

Nahdlatul Ulama's Strategies for Countering Radicalism in Indonesia: A Cultural and Religious Educational Approach

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the increasing spread of religious radicalism in Indonesia which has the potential to threaten social harmony, the integrity of the nation, and moderate Islamic values that have taken root in people's lives. In this context, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as the largest religious organization in Indonesia has a strategic role in counteracting radicalism through cultural and religious educational approaches. This research aims to analyze NU's strategy in preventing and overcoming radicalism, especially through strengthening moderate Islamic values (*wasathiyah*), developing education based on local traditions, and internalizing the teachings of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*. The research methodology used is a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical type of research. Data was collected through literature studies of NU's official documents, books, and scientific journals, and supported by interviews and observations of NU's educational practices and religious activities at the grassroots level. Data analysis techniques are carried out by means of data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusion drawn. The findings of the study show that NU's strategy in countering radicalism is carried out through several main approaches, namely: (1) cultural education based on *pesantren* traditions, religious practices, and local wisdom; (2) strengthening the curriculum and moderate Islamic *da'wah* that emphasizes the values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice); and (3) the development of educational and *da'wah* institutional networks that are adaptive to contemporary challenges. This strategy has proven effective in building people's ideological resilience to radical ideas and strengthening a peaceful and inclusive Islam in Indonesia.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama, Radicalism, Moderate Education

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh meningkatnya penyebaran paham radikalisme keagamaan di Indonesia yang berpotensi mengancam harmoni sosial, keutuhan bangsa, serta nilai-nilai Islam moderat yang telah mengakar dalam kehidupan masyarakat. Dalam konteks tersebut, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) sebagai organisasi keagamaan terbesar di

Indonesia memiliki peran strategis dalam menangkal radikalisme melalui pendekatan pendidikan yang bersifat kultural dan keagamaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi NU dalam mencegah dan menanggulangi radikalisme, khususnya melalui penguatan nilai-nilai Islam moderat (*wasathiyah*), pengembangan pendidikan berbasis tradisi lokal, serta internalisasi ajaran *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*. Metodologi penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian deskriptif-analitis. Data dikumpulkan melalui studi pustaka terhadap dokumen resmi NU, buku, dan jurnal ilmiah, serta didukung oleh wawancara dan observasi terhadap praktik pendidikan dan kegiatan keagamaan NU di tingkat akar rumput. Teknik analisis data dilakukan dengan cara reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan secara tematik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi NU dalam menangkal radikalisme dilakukan melalui beberapa pendekatan utama, yaitu: (1) pendidikan kultural berbasis tradisi pesantren, amaliyah keagamaan, dan kearifan lokal; (2) penguatan kurikulum dan dakwah Islam moderat yang menekankan nilai tasamuh (toleransi), tawazun (keseimbangan), dan *i'tidal* (keadilan); serta (3) pengembangan jaringan kelembagaan pendidikan dan dakwah yang adaptif terhadap tantangan kontemporer. Strategi ini terbukti efektif dalam membangun daya tahan ideologis masyarakat terhadap paham radikal serta memperkuat Islam yang damai dan inklusif di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Nahdlatul Ulama, Radikalisme, Pendidikan Moderat

A. INTRODUCTION

Religious radicalism is a serious challenge facing the Indonesian nation, particularly in the context of social, cultural, and religious diversity. As the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia faces potential vulnerability to the infiltration of radical ideologies, often in the name of religion. This radicalism not only threatens national security but also undermines the foundations of unity built through the values of Pancasila and the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Radicalism often manifests itself through ideological propaganda, the spread of hate narratives, and the blurring of moderate religious understandings, thus influencing the thinking and actions of some segments of society, especially the younger generation, who are susceptible to instant doctrines.¹

In this context, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as Indonesia's largest religious organization, holds a strategic position in countering the development of radical ideology. Founded in 1926, NU upholds the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* ideology, which emphasizes the principles of moderation (*tawassuth*), balance (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and justice (*i'tidal*). These principles serve as a crucial foundation for protecting society from the infiltration of extremist ideologies. NU's role extends beyond the religious realm to the educational, social, and cultural sectors. Through its Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), religious study groups (*masjid taklim*), and

¹Oni Arizal et al., "The Urgency of Digital Literacy in Countering Radicalism Among the Millennial Generation in the Era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0," *Socio-Cultural Dynamics* 23, no. 1 (2021): 126–133, <http://journals.usm.ac.id/index.php/jdsb>.

missionary institutions, NU instills the values of Islam, a mercy for all the worlds, in line with local wisdom and national principles.²

The cultural education approach promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has proven effective in internalizing moderate Islamic teachings. For example, through religious traditions such as tahlilan (recitation of the Prophet's birthday), Yasinan (recitation of the Yasin), and manakiban (recitation of the Quran), NU has succeeded in building a religious culture that is familiar to the community, making radical ideas that tend to reject tradition easily recognized and anticipated. These activities are not merely rituals, but also a means of strengthening social ties, fostering solidarity, and strengthening a peaceful religious identity. Thus, NU's cultural approach not only preserves traditional heritage but also serves as an effective cultural bulwark against the penetration of radical ideologies.³

On the other hand, NU's religious approach emphasizes strengthening a comprehensive and contextual understanding of Islam. Through Islamic boarding school education that emphasizes the study of classical texts (kutub al-turats) and dialogue with contemporary developments, NU equips students and the community with critical thinking skills regarding religious discourse. NU's da'wah rejects a narrow, textualist approach that tends to be exclusive and lead to radicalism, replacing it with an inclusive, balanced understanding of religion that respects the diversity of opinions of scholars. The role of scholars, kiai, and community leaders within the NU network is a key factor in ensuring the message of moderation reaches the grassroots throughout the region.⁴

The urgency of this research is further heightened given the advancement of information technology, which has accelerated the spread of radical ideology through social media, digital platforms, and online forums. Radical ideology now targets not only public spaces but also private spaces, such as small communities and even the family. In such circumstances, Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) strategy to counter radicalism must be continuously explored, strengthened, and adapted to the times, without losing the substance of its distinctive moderate values.⁵

Therefore, this research is crucial to analyze Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) strategy in countering radicalism through two primary approaches: cultural and religious. This approach not only highlights da'wah and educational activities but also examines how NU utilizes local culture as a peaceful and effective means of deradicalization. By

²Mustaqim Hasan, "THE PRINCIPLE OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN NATIONAL LIFE," *Mubtadiin Journal*, 2021, <https://journal.an-nur.ac.id/index.php/mubtadii>.

³M Munif, Mujamil Qomar, and Abdul Aziz, "Religious Moderation Policy in Indonesia," *Beaten* 6, no. 2 (2023): 418–427, <https://ejournal.iaifa.ac.id/index.php/dirasah>.

⁴Fadhil Hidayat Akbar, Farida Lailatul Fasha, and Faris Abdullah, "The Concept of Religious Moderation in a Review of the Qur'an and Hadith," *Bulletin of Islamic Research* 2, no. 1 (2024): 59–80, <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v2i1.21>.

⁵Theguh Saumantri, "Actualizing Religious Moderation in Social Media," *MODERATIO: Journal of Religious Moderation* 3, no. 1 (2023): 64, <https://doi.org/10.32332/moderatio.v3i1.6534>.

studying these strategies, it is hoped that a relevant and widely applicable model for countering radicalism can be identified within Indonesia's multicultural society.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptually, radicalism can be understood as a view or action that seeks rapid, comprehensive, and fundamental change through extreme means, often ignoring humanitarian values and tolerance, as stated by Azra in 2017. In a religious context, radicalism refers to a rigid, exclusive interpretation of religious teachings that rejects diversity of views. The Social Movement Theory proposed by Charles Tilly in 2004 is relevant for understanding the dynamics of radicalism, where radical movements are born from a combination of political opportunities, organizational networks, and ideological framing that mobilizes support. Religious radicalism in Indonesia often emerges through a process of ideological indoctrination that exploits issues of social justice, economic inequality, and identity conflict. Therefore, deradicalization efforts are not sufficient with a security approach alone, but require strategies that touch on the cultural and religious realms, which can change the mindset of society from within.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), from the perspective of the Cultural Approach theory (Geertz, 1973), utilizes local cultural values and symbols to build a moderate religious identity. This approach aligns with the concept of Islam Nusantara, which combines Islamic teachings with local wisdom without compromising the purity of sharia. NU's cultural strategy aligns with Putnam's (2000) Social Capital theory, where social networks, religious values, and norms of mutual cooperation play a crucial role in preventing the development of radical ideology. In the religious dimension, NU prioritizes the principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah, which emphasize moderation (*wasathiyah*), balance (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and justice (*i'tidal*), which theoretically can form ideological resistance at the grassroots level. Thus, this theoretical study combines sociological and religious perspectives to explain why and how NU's strategy is able to become an effective bulwark against radicalism in Indonesia.

C. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study research type. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand in-depth the strategy of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in countering radicalism through cultural and religious approaches at the local level, specifically in Indramayu Regency, West Java. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually, capture meaning from the perspective of the actors, and identify deradicalization practices carried out by NU in this region. Indramayu Regency was chosen as the research locus because it is an area with a strong Nahdliyin base through a network of Islamic boarding schools and religious study groups, but on the other hand, it also faces the

challenge of the spread of radical ideology through digital media and certain religious activities.⁶

The research subjects included administrators of the Nahdlatul Ulama Branch (PCNU) in Indramayu, Islamic boarding school kiai (Islamic boarding school) who are active in religious moderation preaching activities, Islamic boarding school teachers who guide students with the NU curriculum, as well as the community and students who are beneficiaries of the deradicalization program. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in NU activities related to radicalism prevention. Data collection was conducted through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews with NU administrators, kiai, and community leaders; participatory observation of religious and cultural activities such as tahlilan, the Prophet's birthday, manakiban, and regular religious study; and documentation studies of archives, activity reports, books, and preaching materials issued by NU Indramayu.⁷

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and inductive conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by sorting relevant information regarding NU's cultural and religious strategies; data presentation was arranged in the form of a thematic narrative; while conclusions were drawn after a verification process through source triangulation and technical triangulation. Data validity was also strengthened by member checking, which involves requesting reconfirmation from informants regarding the accuracy of the information obtained. With this method, the study is expected to comprehensively describe how NU Indramayu utilizes the strength of local culture and moderate religious teachings as an effective bulwark in preventing and countering

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. The Concept of Radicalism

According to Azra (2017), radicalism is an ideology that demands total and rapid change, usually through extreme means that often involve physical or symbolic violence. Radicalism essentially involves a rejection of existing social, political, and religious orders, with the goal of completely replacing them in accordance with the ideology or beliefs of a particular group. The fundamental characteristic of radicalism is the belief that change can only be achieved through drastic measures, without compromise, and often disregarding peaceful or constitutional procedures. From this perspective, radicalism is seen not only as an intellectual attitude, but also as a socio-

⁶Yasri Rifa'i, "Analysis of Qualitative Research Methodology in Data Collection in Scientific Research in the Preparation of Mini Research," *Innovative and Cultured Scholar* 1, no. 1 (2023), hal. 31–37.

⁷Edi Junaedi, "Religious Moderation in a Critical Review of Religious Freedom," *Harmony* 21, no. 2 (2022): 330–339, <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v21i2.641>.

political movement that can threaten the stability of society, especially when tinged with excessive fanaticism.⁸

In a religious context, radicalism is characterized by a narrow interpretation of religious texts, tending towards literalism and ignoring the historical, social, and cultural context of those teachings. Radical groups often view religious texts in a black-and-white manner, thus rejecting alternative interpretations or differing opinions among religious scholars. This exclusive attitude creates rigid restrictions on interactions with those outside their group. Religious exclusivism then triggers intolerant behavior, where radical groups find it difficult to accept differences in beliefs, schools of thought, or views that align with their understanding. This intolerance can manifest itself in the form of hate speech, discrimination, attacks on symbols of other religions, or acts of physical violence in the name of religion.⁹

The phenomenon of religious radicalism becomes increasingly complex when combined with specific political or ideological agendas. In such situations, religion is often used as a legitimation to justify acts of violence or rebellion against the state. This type of radicalism is dangerous because it has the potential to divide society, undermine social cohesion, and create horizontal conflict. Therefore, understanding radicalism from the perspective described by Azra (2017) is crucial for formulating appropriate prevention and response strategies. A comprehensive approach must involve strengthening moderate religious understanding, promoting multicultural education, and building awareness of the importance of tolerance and respect for differences in national and state life.¹⁰

Religious radicalism has recognizable characteristics in the mindset, attitudes, and actions of its adherents. One of its main characteristics is a rejection of difference and plurality. Radical groups view truth as existing only within their own understanding, thus rejecting recognition of the diversity of beliefs, schools of thought, and religious practices. This attitude ignores the fact that Indonesian society consists of various religions, cultures, and traditions that have coexisted for centuries. Furthermore, religious radicalism tends to employ a textualist interpretation of religious teachings, meaning that sacred texts are understood literally without considering the historical, social, and cultural contexts behind them. This interpretation closes off the space for *ijtihad* (intelligence) and dialogue, resulting in a rigid and inflexible perspective in dealing with the dynamics of modern society. Furthermore, radical groups often display a tendency to consider other groups as infidels (*takfirism*). This labeling is directed not only at adherents of other religions but also at fellow Muslims who hold

⁸Made Saihu, "Educational Moderation: A Means of Grounding Tolerance in the World of Education," *Islamic Education: Journal of Islamic Education* 11, no. 02 (2022): 629, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i02.2651>.

⁹Agus Akhmadi, "Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Diversity," *Journal of Religious Education and Training* 13, no. 2 (2019), hal. 45–55.

¹⁰Ahmad Zainuri Fahri, Mohammad, "Religious Moderation in Indonesia," *Waiting* 13, no. 5 (2022), hal.51.

differing religious views or practices. This takfiri attitude is dangerous because it can trigger internal conflict within the Muslim community and widen the divide.¹¹

Another prominent characteristic is the justification of violence in the name of religion. For some radical groups, violence is seen as a legitimate means to achieve ideological goals, whether in the form of physical attacks, acts of terror, or hate campaigns. This violence is often packaged in a distorted narrative of jihad, thus influencing followers who lack a deep understanding of religious teachings. From the perspective of Social Movement Theory proposed by Tilly (2004), religious radicalism can develop due to three main driving factors. First, political opportunity, namely a political situation that allows radical groups to move freely, for example when government oversight is weakened or political instability occurs. Second, network mobilization (mobilizing structures), namely the ability of radical groups to utilize organizational structures, social media, and personal relationships to recruit new members and expand their influence. Third, ideological framing (framing process), namely the strategy of constructing a compelling ideological narrative, such as presenting oneself as a champion of truth or a defender of the oppressed. The combination of the characteristics of radicalism with these driving factors makes radical movements dangerously attractive and mobilizing, thus requiring a comprehensive and sustainable countermeasure strategy.

Between 2020 and 2025, the dynamics of violence and violations of religious freedom in Indonesia demonstrate that intolerance remains a major national challenge. According to the annual Freedom of Religion/Belief (KBB) report released by the Setara Institute and several other monitoring institutions, hundreds of violations occurred in various forms. 2020 marked the beginning of the period with 180 cases, which, despite being amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, did not show a significant decrease compared to previous years. In fact, social restrictions have allowed narratives of hatred and religious discrimination to flourish through digital platforms. Rejection of the construction of houses of worship, bans on religious activities by minority groups, and criminalization of blasphemy are the three most dominant patterns of violations. West Java, East Java, Aceh, and Jakarta recorded the highest rates, demonstrating that intolerance emerges not only in religiously homogeneous areas but also in areas with high diversity.

Table of Religious-Based Violence & Discrimination in Indonesia (2020–2025)

¹¹M. Anzaikhan, Fitri Idani, and Muliani Muliani, "Religious Moderation as a Uniting Force for the Nation and Its Role in Higher Education," *Abrahamic Religions: Journal of the Study of Religions* 3, no. 1 (2023): 17, <https://doi.org/10.22373/arj.v3i1.16088>.

Year	Case Type	Location/Subject	Explanation
2020	Rejection & Eviction of (Christian) places of worship	Yogyakarta, Bogor, Riau, Bekasi	Closure or cancellation of church permits, threats of jihad, refusal to build places of worship
	Terror attacks against Christians	Central Sulawesi	Four Salvation Army members were burned to death/captured by Islamic militants
2021	Suicide bombing at Makassar Cathedral	Makassar, South Sulawesi	Two suicide bombers; 20 injured
2022	Learning intolerance in religious schools (physical/sexual)	East Java (Gresik, Pasuruan, Jember)	Cases of physical violence, burning of students, and sexual violence were reported.
	Blasphemy laws are being applied more broadly	National	The new Criminal Code expands the blasphemy article to include 'apostasy' with the threat of imprisonment.
2023	Sectarian violence between mass organizations accompanies Gaza demonstrations	Bitung, North Sulawesi	Anti- and pro-Palestinian clashes resulted in one death and vandalism.
	National Human Rights Commission report on increasing intolerance	National	Reports of increasing complaints of intolerance and obstacles to the construction of houses of worship
2024	Forced dispersal & violence against Catholic students during Rosary prayer;	South Tangerang	3 injured and 4 people named as suspects.

Year	Case Type	Location/Subject	Explanation
2025	destruction of GKSI prayer house; children injured/psychological impact;	Padang	9 suspects were arrested and made suspects

Source:

1. Setara Institute; Annual KBB Report (2020, 2021, 2024), SISFO kBB data (2020–2025)
2. National Commission on Human Rights; Official statement and monitoring of violations of the KBB (2020)
3. Wahid Institute; Documentation of religious-based violence and an in-depth analysis of its impact
4. Wikipedia / Freedom House; National trends summary (2022) & religious freedom rankings
5. YouTube Setara & Narasi Daily: Visualization of the results of the KBB and IKT (Inclusivity Index of Tolerant Cities) research

Entering 2021 and 2023, the number of cases did fluctuate, but the pattern of violations remained relatively constant. In 2021, there were 177 cases, a slight increase in 2022 to 190, and a slight decrease in 2023 to 185. This decline was not solely the result of successful policies but also a shift in the form of violence, shifting from physical acts to symbolic and digital violence, such as hate speech, stigmatization, and doxing against certain groups. In 2024 and 2025, although preliminary data is still being collected, radicalism and intolerance remain a serious threat. The state's role through law enforcement, public education, and policies protecting religious rights remains suboptimal, as evidenced by the continued inaction of authorities or even the involvement of individuals in several cases. This reality underscores the importance of collaboration between the state, religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, community leaders, and the media to build ideological and cultural resilience. Continuous education for tolerance, interfaith understanding, and strengthening religious moderation must be prioritized on the national agenda if Indonesia is to maintain its reputation as a peaceful, diverse nation.

2. Relevant Theoretical Approach

In understanding Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) strategy in countering radicalism in Indonesia, three main theoretical frameworks can be used to explain the dynamics that occur: Social Movement Theory (Tilly, 2004), Cultural Approach (Geertz, 1973), and Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000). Social Movement Theory helps explain how radical groups form, spread, and maintain their existence through resource mobilization, exploiting political opportunities, and framing ideological narratives. In this context, radicalism can develop due to the existence of certain political spaces, structured organizational networks, and ideological rhetoric that arouses the

emotions and solidarity of its followers. NU understands this radical movement pattern, so its prevention strategies are aimed at breaking the chain of mobilization, narrowing political opportunities for radical groups, and dismantling their ideological framing with peaceful and inclusive religious narratives.¹²

Geertz's (1973) Cultural Approach theory provides a lens for examining how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) utilizes local symbols, values, and traditions as a medium for internalizing moderate values effectively in countering radicalism. Traditions such as tahlilan (recitation of the Prophet's birthday), yasinan (recitation of the Prophet's birthday), and manakiban (recitation of the Prophet's birthday), not only serve as religious rituals but also as a means of strengthening social bonds, teaching tolerance, and maintaining the identity of Nusantara Islam, which is friendly to diversity. By maintaining and developing these traditions, NU is able to create a strong cultural barrier against radical ideologies that tend to reject local wisdom. In this study, NU's cultural approach is key to understanding why moderate values can persist in society despite attempts at infiltration by extremist ideologies.

Meanwhile, Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital explains how social networks, values of trust, and norms of mutual cooperation play a crucial role in strengthening community resilience against the penetration of radical ideology. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) possesses extensive social capital through its network of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), religious study groups (Majelis Taklim), youth organizations, and movement wings that reach nearly all levels of society. This social capital enables NU to effectively disseminate messages of moderation, facilitate community solidarity, and create internal social defense mechanisms. Public trust in NU clerics strengthens the legitimacy of their preaching, making anti-radicalism messages more readily accepted and practiced.

By combining these three theories, this study can comprehensively illustrate how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) acts not only as an ideological bulwark but also as a cultural driver and a strengthener of social capital in the community in confronting radicalism. Social Movement Theory explains the challenges faced, Cultural Approach explains the cultural strategies adopted, and Social Capital Theory demonstrates the strength of the social networks utilized by NU. The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive picture of NU's strategy in maintaining the sustainability of moderate Islam in Indonesia.

3. Nahdlatul Ulama and Religious Moderation

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is Indonesia's largest Islamic community organization, founded on January 31, 1926, in Surabaya. It was founded by Islamic boarding school scholars in response to various religious, social, and political dynamics, both nationally and internationally. Historically, NU was founded to uphold Islamic teachings in accordance with the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) tradition and to respect the

¹²Dewi Dhea Gita Ananda, Aisyah Puspita, "Religious Moderation Education: Building Tolerance and Diversity," *AI-IKTIAR: Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 3 (2024), hal 1–12.

local wisdom of the Indonesian people. Amidst the currents of modernization, globalization, and the increasing spread of radical ideologies, NU plays a strategic role as the guardian of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*), a religious style that rejects extreme attitudes and prioritizes a balance between text and context, religion and culture, and spirituality and progress.¹³

In principle, NU adheres to the four main values in the *Aswaja* ideology, namely *Tawassuth*, *Tawazun*, *Tasamuh*, and *I'tidal*. First *Tawassuth*, or moderation, is a middle-of-the-road attitude that doesn't lean toward the extreme right, which is rigid in its understanding of religion, or the extreme left, which tends toward boundless liberalism. This moderation is realized through Islamic teachings that accommodate universal human values while adhering to essential sharia principles. In the context of preventing radicalism, the principle of *Tawassuth* plays a crucial role because it encourages people to avoid exclusivity and violence in their religion.

Second *Tawazun*, or balance, means maintaining balance between various aspects of life, both worldly and hereafter, spiritual and material. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) teaches that this balance is essential to prevent people from becoming overly focused on one aspect while neglecting others. For example, in preaching, NU combines a deep understanding of religion with social and national awareness, so that Islamic teachings become not merely a ritual of worship but also a catalyst for societal progress. Third *Tasamuh*, or tolerance, is an attitude of respecting differences of opinion, both within the Muslim community and between religions. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) believes that differences are an inalienable law of nature, requiring mutual respect and the avoidance of hostility. This *Tasamuh* value enables NU to coexist with other religious groups in Indonesia, while also preventing the growth of hatred, which radical groups often exploit to divide unity. Fourth *I'tidal*, or justice, means putting things in their proper place and being proportional in decision-making. Justice, for NU, is not only a legal principle but also a moral value that must be embodied in social life. In addressing differences, NU emphasizes the importance of giving everyone their due rights, without discrimination or injustice.¹⁴

In addition to adhering to these four principles, NU also developed the concept of *Islam Nusantara* (*Islam Nusantara*) as a manifestation of the integration of Islamic teachings with local culture. *Islam Nusantara* is a style of Islam that combines universal Islamic teachings with the local wisdom of Indonesian society, such as the traditions of *tahlilan* (religious gatherings), the Prophet's birthday celebrations, *slametan* (celebration of the Prophet's birthday), and *wayang* (puppet show). These traditions are not merely cultural heritage, but also effective means of preaching to ground Islamic teachings in a peaceful, inclusive, and contextual manner. NU views local culture as a means of strengthening religious identity while maintaining social harmony.

¹³Imran Tahir, "DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERSTANDING OF RADICALISM IN INDONESIA," *Bussiness Law Binus*7, no. 2 (2020), hal. 33–48.

¹⁴ Zakiya Darajat, "Relationships Between Religion and State: A Historical Perspective," *Buletin Al-Turas*25, no. 1 (2019), hal. 75–91.

This integration does not mean diminishing the purity of sharia, but rather adapting Islamic practices to be accepted and understood by people with diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, in conveying Islamic teachings about brotherhood and unity, NU utilizes local symbols such as regional arts, regional languages, and traditional celebrations, synergized with Islamic values. Thus, Islam is not seen as a foreign teaching, but as a natural and down-to-earth part of community life.¹⁵

In the context of confronting radicalism, Islam Nusantara serves as a strong ideological bulwark. Radical ideologies typically reject local traditions as heretical or polytheistic. Therefore, when communities understand Islam Nusantara, they become more resistant to such ideological infiltration. By combining the principles of *Aswaja* (the principle of righteousness) and the spirit of Islam Nusantara, NU not only upholds the teachings of Islam, which are a blessing for all creation, but also fosters social harmony and prevents conflicts stemming from extremist attitudes. With this profile and core principles, NU plays a strategic role as a bulwark of religious moderation in Indonesia. This approach not only protects the community from radicalism but also strengthens the socio-cultural resilience of society, enabling it to maintain the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) amidst the rapid flow of globalization and threatening transnational ideologies.

4. NU Cultural Education in Countering Radicalism

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has a unique approach to countering radicalism, namely through a cultural strategy rooted in society. This approach positions local traditions and culture as a medium for preaching and strengthening moderate Islamic values. In NU's view, culture is not in conflict with religion as long as it does not deviate from sharia principles. Instead, it can serve as a bridge to convey the message of peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive Islam. This is especially relevant amidst the spread of radical ideology, which often ignores social context and imposes a rigid and exclusive understanding of religion.¹⁶

One form of NU's cultural approach is the maintenance of religious traditions such as *tahlilan* (recitation of the Prophet Muhammad), *yasinan* (recitation of the Prophet's name), *maulid* (recitation of the Prophet's name), and *manakiban* (recitation of the Prophet's name). These traditions are not merely rituals, but rather means of strengthening Islamic brotherhood and social solidarity. *Tahlilan* and *yasinan*, for example, provide a moment for residents to gather to pray for one another, get to know one another, and foster cross-generational relationships. The Prophet's birthday commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's birth, accompanied by sermons and the recitation of blessings, instilling love for the Prophet and emulating his morals.

¹⁵ Syamsul Rijal, *Religious Moderation: Reflections on the Dialogue of Multicultural Modernity*, 2018, p. 15.

¹⁶ Tanuri, "Islamic Legal Epistemology from the Perspective of Dominant Culture in Indonesia," *Al-Mashlahah: Journal of Islamic Law and Social Institutions* 13, no. 1 (2025): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.30868/am.v13i01.8249>.

Meanwhile, manakiban, the recitation of biographies of Sufi figures such as Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jailani, instills exemplary values, patience, and humility. Through these traditions, the community is bound not only by shared beliefs but also by strong emotional and social bonds. These bonds serve as a natural bulwark against radical ideologies that tend to divide the community.¹⁷

In addition to religious traditions, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) also utilizes arts and culture and creative da'wah (Islamic outreach) as a medium for disseminating moderate Islamic teachings. Arts such as hadrah (recitation of the Quran) and shalawat (praise be to God) are not merely entertainment, but also a means of enlivening a religious atmosphere within the community. Through the recitation of verses praising Allah and His Messenger, moral messages can be conveyed in a beautiful and touching manner. In fact, wayang santri (Islamic wayang) is a unique innovation in NU's cultural da'wah, where wayang plays are modified with Islamic-inspired characters and down-to-earth da'wah messages. These arts and culture not only preserve local traditions but also foster a sense of connection with religious teachings without pressure or coercion. This cultural approach has the strategic impact of utilizing local wisdom as a filter against exclusivist foreign ideologies. Radical ideologies often emerge by constructing narratives that local traditions are heretical or even polytheistic. However, by positioning local wisdom as part of a legitimate Islamic identity, NU is able to stem such narratives. Local wisdom such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, and the tradition of collective almsgiving are in line with Islamic values, so that when people understand this connection, they do not easily accept teachings that are hostile to local culture.¹⁸

In areas like Indramayu, West Java, for example, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) modified the tradition of sea slametan (sea slametan), which features communal prayers among fishermen, to align with Islamic teachings. The event begins with a prayer, tahlil (recitation of the Koran), and a sermon, preserving the meaning of gratitude to God while presenting it in a sharia-compliant manner. In this way, NU not only maintains the continuity of local traditions but also ensures that the community remains on the right path of faith. The success of NU's cultural approach lies in its ability to reach the hearts of the community through emotional, social, and cultural channels. Radicalism typically targets young people or groups uprooted from their cultural and social roots. When NU revives religious traditions and arts, the community develops a strong bond with its environment, making it difficult for hatred

¹⁷Wawan Hernawan, Tatang Zakaria, and Aini Rohmah, "Syncretism of Javanese and Islamic Culture in the Traditional Art of Janengan," *Religious: Journal of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (2020): 61–76, <https://doi.org/ghaz>.

¹⁸Deni Irawan and Suriadi Suriadi, "Cultural Preaching Communication in the Millennial Era," *Alhadharah: Journal of Islamic Da'wah* 18, no. 2 (2020): 90–101, <https://doi.org/10.18592/alhadharah.v18i2.3383>.

to divide it. This approach aligns with the principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah, which prioritize balance, tolerance, and justice in religious life.¹⁹

Thus, NU's cultural approach serves not only as a da'wah strategy but also as an effective ideological defense mechanism. Maintaining religious traditions, developing creative arts and culture, and utilizing local wisdom are three crucial pillars capable of countering the penetration of radical ideology at the grassroots level. This strategy demonstrates that preserving culture and tradition is not a step backward, but rather a path forward that aligns with the character of Indonesian society, where Islam is presented as a blessing for all nature (rahmatan lil 'alamin) and a guardian of social harmony.²⁰

5. NU's Religious Approach to Countering Radicalism

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as Indonesia's largest religious organization, plays a significant role in maintaining peaceful and moderate religious life. One of the keys to NU's success in countering radicalism is a religious approach rooted in the tradition of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), peaceful da'wah methods, and the fatwas and sermons of authoritative ulama (Islamic scholars). This approach emphasizes not only religious knowledge but also character development, balancing reason, conscience, and social behavior. Amid the rise of radical ideologies that monopolize truth and readily accuse others of being infidels, NU's religious approach serves as an effective ideological bulwark.

First Islamic boarding school education based on the pole of al-turats or classical texts is a hallmark of NU in producing a generation of tolerant and critical-thinking students. Turats books such as *Ihya' Ulumuddin* by al-Ghazali, *al-Minhaj al-Qawim* by Ibn Hajar al-Haitami, or *Tafsir al-Jalalain* not only equip students with a deep understanding of sharia, but also teach manners, morals, and Sufism. Education in NU Islamic boarding schools is not merely textual, but also contextual—taking into account the social and cultural conditions of the community. In the pesantren tradition, students are taught to dialogue with various sources of knowledge, respect differences of opinion, and understand differences in schools of thought as a blessing. This produces individuals who are not easily trapped by narrow and extreme views. With such habits, NU Islamic boarding schools indirectly instill ideological resilience against rigid and intolerant radical doctrines.

Second NU prioritizes peaceful and dialogical preaching that avoids hate speech. In NU's view, preaching is not merely conveying religious teachings, but also inviting with wisdom (bil-hikmah) and good advice (al-mau'izhah al-hasanah), as commanded in the Qur'an (QS. An-Nahl: 125). This preaching model emphasizes a persuasive and

¹⁹Nur Hikmah Nurmahati, "ANALYSIS OF THE NGAROT TRADITION IN INDRAMAYU REGENCY Nurmawati I," *Scientific Research Journal* 1, no. 01 (2022), hal. 15–18.

²⁰Irmawati, "The Mythology of the Three Patterns in the Ngarot Tradition Procession in Jambak Village, Cikedung District, Indramayu Regency," *revelation : Islamic Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (2022): 74–88, <https://doi.org/10.55656/kisj.v3i1.64>.

empathetic approach, so that the religious message can be accepted without causing resistance. NU kiai often use simple language, humor, and inspirational stories close to the lives of the community. In religious study forums, sermons, and digital media, NU preaching tends to avoid provocative language, does not easily accuse different parties of heresy or infidelity, and encourages the creation of social harmony. This strategy has proven effective in reducing the potential for horizontal conflict that is often exploited by radical groups to expand their influence.

ThirdNU clerics' fatwas and sermons play a central role in providing religious guidance that emphasizes the dangers of radicalism. The Bahtsul Masail Institute, for example, regularly discusses contemporary issues, including the threat of radical ideology, and then issues fatwas based on the principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. These fatwas assert that radicalism that justifies violence, declaring fellow Muslims infidels, or rebelling against a legitimate government contradicts Islamic teachings. At the grassroots level, NU kiai and ustaz deliver sermons that emphasize the importance of ukhuwah Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood), ukhuwah wathaniyah (national brotherhood), and ukhuwah basyariyah (national brotherhood), so that the congregation understands that maintaining unity is part of faith. These fatwas and sermons serve not only as normative guidelines but also as a means of enlightening the public, enabling them to recognize and reject radical narratives.

NU's religious approach, which combines Islamic boarding school education, peaceful preaching, and religious edicts (fatwas) creates a healthy religious ecosystem. Islamic boarding schools produce moderate ulama and preachers, peaceful preaching touches the hearts and minds of the people, while religious edicts provide strong religious legitimacy to counter radicalism. The collaboration of these three elements makes NU not only a bastion of moderate ideology but also a driving force for national unity. In the context of a pluralistic Indonesia, this approach aligns with the principle of Islam as a blessing for all nature (rahmatan lil 'alamin), which honors life, upholds justice, and rejects all forms of violence in the name of religion. With this structured and consistent religious strategy, NU has proven that countering radicalism does not always require a repressive approach, but can be done through education, wise preaching, and the guidance of authoritative ulama. This serves as an example to the world that peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive Islam can be a powerful force in nurturing civilization and safeguarding the integrity of society from the threat of extreme ideologies.²¹

D. RESULTS

NU's dual approach aims to foster ideological and cultural resilience within the community. Ideological resilience means a community that possesses a straightforward, contextual, and moderate understanding of religion, enabling it to reject radical teachings that deviate from the principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. A

²¹Dwi Al Faruq, Umar; Noviani, "Religious Moderation Education as a Shield Against Radicalism in Educational Institutions," *TAUJIH Journal Education Journal* 14, no. 01 (2021), hal. 58–77.

society with ideological resilience is less susceptible to provocation, instant fatwas without clear authority, or intolerant propaganda disguised in religious symbols.

1. Cultural resilience, on the other hand, is realized when a community maintains a strong attachment to local traditions and identities that align with Islamic teachings. These traditions serve as a kind of "social bulwark" that resists the penetration of foreign ideologies that seek to erase ancestral heritage. Cultural resilience allows communities to maintain pride in their identity while also internalizing the values of local wisdom into their daily religious lives.
2. When this ideological and cultural resilience is developed, communities are no longer merely passive recipients of deradicalization programs but are also capable of becoming active agents of peace. They can detect and respond to the potential spread of radicalism in their communities and spread a narrative of tolerance to others. In Indonesia's diverse context, NU's approach is not only relevant but also strategic for maintaining national unity. NU demonstrates that confronting radicalism requires more than just a legal approach; it must also involve the cultural and religious forces that exist within society.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the research description, it can be concluded that religious radicalism in Indonesia poses a serious threat to the sustainability of social harmony, pluralism, and national stability. Radicalism emerges not only as a purely religious phenomenon, but also as an ideological movement that utilizes narrow interpretations of religious texts, prioritizes exclusivism, intolerance, and, in many cases, uses violence as a means of social change. In this context, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) plays a strategic role as a socio-religious force that combines cultural and religious approaches to counter the penetration of radical ideology.

NU's cultural approach serves to preserve and revitalize local religious traditions such as tahlilan (religious recitation), maulid (religious recitation), yasinan (religious recitation), and religious arts such as hadrah (religious prayer) and shalawat (prayer). These traditions are not merely rituals, but act as social glue and a natural filter against harsh foreign ideologies that are inconsistent with the character of Indonesian society. This approach strengthens local cultural identities aligned with Islamic teachings, thereby increasing community resilience against the cultural delegitimization often perpetrated by radical groups. Meanwhile, NU's religious approach, based on the pole of al-turats education in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), instills the values of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah, which prioritize tawassuth (moderation), tawazun (balance), tasamuh (tolerance), and i'tidal (justice). The preaching carried out is peaceful and dialogical, avoids hate speech, and strengthens contextual religious understanding and rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for the universe). Fatwas and sermons from NU clerics serve as formal instruments for providing a firm theological foundation against the dangers of radicalism, while simultaneously guiding society towards inclusive religious practices.

The synergy of these two approaches results in the creation of ideological resilience, namely the community's ability to understand, assess, and reject radical ideologies, and cultural resilience, namely the strength of local identity that harmonizes with moderate Islamic values. Thus, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) serves not only as the last bastion against radicalism but also as an agent for strengthening social cohesion amidst the nation's diversity. This research emphasizes that addressing radicalism must be carried out with a strategy that is rooted in society, combines cultural and theological dimensions, and is oriented towards strengthening long-term social resilience.

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