Religious Moderation: Interfaith Harmony in Bandar Village

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| A B S T R A C T  **Background:** Indonesia’s multicultural society presents both opportunities and challenges for maintaining inter-religious harmony. In local communities with religious diversity, the practice of tolerance is essential to support peaceful coexistence and national unity. **Objective:** The purpose of this study is to determine how inter-religious harmony is implemented in Bandar Village, which is known for its religious diversity. **Method:** This research employs a field research method conducted in 2023 in Bandar Village, Bandar District, Batang Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observation, and analyzed using content analysis. **Result:** The findings reveal that Bandar Village residents, despite their religious differences, exhibit strong tolerance and mutual respect. Their religious beliefs are deeply rooted from birth and are not influenced or disrupted by external religious pressures. **Conclusion:** Bandar Village demonstrates a successful model of inter-religious harmony, where strong internal beliefs and mutual acceptance foster a peaceful and respectful community life. **Contribution:** This study provides a valuable reference for understanding the practical application of religious moderation in a multicultural society and offers insights for replicating similar approaches in other diverse communities to sustain harmony and unity.  K E Y W O R D S  Religious moderation: Harmony; Religious community | A R T I C L E H I S T O R Y  Received: September 06, 2024  Revised: September 28, 2024  Accepted: October 23, 2024  Available online: October 29, 2024  C O N T E N T  [Introduction](#INTRODUCTION)  [Method](#METHOD)  [Result and Discussion](#RESULT)  [Implications and Contributions](#IMPLICATIONS)  [Limitations & Future Research Directions](#LIMITATIONS)    [Conclusion](#CONCLUSION)  [Acknowledgments](#ACKNOWLEDGMENTS)  [Author Contribution Statement](#AUTHOR)  [Conflict of Interest Statement](#CONFLICT)  [Ethical Approval Statement](#ETHICAL)  [References](#REFERENCES)  [Article Information](#Article) |

**1.** **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is a country rich in nature, as well as gifts that are not owned by other countries in this world. Among these gifts, we can see the existence of social differences and diversity in society such as ethnic, cultural, and even religious differences ([Jalil, 2016](#Jalil)). This difference is an important capital in order to encourage progress in the state. This progress is very likely to be achieved if these differences can be managed very well where each of the different ones can understand and even complement each other ([Makruf et al., 2021](#Makruf)).

Humans are social creatures who need each other to communicate, even meeting in person ([Rahmi, 2021](#Rahmi)). As a social creature, one of the concerns of society is inter-religious harmony ([Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018](#Rusydi)). Religious har-mony is a state of inter-religious relations based on tolerance, mutual understanding, and mutual respect in the prac-tice of religious teachings and cooperation in social life ([Walean, 2021](#Walean)). The existence of this harmony is very im-portant, apart from being a necessity in the context of protecting human rights, also because this harmony is a pre-requisite for the realization of national integration, and this integration is a prerequisite for the success of national development.

Religious harmony is determined by two factors, namely the attitude and behavior of religious people and state/government policies that are conducive to harmony ([Hakim, 2018](#Hakim)). All religions teach this harmony, so religion ideally functions as an integrative factor ([Nugroho & Ni'mah, 2018](#Nugroho)). And in reality, relations between religious believers in Indonesia have been very harmonious. However, in the reform era, which supports this freedom, various expressions of freedom have emerged, both in the form of thoughts, political ideologies, religious ideas, and in the expression of human rights. In this climate, there are also expressions of radical or intolerant groups, which although very few in number, in certain cases act on behalf of the majority group ([Soebahar & Karim, 2020](#Soebahar)).

The state policy on inter-religious relations is among the best and a model in the world. It’s just that, some government officials in the region with political considerations sometimes support the intolerant attitude of certain groups in the name of fulfilling the aspirations of the majority group. The claim of the aspirations of the majority group is not always in accordance with reality, because an intolerant action is often only driven by certain groups on behalf of the majority ([Masudi, 2018](#Masudi)). However, local government policies that are quite wise and fair, including in the context of maintaining religious harmony, are far more than policies that are considered to support this into-lerant attitude ([Kurnia et al., 2024](#Kurnia)).

Inter-religious conflicts are generally not purely caused by religious factors, but by political, economic, or other factors which are then associated with religion ([Muhaemin & Sanusi, 2019](#Muhaemin)). Those related to religious issues, in ad-dition to the emergence of radical and intolerant religious attitudes in a small number of religious groups, are also triggered by issues regarding the establishment of houses of worship and religious broadcasting, and accusations of blasphemy. The issue of the establishment of houses of worship is the factor that most influences the occurrence of disputes or intolerance ([Suryawati & Syaputri, 2022](#Suryawati)).

Religious harmony contains three important elements ([Zulkefli et al., 2028](#Zulkefli)): first, the willingness to accept the existence of different beliefs with other people or groups. Second, the willingness to allow others to practice the teachings they believe in. And third, the ability to accept differences to feel the beauty of a difference and practice its teachings. The nobility of each religious teaching that is the role model of each person. More than that, every religion is a guide to human life that comes from the teachings of Allah Swt. Inter-religious harmony is a social condition when all religious groups can live together without compromising the basic rights of each to carry out their religious obligations ([Wirman, 2017](#Wirman)). Each adherent of a good religion must live in harmony and peace. Therefore, inter-reli-gious harmony is unlikely to be born from blind fanaticism and indifference to the rights of diversity and the feelings of others ([Bhargava, 2002](#Bhargava)). But in this case it does not mean that inter-religious harmony gives room to mix certain elements of different religions, because it will damage the value of religion itself.

When individuals or groups meet each other, they bring behavior and viewpoints based on their respective cultures and understandings, then this can cause conflict if not handled wisely. This is where the understanding of religious moderation will play a role in maintaining harmony and community unity ([Akhmadi, 2019](#Akhmadi)).

These differences are also the wealth that exists in Bandar Village, Bandar Subdistrict, Batang Regency. There are several differences, especially ethnic and religious differences. In the data we obtained from the village head, religious differences include Islam with a total of 3861 residents, Christianity with 115 residents, Catholicism with 75 residents, and Buddhism with 9 residents. Meanwhile, ethnic differences include Chinese 135 people and Arab 4 people, the rest are indigenous people. With these differences, Bandar village is now designated as a “Religious Moderation Example Village” after Kuripan village, Subah sub-district, in the socialization and launching of the Religious Moderation Village organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Batang Regency.

While previous studies have largely focused on theoretical discussions or urban contexts of inter-religious harmony in Indonesia, there is a noticeable gap in research exploring how such harmony is practiced at the grassroots level in rural, religiously diverse communities. This study addresses that gap by examining the real-life implementation of inter-religious tolerance in Bandar Village, a rural area known for its religious diversity. The novelty of this research lies in its field-based approach, capturing firsthand accounts and lived experiences of community members who maintain mutual respect and harmony despite differing religious beliefs. The primary objective of this study is to explore and document how inter-religious harmony is fostered and sustained in Bandar Village, offering practical insights that can inform broader efforts to promote peaceful coexistence in other multicultural settings.

**2.** **METHOD**

*2.1 Research Design*

This research uses field research. Field research aims to find out how the community in Bandar Village continues to live safely and peacefully while the village has a variety of beliefs. The object of this research is the local community and residents who have different beliefs. The subjects of this research were determined by purposive sampling because many research subjects were taken based on the research objectives and not randomly or as a whole, but only several objects to be used as samples. This is considered sufficient as a representation of what is experienced by the community in the village.

*2.2 Research Object*

This research was conducted on Monday, October 2, 2023, in Bandar Village, Bandar Subdistrict, Batang Regency. This research was conducted to dig deeper into the differences that exist, and how they are able to maintain community harmony, especially in religion.

*2.3 Data Collection*

Data collection is a systematic standardized procedure or procedure in the process of collecting research information (data) ([Utomo et al., 2024](#Utomo)). The data collection process carried out in this study began with direct ob-servation of the field and using all five senses. These observations can be supported by various media such as ca-meras, cellphones, and others. However, in qualitative research, these media function as auxiliary tools because ba-sically, observation is direct observation that is not engineered. Thus, in the context of qualitative research, observa-tion refers to direct observation of objects, situations, contexts, and their meanings to collect research data ([Lofland et al., 2022](#Lofland)).

After that, an in-depth interview model was conducted on the research subject to obtain a comprehensive picture. This interview was conducted to reveal the community's view on the Harmony of People with Different Beliefs in Bandar Village. The subjects of this research model are the village head and some religious leaders.

*2.4 Data Analysis*

The process of data analysis in this research is done by collecting information from various primary and secondary sources. The data collected is then analyzed descriptively to get the conclusion of the research that has been done. This data analysis method aims to produce descriptive data that will be described in detail. In addition, this research also uses qualitative methods based on literature studies from several books and journals, as well as quantitative descriptive methods by conducting interviews with several figures such as the village head, sub-district head, and religious leaders from the community in Bandar Village.

**3.** **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

*3.1 Result*

Bandar is a village located in Bandar Subdistrict, Batang Regency, Central Java Province. Bandar Village is a village located in the highlands, which has a distance between the village and the sub-district of 0.5 km. Meanwhile, the distance to the capital of Batang Regency is 18 km to the southeast or 30 minutes by vehicle.

With its location in the highlands, most of the land in Bandar Village is used for agriculture and moorland. On agricultural land, rice, corn and cassava are often planted. Meanwhile, moorland is commonly used to plant durian, petai, and even mahogany trees. Meanwhile, moorland is commonly used to grow durian, Pete, and even sengon. Nevertheless, Bandar Sub-district is one of the centers of education in Batang Regency. M. Nashiruddin, S.H., as the local sub-district head, is eager to make the Bandar sub-district an advanced sub-district in the Batang district, especially in terms of education.

Moreover, Bandar Sub-district has Bandar Village, which is the center of government, as well as the icon of the center of religious harmony in Batang Regency. The religions in Bandar Village include Islam with 3861 residents, Christianity with 115 residents, Catholicism with 75 residents, and Buddhism with 9 residents. Not only are there different religions, but the village also has several ethnicities such as Chinese and Arab. The Chinese ethnicity totals 135 people, and the Arab ethnicity totals 4 people.

In addition, the village also has several buildings that are used for religious rituals. Among them are 2 mosques that stand firmly and are still well maintained. Then there are 17 surau or musholla. Not only buildings for Islamic religious rituals, there are also 2 Christian churches that are still in use. And 2 more Catholic churches that are also still actively used in worshiping their adherents.

The form of social interaction in Bandar Village is very beautiful. Both individuals and groups have a high sense of social care and tolerance. This is manifested in the expression of the village head who said that non-Muslim resi-dents of Bandar Village often participate in Muslim community activities such as Tahlilan. Vice versa, Banser, which is an Islamic youth and security organization, also takes part in maintaining the security of Christmas Day activities at the Church. In addition, Bandar village has an annual agenda such as the Legenonan tradition. Legenonan is a tradition that is held once a year in the 11th month (Javanese calendar, the month of Dhulqo'dah). This tradition consists of a joint prayer, then an Earth alms parade in the afternoon, and continued with a puppet show in the evening. Earth alms are held with the aim of expressing gratitude to Allah Swt, while the shadow puppet show is a form of tolerance between religious communities.

Mr. Agus Warsono is a Javanese Christian religious leader in Bandar Village, born in Salatiga City. Mr. Agus has lived in Bandar since childhood or around the 90s. According to Mr. Agus, the tolerance in Bandar Village is very good. He said that “every Sunday morning, the Javanese Christian congregation holds a study at the Bandar Sub-district Hall. The event has been a tradition since 1992. The supporting factor for inter-religious harmony in Bandar Village, according to him, is the maturity of the general public in religion. There is no such thing as religious dis-crimination”. The sub-district head even emphasized: “We must be open and really clean, pure physically and inwar-dly. Look inside before speaking. Get rid of the dust that is still attached”.

From the results of this research, the author concludes that Bandar Village has various religions with strong tolerance. Their belief in religion has grown since they were born, so their belief in religion is not for-ced by the influences of people who are not of their religion. Indirectly, they also apply a balanced, tolerant attitude and the basic principles of religious moderation in social relations. Because it is almost impossible that the harmony they get is not the result of an attitude of religious moderation. The presence of non-Muslims who follow the Taliban activities of Muslims, and Banser who maintain the security of the church, is an example of religious moderation. Because they want to be open and accept their differences with each other.

*3.2. Discussion*

*3.2.1 Religious Moderation*

Religious moderation comes from two syllables, namely moderation and religion. The word moderation itself is an absorption from the Latin Moderatio, which means moderate or not excessive and not lacking. While the meaning of the word moderation in Arabic, is often referred to as Wasathiyyah which means the middle, or I'tidal (fair), and Tawazun (balanced). The word moderation has two meanings, namely the reduction of violence and the avoidance of extremism ([Armita & Karuok, 2022](#Armita)). So religious moderation can be interpreted as not exaggerating religion and is a middle way in living a religious life, by prioritizing balance, morals, and character, whether treating others or a group ([Arifinsyah et al., 2020](#Arifinsyah)).

Likewise, the Quran underlines the importance of moderation in terms of morality. It emphasizes the importance of having moral balance and perseverance in the face of temptation, as well as being firm in one's stance without being tempted by wealth and worldly temptations that can shake faith. This moderation rejects the practice of corruption and misappropriation for the sake of worldly gains and personal interests. In addition, the Quran al-so provides guidance on religious moderation in a pluralistic society. Pluralistic societies consist of various eth-nicities, cultures, and religions, which are increasingly unavoidable in the era of globalization. Conflicts often occur in pluralistic societies due to differences in interests and religious beliefs, but the Quran offers the concept of Wa-sathiah, or religious moderation, as a solution. Religious moderation emphasizes an understanding of religion that is friendly, peaceful, and tolerant, thus avoiding the impression that Islam came to fight or scare. History has shown examples such as Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih of the Ottoman Empire, who respected Christians and protected their churches when conquering Constantinople.

This has also been commanded by Allah in the Quran for religious believers not to overdo religion

.قل يا أهل الكتاب لا تغلوا في دينكم غير الحق

*Meaning “Say: O People of the Book, do not exaggerate in your religion, going beyond the truth.” (Al Maidah 5: 77)*

*Likewise, the word wasathiyyah has been written in the Quran:*

و كذالك جعلناكم أمة وسطا لتكونو شهداء على الناس و يكونو الرسول عليكم شهيدا

*Meaning “Likewise, We have made you (Muslims) a people of the middle (just), that you may bear witness to (the deeds of) mankind, and the Messenger (Muhammad) bear witness to you.”*

Imam Ath Thabari explained that the word Ummatan Washathan in the verse means Khiyar (chosen/best), so it becomes the chosen / best people. But actually, the word wasath has a symbolic meaning of fairness because jus-tice is the embodiment of the best people. Imam Ibn Kathir also has the same understanding in this regard. However, he added that the word wasath here can also be interpreted with the word Asyraf (the noblest). This happens when Ibn Kathir mentions the word wasath for the Prophet, so wasath here is interpreted as the noblest person.

Meanwhile, according to Imam Ar Razi, the word wasath in the verse has four meanings. First, wasath is inter-preted with the word Fair which means not siding with one of the two sides in which there is a conflict. Second, the word wasath is interpreted with the word Khiyar which means the best. Third, there is Aktsaru Fadhlan which means the best. And fourth, the word wasath is interpreted as not excessive in worship and religious activities.

From here we can understand that religious moderation must be understood and done well. Religious moderation is a key to realizing harmony wherever it is ([Saharani & Suharyati, 2024](#Saharani)). Likewise, with the practice of religious moderation in a place, a person or a group can treat and respond to one individual or another group in a respectful manner, accept differences, and life will run harmoniously. In the life of Indonesian society, which has many differences, religious moderation is not an option, but a necessity.

*3.2.2 Principles of Religious Moderation*

The Ministry of Religious Affairs divides the basic principles of religious moderation into two: First, religious moderation always maintains a balance of two things, such as the balance of reason and revelation, body and mind, rights and obligations, personal and social interests, necessity and selflessness, religious texts and ijtihad of re-ligious leaders, reality and ideal ideas, and the balance of the past and the future. Second, balance in describing the way a person views, behaves and is committed to justice, humanity, and equality. Being balanced in attitude does not mean not having an opinion, but being able to behave fairly and firmly, not arbitrarily to the point of using violence, nor to take away someone's rights, let alone to the detriment of others. Balance here is an attitude or view that is necessary, not exaggerated and not reduced, not stubborn, and not liberal.

The Indonesian state has formulated that religious moderation has three pillars:

1. Moderation of thought, meaning religious thought that is not fixated on religious texts and ignores new realities and contexts [(Ichwan, 2013](#Ichwan)). However, it is able to find a middle ground between the two so that thinking be-comes moderate. At the same time, it is also not so free that it ignores both.
2. Movement moderation, meaning that religious movements with the aim of attracting individuals or groups to goodness and keeping them away from evil must be in a good way with the foundation and principles of impro-vement. Not by doing new damage with violence, so that what results is things that can be even worse ([Dalgaard & Supphellen, 2019](#Dalgaard)).
3. Moderation of action, which is also called moderation in tradition and practice. That is, strengthening relations between religious communities and the traditions and culture of the community. So that both can be open to each other ([Pajarianto et al., 2022](#Pajarianto)).

According to Prof. M. Quraish Shihab, religious moderation has several important pillars in practice ([Shafwan & Zakariya, 2023](#Shafwan)): First, fairness is defined as equal rights, as well as putting something in its place. Fairness here means moderation, not excessive, and not lacking. Second, balance, which according to him is a very impor-tant principle in religious moderation. Because if it is not balanced, then there will be no justice. This is similar to the balance in creation. Allah Swt created and organized the universe in such a way that everything is balan-ced according to its level. Just as the planets and other objects in outer space are able to circulate in balance according to their portions without clashing with each other. Third, tolerance is simply defined as adding or subtracting things that are still acceptable ([Fahri & Zainuri, 2019](#Fahri)).

There are 9 values of religious moderation or Wasathiyah according to the Ministry of Religion, including the middle (tawassuth), upright (tawazun), tolerance (tasamuh), deliberation (shura), reform (ishlah), pioneering (qudwah), citizenship/love of the country (muwathanah), non-violence (la 'unf) and culture-friendly (i'tibar al-'urf).

Afrizal Nur, and Mukhlis divide the characteristics and values of religious moderation into nine ([Karimullah & Islami, 2023](#Karimullah)), including (1) The Middle Way (Tawassuth), which means understanding and treatment that does not exaggerate or reduce. Not extreme left and right, and able to maintain a balance between two opposing sides; (2) Upright Straight (I'tidal), meaning fairness or putting something in its place. There is no such thing as leaning more to the right or left (one-sided), being proportional in claiming something, and being consistent; (3) Tolerance (Tasamuuh), which is accepting differences in the form of religion, ethnicity, race, to appreciating differences in rituals to holidays of other religions; (4) Deliberation (Shura), which is solving all forms of problems by discussing first. So that problems can be solved together; (5) Repair (Al Ishlah), which is to prioritize the principle of refor-mation (change) which aims for better things for the common good. Or it can be understood by maintaining the old well, and renewing it with something even better; (6) Balanced (Tawazun), which is balanced in all aspects and firm in principles that are able to distinguish between deviations and differences; (7) Egalitarian (Musawah), which means not discriminating against existing differences in the form of religion, tradition, and so on; (8) Priority (Aulawiyah), which means being able to sort out which is more important and must be prioritized over other inte-rests that are below it; (9) Dynamic or Innovative (Tathawwur wa Ibtikar), which means always being open to changes for the better.

**4.** **IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Research on religious moderation in Bandar Village contributes to science by digging deeper into how religious and ethnic differences can be maintained to create harmony in society. The implication of this research is as a reference and understanding of the practice of religious moderation and how it can be applied in a multicultural society to maintain harmony and unity.

**5.** **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

The limitation of this article's research is the limited sample interviewed, so it may not cover the entire broader spectrum of society. In addition, this research did not explore external factors that may influence the practice of religious moderation in the village.

Recommendations, for future researchers can use other methods such as case studies, phenomenology so as to produce new findings (novelty) about interfaith harmony.

**6.** **CONCLUSION**

Bandar Village is a religiously diverse community that successfully maintains interfaith harmony through the consistent application of religious moderation principles. These include mutual respect, balance, tolerance, and fairness in daily interactions. The village community demonstrates this in their social relationships and religious practices, including worship rituals that are carried out without conflict or interference. Residents are open to engaging with one another regardless of religious or ethnic background, fostering an inclusive environment that values peaceful coexistence. Due to this exemplary practice of religious tolerance and moderation, Bandar Village has been recognized as the icon of the Religious Moderation Village in Batang Regency.

The findings of this study emphasize that sustainable religious harmony must be oriented toward cultivating a creative and collaborative social atmosphere. This interactive creativity fosters an environment where ideas, initiatives, and communal efforts flourish across various sectors of life, encouraging meaningful and inclusive development. Such an atmosphere not only strengthens unity among religious communities but also promotes proactive contributions from individuals to collectively improve the quality of life in the village.

Furthermore, the quality of interfaith harmony must go beyond coexistence and be directed toward enhancing the productive value of society. Harmony should facilitate social relationships that support practical outcomes, such as alleviating poverty, overcoming ignorance, and addressing underdevelopment. This can be achieved through the establishment of social charities, public services, cooperative enterprises, and other socio-economic initiatives. These efforts contribute significantly to the welfare of the community, showing that religious moderation is not just about tolerance, but also about empowering communities to thrive together in dignity and peace.

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**Author Contribution Statement**

The authors have completed their respective tasks well during the process of conducting this research. We declare that all data presented in this article are fully accountable.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that they have no significant competing financial, professional or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

**Ethical Approval Statement**

The author declares that this study was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles and has received ethical approval from the author's institution, including respect for participants' autonomy, confidentiality of data, and ensuring their safety and well-being, as outlined in the applicable research ethics guidelines.

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