

Religious Moderation within Indonesian Diaspora in Australia's Secular Society

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Abstract

This study investigates the concept and practice of religious moderation within the Indonesian diaspora community in Australia, with a focus on how members navigate religious identity in a Western, secular society. Grounded in the four pillars of religious moderation established by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs—national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local cultural values—the research employs a hybrid methodology combining online and in-person interviews, as well as direct observation, drawing on the author's field experience in Sydney. The findings highlight three core dimensions. First, the practice of religious moderation is significantly shaped by diaspora organisations such as PCI Nahdlatul Ulama Australia-New Zealand, PCI Muhammadiyah Australia, the Iqro Foundation, and the Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN), which promote inclusive religious practices and enhance community cohesion. Second, Australian public institutions play a vital role in fostering values such as religious freedom and pluralism, providing a supportive environment for the diaspora to sustain their cultural and religious identities. Third, the Indonesian diaspora demonstrates effective acculturation by preserving religious traditions while adapting to Australia's multicultural landscape, despite ongoing challenges related to identity negotiation in a pluralistic context. The study concludes that the Indonesian diaspora in Sydney exemplifies a resilient model of religious moderation through inclusive engagement, institutional collaboration, and cultural adaptation, offering valuable insights for broader discussions on religion, migration, and pluralism in global settings.

Abstrak

Studi ini mengeksplorasi moderasi beragama dalam komunitas diaspora Indonesia di Australia, dengan fokus pada navigasi identitas dan praktik mereka dalam konteks masyarakat sekuler Barat. Berdasar pada pilar moderasi beragama Kementerian Agama; Komitmen Nasional, Toleransi, Antikekerasan, dan Akomodasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Lokal, studi ini menggunakan metode hibrida, termasuk wawancara daring dan tatap muka serta observasi langsung yang diinformasikan oleh pengalaman penulis di Sydney. Studi ini menemukan tiga aspek utama. *Pertama*, praktik moderasi beragama dalam komunitas diaspora Indonesia sangat dipengaruhi oleh organisasi diaspora seperti PCI Nahdlatul Ulama Australia-Selandia Baru, PCI Muhammadiyah Australia, Iqro Foundation, dan Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN), yang mendorong praktik keagamaan inklusif dan memperkuat hubungan sosial dalam masyarakat Australia. *Kedua*, lembaga publik Australia memainkan peran penting dalam mempromosikan nilai-nilai inti seperti toleransi dan kebebasan, dengan demikian menciptakan ruang inklusif bagi diaspora Indonesia untuk mengekspresikan identitas budaya dan agama mereka. *Ketiga*, diaspora Indonesia



telah berhasil berakulturasi dengan melestarikan tradisi dan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama sambil beradaptasi dengan lingkungan multikultural Australia, meskipun menghadapi tantangan terkait identitas dalam masyarakat yang pluralistik. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa diaspora Indonesia di Sydney menunjukkan ketahanan dalam mempertahankan moderasi beragama melalui praktik-praktik inklusif dan adaptasi budaya.

Keywords Religious Moderation; Indonesian Diaspora Community; Pluralism; Moderation Commitment

Introduction

The Indonesian diaspora in Australia represents a highly diverse community, encompassing professionals, labourers, and students. According to data from the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (2022), approximately 96,000 Indonesian citizens reside in major cities such as Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Darwin, and Perth. This community is not only expanding but also exhibiting a notable degree of organisational development through the establishment of various cultural, social, and religious groups. These organisational structures play a vital role in preserving cultural and religious identities while simultaneously facilitating the integration of Indonesian migrants into the broader Australian society.¹

According to the Indonesian Consulate General in Perth, at least 76 Indonesian community organisations are distributed across Australia. These organisations function as important platforms for diaspora members to build networks, enhance capacities, and offer mutual support.² Religious organisations such as the Overseas Branches of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCI NU), Muhammadiyah (PCI Muhammadiyah), the Indonesian Catholic Youth Organisation (ICYO), and numerous community-based churches play a particularly pivotal role. Beyond serving as centres for religious practice, these organisations act as key instruments for promoting and maintaining values of religious moderation within a multicultural and pluralistic environment.³

Nevertheless, this diversity also presents considerable challenges. The process of acculturation does not always unfold smoothly, particularly within the context of a secular and pluralistic Western society. The integration of the Indonesian diaspora into Australian society raises critical questions regarding the preservation of cultural and religious identities without fostering exclusivism. It also

¹ Kedutaan Besar Australia di Indonesia, "Penduduk, Kebudayaan Dan Gaya Hidup," Government, 2024, https://indonesia.embassy.gov.au/jaktindonesian/penduduk_kebudayaan.html.

² Ahmad Muttaqin, Achmad Zainal Arifin, and Firdaus Wajdi, "Problems, Challenges and Prospects of Indonesian Muslim Community in Sydney for Promoting Tolerance," *Komunitas* 8, no. 2 (September 22, 2016): 169–84, <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v8i2.5971>; Joshua Fernando, Rustono Farady Marta, and Ratih Kurnia Hidayati, "Reaktualisasi Mahasiswa Diaspora Indonesia Dalam Menjaga Identitas Budaya Bangsa Di Benua Australia," *Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi* 8, no. 2 (December 26, 2020): 194, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkk.v8i2.25219>.

³ According to Salut Muhiddin, Chairman of the Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN), there are more than 70 diaspora organisations affiliated with religious, educational, social, regional, or professional groups. Salut Muhiddin, Coordinator of Indonesian Diaspora Network, Sydney, Australia, December 10, 2024.

prompts inquiry into how diaspora communities navigate and respond to the complexities inherent in multicultural settings. A crucial dimension of this discussion is the religious aspect. Given that most of the Indonesian diaspora identifies as Muslim, important questions arise concerning the role of Indonesian Muslim communities in promoting religious moderation within a global context increasingly sensitive to issues surrounding Islam. The persistence of Islamophobia in Australia compounds these challenges, manifesting through various forms of discrimination and negative stereotyping, including in media representations.⁴

The historical trajectory of Islam in Australia reflects a complex and multifaceted narrative. Once relegated to the societal margins, the Muslim community has increasingly become central to public discourse, particularly concerning national identity, security, and social cohesion.⁵ Within this broader context, the Indonesian Muslim community offers a distinct expression of Islamic identity, one characterised by moderation and deeply rooted in local cultural traditions. This unique positioning has the potential to serve as an alternative model for engaging with global Islamic discourses, which are often associated with radicalism.⁶

In this regard, religious organisations within the Indonesian diaspora assume a strategic and influential role. This study positions such organisations as key actors in exploring how practices of religious moderation are developed, articulated, and sustained.⁷ In addition, the research examines the contributions of Australian public institutions—including schools, universities, and government agencies—in cultivating social environments that promote moderation, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding.⁸

This study aims to address two central research questions: first, how do Indonesian diaspora organisations cultivate and implement values of religious moderation within the context of diaspora life? Second, how do Australian public institutions support and reinforce these values? This dual focus seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of religious moderation among diaspora communities in Australia.

The research is informed by the author's personal experiences during doctoral studies in Sydney, as well as a series of hybrid interviews conducted online (via Zoom) and in person between

⁴ Kedutaan Besar Australia di Indonesia, "Penduduk, Kebudayaan dan Gaya Hidup", *Government* (2024), https://indonesia.embassy.gov.au/jaktindonesian/penduduk_kebudayaan.html, accessed 3 Mar 2024.

⁵ Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London: IB Tauris, 2020); Modood Tariq, *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslim in Britain* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

⁶ Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia."

⁷ Julian Hargreaves and L. Daniel Staetsky, "Antisemitism and Islamophobia: Measuring Everyday Sensitivity in the UK," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 12 (September 25, 2020): 2176–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1682177>; Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia."

⁸ Robert Jackson, "Religious Education and Social and Community Cohesion: An Exploration of Challenges and Opportunities," *British Journal of Religious Education* 34, no. 1 (January 2012): 101–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2012.634584>.

October and December 2024. Organisations selected for this study were identified through purposive sampling and include PCI Nahdlatul Ulama Australia–New Zealand, PCI Muhammadiyah Australia, the Iqro Foundation, and the Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN), each representing different approaches to promoting religious moderation within the Indonesian diaspora community.

Australia as a Crossroads of Civilisations

As a nation shaped by a long history of migration, Australia has evolved into a complex and dynamic multicultural society. Cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity are fundamental elements of its national identity. The country's historical landscape includes the enduring presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who have inhabited the continent for over 60,000 years, as well as successive waves of migration following European colonisation in the 18th century. This convergence of histories and cultures has positioned Australia as a significant global crossroads of civilisations.⁹

Early interactions between Indonesia and Australia can be traced to the contact between Makassarese sailors and Aboriginal communities along Australia's northern coast during the 16th and 17th centuries. These encounters were characterised by peaceful exchanges through which elements of Islamic culture and teachings were introduced. In the 19th century, the presence of Islam in Australia was further consolidated by the arrival of Afghan cameleers, who played a pivotal role in the development of infrastructure across the Australian interior.¹⁰

The transformation of Australia's immigration policy following World War II—particularly the abolition of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s—paved the way for increased migration from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This policy shift contributed to Australia's emergence as one of the world's most multicultural nations, with immigrants representing over 270 ethnic groups. According to the 2016 census, approximately 33% of immigrants originated from Asia, reflecting a significant departure from the earlier dominance of European migration.¹¹

Major urban centres such as Sydney and Melbourne, particularly in the states of New South Wales and Victoria, serve as focal points of cultural coexistence. Diversity is prominently expressed in everyday life, from culinary traditions to interfaith celebrations. However, this pluralism is not without challenges. Issues such as **discrimination and persistent stereotyping—particularly toward the

⁹ Australian Bureau Statistics, "Religion in Australia," Government, Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS), accessed March 3, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170630034823/http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Religion%20Data%20Summary~25>.

¹⁰ Saeed, "Media, Racism and Islamophobia," 7.

¹¹ John J Veevers and Joseph Micheal Powel, "The Mesozoic and Cenozoic Eras," Britannica, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Australia/The-Mesozoic-and-Cenozoic-eras>.

Muslim community—**remain prevalent, shaped in part by the broader rise of Islamophobia in Western societies.

Within this multicultural environment, the Indonesian diaspora plays an important role. As of 2024, the Indonesian population in Australia is estimated at approximately 100,000 individuals, contributing across various sectors including education, culture, and religious life.¹² Their presence not only reinforces bilateral relations between Indonesia and Australia but also enriches the broader social and cultural fabric of Australian society.

Diaspora organisations such as PCI Nahdlatul Ulama (PCI NU), PCI Muhammadiyah (PCIM), and the Iqro Foundation demonstrate how moderate Indonesian Islamic values are contextualised within Australia's pluralistic society. PCI NU focuses on organising Islamic educational activities, particularly for children, while PCIM promotes a modern and rational interpretation of Islam. The Iqro Foundation emphasises cross-cultural understanding through educational programmes and community-based initiatives. These organisations' moderate religious approach reinforces the Indonesian diaspora's religious identity and fosters bridges with other cultural and religious communities. Collectively, they illustrate how religion can serve as a unifying force in a diverse, multi-ethnic society.

Australia's religious diversity is reflected in the 2016 census, which reported that Christians remain the largest religious group (52%), followed by Muslims (2.6%), Buddhists (2.4%), and Hindus (1.9%). Notably, the increase in the number of individuals identifying with no religious affiliation (30.1%) signals a substantial shift in the nation's spiritual landscape.¹³ Urban areas increasingly serve as sites where mosques, temples, and churches exist side by side, symbolising a strong commitment to religious pluralism. Nevertheless, intercultural tensions and integration challenges persist. In response, both the Australian government and civil society have actively promoted interfaith dialogue and social inclusion programmes as strategies to foster community cohesion and mutual understanding.

Given its long history of migration and relatively progressive multicultural policies, Australia is frequently regarded as a model for harmonious coexistence in diverse societies. Within this framework, the Indonesian diaspora plays a strategic role by promoting moderate religious values that contribute to strengthening social cohesion and advancing inclusive and adaptive religious practices.

¹² Derri Ris Riana, Mukhammad Isnaeni, and Syaifuddin Syaifuddin, "Diaspora Indonesia Dan Penguatan Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia Di Australia," *Prosiding Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya (KOLITA)* 20, no. 20 (October 19, 2022): 44–54, <https://doi.org/10.25170/kolita.20.3776>.

¹³ Veevers and Powel, "The Mesozoic and Cenozoic Eras."

Principles of Australian Values

Social harmony in Australia is underpinned by fundamental principles collectively known as Australian values. These values form the basis of an inclusive society, particularly significant in a nation where the majority of the population is of migrant descent, apart from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who are the original inhabitants of the land.

The first foundational principle is individual liberty and the protection of human rights.¹⁴ The Australian Constitution, particularly Section 116, guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits the government from establishing an official religion or interfering with the free exercise of religious practices.¹⁵ This constitutional safeguard extends to other civil liberties, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to pursue one's personal lifestyle, provided it remains within the bounds of the law.¹⁶ In a multicultural context, such freedoms enable individuals to express their cultural and religious identities while simultaneously respecting the rights and dignity of others.

The second key principle is equality. Australia prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability.¹⁷ Legal protections for equality are embedded in several legislative instruments, including the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, and the *Age Discrimination Act 2004*. This commitment to equality is also reflected in the cultural ethos of a "fair go," which encapsulates the belief that every individual should have an equal opportunity to succeed through personal effort and hard work (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020).¹⁸

The third core value is tolerance and respect for diversity. Australia is home to more than 270 ethnic groups, reflecting its profoundly multicultural character. The national multiculturalism policy encourages individuals to celebrate and preserve their cultural heritage while contributing to a shared national identity. The government supports this integration through various initiatives, including English language education programs, the official recognition of religious and cultural holidays, and legal protections against discrimination based on cultural or religious background.¹⁹

The fourth foundational value is the rule of law, which asserts that all individuals are equally subject to the law, without exception. Australia's legal framework ensures justice through a fair,

¹⁴ Ronald J Krotoszynski, Jr., "Australia: The Constitutional Protection of Political and Governmental Speech as an 'Implied Freedom' Essential to Facilitating Democratic Deliberation, the Electoral Process, and Democracy Itself," in *Free Speech as Civic Structure*, by Ronald J Krotoszynski, Jr., 1st ed. (Oxford University Press New York, NY, 2024), 103–34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780197662229.003.0005>.

¹⁵ Krotoszynski, Jr.

¹⁶ Australian Government, "Life in Australia: Australian Values and Principles," Portfolio Media and Engagement Branch (Australia, 2020).

¹⁷ Brian S Turner, "Religion, State and Civil Society: Nation-Building in Australia," in *Church-State Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 233–51.

¹⁸ Turner.

¹⁹ Jawad Syed and Robin Kramar, "What Is the Australian Model for Managing Cultural Diversity?" *Personnel Review* 39, no. 1 (December 22, 2009): 96–115, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011007887>.

transparent, and impartial judicial system, affirming that no individual or institution, including the government, is above the law. This principle underpins the maintenance of security, freedom, and social order in a pluralistic society.²⁰ Collectively, these four principles constitute the foundation of national life, positioning Australia as a model of inclusive and harmonious multiculturalism within an increasingly diverse global landscape.²¹

Foundations of Moderation and Social Change in Diaspora Communities

Religious moderation is an approach that emphasizes balance in the practice of religious teachings by rejecting all forms of extremism. In global and diaspora contexts, it plays a vital role in fostering social harmony, preserving cultural identity, and addressing the challenges of integration in multicultural societies. Etymologically, “moderation” derives from the Latin *moderatio*, meaning “neither excessive nor deficient.” In Islamic thought, this aligns with the concept of *wasathiyah*, which reflects values of justice, balance, and tolerance.²² The Qur’an describes Muslims as *ummatan wasathan* (QS Al-Baqarah: 143), highlighting moderation as an ideal characteristic of the Islamic community.

Muslim scholar Quraish Shihab identifies three core pillars of religious moderation: justice, balance, and tolerance.²³ Justice entails placing matters in their appropriate context and ensuring that rights are granted to those entitled to them. Balance refers to the capacity to maintain proportion between worldly and spiritual concerns. Tolerance signifies openness to diversity and respect for differing beliefs and perspectives.²⁴

Within this framework, religious moderation does not entail diluting the core tenets of religious teachings; rather, it preserves their integrity by steering clear of two forms of extremism: radicalism, which legitimizes violence in the name of religion, and liberalism, which may undermine foundational values.²⁵ Moderation, therefore, positions religion as a source of universal compassion and benefit (*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*).

In diaspora contexts, maintaining religious and cultural identity presents complex challenges, particularly amid differing societal values.²⁶ This tension often creates a dilemma between preserving

²⁰ Australian Government, “Life in Australia: Australian Values and Principles.”

²¹ John Braithwaite, “Community Values and Australian Jurisprudence,” *Sydney Law Review* 17, no. 3 (n.d.): 351–72.

²² Moh Ashif Fuadi et al., “Strengthening Religious Moderation to Counter Radicalism at IAIN Surakarta,” *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 21, no. 2 (November 2, 2021): 261–84, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v21i2.3102>.

²³ Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyah: Wawasan Islam Tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2019).

²⁴ Dudung Abdurahman et al., “Multicultural Islam in the Ottoman Turkish Civilization during the Medieval Era,” *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24, no. 2 (September 1, 2023): 144–55, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v24i2.4823>.

²⁵ Khoirul Huda et al., “Pemikiran Politik Islam Dalam Moderasi Beragama,” *El-Mujtama: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat* 4, no. 5 (September 2, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.47467/elmujtama.v4i5.3114>.

²⁶ Muhammad Heriyudanta and Risma Dwi Arisona, “Strengthening Religious Moderation Through Nalar Strategies as a Deradicalization Effort in the Indonesian Migrant Worker Community,” *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 5, no. 2 (July 27, 2024): 1098–1114, <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v5i2.5105>.

traditional roots and adapting to new cultural norms. Religious moderation offers a constructive approach for navigating this dynamic, enabling diaspora communities to uphold authentic religious practices while fostering social harmony.²⁷ This is reflected in active engagement in intercultural dialogue, the strengthening of social networks, and the preservation of religious heritage through education and community activities. As Wijarwadi explains:²⁸

“Although Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) does not explicitly use the term ‘religious moderation’, it is widely recognised as a moderate Islamic organisation. The educational content and religious practices promoted within NU reflect values of moderation. Study groups held in Kaifa, for example, include traditional Islamic rituals such as *yasinan* and *tahlilan*. Additionally, NU operates Qur’anic learning centres (TPQ) that teach children how to recite the Qur’an and practice *shalawat* while also preserving various Indonesian religious and cultural traditions”.

Through religious study and traditional practices, diaspora communities such as Nahdlatul Ulama have successfully integrated Islamic values and Indonesian cultural heritage into the fabric of diaspora life. Rituals such as *yasinan*, *tahlilan*, and Qur’anic instruction serve not only to preserve religious traditions but also to reinforce a shared identity in the face of cultural pressures. The principle of religious moderation enables diaspora communities to perform three strategic functions.

First, it facilitates the preservation of religious identity. Religious moderation supports a steadfast commitment to Islamic values while promoting openness to diversity. For instance, the study of classical Islamic texts (*kutub al-turath*), such as *al-Hikam* taught at NU Kaifa, enhances religious literacy and fosters a deep spiritual understanding of Islam that remains relevant in contemporary contexts.

Second, it aids in cultural integration. Religious moderation encourages the formation of a hybrid identity that blends traditional values with those of the host society. This is aptly captured by Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space,” a transitional cultural arena in which diaspora communities simultaneously preserve their heritage and serve as agents of social transformation.²⁹

Third, it promotes intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Through platforms such as the Diaspora Network for Driving Religious Moderation (*Jaringan Diaspora Penggerak Moderasi Beragama, JDPMB*), initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesian students abroad are empowered

²⁷ Miftahur Rohman, Muhammad Akmansyah, and Mukhibat Mukhibat, “Mainstreaming Strategies of Religious Moderation in Madrasah,” *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 22, no. 1 (May 24, 2022): 103, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v22i1.3806>.

²⁸ Wendy Wijarwadi, Wakil Ketua PCI Nahdlatul Ulama Australia-New Zealand, October 5, 2024.

²⁹ Antony Easthope, “Homi Bhabha, Hybridity and Identity, or Derrida versus Lacan,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 4, no. 1/2 (1998): 145–51.

to become active proponents of moderation, contributing to the development of tolerant and inclusive societies within their host countries.

However, the implementation of religious moderation within diaspora communities is not without challenges. These primarily stem from two sources: the influence of extremist ideologies and the pressures of assimilation from dominant societal norms. Limited access to moderate religious education, coupled with feelings of alienation in a new sociocultural environment, can increase the vulnerability of diaspora communities, particularly youth, to radical interpretations of religion.³⁰ Moreover, younger generations often experience identity conflicts as they navigate the tension between preserving cultural and religious traditions and fully adapting to the norms of their host societies. As expressed by Rohman in an interview:³¹

“One of the challenges faced in Western societies is the emphasis on individual freedoms, including the widespread dissemination and acceptance of issues such as LGBT rights. In countries like Australia, support for LGBT communities is part of broader commitments to human rights and personal liberty. While this reflects a pluralistic approach to freedom of belief and expression, it may also pose challenges to the preservation of Indonesian cultural and religious values within the diaspora. In response, the Muhammadiyah Special Branch (PCIM) in Sydney maintains a clear set of religious principles, which are consistently taught and upheld within the local Muhammadiyah community”.

This statement underscores the difficulty of preserving religious values within highly liberal cultural contexts. In response, the principle of inclusive and adaptive religious moderation offers a critical framework. Solutions include strengthening community-based networks, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and promoting religious education that emphasizes tolerance, contextual understanding, and moderation—especially among the younger generation.³² Such education not only counters extremism but also fosters the capacity to engage, adapt, and contribute meaningfully within diverse societies.

Through this approach, diaspora communities can thrive as agents of positive social change, rooted in Islamic values while embracing inclusive global citizenship. As an approach, religious

³⁰ Sri Guno Najib Chaqoqo and Sukron Ma'mun, “The Islamic Discourses of Indonesian Islamist Organizations,” *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 24, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 109–25, <https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v24i1.16616>.

³¹ Izza Rohman, The head of PCI Muhammadiyah, Sydney, November 18, 2024.

³² Friedrich Schweitzer, “Education for Tolerance,” in *Religious Education*, ed. Ednan Aslan and Margaret Rausch (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2018), 19–34, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-21677-1_2; Samuel Curkpatrick, Hery Susanto, and Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu, “Symbolic Cohesion and Interpretive Freedom: Embodying Unity in Diversity through Warlpiri Ngurra-Kurlu and Indonesian Pancasila,” *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 37, no. 2 (August 30, 2024): 243–66, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.26695>.

moderation is not only theologically significant but also socially strategic. Within diaspora contexts, it functions not merely as a necessity but as a sustainable solution for preserving identity, fostering social harmony, and addressing contemporary challenges. Supported by initiatives such as the JDPMB and the reinforcement of moderate religious education, the Indonesian diaspora has the potential to serve as ambassadors of global moderation, embodying the principle of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* through the lived experience of cross-cultural engagement.

Reconceptualising Religious Moderation within Diaspora Communities

The Indonesian diaspora community in Sydney navigates a dynamic multicultural environment that presents both challenges and opportunities for religious practice.³³ Within a predominantly secular and pluralistic society, maintaining a strong religious identity necessitates a balanced approach. Religious moderation serves as a critical framework, enabling the community to uphold core Islamic values while integrating harmoniously into Australian society.³⁴ This approach effectively bridges the gap between religious conviction and local social norms.

In this context, reconceptualising religious moderation involves operationalising principles such as tolerance, justice, and balance into practical engagements with multicultural life. This includes respecting local values while preserving religious traditions in adaptive ways—for example, through inclusive cross-cultural events that celebrate Islamic holidays and promote moderate religious values to the broader community.³⁵

Religious moderation enables the Indonesian diaspora in Sydney to function as agents of tolerance and social cohesion. By promoting inclusive and peaceful religious practices, they exemplify how faith can thrive within a pluralistic society. This role is reinforced through collaborations with local institutions, including interfaith dialogues, cross-community charity work, and educational initiatives that emphasise moderate religious values.³⁶ In doing so, the diaspora not only preserves its religious identity but also actively contributes to building a more inclusive and harmonious Sydney. Through this moderation-based approach, they serve as cultural bridges, fostering mutual understanding and enriching both their heritage and the broader Australian society.³⁷

³³ Muttaqin, Arifin, and Wajdi, "Problems, Challenges and Prospects of Indonesian Muslim Community in Sydney for Promoting Tolerance."

³⁴ Muhammad Adnan, Nailul Husna, and Ni'matul Fauziah, "Religious Moderation Perspectives and Practices in Muslim Youths With International Exposure," *JURNAL ILMU SOSIAL* 23, no. 1 (June 19, 2024): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.14710/jis.23.1.2024.1-19>.

³⁵ Adnan, Husna, and Fauziah.

³⁶ Ahmad Hasan Ridwan et al., "Implementing and Interpreting Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Moderation Concept in the Indonesian Context," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (November 11, 2022): 58–73, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.05>.

³⁷ Suhadi Cholil, "Freedom of Religion amid Polarization and Religious Moderation Policy," *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 6, no. 2 (March 30, 2023): 196–204, <https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.24603>.

Religious moderation within the Indonesian diaspora community reflects a continuous effort to balance Islamic values with adaptation to Australia's secular culture. A notable challenge relates to identity, as many Indonesian Muslims prefer identifying as "Indonesian Muslims in Australia" rather than "Australian Muslims."³⁸ This identity is reinforced through religious practices, such as *pengajian* (Islamic study groups), Islamic holiday celebrations, and religious teachings rooted in *Nahdlatul Ulama*³⁹ and *Muhammadiyah* traditions.⁴⁰

"We, the *Nahdliyyin* in Sydney, continue to uphold the traditions practised in Indonesia. During religious holidays, we still celebrate them with traditional Indonesian dishes. Food, of course, plays an important role in this, as it helps us satisfy our longing for our homeland".⁴¹

"At Iqro, religious celebrations are frequently held, such as halal bi halal and Islamic New Year celebrations, among others. These events are always accompanied by traditional Indonesian dishes, like *bakso*, *rendang*, *satay*, *opor*, and more".⁴²

Living in a pluralistic environment compels the diaspora to adapt to values such as individualism, gender equality, and secular governance. These challenges often prompt the community to reinterpret and reapply religious values in ways that remain relevant in diverse social contexts.⁴³

Reconceptualising religious moderation involves several key strategies. *First*, adapting to a multicultural environment is essential for sustaining a harmonious religious life. Mosques and Indonesian Muslim community centres in Sydney provide inclusive spaces for prayer and cultural exchange, in alignment with Australia's pluralistic norms.⁴⁴ Events such as the Ramadan night market in Lakemba, which attracts participants of various faiths and backgrounds, exemplify how the diaspora integrates its traditions into the broader social fabric.

Second, the preservation of religious identity remains a priority. Religious study groups and organisations play a vital role in maintaining Indonesian Islamic practices. Regular activities such as *pengajian kitab kuning* (classical Islamic text study) and *tahlilan* (communal prayer) function as

³⁸ Muttaqin, Arifin, and Wajdi, "Problems, Challenges and Prospects of Indonesian Muslim Community in Sydney for Promoting Tolerance."

³⁹ Andree Feillard, *NU vis a vis Negara; Pencarian Isi, Bentuk dan Makna* (Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 1999).

⁴⁰ Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises Over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, C. 1910-2010* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012).

⁴¹ Wijarwadi, Wakil Ketua PCI Nahdlatul Ulama Australia-New Zealand.

⁴² Hasran Addahroni, Pembina Iqro Foundation, Sydney, October 21, 2024.

⁴³ Mike Mohamed Ghouse, "Shaping Pluralistic Cohesive Societies," *Academicus International Scientific Journal* 26 (July 2022): 154–60, <https://doi.org/10.7336/academicus.2022.26.10>.

⁴⁴ Wijarwadi, Wakil Ketua PCI Nahdlatul Ulama Australia-New Zealand.

platforms for transmitting spiritual values to younger generations.⁴⁵ These practices ensure continuity of religious identity while accommodating a secular environment.

Third, promoting tolerance through education and dialogue is fundamental. Educational initiatives—including Indonesian language and culture classes, interfaith discussions, and mosque open days—facilitate cross-cultural understanding. For example, open day events at Iqro Mosque enable local communities to engage with Islam directly, helping to dispel misconceptions.⁴⁶ As Addahroni stated, “*We don’t just open the mosque for Friday prayers or study sessions; even during religious activities and meals, many people -both members of Iqro and non-Indonesians- participate*”.

Fourth, active involvement in public life is critical. Participation in multicultural events such as halal food bazaars and cultural festivals enhances engagement with the wider Australian population. This interaction demonstrates that Islamic values can coexist with democratic and inclusive principles.⁴⁷ Rohman noted, “*I usually join other Muslim communities, not just Muhammadiyah. Activities in Muhammadiyah sometimes conflict with those of other organisations, such as NU or Iqro*”.

Despite these positive developments, the community faces several obstacles. One major challenge is the influence of extremist ideologies, which exploit feelings of marginalisation to promote narratives contrary to the values of moderation.⁴⁸ Additionally, pressures to fully assimilate can create identity dilemmas, particularly for younger generations seeking to reconcile cultural and religious heritage with Australian norms.⁴⁹ Internal divisions within Muslim communities—stemming from ethnic, doctrinal, or practical differences—also pose challenges to unity and cohesion.

Addressing these challenges requires an inclusive and dialogical approach that embraces internal diversity.⁵⁰ This can be achieved through intergroup discussion forums, social events, and inclusive religious celebrations, transforming differences into opportunities for mutual enrichment. Religious education also plays a critical role by instilling values of tolerance, openness, and respect for diversity.⁵¹ Such programmes should not only deepen religious knowledge but also develop social skills necessary for engagement in a multicultural society.⁵² For instance, courses on effective communication

⁴⁵ Moch Fakhruroji, “Maintaining Indonesian Muslim Identity through Islamic Study Groups,” *Komunitas* 11, no. 1 (March 28, 2019): 75–84, <https://doi.org/10.15294/komunitas.v11i1.16950>.

⁴⁶ Addahroni, Pembina Iqro Foundation, Sydney.

⁴⁷ Rohman, Ketua PCI Muhammadiyah, Sydney.

⁴⁸ Nadiatus Salama, “Breaking Barriers: The Fight Against Discrimination Among Indonesian Muslim Minority in America,” *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 9, no. 1 (September 18, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v9i1.9921>.

⁴⁹ Rohman, Ketua PCI Muhammadiyah, Sydney.

⁵⁰ Ibnu Salim, “Understanding and Implementation of the Unity in Diversity Principle in Handling Racism and Discrimination in Indonesia,” *OSF Preprints*, June 18, 2023.

⁵¹ Edi Ahyani, “Role of Religious Education in Shaping Religious Moderation Awareness Among Students,” *12 Waiheru* 10, no. 1 (June 1, 2024): 85–94, <https://doi.org/10.47655/12waiheru.v10i1.182>.

⁵² Wiwik Angranti, “The Importance of Teaching Religious Moderation in Shaping Pluralist Understanding in Islamic Education,” *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 03 (August 30, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v13i03.6581>.

in pluralistic settings can help the diaspora build harmonious relationships with the broader community.

Collaboration with local institutions and interfaith organisations further enhances the diaspora's role in promoting religious moderation.⁵³ These partnerships allow the community to advocate for inclusive values and contribute to building mutual understanding across cultural and religious divides. Through such efforts, the diaspora addresses both internal and external challenges while advancing a peaceful and respectful multicultural environment.

The reconceptualization of religious moderation among the Indonesian diaspora in Sydney is a dynamic and ongoing process. It involves balancing integration with cultural preservation, and tolerance with religious conviction. This approach allows the community to maintain a distinctly Indonesian Islamic identity while acting as a model of religious moderation in a pluralistic context.⁵⁴

Through cross-cultural initiatives that highlight Indonesian Islamic traditions, such as festivals featuring traditional cuisine and art, the diaspora fosters deeper understanding with the local community. These efforts contribute to positive perceptions of Islam and Indonesia as integral components of global diversity.⁵⁵

Moreover, by participating in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue, the Indonesian diaspora actively promotes religious moderation. Their engagement in forums and partnerships with local organisations underscores their commitment to mutual respect and social harmony.⁵⁶ In doing so, they not only strengthen community cohesion in Sydney but also offer a replicable model of peaceful coexistence for other multicultural societies.

Ultimately, the Indonesian diaspora community in Sydney demonstrates that religion, when grounded in moderation, can serve as a force for unity rather than division. By integrating Islamic values with openness to local norms, they reinforce religious moderation as a crucial foundation for an inclusive, peaceful, and harmonious global society.

⁵³ Abdullah Aziz et al., "The Relevance of the Value of Religious Moderation in the World of Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Education," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (June 11, 2024): 189, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v9i1.9024>; Mishbah Khoiruddin Zuhri, Safii Safii, and Mohamad Sobirin, "Indonesian Muslim Diaspora: Strengthening Cognitive Aspects and Competencies Regarding Islamic Heritage in Southeast Asia," *Dimas: Jurnal Pemikiran Agama Untuk Pemberdayaan* 23, no. 1 (May 31, 2023): 173–96, <https://doi.org/10.21580/dms.2023.231.14785>.

⁵⁴ Masykur Et Al., "Reviving Religious Moderation for World Peace from The Religious Moderation House in Indonesia," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, No. 3 (June 21, 2024): 295–307, <https://doi.org/10.62754/Joe.V3i3.3343>; Nur Hafizoh Lubis Et Al., "Contextual Interpretation of Religious Moderation Verses According to Abdurrahman Wahid," *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 6, no. 2 (April 26, 2024): 189–212, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v6i2.337>.

⁵⁵ Titik Sudartinah, "Promoting Cultural Literacy in Indonesian Multicultural Setting," *OSF Preprints*, April 19, 2023; Melsya Firtikasari and Dinda Andiana, "Pentingnya Multikultural Dalam Lembaga Pendidikan," *Jurnal BELAINDIKA (Pembelajaran Dan Inovasi Pendidikan)* 5, no. 2 (September 27, 2023): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.52005/belaindika.v5i2.117>.

⁵⁶ Ali Mursyid Azisi et al., "Recontextualizing Interfaith Dialogue as an Implementation of Religious Moderation in the Modern Era: A Study of the Online-Based Inclusive Movement," *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 8, no. 1 (May 30, 2023): 83, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v8i1.7461>; Muhammad Danu Winata et al., "Interpreting Intercultural Communication Approach of Indonesian Diaspora in Turkiye," *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi* 16, no. 1 (June 8, 2023): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.14421/pjk.v16i1.2721>.

Conclusion

This study yields three principal conclusions. First, the promotion of religious moderation among the Indonesian diaspora in Australia is actively supported by key organisations such as PCI Nahdlatul Ulama (PCI NU), PCI Muhammadiyah (PCIM), the Iqro Foundation, and the Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN). These institutions play a vital role in cultivating inclusive religious practices, fostering internal cohesion, and facilitating peaceful intercultural engagement. Religious moderation thus functions not only as a theological stance but also as a practical framework for sustaining harmony within and beyond the diaspora community.

Second, Australian public institutions, by upholding principles of pluralism, religious freedom, and multicultural inclusion, provide an enabling environment in which diaspora communities can freely express and preserve their religious and cultural identities. This institutional support significantly reinforces the viability of moderation as a lived practice in a secular and diverse society. Third, although the Indonesian diaspora faces challenges related to identity negotiation and cultural adaptation, it has demonstrated a remarkable ability to internalise and implement moderate Islamic values within a multicultural setting. This success reflects a dynamic reconceptualization of religiosity that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to contemporary global realities.

Considering these findings, this study offers two key recommendations. First, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs should initiate and fund further research aimed at the development of diaspora-specific curricula on religious moderation. This includes the provision of contextually relevant teaching materials, cross-cultural engagement initiatives, and leadership development programmes. Second, a strategic framework should be established to support diaspora organisations, such as through the creation of a Religious Moderation Diaspora Network and the integration of digital technologies to enhance outreach and education.

Ultimately, this study affirms that religious moderation is essential to the preservation of identity, the cultivation of harmony, and the promotion of intercultural understanding within the Indonesian diaspora. Moreover, the Indonesian experience in Australia offers a replicable model of inclusive and tolerant religiosity that contributes meaningfully to global discourses on religion, migration, and pluralism.

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