolerance and radicalism. (Yasin & Rahmadian, 2024) . Data from the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia shows that extreme religious issues can trigger social conflicts in various regions. In this context, religious moderation is important to maintain a balance between individual beliefs and social harmony. (Prastyo, 2022) . The Religious Affairs Office (KUA) as a government institution at the sub-district level plays a strategic role in promoting the values of religious moderation in society. At KUA Ajung Jember, religious moderation is an effort to create harmony amidst the plurality of local society. The importance of strengthening the role of KUA in building religious moderation makes this research relevant to providing solutions to these social challenges.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of religious moderation in the Indonesian context. A study by Mukhibat, Nurhidayati Istiqomah, et al., (2023) emphasized the role of government and educational institutions in supporting religious moderation through multicultural education. Meanwhile, other research by Taufiq &

Alkholid, (2021) identified that religious moderation is often hampered by the lack of public understanding of the values of tolerance. However, research that focuses on the implementation of religious moderation at the local level, especially through the role of the KUA, is still limited. There are not many studies that specifically examine how the KUA runs a religious moderation program amidst local challenges. Therefore, this study is here to fill this gap with a case study at the KUA Ajung Jember, revealing the roles, challenges, and opportunities in the implementation of religious moderation.

This study aims to explore how religious moderation is implemented in KUA Ajung Jember, identify the challenges faced, and analyze the opportunities that can be utilized to strengthen religious moderation. By understanding these dynamics, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the strategic role of KUA in creating social harmony at the local level.

This study indicates that KUA has great potential to be an agent of change in promoting religious moderation in society. Through programs such as marriage guidance, religious counseling, and conflict mediation, KUA can be a catalyst for creating an inclusive and tolerant society. However, this potential can only be realized if KUA is supported by appropriate policies, adequate human resource training, and active participation from the local community. The implication of this study is the need to increase the institutional capacity of KUA and closer collaboration between KUA, religious leaders, and the community. The temporary answer that will be tested is that the community-based approach carried out by KUA Ajung Jember has a positive impact on strengthening religious moderation, although it still faces challenges in the form of limited resources and social resistance.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted at the Ajung Jember Religious Affairs Office (KUA), which is the unit of analysis or material object of the research. This location was chosen because the Ajung Jember KUA is considered to represent a sub-district-level religious institution that plays an important role in promoting religious moderation. With various religious service programs being implemented, the Ajung Jember KUA has great potential to become a relevant case study. This unit of analysis includes activities, policies, and social interactions carried out by the KUA in the context of religious moderation.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. Qualitative research is a procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from informants and observable behavior. Qualitative research is research that uses observation methods, interviews, content analysis, and other data collection methods to present responses from subject behavior. (M, Rizal, Anita, Dani, 2022) . This approach was

chosen to explore in depth the phenomenon of religious moderation carried out by KUA Ajung Jember. Case studies allow researchers to understand the specific context, internal dynamics, and factors that influence the implementation of religious moderation. This study is also designed to explore how policies and programs at KUA Ajung Jember can contribute to strengthening religious moderation in local communities.

The information in this study was obtained from various key informants, including the head of the KUA, the Religious Affairs Section, and the Community Section. These informants were selected based on their roles and involvement in religious moderation programs run by the Ajung Jember KUA. In addition, informants also included local religious figures and communities who interacted directly with the KUA. The selection of informants was based on purposive sampling techniques to ensure that the data obtained was relevant and in-depth.

Table 1
Research Informants

No.	Informant Name	Number of Informants	Involvement in the Religious Moderation Program	Selection Techniques
1	Head of KUA	1	Program coordination and supervision	Purposive Sampling
2	Religious Affairs Section	2	Program implementation and evaluation	Purposive Sampling
3	Community Section	2	Program socialization and assistance	Purposive Sampling

Data collection was carried out through three main methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. (Fadilla & Wulandari, 2023) . Observations were conducted by directly observing KUA activities related to religious moderation. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their views, experiences, and evaluations of religious moderation programs. Documentation includes data collection from official documents, such as annual reports, policies, and activity records relevant to the research topic.

The data obtained was analyzed through several stages: data reduction, data display, and data verification. (Elviya & Sukartiningsih, 2023) . Data reduction is done by sorting data that is relevant to the focus of the research. Data display is done in the form of tables, diagrams, or narratives to facilitate interpretation. Data verification aims to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The analysis methods used include content analysis to evaluate documents, discourse analysis to understand informant perspectives, and interpretation analysis to link data to the theoretical framework used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Religious Moderation at KUA Ajung Jember

The implementation of religious moderation in the KUA as conveyed by the head of the KUA, Drs. Isnan HM, ME, stated:

"The real form of implementation of religious moderation carried out in community service is that we strongly emphasize the values of tolerance and mutual respect in every service, especially through the Marriage Guidance (Bimwin) program. In Bimwin, we not only discuss administrative matters of marriage but also instill the importance of respecting differences in beliefs in building a household." (Isnan, 2025)

Then Hasan Fauzi as a religious instructor added:

"There are other activities besides Bimwin to support religious moderation in society, namely, we also routinely hold religious counseling for the general public. Our material is deliberately expanded, not only about worship rituals but also about harmony between religious communities, preventing radicalism, and the importance of a sense of nationality." (Fauzi, 2025)

The results of the interview with the head of the KUA and religious counselors showed that the implementation of religious moderation was carried out actively through the Marriage Guidance (Bimwin) program and religious counseling to the community. In the Bimwin program, prospective brides and grooms are not only given administrative materials but are also equipped with an understanding of the importance of respecting differences in marriage. Meanwhile, in general counseling, the material presented covers major themes such as maintaining religious harmony, preventing radicalism, and strengthening national values. The community's response to this approach was very positive, as seen from their active participation in the discussion session. The delivery of material using an inclusive and dialogical method makes the values of religious moderation easier for the community to understand and accept. Thus, this interview confirms that KUA Ajung not only focuses on administrative services but also plays a role as an agent of social change in promoting harmony and tolerance.

The results of the interview data visualization show that the implementation of religious moderation at the Ajung Jember KUA has two main focuses: education for prospective brides and grooms through Bimwin and religious counseling for the general public. In the Bimwin program, strengthening the value of moderation is given systematically along with technical materials on marriage. Meanwhile, in religious counseling, the message of moderation is conveyed more broadly, covering various age groups and social backgrounds. The dialogical approach is a characteristic of the method used, allowing for two-way interaction between counselors and the community. This

approach reflects that the Ajung KUA seeks to reach various segments of society with contextual and relevant materials, not only discussing religious rituals but also current social issues. This shows that religious moderation at the Ajung KUA is not rigid, but dynamic, following the needs and developments of the local community.

In addition, the interview results also show that the approach applied at KUA Ajung Jember was born from an internal awareness that religious moderation is not sufficiently conveyed through a textual approach alone, but needs to be actualized through a social approach that touches on the realities of community life. The integration of moderation values into Bimwin and religious counseling shows that KUA understands the importance of forming a culture of tolerance from the individual to the community level. The dialogical approach applied also reflects adaptation to the heterogeneous social reality of the Ajung community. The positive response from the community is an indicator that this method is effective. This pattern can be interpreted as a form of renewal of the way of religious preaching, where the universal values of Islam about tolerance, harmony, and love for the homeland are framed in a more communicative and applicable way. Thus, the implementation of religious moderation at KUA Ajung shows the practice of religious education that is contextual, adaptive, and oriented toward social transformation.

In the context of Islam, religious moderation refers to an attitude that prioritizes the middle path, without falling into extremism in religious understanding and practice. This concept reflects self-control from excessive or deficient behavior, as well as efforts to achieve balance in various aspects of life. Islam views religious moderation as a principle that emphasizes balance and justice in practicing teachings, both in internal relations between Muslims and in interfaith interactions. This concept is reflected in the principles of *wasath* (middle) and *tawassuth* (balanced) contained in Islamic teachings (A. Aziz & Anam, 2021). In addition, indicators of religious moderation can be seen from various aspects of individual and community life, as described in the existing nomenclature.

The Ajung Jember Religious Affairs Office plays a very active role in promoting the values of religious moderation in society. This role is realized through various programs and activities that not only focus on the administrative aspects of religion but also on strengthening tolerance, mutual respect, and the importance of peaceful coexistence. One of the flagship programs that is effective in conveying these values is the Marriage Guidance (Bimwin) program (Dana, 2020). This program not only provides an understanding of administrative marriage procedures, but also delivers material related to universal values in religion, such as tolerance in domestic life, respect for differences, and the importance of building a harmonious family.

In addition to running the Bimwin program, KUA Ajung is also active in holding religious counseling activities aimed at various levels of society. This activity is designed with an inclusive and dialogical approach so that the community feels comfortable participating and discussing openly (Subhi, 2019). The material presented in the counseling is not only limited to aspects of worship rituals but also explores social issues that are relevant to the conditions of the local community. This includes the importance of maintaining harmony between religious communities, efforts to prevent radicalism, and strengthening national values. This approach has proven to be effective in building collective awareness of the importance of living side by side amidst diversity (Amtiran & Kriswibowo, 2024).

Challenges in Realizing Religious Moderation

Religious moderation as a basic principle in building harmony and tolerance between religious communities cannot be separated from a number of serious challenges faced in the process of implementing it. These challenges are multidimensional, covering ideological, social, political, and institutional structural issues (Pebrikarlepi et al., 2024). To understand the challenges in implementing religious moderation at KUA Ajung, Jember, is presented in the following table.

Table 2
Visualization of Observation and Interview Data

Challenge	Short Description
Human resource limitations	Lack of personnel with specific competencies in religious moderation
Community Resistance	The existence of community groups with exclusive and intolerant views

Based on the results of observations and interviews, there are two main challenges in realizing religious moderation at the Ajung Jember KUA, as summarized in the table. *First*, limited human resources (HR), where there are still few KUA personnel who have specific expertise in managing religious moderation issues. This has implications for the limited scope and depth of material that can be delivered in the programs being run. *Second*, resistance from some of the community. Informants noted that there are certain groups that still hold exclusive views and show a less tolerant attitude towards religious and cultural differences. These challenges show that although the KUA has made maximum efforts, the social reality in the field shows that the implementation of religious moderation values requires more adaptive and sustainable strategies and approaches.

The data from the table shows that the challenges faced by the KUA in implementing religious moderation are internal and external factors. Internally, limited

human resources are a fundamental problem that affects the quality of the moderation program. The lack of trained human resources causes several programs to not be executed optimally or must be carried out by personnel with limited competence. While externally, the community resistance factor shows strong sociocultural challenges. Community groups with exclusive views become obstacles to the spread of moderation values, even in some cases strengthening the narrative of intolerance. This pattern illustrates that the success of the moderation program depends not only on the internal readiness of the institution but also on the social acceptance of the community as the recipient of the program. These challenges are complex and interrelated between institutional aspects and the sociological conditions of the community.

The challenges found indicate that the successful implementation of religious moderation requires a more comprehensive approach and cannot rely solely on formal programs. The limited human resources occur because religious moderation as a new scientific discipline has not received much attention in official training for KUA officials. This shows the importance of strengthening capacity through ongoing training and recruitment of competent human resources in the field of moderation. Meanwhile, community resistance shows that religious moderation directly intersects with long-standing social constructions. Exclusive views do not simply emerge spontaneously but are the result of historical, cultural, and doctrinal factors that require a sustainable persuasive approach. Thus, the interpretation of this data confirms that in order to effectively instill the value of moderation, KUA needs to build a more innovative communication strategy and form a cross-sectoral cooperation network.

The results of observations and interviews conducted revealed a number of significant challenges in efforts to promote religious moderation. One of the main obstacles identified was the limited human resources (HR) (Srikandi et al., 2025). Informants revealed that the number of personnel currently available is still very minimal, and most of them do not yet have specific competencies related to religious moderation issues. This has an impact on the low quality and effectiveness of the programs being run because the delivery of moderation messages is often not carried out with the right and in-depth approach.

In addition, other challenges also arise from the community itself, especially the resistance from some groups who still adhere to exclusive religious views and tend to be less tolerant of differences in beliefs (Supriadin et al., 2024). These two factors, limited human resources, and social resistance are serious obstacles in the implementation of the religious moderation program initiated by the KUA.

Opportunities for Strengthening Religious Moderation

The results of observations in this study reveal a number of opportunities that can be utilized to strengthen religious moderation programs, namely: First, increasing public awareness of the importance of maintaining social harmony provides moral support for KUA programs. Second, the development of information technology opens up opportunities to reach more people, especially the younger generation, through social media and digital platforms. Third, opportunities for collaboration with various parties such as religious leaders, civil society organizations, and local governments provide great potential to expand the reach and increase the legitimacy of religious moderation programs.

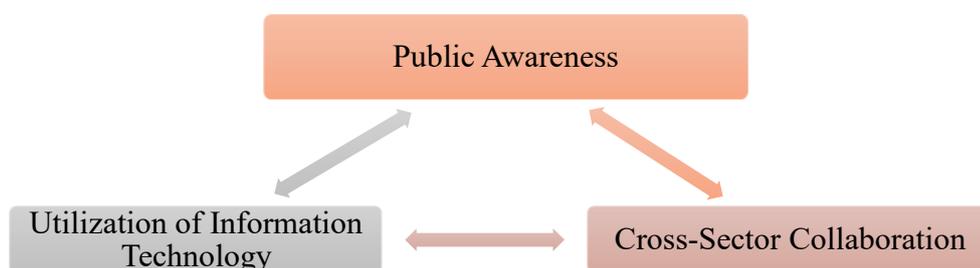


Figure 1

Illustration chart. Opportunities for strengthening religious moderation

The chart above shows the existence of opportunities rooted in two main sources, namely socio-cultural factors and technological advances. From the socio-cultural side, public awareness of the importance of social harmony is a significant basic capital, considering that collective awareness is the main foundation for accepting moderation programs. From the technological side, social media and digital platforms provide new communication channels that allow counseling to be carried out in a more interactive way and reach young age groups that were previously difficult to access through conventional methods. The other side is the importance of building cross-sector collaboration to strengthen legitimacy, expand support, and optimize limited resources within the KUA. These data show that these opportunities complement each other, forming a network of potential that if managed properly can strengthen efforts to moderate religion sustainably.

The opportunity patterns identified in this study indicate that strengthening religious moderation is very possible if the KUA is able to adapt to social and technological changes. Increased public awareness is the result of educational developments, social experiences, and exposure to pluralistic values, both from national and global media. This creates a broader support base for moderation programs. The use

of information technology indicates that the younger generation, as the group that uses the most digital media, should be the main target in the extension strategy. Meanwhile, cross-sector collaboration reflects the importance of a network approach *in* overcoming the internal limitations of the institution. This interpretation leads to the understanding that future strategies must focus on communication innovation, building collaborative networks, and strengthening the existing social base of the community.

Amidst the various challenges faced, this study identified a number of opportunities that can be utilized by the KUA to strengthen its role in promoting religious moderation. One of the main opportunities found is the increasing public awareness of the importance of maintaining social harmony amidst diversity (Beddu, 2023). This awareness becomes a strong social capital, encouraging active community participation in various programs organized by the KUA, especially those that focus on strengthening the values of tolerance and mutual respect.

In addition, advances in information technology have opened up great opportunities for the KUA to expand its religious reach. Through social media, digital applications, and other online communication platforms, moderation messages can be disseminated in a more engaging way, and reach more levels of society, including the younger generation (Morales, 2025). Collaboration between various parties such as religious figures, civil society organizations, and local governments is considered key to strengthening synergy between institutions, expanding support for religious moderation programs, and creating a more inclusive, harmonious, and tolerant social environment.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding in this study is that KUA Ajung Jember has successfully played a significant role in promoting religious moderation through programs such as Marriage Guidance (Bimwin) and religious counseling. Both programs effectively convey the values of tolerance, respect for differences, and the importance of living harmoniously in diversity. However, the challenges that arise are the limited human resources who have competence in the field of religious moderation and the resistance from some community groups who still hold exclusive views. This finding reminds us that strengthening human resource capacity and community understanding are the keys to achieving success in promoting religious moderation at the local level.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to updating the scientific perspective related to the implementation of religious moderation at the local level, with a focus on practical approaches through Bimwin and religious counseling. This study contributes to understanding the social dynamics that influence the acceptance of religious moderation values and shows the importance of synergy between religious institutions, education, and society. However, this study is limited to a case study in one

location, namely KUA Ajung Jember, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Therefore, further research involving other regions and quantitative approaches is needed to deepen the understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting religious moderation.

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