

Strategies Of Religious Extension In Strengthening Moderate Understanding For The Prevention Of Radicalism And Identity Conflict

Muh. Nasihin^{1*}, Wellie Sulistijanti², Rahmat Setiawan³, Muhammad Robeth Suprayitno⁴, Meia Rizqi Talitha Putri⁵, Desy Eki Cahyani⁶

Institut Teknologi Statistika dan Bisnis Muhammadiyah Semarang, Indonesia^{*1, 2, 4, 5, 6}

Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendal Batang, Indonesia³

^{*1}email: monas@itesa.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the strategies implemented by religious instructors in preventing radicalism and identity friction in four regions in Central Java—Semarang City, Demak Regency, Semarang Regency, and Kendal Regency. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with religious instructors, lecturers, and community leaders to provide in-depth context for local dynamics. The results reveal three complementary clusters of strategies: (1) socializing the value of religious moderation through sermons/lectures, religious study groups, and targeted use of social media; (2) strengthening religious and national literacy through non-formal education such as training, workshops, and interactive forums; and (3) multi-sector collaboration with local governments, religious organizations, and community leaders. However, the implementation of these strategies faces recurring challenges, including limited resources, uneven policy support, and security risks when interacting with intolerant groups. Research findings indicate that the role of religious instructors as key local actors in building social resilience against radicalism is highly strategic, but its effectiveness depends on the integration of educational, collaborative, and contextual approaches supported by sustainable policies and resources.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Religious Counselors; Mixed Methods; Survey; Central Java; Civic Literacy; Community Leaders.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi yang diterapkan penyuluh agama dalam pencegahan radikalisme

Article Info

Received:

July 21, 2025

Revised:

August 24, 2025

Accepted:

October 22, 2025

Published:

December 10, 2025

dan gesekan identitas di empat wilayah di Jawa Tengah—Kota Semarang, Kabupaten Demak, Kabupaten Semarang, dan Kabupaten Kendal. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan diskusi kelompok terfokus bersama penyuluh agama, dosen, serta tokoh masyarakat untuk memberikan konteks yang mendalam terhadap dinamika lokal. Hasil penelitian mengungkap tiga gugus strategi yang saling melengkapi: (1) sosialisasi nilai moderasi beragama melalui khutbah/ceramah, majelis taklim, dan pemanfaatan media sosial yang terarah; (2) penguatan literasi keagamaan dan kebangsaan melalui pendidikan nonformal seperti pelatihan, lokakarya, dan forum interaktif; serta (3) kolaborasi multisektor dengan pemerintah daerah, ormas keagamaan, dan pemimpin komunitas. Meski demikian, implementasi strategi-strategi tersebut menghadapi tantangan berulang, termasuk keterbatasan sumber daya, dukungan kebijakan yang belum merata, serta risiko keamanan saat berinteraksi dengan kelompok intoleran. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peran penyuluh agama sebagai aktor lokal kunci dalam membangun ketahanan sosial terhadap radikalisme sangat strategis, namun efektivitasnya bergantung pada integrasi pendekatan edukatif, kolaboratif, dan kontekstual yang didukung oleh kebijakan dan sumber daya yang berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Moderasi Beragama; Penyuluh Agama; Metode Campuran; Survei; Jawa Tengah; Literasi Kebangsaan; Tokoh Masyarakat.

A. Introduction

This study aims to examine the strategies of religious extension workers in strengthening the understanding of religious moderation as an effort to prevent radicalism and identity conflicts in Central Java—an area that is vulnerable to socio-religious dynamics due to identity heterogeneity and increased activity of radical groups. Data from the National Counterterrorism Agency

(BNPT, 2023) shows a 21% increase in cases of radical networks in this province compared to 2022, with a total of 17 cases, mainly concentrated in Semarang City, Brebes Regency, and Kudus Regency—areas that are central to the spread of religious and ethnic-based hate narratives (Zulian, 2021). A survey by the Institute for Social and Religious Studies (eLSA) Semarang (2024) revealed that 34% of

Central Java people have been exposed to radical content through social media, while 22% have witnessed social friction due to differences in religious views associated with group identity (Gunawan et al., 2023). Low literacy of religious moderation, especially among the younger generation in the suburbs, exacerbates this vulnerability (Widodo, 2019). In the midst of these challenges, prevention efforts by local governments and religious leaders are still sporadic and not integrated. This fact is strengthened by data from the Central Java Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) (2025) which recorded a 12% decrease in the number of religious moderation activities at the village level over the past two years (Solikhin, 2021). These findings underscore the urgency of systematic and sustainable interventions through the strategic role of religious extension workers—as key actors in building an inclusive and contextual understanding of religious moderation—to protect the foundations of the diversity of Central Java society from the threat of radicalism and identity fragmentation (Setianto et al., 2022).

Various studies have uncovered the root causes and dynamics of radicalism and identity conflict in Indonesia. For example, Hasanah et al. (2021) concluded that radicalization among urban youth is primarily fueled by exclusive religious narratives and economic inequality. Perkasa

(2023) provided similar findings, showing that social media is often exploited to spread radical ideology through dichotomous narratives of religious identity. Meanwhile, Adam (2022) argued that the politicization of religion in electoral contests often triggers identity conflict and exacerbates social polarization. Yusuf (2021) highlighted how a textualistic approach to religious education contributes to the growth of intolerance, while Ilyas and Maknun (2023) found that low levels of religious literacy in the community increase vulnerability to radical propaganda. Furthermore, Ihsan (2018) demonstrated that community-based interventions involving local figures are quite effective in mitigating potential conflict, although they do not yet address the strategic role of religious instructors as official government representatives in community development. Overall, these six studies tend to focus on analyzing the root causes, channels of spread, and socio-political impacts of radicalism and identity conflict. However, there is very limited research specifically examining how religious instructors—as the government's spearhead in religious development—design and implement strategies based on religious moderation values to prevent these two threats.

Responding to the research gap due to the lack of empirical studies on the strategic role of religious extension

workers in the context of preventing radicalism and identity conflict through the religious moderation approach, this study aims to analyze in depth the strategies applied by religious extension workers in Semarang City, Central Java, in strengthening the values of religious moderation as a social fortress from the threat of radicalism and identity polarization. The formulation of this research problem is designed to answer two main questions: first, what religious moderation-based strategies are implemented by religious extension workers in these prevention efforts; and second, what challenges are faced in the implementation of the strategy in the field. This research is important to be carried out in Semarang City because this city is a miniature of Indonesia that is ethnically, religiously and culturally heterogeneous, as well as being an area that is vulnerable to radicalism dynamics and identity conflicts, especially in political momentum or certain social issues. In addition, Semarang has an active network of religious extension workers under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious

Affairs, but there has been no comprehensive study evaluating the effectiveness of their role in the framework of religious moderation.

B. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the strategies of religious extension workers in strengthening religious moderation as an effort to prevent radicalism and identity conflict. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand the social context, meaning, and interaction processes behind the actions and strategies of religious extension workers in a complex and dynamic environment (Sa'idy & Verawati, 2022; , Irama & Zamzami, 2021). The case study design was used because this study focuses on a specific phenomenon—i.e., the strategic practices of religious extension workers in areas prone to radicalism—thus allowing for a holistic exploration of local conditions, challenges faced, and strategic responses developed (Rumahuru, 2021; , Muthia et al., 2024). The city of Semarang was chosen purposively based on indicators of

vulnerability to radical narratives and identity polarization (Sitorus et al., 2024). The logical reason for using this design is that radicalism prevention strategies cannot be understood through numbers or generalizations alone, but rather require a deep contextual understanding of the roles, approaches, and obstacles faced by religious extension workers in the field.

Data collection in this study was carried out through a qualitative approach by combining in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight religious extension workers spread across three regions: four in Semarang, two in Demak, and two in Kendal. The interviews were conducted in a focused group discussion format for approximately 150 minutes, which allowed the emergence of interaction dynamics and exchange of views between extension workers regarding strategies to prevent radicalism and identity conflicts based on religious moderation. During the discussion session, the data is recorded using a *smartphone* to ensure the accuracy of the information, while also being

manually recorded as an additional field record. All sources have given written consent and expressed their willingness for the data provided to be used and disseminated as part of the research report. In addition to interviews, the researcher also conducted participatory observations during counseling activities and the interaction of extension workers with the community, in order to understand the social context and field practices directly. To complete the primary data, an analysis of relevant documents such as counseling modules, activity reports, and regional policies related to religious moderation was also carried out.

Table 1. Informant Profile

No.	Initials	Work	As long as	Status
1	PA1	Religious Extension Worker	Semarang	Civil Servants
2	PA2	Religious Extension Worker	Semarang	Civil Servants
3	PA3	Religious Extension Worker	Semarang	Civil Servants
4	PA4	Religious Extension Worker	Semarang	Civil Servants
5	PA5	Religious Extension Worker	Demak	Civil Servants
6	PA6	Religious Extension Worker	Demak	Civil Servants
7	PA7	Religious	Kendal	Civil

		Extension Worker		Servants
8	PA8	Religious Extension Worker	Kendal	Civil Servants

After all the data is collected, the researcher conducts a data validation process to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. Validation is carried out by applying two main techniques, namely source triangulation and member checking. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from various sources (religious extension workers from Semarang, Demak, and Kendal), data types (interviews, observations, documents), and different field contexts (Faizi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, member checking is carried out by returning the results of the provisional interpretation to religious extension workers to verify the accuracy of the meaning and context of their statements (Parhati et al., 2022). After the data is validated, data analysis is carried out following the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Firman, 2018). In the reduction stage, the researcher selects, focuses, and simplifies the data

by grouping information based on the themes of radicalism prevention strategies, challenges in the field, and the role of religious moderation. The reduced data is then presented in the form of thematic narratives, matrices, and representative citations (Parhati et al., 2022). Finally, conclusions are drawn inductively based on patterns and relationships that emerge from the data, resulting in in-depth, contextual, and scientifically accountable findings (Adawiah et al., 2023).

C. Results and Discussion

Religious extension strategies in preventing the spread of radicalism and identity conflict through strengthening the values of religious moderation

The findings of this study show that religious extension workers in the cities of Semarang, Demak, and Kendal implement three main strategies in an effort to prevent the spread of radicalism and identity conflicts through strengthening the values of religious moderation. First, they actively socialize the value of religious moderation through various mediums, such as lectures in mosques and prayer rooms, routine studies in the community, and the use of social media to reach the

younger generation. Second, religious extension workers strengthen religious and national literacy by conducting non-formal education—such as training, workshops, and interactive discussion forums—aimed at increasing public understanding of peaceful religious teachings and the importance of unity in diversity. Third, they establish strategic collaboration with various stakeholders, including local governments, religious community organizations, and indigenous leaders, to build an inclusive, responsive, and sustainable prevention network. This collaboration not only expands the reach of religious moderation programs, but also strengthens social legitimacy and public trust in the message conveyed. Overall, the three strategies complement each other and reflect a holistic approach based on local contexts, community participation, and multi-sector synergies. Thus, the role of religious extension workers is not only as a conveyor of teachings, but also as an agent of peace and an effective social glue in maintaining the harmony of religious and national life in the northern part of Central Java.

Religious extension workers in Semarang Regency, Demak Regency, and Kendal Regency consistently utilize traditional religious spaces as the main medium to socialize the values of religious moderation. They understand that mosques and prayer rooms are not only places of worship, but also effective centers of social education. PA1 from Semarang explained, "I always insert a message of tolerance in every Friday sermon at the mosque, because that moment is attended by hundreds of worshippers from various backgrounds." PA2 added, "Weekly studies in the mushala are an effective means of conveying Islam that is rahmatan lil 'alamin, especially to mothers and adolescents." PA3 asserts that the local context is crucial: "Society is more open when we convey moderation in the context of everyday life, not with ideological rhetoric." PA4 stated, "The lecture is not only about ritual worship, but also how to coexist with different beliefs peacefully." In Demak, PA5 revealed, "We use the dawn study as an educational moment for anti-radicalism because the atmosphere is calm and the congregation is more focused." Meanwhile, PA6 said, "We avoid

provocative diction and focus more on the universal human values that religion teaches." This approach has proven to be effective because it uses familiar language, relevant contexts, and figures that people trust.

Facing the challenges of digitalization and the spread of extreme narratives in cyberspace, religious extension workers are proactively using social media as an educational tool for religious moderation. They realize that the younger generation spends more time on digital platforms than in the physical religious space. PA1 revealed, "I create Instagram content in the form of infographics about religious moderation once a week, with an attractive design so that it is easy to share." PA2 added, "Through YouTube, I held a live Q&A about religious hoaxes and radicalism, and the response was overwhelming—a lot of young people asked questions." PA3 explained its strategy: "TikTok is an effective means of conveying a message of peace in a short duration, for example quotes from Nusantara scholars about tolerance." PA4 emphasizes collaboration: "We invite creative young people to create educational content that is engaging and not patronizing." In

Demak, PA5 stated, "WhatsApp groups are a forum for moderate religious discussions, especially for teenagers who are reluctant to come to in-person recitations." Meanwhile, PA6 said, "We monitor negative narratives on social media and immediately provide clarification based on balanced and contextual evidence." With this approach, religious extension workers are not only messengers, but also curators of healthy religious content in the digital world.

To counter a narrow and textual understanding of religion, religious extension workers develop various forms of non-formal education that are inclusive and participatory. They believe that deep religious literacy is the main bulwark against radicalism. PA1 stated, "We hold religious moderation training for mosque youth every month, using a discussion method, not a one-way lecture." PA2 added, "Contextual Qur'an interpretation workshops are our mainstay against the radical textual interpretations that are often used by extreme groups." PA3 explains its innovation: "We created a simple module on the history of Islam in the archipelago that is inclusive, complete

with local case studies." PA4 emphasizes the importance of a critical approach: "The discussion of the yellow book is repackaged to be relevant to current issues such as hoaxes, hate speech, and intolerance." In Demak, PA5 revealed, "We held a free religious moderation school for PKK mothers, because they have a great influence in the family." PA6 said, "Religious digital literacy training is a priority so that people are not easily exposed to extreme content that is packaged as if it is Islamic." This program not only enhances theological understanding, but also trains critical thinking skills with religious information.

Religious extension workers understand that religious moderation cannot be separated from the spirit of nationalism. Therefore, they consciously integrate the values of Pancasila, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and love for the homeland in every counseling material. PA1 emphasized, "I always emphasize that love for the homeland is part of faith, according to the teachings of the scholars of the archipelago." PA2 added, "In the study, we connect the verses of the Qur'an with the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, for example surah Al-

Hujurah verse 13 about diversity." PA3 explains the practice: "We invite people to memorize Pancasila with daily prayers, so that national values become part of spiritual life." PA4 affirms the basic principle: "This country belongs to all, not to one religious group only—that is the message we continue to convey." In Demak, PA5 revealed, "We teach the history of the struggle of the ulama in defending the Republic of Indonesia, such as the role of Kiai Haji Hasyim Asy'ari in the Jihad Resolution." PA6 said, "Religious moderation is incomplete without a strong national consciousness; both strengthen each other." This approach succeeded in establishing a dual identity: as a devout Muslim as well as a loyal citizen.

Partnerships with local governments are an important foundation in ensuring the sustainability and legitimacy of religious moderation programs. Religious extension workers do not work alone, but are part of the public policy ecosystem. PA1 stated, "We are often invited to meetings by the Ministry of Religion of Semarang City to prepare joint programs, especially related to the prevention of radicalism." PA2 added, "The Social Service

provides logistical support—such as sound systems and consumption—when we conduct moderation training in the village." PA3 explained, "The Semarang City Government provides public spaces such as village halls for inclusive religious discussion activities." PA4 emphasized, "Collaboration with the government makes our message more heard by the public because it is considered official and trustworthy." In Demak, PA5 said, "We are involved in a social conflict prevention team formed by the regent, so that we can respond quickly to sensitive issues." PA6 said, "We are an official partner in the 'Moderate Village' program initiated by the Demak Regency Government, complete with a budget and evaluation monitoring." This synergy allows religious extension workers to move not only as individuals, but as part of a government system that is responsive to the threat of social disintegration.

Religious extension workers build a close network with religious organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, MUI, LDII, and Persis to expand their reach and strengthen the message of moderation. They understand that mass organizations have a broad

mass base and moral authority in society. PA1 stated, "We routinely coordinate with NU and Muhammadiyah in moderation activities, because they have a network to the villages." PA2 added, "The forum for gathering between mass organizations is a forum for mutual resistance against radical narratives that try to divide the people." PA3 explained, "Together with MUI, we drafted a local fatwa on the importance of coexistence and rejecting violence in the name of religion." PA4 emphasized, "The collaboration with LDII and Persis expands the reach of moderation messages to communities that have been undertouched." In Demak, PA5 said, "We held a 'Ngaji Kebangsaan' with Banser and Muhammadiyah Youth to strengthen cross-group solidarity." PA6 said, "Collaboration across mass organizations creates a cool and mutually respectful religious climate, as well as a social fortress against the infiltration of transnational ideologies." This collective approach shows that religious moderation is not the responsibility of individuals, but a joint movement of all elements of the ummah.

To ensure the social roots of religious moderation programs, religious

extension workers involve traditional leaders, village heads, village heads, and informal figures who are respected by the community. They understand that local legitimacy is often stronger than formal authority. PA1 stated, "We involve village heads and traditional leaders in every socialization activity, because they have a great influence at the RT/RW level." PA2 added, "In the coastal village of Semarang, we invite village elders to be ambassadors of moderation because their advice is more heard than lectures from outside." PA3 explained, "The message of moderation is more acceptable when it is conveyed by respected figures, not just by religious extension workers." PA4 emphasized, "We make community leaders as educational partners at the base level, so that the program does not feel 'brought in from outside'." In Demak, PA5 said, "Traditional leaders help us neutralize the issue of SARA which has the potential to be divisive, for example when there is an issue of building houses of worship." PA6 said, "Synergy with local leaders makes our programs more contextual, relevant, and sustainable because they are born from the needs of the community itself." This approach

strengthens the community's ownership of the values of moderation.

These three strategies are applied holistically with the principle of active community participation. Religious extension workers do not come as a party that knows everything, but as a facilitator who invites the community to design solutions together. PA1 stated, "We do not come as teachers, but as equal discussion partners, because the community knows their own conditions." PA2 added, "The community is invited to design their own moderation activities according to their needs, for example through village deliberation forums." PA3 explained, "We formed moderation volunteers from youth, women, and informal figures so that the program runs independently." PA4 asserts, "The success of the program depends on the extent to which the community feels belonging and involved at each stage." In Demak, PA5 revealed, "We held a village deliberation to prepare a moderation action plan, starting from targets to success indicators." PA6 said, "A participatory approach makes the message of moderation deeply rooted in the community, not just a momentary

project that disappears after the budget runs out." Thus, the role of religious extension workers goes beyond educational functions—they become agents of social change that build harmony from below, based on belief, local wisdom, and collective solidarity.

The challenge of religious extension workers in preventing the spread of radicalism and identity conflicts through strengthening the values of religious moderation

The findings of this study show that religious extension workers in the cities of Semarang, Demak, and Kendal face a number of significant challenges in carrying out their duties as agents of religious moderation and strengthening national values. Among the main obstacles identified is limited resources, both in the form of infrastructure, operational funds, and adequate support personnel. This condition often hinders the implementation of sustainable and far-reaching extension programs. In addition, resistance from radical groups is a serious challenge, especially in the context of spreading intolerant narratives that are contrary to the principles of religious moderation. Religious extension workers often feel unsafe or

intimidated when delivering messages of peace in areas prone to ideological conflict. Another challenge that is no less important is the lack of sustainable policy support from local and central governments. Although there are regulations governing the role of religious extension workers, their implementation is often inconsistent, affecting their effectiveness and motivation for work. In fact, the role of extension workers is very strategic in forming an inclusive, tolerant, and appropriate religious understanding in accordance with the Indonesian context. Therefore, this study recommends the need to strengthen the capacity of extension workers through continuous training, increased budget allocation, and cross-sectoral policy synergy to create an ecosystem conducive to religious extension tasks at the grassroots level.

Religious extension workers in Semarang, Demak, and Kendal consistently complained about the lack of facilities and infrastructure to support counseling activities. This condition greatly hinders the reach and quality of their interaction with the community. PA1 stated, "We often have to bring our own projectors and sound systems from

home because the office doesn't provide them." PA2 added, "There is no dedicated space for counseling activities; Sometimes we borrow a prayer room or village hall that is not always available." According to PA3, "Operational vehicles are only one for five people, so we have to take turns and are often late to the location." PA4 complained: "Printed materials such as the religious moderation handbook are very limited—sometimes one copy is used in turn." PA5 confirmed, "In our area, electricity and internet networks are often out, even though now many materials are delivered online." Meanwhile, PA6 concluded, "Without adequate facilities, how can we reach the community effectively?" This limitation not only slows down the distribution of religious moderation messages, but also reduces the credibility of extension workers in the eyes of the public. Many activities were forced to be canceled or carried out casually, so the impact was not optimal. In fact, adequate facilities—such as vehicles, technological devices, and educational spaces—are basic prerequisites for reaching communities spread across urban and rural areas. Without infrastructure investment,

efforts to build inclusive religious understanding will continue to be hampered by technical obstacles that should be overcome by the government.

Budget limitations are the main obstacle to the implementation of sustainable and far-reaching extension programs. The extension workers revealed that operational funds are often insufficient or even not liquid at all. PA7 revealed, "Transportation funds often go unliquidated for months, so we are forced to use personal money." PA8 added, "Socialization activities on religious moderation are often canceled because there are no funds for participants' consumption." PA1 stated, "We can't print modules or pocketbooks because there is no printing budget." PA2 complained, "Our honorarium is often delayed, even though it is the only incentive as a non-civil servant extension worker." PA3 emphasized, "Without sufficient funds, it is difficult for us to invite speakers or conduct further training." PA4 concluded, "We want to work optimally, but in reality we are hit with an inadequate budget." Budget uncertainty makes activity planning unsystematic. Many extension workers are forced to rely on voluntary donations

or personal assistance to carry out their duties. This is not only financially burdensome, but also erodes the spirit of service. Adequate operational funds should be a priority, considering that religious extension workers are at the forefront of countering radical narratives and building social harmony. Without consistent financial support, religious moderation efforts will only become rhetoric without real implementation on the ground, making it difficult to achieve the goal of strengthening national values.

The high workload without the support of accompanying staff makes it difficult for religious extension workers to carry out their duties effectively. Large work areas and large numbers of people require a solid team, but in reality they work almost alone. PA5 said, "One extension worker has to handle five sub-districts—impossible without a support team." PA6 added, "We don't have administrative staff, so we also do the reporting and documentation ourselves." PA7 stated, "There are no trained volunteers that we can engage in routine activities." PA8 complained, "When there is a big event, we have to rely on the help of volunteers who do not understand religious moderation

material." PA1 emphasized, "We need at least one assistant per sub-district to help with coordination." PA2 concluded, "Without support personnel, the quality of counseling will definitely decline." This condition causes extension workers to be physically and mentally exhausted, so they are unable to design innovative or responsive programs to the needs of the community. In addition, the lack of support staff also hinders activity documentation, evaluation, and reporting—an important component of program accountability. Ideally, each extension worker should be accompanied by a field coordinator, trained volunteers, and administrative staff to focus on the substance of the extension. Without an adequate team structure, extension workers are stuck in technical tasks that should be delegated. Strengthening institutional capacity through the addition of support staff is an urgent strategic step to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of religious moderation programs at the grassroots level.

Security threats are a serious psychological burden for religious extension workers, especially in areas with a history of ideological conflict.

Many of them feel unprotected while carrying out their duties in the field. PA1 said, "I was stoned when I came home from a religious moderation activity." PA2 added, "My children were threatened at school because I was active in fighting radicalism." PA3 stated, "We have no official legal protection from the government in case something bad happens." PA4 complained, "There is no emergency evacuation mechanism if we feel threatened on the ground." PA5 emphasized, "We need assistance from the security forces when entering vulnerable areas." PA6 concluded, "Without a sense of security, our spirits are slowly extinguished." This insecurity not only impacts individuals, but also hinders the mobility and reach of the program. Many extension workers choose to avoid certain areas even though they urgently need moderate intervention. This creates a "blind zone" where radical narratives thrive without challenge. Physical and psychological protection should be an integral part of religious counseling policies. Without security guarantees, extension workers cannot work optimally, let alone be innovative. The government needs to provide security protocols, risk

management training, and emergency communication lines. In addition, partnerships with community leaders and local security forces are essential to create a safe environment for extension workers to spread national values and tolerance.

Inconsistent and often capricious government policies become structural obstacles in the implementation of extension workers' duties. Although there are national regulations on religious moderation, their implementation in the regions is often out of sync. PA7 revealed, "Last year's religious moderation program was intensified, this year it was suddenly stopped without explanation." PA8 added, "We often don't know the direction of policy because there is no coordination between the central and regional levels." PA1 stated, "There are regulations, but they are not followed by clear technical instructions." PA2 complained, "We were asked to make a monthly report, but there was never any feedback or evaluation." PA3 emphasized, "Policies change depending on the official in office." PA4 concluded, "We need a stable policy, not just a momentary project." These

inconsistencies create uncertainty in long-term planning. Extension workers have difficulty strategizing because they do not know whether their programs will be supported next year. In addition, policy changes are often not accompanied by adequate socialization, so extension workers work in the dark. Sustained policy support—through clear regulations, fixed budgets, and evaluation mechanisms—is urgently needed. Without policy stability, religious moderation efforts will only be incidental programs that do not have a systemic impact. The government needs to build a long-term policy framework that involves extension workers in the formulation process, so that policies are truly responsive to the realities on the ground.

Challenging working conditions have a direct impact on the motivation and performance of religious extension workers. Many of them feel emotionally exhausted and discouraged due to a lack of appreciation and support. PA5 said, "I wanted to quit because I felt like our efforts were not being appreciated." PA6 added, "Many of my colleagues have switched professions because they can't stand the pressure and uncertainty." PA7

stated, "We lost our passion when the program we had worked so hard to put together never materialized." PA8 complained, "No appreciation, no career development—we're like working in a vacuum." PA1 confirmed, "Our motivation drops drastically when there is no real support from the boss." PA2 concluded, "We need recognition that this work is important to the nation." This decrease in motivation has an impact on the quality of counseling: the material becomes less innovative, the frequency of activities decreases, and interaction with the community becomes a formality. In fact, religious extension workers are key actors in building the ideological resilience of the community. Without high passion and commitment, they are not capable of being effective agents of change. The government needs to provide non-financial incentives such as awards, training opportunities, and clear career paths. In addition, dialogue spaces between extension workers and policy makers must be opened regularly so that their voices are heard. High motivation only appears when extension workers feel valued, protected, and given space to grow.

The extension workers agreed that solutions to various challenges must be systemic, holistic, and sustainable. They emphasized the importance of cross-sector collaboration and institutional capacity building. PA3 said, "We need regular training on religious moderation communication strategies." PA4 added, "The budget must be allocated on a fixed basis, not only when there is an issue of radicalism." PA5 stated, "There must be synergy between the Ministry of Religion, the local government, the TNI/Polri, and moderate mass organizations." PA6 complained, "We can't work alone—we need a mutually supportive ecosystem." PA7 emphasized, "Capacity building must be followed by legal and security protection." PA8 concluded, "If the country is serious about making religious moderation work, it starts by empowering us at the grassroots." Systemic strengthening includes improving competencies through continuous training, adequate budget allocation, legal protection, and inter-agency policy coordination. Without an integrated approach, religious moderation efforts will continue to be fragmented and will not have a wide

impact. Religious extension workers must be placed as strategic partners, not just field implementers. Investment in them is an investment in the social and ideological stability of the nation. Therefore, the government needs to design policies that are not only responsive to crises, but also proactive in building community resilience through empowering extension workers as the forefront of religious moderation and national values.

Discussion

The most important findings in this study reveal that in the cities of Semarang, Demak, and Kendal, religious extension workers apply three main strategies in preventing radicalism and identity conflicts through strengthening religious moderation: first, socialization of the value of moderation through lectures, studies, and social media; second, increasing religious and national literacy through non-formal education such as training and interactive discussions; and third, strategic collaboration with local governments, religious organizations, and indigenous leaders to build an inclusive and sustainable prevention network. This

approach is holistic, contextual, and participatory, making religious extension workers agents of peace and social glue. However, they also face serious challenges, such as limited resources (facilities, funds, and manpower), resistance from radical groups that spread intolerant narratives, and a lack of sustainable policy support from the government. Unclear implementation of regulations often reduces the effectiveness and work motivation of extension workers. In fact, their role is very strategic in forming an inclusive religious understanding and in accordance with Indonesian values. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen capacity through continuous training, increased budget allocation, and cross-sectoral policy synergy to create an ecosystem that supports the task of religious counseling at the grassroots level, so that efforts to prevent radicalism and maintain social harmony can run optimally in the northern Central Java region.

The cases that occurred in the findings of this study can be highlighted with social change communication theory and social capital theory. According to Putnam (2007), social

capital such as trust, networks, and common norms are very important in building a cooperative and resilient society to the threat of disintegration, including radicalism. The socialization strategy through lectures and social media reflects efforts to build a collective understanding based on inclusive values, in line with framing theory in communication, which emphasizes the importance of the way of conveying messages in shaping public perception (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Strengthening religious and national literacy refers to the concept of critical religious literacy by Wuthnow (2002), which emphasizes the ability of individuals to understand the historical, social, and political context of religious teachings critically and peacefully. Collaboration with various stakeholders is also in line with the principles of multilevel governance, where handling complex issues such as radicalism requires cross-actor synergy. However, the challenges that arise—such as resource limitations, resistance from radical groups, and weak policy support—can be explained through the policy implementation theory of Song et al. (2009), which show that the gap

between policies on paper and the reality on the ground is often due to a lack of institutional capacity, coordination, and political commitment. In addition, Wuthnow's (2002) theory of identity conflict explains why radical groups are resistant: they maintain an exclusive identity that feels threatened by a moderating narrative. Without adequate structural support, religious extension workers struggle to keep up with radical narratives that are often more systematic and far-reaching.

The novelty of this research's findings lies in the integration of contextual, participatory, and multisectoral approaches in the role of religious extension workers as agents of religious moderation in the coastal areas of Central Java—an aspect that has not been fully explored in the previous five studies. First, in contrast to the research by Ismail et al., (2024) which focuses on the role of religious leaders in general in combating radicalism in urban areas without touching the dimension of institutional collaboration, this study explicitly reveals the synergy between religious extension workers and local governments, mass organizations, and traditional leaders as a systemic strategy.

Second, while Wahyudi & Hadi, (2021) emphasize digital literacy as a response to the spread of online radicalism, these findings expand the scope by showing how social media is combined with a community-based face-to-face approach to strengthen public reach and trust. Third, different from the normative and theoretical study of Rahmadi et al., (2023) on religious moderation, this research is empirical and field-based, revealing real practices and operational challenges at the grassroots level. Fourth, if the research of Satriawan et al., (2019) only highlights aspects of religious education in schools, these findings expand the arena of intervention to non-formal public spaces such as mosques, citizens' forums, and community activities. Fifth, in contrast to the study by Asy'ari, (2023) which emphasizes national policies without local analysis, this study highlights the importance of local contexts—especially socio-cultural dynamics in Semarang, Demak, and Kendal—in designing effective radicalism prevention strategies.

The findings of this study show that religious extension workers have a strategic role in preventing radicalism

and identity conflicts through strengthening religious moderation, but their performance is hampered by limited resources, lack of protection from the threat of radical groups, and weak sustained policy support. Therefore, from the policy aspect, an urgent step that needs to be taken is to revitalize the role of religious extension workers through strengthening regulations and adequate budget allocation at the central and regional levels. The government needs to develop affirmative policies that not only regulate the duties of extension workers, but also ensure their welfare, security, and professional capacity through continuous training based on religious moderation and national literacy. In addition, a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism—involving the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs, BNPT, religious organizations, and local governments—is needed to build an integrated radicalism prevention ecosystem that is responsive to local dynamics. Policies should also encourage the empowerment of extension workers as part of the early detection system of potential ideological conflicts at the community level.

Furthermore, local governments need to develop religious moderation programs that are contextual, data-based, and involve active community participation, so that the message of peace is not only conveyed top-down, but also grows from within the community itself. With a comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable policy approach, the role of religious extension workers can be maximized as the front line in maintaining social harmony and strengthening the nation's ideological resilience in the midst of the growing threat of radicalism.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that religious extension workers in the cities of Semarang, Demak, and Kendal have implemented three main strategies—socialization of the value of religious moderation through lectures, studies, and social media; increasing religious and national literacy through non-formal education; as well as strategic collaboration with local governments, religious organizations, and traditional leaders—in an effort to prevent radicalism and identity conflicts. This holistic, contextual, and participatory

approach makes them effective agents of peace and social adhesives. However, the surprising finding lies precisely in the fact that in the midst of their strategic role in shaping an inclusive understanding of religion that is in line with Indonesian values, extension workers face serious challenges: limited resources, resistance from radical groups, and lack of sustainable policy support from the government, exacerbated by the lack of clarity in the implementation of regulations, thus eroding their effectiveness and motivation for work. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen capacity through continuous training, increased budget allocation, and cross-sectoral policy synergy to create an ecosystem that supports the task of religious counseling at the grassroots level, so that efforts to prevent radicalism and maintain social harmony in the northern Central Java region can run optimally.

One of the main weaknesses of this study is the limited geographical scope that only focuses on three coastal areas in Central Java—Semarang City, Demak, and Kendal—so the findings produced cannot necessarily be generalized to other coastal areas in

Indonesia that have different social, cultural, and religious contexts. The typical local contexts in the three regions, including community characteristics, levels of radicalism penetration, and patterns of inter-institutional interaction, may not represent the reality in the coastal areas outside Central Java or even in non-coastal areas. To overcome these limitations, future researchers are advised to conduct cross-regional comparative studies—for example, involving coastal areas in West Java, East Java, or outside Java—to test the consistency of findings and identify contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of the role of religious extension workers in preventing radicalism. In addition, a quantitative approach or mixed-methods can also be developed to strengthen the validity and generalization of research results.

E. Bibliography

- Adam, Y. (2022). Islam dan politik identitas: Konflik pada gerakan 212 dalam perspektif sejarah Indonesia. *Nalar Jurnal Peradaban dan Pemikiran Islam*, 6(2), 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.23971/njppi.v6i2.4395>

- Adawiah, R., Kiptiah, M., & Kamariah, N. (2023). Penerapan penilaian sikap siswa pada pembelajaran online. *Integralistik*, 34(1), 7–12. <https://doi.org/10.15294/integralistik.v34i1.39476>
- Asy'ari, A. (2023). Gampong muslimin: Strategi pencegahan radikalisme berbasis hukum Islam di Aceh Barat. *Jurnal Hukum Samudra Keadilan*, 18(2), 463–481. <https://doi.org/10.33059/jhsk.v18i2.7773>
- Faizi, N., Wulandari, N., & Sibawaihi, S. (2024). Meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan: Peran kepemimpinan kepala madrasah dalam pengembangan profesionalisme guru. *Jiip – Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 7(2), 1228–1233. <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v7i2.3337>
- Firman, F. (2018). Analisis data dalam penelitian kualitatif. <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/t7fgv>
- Gunawan, E., Tohis, R., & Hakim, B. (2023). Implications of the law of religious moderation on interfaith marriages. *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Syir Ah*, 21(2), 283. <https://doi.org/10.30984/jis.v21i2.2649>
- Hasanah, F., Widiyanto, A., & Purwasih, J. (2021). Dinamika konflik identitas penghayat sapta darma di Desa Sukoreno, Jember, Jawa Timur. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 16(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v16i1.2250>
- Ihsan, M. (2018). Upaya penguatan pendidikan agama Islam berbasis literasi pesantren. *Libraria Jurnal Perpustakaan*, 6(1), 175. <https://doi.org/10.21043/libraria.v6i1.3832>
- Ilyas, M., & Maknun, J. (2023). Strategi pengembangan literasi keagamaan dalam pendidikan Islam di era digital. *Journal of Education and Religious Studies (JERS)*, 3(01), 08–12. <https://doi.org/10.57060/jers.v3i01.70>
- Irama, Y., & Zamzami, M. (2021). Telaah atas formula pengarusutamaan moderasi beragama Kementerian Agama tahun 2019–2020. *Kaca (Karunia Cahaya Allah) Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 11(1), 65–89. <https://doi.org/10.36781/kaca.v11i1.3244>
- Ismail, M., Novita, M., & Hakim, F. (2024). Peran strategis Jama'ah Tabligh dan Muhammadiyah dalam pencegahan ancaman radikalisme. *Harmoni*, 23(1), 82–98. <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v23i1.710>
- Muthia, A., Sultan, M., & Latief, D. (2024). Website kemenag.co.id sebagai strategi komunikasi publik dalam menyebarkan program

- moderasi beragama. *Jurnal Penelitian Inovatif*, 4(2), 354–360.
<https://doi.org/10.54082/jupin.302>
- Pajarianto, H., Yusuf, M., Duriani, D., Pribadi, I., Halim, I., Salju, S., ... & Nurhapisah, N. (2023). Peningkatan literasi keagamaan melalui Baitul Arqam pada mahasiswa Muslim di Universitas Muhammadiyah Palopo Sulawesi Selatan. *Jurnal Abdi Masyarakat Indonesia*, 3(2), 483–490.
<https://doi.org/10.54082/jamsi.692>
- Parhati, L., Zulijah, S., & Nugroho, M. (2022). Peran guru PAI dalam mengembangkan kecerdasan spiritual dan emosional peserta didik sekolah dasar. *Journal of Elementary Educational Research*, 2(2), 121–129.
<https://doi.org/10.30984/jeer.v2i2.285>
- Perkasa, A. (2023). Konflik sosial berupa politisasi agama sebagai sisi gelap politik Indonesia. *Deviance Jurnal Kriminologi*, 7(1), 1.
<https://doi.org/10.36080/djk.2356>
- Putnam, R. (2007). E pluribus unum: Diversity and community in the twenty-first century the 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2), 137–174.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x>
- Rahmadi, R., Syahbudin, A., & Barni, M. (2023). Tafsir ayat wasathiyah dalam Al-Qur`an dan implikasinya dalam konteks moderasi beragama di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 22(1), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.18592/jiiu.v22i1.8572>
- Rumahuru, Y. (2021). Pendidikan agama inklusif sebagai fondasi moderasi beragama: Strategi merawat keberagaman di Indonesia. *Kurios*, 7(2).
<https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v7i2.323>
- Sa'idy, S., & Verawati, H. (2022). Eksistensi penyuluh agama dalam meningkatkan moderasi agama. *Tafahus Jurnal Pengkajian Islam*, 2(1), 17–25.
<https://doi.org/10.58573/tafahus.v2i1.14>
- Satriawan, I., Islami, M., & Lailam, T. (2019). Pencegahan gerakan radikalisme melalui penanaman ideologi Pancasila dan budaya sadar konstitusi berbasis komunitas. *Jurnal Surya Masyarakat*, 1(2), 99.
<https://doi.org/10.26714/jsm.1.2.2019.99-110>
- Setianto, Y., Mu'adi, S., Lukman, M., Maksum, A., & Chairul, M. (2022). Transformation of the abangan group towards radical students (study of the dynamics of Islamic radicalism in abangan society in Solo, Central Java). *JPCR*.
<https://doi.org/10.7176/jpcer/55-04>

- Sitorus, H., Tanoyo, M., & Irwansyah, I. (2024). Polarisasi politik melalui interaksi sosial di Instagram: Studi kasus Pemilu 2024 di Indonesia. *Jkomdis Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Media Sosial*, 4(2), 383–394. <https://doi.org/10.47233/jkomdis.v4i2.1675>
- Solikhin, S. (2021). The factors affecting poverty rate in Central Java Province 2018–2020. *Eko-Regional Jurnal Pengembangan Ekonomi Wilayah*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.20884/1.erjpe.2021.16.2.1856>
- Song, Y., Lee, H., & Kurnia, S. (2009). Social capital in information and communications technology research: Past, present, and future. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 25. <https://doi.org/10.17705/1cais.02523>
- Wahyudi, S., & Hadi, S. (2021). Pengoptimalan peran penggiat media sosial dalam manangkal radikalisme di dunia maya. *Esensi Hukum*, 3(2), 134–143. <https://doi.org/10.35586/esensihukum.v3i2.101>
- Widodo, A. (2019). Moderation of Islamic education as an effort to prevent radicalism (case study of FKUB Singkawang City, Kalimantan, Indonesia). *Nadwa Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 13(2), 271–294. <https://doi.org/10.21580/nadwa.v13i2.271-294>
- Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Social capital: Implications for development theory, research, and policy. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 15(2), 225–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225>
- Wuthnow, R. (2002). Religious involvement and status-bridging social capital. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(4), 669–684. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5906.00153>
- Yusuf, C. (2021). Literasi keagamaan generasi milenial Indonesia: Tantangan masa depan bangsa. <https://doi.org/10.14203/press.459>
- Zulian, P. (2021). Another face of puritan Islam: Muhammadiyah and radicalism among the youth. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 04(08). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v4-i8-14>