



New Media, Pandemic, and Discourse on Religious Moderation: A Study of NU and Muhammadiyah Websites

The websites of NU and Muhammadiyah effectively reconcile religious beliefs with the practicalities of government policies during the pandemic. These organizations have crafted legal frameworks that streamline religious rituals amidst COVID-19 restrictions and containment measures. This study explores how their discourse promotes a harmonious fusion of religious and state values, particularly within organizations known for their moderate approach to religious matters. Utilizing discursive practice and discourse analysis, the study reveals that both NU and Muhammadiyah establish pandemic-specific worship guidelines aligned with government policies. While NU's approach relies on classical *Fiqh* arguments, Muhammadiyah adopts a more pragmatic and progressive stance. Nevertheless, both organizations share the common goal of ensuring ease and accessibility for the public to practice their faith during these challenging times. This facilitation, grounded in sound reasoning, incorporates adaptations to state policies when selecting thematic approaches. This alignment highlights that NU and Muhammadiyah's moderation concept not only considers the applicability of religious texts to local circumstances but also supports government initiatives aimed at public welfare and addressing the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: Media, NU, Muhammadiyah, Religious Moderation, Covid-19

Wacana yang hadir dalam media *website* yang dilakukan oleh NU dan Muhammadiyah yang berkaitan dengan isu ibadah di masa pandemi memiliki kecenderungan ke arah penstabilan konsepsi keagamaan dengan relasi kenegaraan. Arah konstruksi hukum untuk memudahkan pelaksanaan ibadah di masa Covid-19 berkaitan dengan aturan-aturan pembatasan ibadah dan kebijakan penanggulangan pandemi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan konsepsi pembentukan wacana yang mengarah pada keseimbangan nilai agama dan kenegaraan yang dilakukan oleh dua organisasi yang dikenal mendukung moderasi dalam beragama. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan *discursive practice* dalam konsepsi analisis wacana sebagai alat analisa. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa NU dan Muhammadiyah melakukan konstruksi praktik ibadah di masa pandemi dengan mengacu pada tema-tema yang berkesesuaian dengan kebijakan pemerintah. Meskipun keduanya menampilkan cara yang berbeda dengan NU berbasis pada dalil fikih klasik dan Muhammadiyah dengan kecenderungan praktis-progresifnya, keduanya memiliki tujuan yang sama untuk memberikan kemudahan praktik beribadah kepada masyarakat di masa pandemi. Kemudahan yang diberikan dengan pertimbangan dalil yang valid teridentifikasi adanya pertimbangan penyesuaian terhadap kebijakan negara dalam pemilihan temanya. Kesesuaian ini mengindikasikan konsepsi moderasi yang diusung oleh NU dan Muhammadiyah tidak hanya mempertimbangkan relevansi makna teks keagamaan dengan kebutuhan lokal, akan tetapi juga mendukung kebijakan pemerintah dalam menciptakan kemaslahatan dan penyelesaian Covid-19.

Kata Kunci: Media, NU, Muhammadiyah, Moderasi Beragama, Covid-19

Author:Adeni¹Silviatul Hasanah²**Affiliation:**^{1,2} UIN Walisongo
Semarang, Indonesia**Corresponding author:**

adeni@walisongo.ac.id

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Introduction

Initial perceptions of religious organizations' pandemic response limited to spiritual guidance via social media¹, but NU and Muhammadiyah narratives reveal a broader and more nuanced picture. These prominent socio-religious organizations, with their vast memberships, offer a nuanced perspective on moderate worship practices amidst the COVID-19 crisis by developing innovative legal frameworks tailored to the current circumstances. These ideological narratives manifest as distinct approaches. NU constructs discourses centered on the legitimacy of worship practices, drawing upon traditional *Fiqh* narratives.² Conversely, Muhammadiyah prioritizes practical guidance for implementing worship in tangible actions.³ Both organizations demonstrate a commitment to craft legal and worship frameworks in line with government policies in their efforts to address the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Many researchers have surprisingly overlooked the development of a moderate religious discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic by NU and Muhammadiyah, particularly in the context of government policies restricting religious activities. Previous research has primarily focused on NU and Muhammadiyah's roles as religious institutions providing doctrinal guidance to their followers, often neglecting their importance as influential

organizations within the state framework. Two prominent models can be considered when evaluating the contributions of NU and Muhammadiyah during the pandemic. First, the pandemic has driven a shift in da'wah patterns, with both NU and Muhammadiyah adapting to the trend of transitioning from offline to online platforms, disseminating religious teachings during this challenging period.⁴ Second, due to their immense influence over the majority of Indonesia's Muslim population, these organizations have taken on a crucial role in enlightening their constituents about the pandemic. They stress the importance of perceiving COVID-19 as a severe affliction rather than a predetermined catastrophe to be passively embraced.⁵ Adeni and Hasanah's research findings within the context of Muhammadiyah and NU corroborate the concerted efforts to situate COVID-19 within a theological framework.⁶

This study aims to bridge the gaps in previous research that have overlooked the development of a moderate religious discourse in response to government policies. To achieve this objective, the research delves into two crucial areas. First, it examines the construction of religious discourse by analyzing various discourse structures to identify recurring patterns in conveying information consistent with government policies on COVID-19. The insights gained from this analysis, particularly regarding the tendency to establish worship

¹ World Health Organization (WHO), "Practical Considerations and Recommendations for Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Communities in the Context of COVID-19," *WHO*, last modified April 7, 2020, accessed November 4, 2021, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>.

² Alhafiz Kurniawan, "Hukum Melaksanakan Shalat Dengan APD Lengkap," *NU Online*, last modified September 26, 2020, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/hukum-melaksanakan-shalat-dengan-apd-lengkap-mRkik>.

³ Ilham, "Vaksinasi Tidak Membatalkan Puasa, Ini Alasannya," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified March 23,

2021, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/vaksin-saat-puasa-bolehkah/>.

⁴ Amelia Rahmi et al., "Formulation Formulation of NU and Muhammadiyah Da'wah Among Millennial Generations During the Covid 19 Pandemic," *Meyarsa: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Dakwah* 4, no. 1 (2023): 34–52.

⁵ Ahmad Munjin Nasih et al., "Theological Perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Leaders in Facing the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Filsafat* 18, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 111–134.

⁶ Adeni and Silviatul Hasanah, "Islam and Disaster Communication via Online Media amid the Covid-19 in Indonesia: The Case of Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the Salafism," *Al-Milal: Journal of Religion and Thought* 3, no. 2 (2021).





guidelines during the pandemic, serve as a basis for understanding the role of media as a vehicle for information dissemination, which constitutes the second research focus. By addressing these two critical aspects, the study aims to shed light on the concept of religious moderation as embraced by two prominent organizations that advocate for moderate religious practices within the framework of the state.

This research is founded on the principle that religious initiatives spearheaded by institutions or groups committed to fostering a moderate understanding of faith have a profound impact on shaping religious practices during the pandemic in alignment with national values. This phenomenon is clearly evident in the religious landscape of Russia, where religious institutions actively embrace bureaucratic policies that encompass both the tenets of religious moderation and those of the state.⁷ The approach of disseminating religious information while meticulously balancing religious and state values represents a novel manifestation of the religious moderation paradigm within the pandemic's context. Religious moderation not only strives to strike a harmonious balance between religious texts and their practical application (praxis) but also embraces alignment with government policies as an integral component of its contextual framework.⁸ The cultivation of new religious narratives in the context of the pandemic, with a deliberate focus on compatibility with government policies, not only mitigates conflicts arising from diverse interpretations of religious texts but also fosters stability in the relationship between the state and religious communities.

To explore the connection between the development of religious regulations during the

pandemic and the government's corresponding policies, this research employs qualitative methods. This methodology is deemed appropriate for structuring the narratives found in the materials published on the websites of the two organizations, with a particular focus on identifying recurring themes related to worship.⁹ The data for this study is drawn from the content posted on the official websites of NU and Muhammadiyah throughout the pandemic period. The collected data undergoes a systematic analysis comprising three essential phases: data reduction, analysis, and conclusion drawing. The data is organized according to relevant themes. Data reduction is achieved through the application of the discursive practice approach, which involves examining the dissemination of discourse while situating it within its original context.¹⁰ This analytical process plays a pivotal role in crafting findings that culminate in meaningful insights.

Religious Moderation in Discourse

Religious moderation finds its embodiment in the concept of "*ummatan wasatan*" or a balanced community, which encompasses a measured approach in thoughts, attitudes, and actions. The Ministry of Religious Affairs in the Republic of Indonesia defines religious moderation as a perspective, attitude, and behavior characterized by a commitment to maintaining a balanced stance, practicing fairness, and eschewing extremism in matters of faith. This approach is delineated by four pivotal indicators: 1) dedication to the nation, 2) tolerance, 3) non-violence, and 4) an ability to

⁷ Sofya A. Ragozina, "The Body in Islamic Discourse in Russia during the Pandemic: Between Religious, Medical, and Political Discourses," *Corpus Mundi* 1, no. 4 (December 25, 2020): 56–69.

⁸ Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*. (London: Oneworld Oxford, 2003).

⁹ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis (a Source Book of New Methods)* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1984).

¹⁰ Theresa Catalano and Linda R. Waugh, "Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), and Beyond," *Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy and Psychology* 26 (2020): 1–12.





adapt to local culture.¹¹ Research findings, as highlighted by Dodego and Witro, underscore that the ultimate objective of religious moderation is to foster a climate of tolerance, peace, and harmony within the framework of a diverse, multi-religious, and multicultural society.¹² Additionally, Ni'am's research underscores the pivotal role of pesantren—traditional Islamic boarding schools—as the cornerstone for the cultivation of moderate Islam in Indonesia.¹³ The *pesantren* tradition, nurtured by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), stands as a prime exemplar of religious moderation. NU is widely recognized as a moderate Islamic organization, consistently championing values of tolerance and democracy.¹⁴

In addition to the pesantren tradition cultivated by NU, Muhammadiyah also espouses a concept of religious moderation. This perspective emphasizes the importance of spreading kind and positive words among fellow individuals, complemented by benevolent actions, particularly through the development of socio-economic infrastructure. In contrast to extremist groups, which prioritize violence and destructive actions, Muhammadiyah's approach emphasizes the importance of strengthening socio-economic structures. Such an approach is aimed at countering radical actions and safeguarding the true essence of Islam in society. This entails interpreting Islam through reason and emphasizing socio-economic progress to address the root causes of radical behavior, such as poverty and socio-economic disparities.¹⁵ Like the NU organization, Muhammadiyah is also recognized as an Islamic institution that supports

the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, democracy, tolerance, and other values that uphold a harmonious and inclusive society.¹⁶

Combining religious moderation with socio-economic development represents a contemporary strategy that can align with the principles of moderation found in Islamic boarding schools. Omid Safi posited that Islam's active engagement in meeting community needs, including involvement in social initiatives, is a testament to a tolerant and peaceful interpretation of Islam.¹⁷ An inflexible interpretation of religious texts, devoid of moderation, can have detrimental social repercussions. However, when a textual approach is perceived as a deeply committed and caring attitude toward one's faith, it can foster social growth and the development of a compassionate mindset. In this context, a group can still be characterized as leaning towards moderation. Practically, Islamic groups commonly recognized for exemplifying moderate Islam include NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) and Muhammadiyah.

Conversely, a literal interpretation of religious texts, which often leads to rigid religious practices, is also considered a characteristic of non-moderate Islam. In general, groups that emphasize a literal interpretation of religious texts are sometimes linked to more extreme factions, although this generalization does not apply universally. The root of the word "radical" does not inherently carry a negative connotation. Individuals who adhere to religious teachings in a literal manner can be seen as

¹¹ Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

¹² Subhan Hi. Ali Dodego and Doli Witro, "The Islamic Moderation And The Prevention Of Radicalism And Religious Extremism In Indonesia," *Dialog* 43, no. 2 (December 21, 2020): 199–208.

¹³ Syamsun Ni'am, "Pesantren: The Miniature of Moderate Islam in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 111.

¹⁴ Masdar Hilmy, "Whither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism? A Reexamination on the Moderate Vision of

Muhammadiyah and NU," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (June 1, 2013): 24.

¹⁵ Alexander R. Arifianto, "Islam with Progress: Muhammadiyah and Moderation in Islam" *RSIS Commentary*. No. 213 – 10 November 2017.

¹⁶ Hilmy, "Whither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism? A Reexamination on the Moderate Vision of Muhammadiyah and NU."

¹⁷ Safi, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, 2.





upholding their personal beliefs.¹⁸ However, challenges arise when radical ideas translate into violent actions, encompassing both verbal and physical aggression.

Religious Moderation Models in the Pandemic: NU and Muhammadiyah Online Narratives

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the development of innovative approaches for religious institutions to engage with their members and ensure the continuity of moderate religious practices. To bridge the gap between religious institutions and their congregants, a shift to digital media channels has been embraced, enabling seamless access without the need for physical gatherings.¹⁹ The creation of discourse on social media, aligned with the organization's objectives, plays a crucial role in guiding members to uphold worship practices consistent with the values promoted by the religious institutions. This mechanism serves as an effective means of influencing the understanding of members constrained by the pandemic and aligning it with the organization's goals.²⁰ By disseminating messages through their official websites, NU and Muhammadiyah exercise control over the understanding of their members, which ultimately impacts various behaviors aimed at preserving religious moderation.

The evolution of moderate religious discourse in response to COVID-19 manifests in diverse forms and exhibits distinct inclinations. These multifaceted forms and tendencies will be explored in detail in the following sections.

1. Navigating Religious Moderation in the Face of a Pandemic: NU's Discourse

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has adopted a thoughtful and scholarly approach to shaping discourse around the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing upon its rich tradition of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), NU has provided valuable guidance to its vast membership and the broader Indonesian community. They meticulously assess the sufficiency of newly formulated *fiqh* regulations within the pandemic context, relying on theological-normative reasoning and the quest for robust arguments to resolve legal quandaries. For instance, they cite the opinion of Izz ad-Dīn bin Abd as-Salām concerning the permissibility of not bathing the deceased in cases of COVID-19, and subsequently conclude that it is acceptable to replace complete washing with partial cleansing or *tayamum*, a practice akin to handling the deceased from drowning, as per al-Jāziri's perspective. Upholding the normativity of *fiqh* rules is achieved by considering the fundamental principle of *ma ubiha li al-dlarurati tuqaddaru biqadaraha* (every emergency must be determined by the degree of emergency).²¹ NU leaders maintain that an emergency is a logical basis for formulating new laws, which is instrumental in addressing the legal challenges emerging during the pandemic.

The adaptability of Islamic Jurisprudence allows for legal moderation that harmonizes with the principles of *uṣūl fiqh* and government policies. For instance,

¹⁸ Adeni Adeni and Nur Hamid, "Pergulatan Kelompok Civil Islam Arus Utama Dan Sempalan Dalam Ranah Private, Public, Market, Dan State: Pendekatan Sosiologis," *International Journal Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* 22, no. 1 (May 30, 2020): 71–96.

¹⁹ Lukasz Sulkowski and Grzegorz Ignatowski, "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Organization of Religious Behaviour in Different Christian Denominations in Poland," *Religions* 11, no. 5 (May 19, 2020): 254.

²⁰ Yiqi Li et al., "Organizational Sensemaking in Tough Times: The Ecology of NGOs' COVID-19 Issue Discourse

Communities on Social Media," *Computers in Human Behavior* 122 (2021): 106838; Mélissa Généreux et al., "Communication Strategies and Media Discourses in the Age of COVID-19: An Urgent Need for Action," *Health Promotion International* 36, no. 4 (2021): 1178–1185.

²¹ Muhammad Syamsudin, "Soal Jenazah Positif Covid-19 Yang Berbantal Semen Dan Tidak Dimandikan," *NU Online*, last modified August 31, 2020, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/soal-jenazah-positif-covid-19-yang-berbantal-semen-dan-tidak-dimandikan-4lXkS>.





the prohibition of the swab test, a pandemic-related requirement, was established by drawing an analogy (*qiyās*) to *al-su'ūṭ* (inserting something through the nose), a practice forbidden during fasting.²² Moreover, the decision to suspend the obligatory Friday prayer during the pandemic²³ and the allowance for conducting Friday prayers via online²⁴ illustrates a disposition towards facilitating worship practices that align with government policies regarding Friday prayer.²⁵ In cases where government instructions diverge from religious obligations, the inclination to comply with governmental directives is justified by referencing the views of Sheikh Syaṭa ad-Dimyāṭī. The consensus with government policies, while upholding *fiqh* principles, aims to streamline the execution of worship during the pandemic.

Crafting moderate laws during a pandemic necessitates careful consideration of their practicality in light of community activities hampered by pandemic-related restrictions. This entails favoring more lenient legal interpretations that prioritize ease of adherence. For instance, regarding the prayer obligation for individuals wearing PPE (personal protective

equipment), an-Nawawi's opinion, which does not require repeating prayers for those hindered by PPE usage, takes precedence over the opinion allowing congregational prayers (*jama'*) or prayers tailored to their circumstances. The latter approach involves making up (*qadā'*) the prayer at a later, non-urgent time.²⁶ Similarly, the permissibility of using alcohol-based hand sanitizers for religious purification is decided in favor of Wahbah az-Zuhailī's opinion that allows such usage, overriding the prohibition of alcohol in worship.²⁷

2. Muhammadiyah's Discourse of Religious Moderation on Pandemic

The discourse on the Muhammadiyah website adopts a cultural-substantive-transformative approach, prioritizing practical strategies to combat COVID-19 through theological and medical initiatives. The website's focus on offering immediate solutions rather than developing new *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) in response to the pandemic is partly attributed to Muhammadiyah's existing comprehensive framework for pandemic management, known as *Fikih Bencana* (*fiqh* of disaster).²⁸ This is evident in the post addressing the proper handling of disaster victims' bodies, which draws upon *Fiqh of Disasters*.²⁹ In the

²² Alhafiz Kurniawan, "Apakah Tes Swab Membatalkan Puasa?," *NU Online*, last modified August 30, 2020, accessed February 3, 2021, <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/apakah-tes-swab-membatalkan-puasa-B21t4>.

²³ Alhafiz Kurniawan, "Mengapa Umat Islam Tidak Shalat Jumat Karena Covid-19?," *NU Online*, last modified March 24, 2020, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/mengapa-umat-islam-tidak-wajib-shalat-jumat-karena-covid-19-tDWax>.

²⁴ Alhafiz Kurniawan, "Hukum Shalat Jumat Online Atau Live Streaming via Media Sosial," *NU Online*, last modified April 16, 2020, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/hukum-shalat-jumat-online-atau-live-streaming-via-media-sosial-xyPe>.

²⁵ Alhafiz Kurniawan, "Hukum Menjaga Jarak Jamaah Dan Shaf Shalat Jumat Dari Covid-19," *NU Online*, last modified March 20, 2020, accessed February 6, 2021,

<https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/hukum-menjaga-jarak-jamaah-dan-shaf-shalat-jumat-dari-covid-19-Af1Wc>.

²⁶ Kurniawan, "Hukum Melaksanakan Shalat Dengan APD Lengkap."

²⁷ Alhafiz Kurniawan, "Hukum Memakai Hand Sanitizer Atau Cairan Antiseptik Tangan Untuk Shalat," *NU Online*, last modified March 16, 2020, accessed February 6, 2021, <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/hukum-memakai-hand-sanitizer-atau-cairan-antiseptik-tangan-untuk-shalat-GE8ik>.

²⁸ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Fikih Kebencanaan* (Yogyakarta: Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Musat Muhammadiyah, 2015).

²⁹ Redaksi Muhammadiyah, "Tata Cara Memperlakukan Jenazah Korban Bencana," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified January 19, 2021, accessed January 23, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/tata-cara-memperlakukan-jenazah-korban-bencana/>.





context of vaccine law, the construction of *fiqh* discourse adheres to *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) by employing the concept of *istihalah*, proposed by Umar Sulaimān al-Asyḳār, a contemporary scholar from Jordan. Additionally, it references the concept of *ḍarurah* as mentioned in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 173,³⁰ while determinations related to fasting individuals draw from Quranic texts and Hadiths.³¹

The limited coverage of emerging worship-related issues during the pandemic can be traced back to the establishment of legal guidelines primarily through the Tarjih Council's decisions, which are then disseminated via the official website.³² In response to the evolving worship practices necessitated by the pandemic, Muhammadiyah issued an official circular letter outlining the procedures for worship during the COVID-19 period. This circular letter served as the foundation for conducting worship activities during Ramadan amidst the pandemic, encompassing protocols for fasting, conducting tarawih prayers³³. The principal focus of Muhammadiyah's discourse formation is to bolster societal resilience by reducing undue religious rigidity when

dealing with COVID-19. This orientation is evident in various posts designed to fortify individuals' psychological well-being in managing the challenges posed by COVID-19, such as scrutinizing and rejecting weak hadith narratives (*ḍa'if*)³⁴ and dispelling various conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19³⁵.

Muhammadiyah's approach to constructing discourse is characterized by integrating tangible actions, creating a synergistic discourse that aligns with the principles of disaster *fiqh*. Muhammadiyah demonstrates a propensity for shaping legal norms through practical measures, exemplified by their active engagement in debates concerning the validity of vaccines. This engagement culminates in a policy for all members to receive vaccinations, a directive endorsed by the Chairperson of Muhammadiyah and the Chairperson of Aisyiyah. In disseminating information related to religious beliefs, Muhammadiyah consistently positions itself in support of various government policies, translating its stance into concrete actions.³⁶ A notable instance of Muhammadiyah's societal engagement can be observed on their website, where it is revealed that, during the

³⁰ Redaksi Muhammadiyah, "Vaksin Halal Atau Haram? Berikut Tinjauan Ushul Fikih," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified January 15, 2021, accessed February 25, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/vaksin-halal-atau-haram-berikut-tinjauan-ushul-fikih/>.

³¹ Ilham, "Vaksinasi Tidak Membatalkan Puasa, Ini Alasannya."

³² Adam, "Edaran PP Muhammadiyah Tentang Tuntunan Ibadah Ramadan 1442 H Dalam Kondisi Darurat Covid-19," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified March 28, 2021, accessed October 4, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/edaran-pp-muhammadiyah-tentang-tuntunan-ibadah-ramadan-1442-h-dalam-kondisi-darurat-covid-19/>.

³³ Redaksi Muhammadiyah, "Wajibkah Pemerintah Mengobati Covid-19? - Muhammadiyah," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified February 13, 2021, accessed November 4, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/wajibkah-pemerintah-mengobati-covid-19/>.

³⁴ Syifa, "Hindari Penggunaan Hadis Dha'if Dalam Mencegah Penyebaran Virus Corona - Muhammadiyah," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified July 5, 2021, accessed November 4, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/hindari-penggunaan-hadis-dhaif-dalam-mencegah-penyebaran-virus-corona/>.

³⁵ Afandi, "Permasalahan Covid-19 Harus Didekati Secara Scientific, Jangan Merumitkan Diri Dengan Segala Teori Konspirasi," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified July 7, 2021, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/permasalahan-covid-19-harus-didekati-secara-scientific-jangan-merumitkan-diri-dengan-segala-teori-konspirasi/>.

³⁶ Afandi, "Atasi Pandemi Dengan Empati Nyata, Bukan Debat Konspirasi Dari Zona Aman," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified July 4, 2021, accessed November 4, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/atasi-pandemi-dengan-empati-nyata-bukan-debat-konspirasi-dari-zona-aman/>.





Covid-19 pandemic, Muhammadiyah disbursed an impressive 344,162,461,061 billion rupiahs in funds to benefit 31,869,988 recipients.³⁷ The substantial financial disbursements and the provision of several other services are integral components of the discourse on disaster *fiqh* articulated by Muhammadiyah.

NU and Muhammadiyah undertake discourse formation intending to regulate the relationship between their organizational institutions and their members. They achieve this by enhancing the role of their official websites as a means of cultivating moderate religious conduct. The articulation of a moderate religious discourse in response to COVID-19 is manifest in the form of discussions on fresh legal frameworks that align with their respective tendencies in the process of legal formation (*istibāt al-ahkām*). NU opts for a traditional *fiqh* discourse as the foundation for its legal framework, selecting robust viewpoints pertinent for application in a pandemic context. Similarly, Muhammadiyah constructs its legal guidelines through contextual interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. Both organizations reject various discourses presented by certain groups that rely on weak hadiths, as such approaches can lead to actions conflicting with government regulations. This strategic choice serves to mold the moderate behavior of their members.

Both organizations have demonstrated a nuanced approach to pandemic response, harmonizing state directives with Islamic principles while maintaining their distinct identities. This alignment is achieved through direct adherence to these texts or by drawing

upon various interpretations offered by eminent figures in Islamic jurisprudence. As influential organizations with substantial memberships in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah function as institutions that play a pivotal role in driving changes in actions that support the management of the pandemic. Their efforts to disseminate information on moderate religious conduct during the COVID-19 period underscore their commitment to fulfilling their Islamic responsibilities.³⁸ While their approaches to presenting information differ, with NU emphasizing the meticulous development of legal arguments and Muhammadiyah focusing on practical applications through real-life examples, both organizations share a dedication to the integration of religious values with national identity. This dedication is corroborated by Brown's research findings, which highlight NU and Muhammadiyah's emphasis on state commitment rather than ideological commitment in their responses to issues related to pluralism and democracy.³⁹

NU and Muhammadiyah's efforts to foster moderation in religion during the pandemic aim to balance implementing legal principles and adherence to state policies for mitigating COVID-19. This equilibrium reflects the institutionalization of moderate religious practices, with the primary focus not solely on intensifying the development of models for moderate religious actions during the pandemic. This resonates with Arifinsyah's findings, highlighting how moderate groups prioritize shared interests as their primary consideration when taking action.⁴⁰ The consideration of legal and policy frameworks, in alignment with state

³⁷ Syifa, "11 Bulan Tangani Covid, Muhammadiyah Gelontorkan 344 Milliar-Muhammadiyah," *Muhammadiyah.or.Id*, last modified January 7, 2021, accessed November 4, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/11-bulan-tangani-covid-muhammadiyah-gelontorkan-dana-344-miliar/>.

³⁸ Nawal A. Al Eid and Boshra A. Arnout, "Crisis and Disaster Management in the Light of the Islamic Approach: COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis as a Model (a Qualitative Study

Using the Grounded Theory)," *Journal of Public Affairs* 20, no. 4 (2020): e2217.

³⁹ Gustav Brown, "Civic Islam: Muhammadiyah, NU and the Organisational Logic of Consensus-Making in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 397–414.

⁴⁰ Arifinsyah Arifinsyah, Safria Andy, and Agusman Damanik, "The Urgency of Religious Moderation in Preventing Radicalism in Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (April 27, 2020): 91–108.





policies for combating and mitigating the disease, is a priority manifested through discourse formation in the media to engage their members. Figures within these organizations play a crucial role in shaping actions consistent with state policies for addressing COVID-19. This observation aligns with the research by Adler et al.,⁴¹ which underscores the effectiveness of NU and Muhammadiyah's narratives in the media for promoting moderate religious actions. This collective evidence underscores the shared commitment of NU and Muhammadiyah to promoting religious moderation within the nation-state context.

Shaping Religious Moderation in the Nation-State: NU and Muhammadiyah's Response to Pandemic Worship Practices

NU and Muhammadiyah's extensive online guidance on pandemic-era worship practices reflects a shift in the perception of religious moderation within the nation-state framework. Both organizations advocate for compliance with government regulations on religious practices, drawing religious justifications from the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) scholars' insights. Their focus lies in aligning various state policies regulating religious conduct during the pandemic with interpretations of Quranic and Hadith texts, as well as the views of prominent fiqh scholars. Through their websites, these organizations disseminate information on religious practices, fostering a dynamic discourse that promotes moderation while supporting government pandemic mitigation measures.

Using websites to reinforce religious narratives that align with government policies without violating religious texts is a strategic

approach that facilitates the seamless and transparent dissemination of information. The inherent nature of websites operating within the internet network fosters the growth of fresh insights capable of driving enduring transformations.⁴² The objective of disseminating knowledge through websites is to introduce a novel mechanism for empowering communities in the digital age. Incorporating the values advocated by NU and Muhammadiyah into the discourse of religious moderation via digital media can serve as a hallmark of religious humanism, offering timeless accessibility and relevance for future generations.⁴³ This process of shaping discourse motives sets it apart from other forms of media, serving as a tangible manifestation and sustainability of the organization's mission during the pandemic.

The distinct discourse identities evident on the NU and Muhammadiyah websites arise from internal inclinations that emphasize a commitment to national values in shaping religious discourse, particularly during the pandemic. As Helland and Campbell argued, this inclination becomes a recurring theme in constructing every discourse, reflecting the institutions' efforts to uphold the perspectives of their members, the authority of their religious institutions, and their distinctive organizational identities.⁴⁴ The interplay between religious institutions and their adherents, as expressed through doctrines, transforms media platforms into conduits for broader community concerns. Oprea recognized this evolving trend by highlighting the prevalence of open interactions across diverse circles as a factor influencing changes in how doctrinal messages are

⁴¹ Gary J. Adler et al., "Religion at the Frontline: How Religion Influenced the Response of Local Government Officials to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Sociology of Religion* 82, no. 4 (2021): 397–425, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srab029>.

⁴² Anna Everett and John. T. Caldwell., *New Media Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (London: Routledge,

2013); Natalia Fenton, *New Media, Old News Journalism and Democracy in Digital Age* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010).

⁴³ Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jasey Bass Inc., 2001).

⁴⁴ Christopher Helland, *Virtual Religion: A Case Study of Virtual Tibet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).





communicated through the media.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the collaborative dynamics of engagement within these media outlets contribute to the distinctive character of discourse formation.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the collaborative dynamics of engagement within these media outlets contribute to the distinctive character of discourse formation. This collaborative process, shaped by the institution's relationship with the state and the publication of openly accessible discourse, dictates how NU and Muhammadiyah convey narratives of moderate worship while considering alignment with state policies.

NU and Muhammadiyah's propensity to devise innovative religious practices further solidifies their institutional standing, as both organizations demonstrate a deep commitment to the state. Legal ritualization,⁴⁷ enhanced public awareness of health concerns,⁴⁸ and the intensified utilization of religious arguments⁴⁹ constitute deliberate measures to emphasize the alignment of state-imposed worship restrictions with religious reasoning. Within this framework, consideration of the public good during perilous circumstances serves as a counterbalance, promoting moderate religious conduct while upholding civic responsibilities. In this context, NU and Muhammadiyah jointly embrace the conceptualization of religious moderation during the pandemic as a harmonious convergence of religious principles and government-imposed restrictions.

The new media era has ushered in an era of increased visibility and openness for religious discourse. New media platforms provide a versatile space for diverse virtual communities to

express their religious views, albeit occasionally in an imprudent manner. However, the discourse presented by established religious entities like NU and Muhammadiyah offers a structured and accountable perspective. While online platforms disseminate COVID-19 information that can bolster public health, they also harbor the potential for public unrest. Religious websites, particularly those guided by NU and Muhammadiyah's Islamic approach, serve as a valuable source of COVID-19-related information. Consequently, these websites enable readers to access NU and Muhammadiyah's moderate Islamic teachings through this information.

Conclusion

This study reveals a significant expansion in the identity of organizations and their members, particularly within the context of NU and Muhammadiyah, in terms of religious moderation. It introduces a novel interpretation of religious moderation practiced by NU and Muhammadiyah during the pandemic, primarily through online media channels. The widespread accessibility of online media has influenced the evolution of NU and Muhammadiyah's approach to constructing religious discourse, characterized by a more open perspective that prioritizes national interests over strict doctrinal ideologies. Diverse initiatives aimed at communicating information to members with varied presentations underscore the development of religious practices during the pandemic that align with government guidelines. NU, drawing on *fiqh* arguments from the *turas* (classical Islamic reference) tradition, shares the

⁴⁵ Delia Oprea, "Discourse Analysis in Social Media," *International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on the Dialogue between Sciences & Arts, Religion & Education* 3, no. 1 (August 25, 2019): 315–320.

⁴⁶ Gwen Bouvier, "What Is a Discourse Approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Other Social Media: Connecting with Other Academic Fields?," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 10, no. 2 (May 4, 2015): 149–162.

⁴⁷ Andar Nubowo, "Covid-19, Fatwas, and Socio-Religious Praxis," *Social Sciences and Missions* 35, no. 3–4 (November 28, 2022): 308–342.

⁴⁸ Nasih et al., "Theological Perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Leaders in Facing the Covid-19 Pandemic."

⁴⁹ Adeni and Hasanah, "Islam and Disaster Communication via Online Media amid the Covid-19 in Indonesia: The Case of Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the Salafism."





common objective of shaping religious conduct following government regulations. Muhammadiyah, however, takes a distinct approach by emphasizing concrete actions to motivate its members to adhere to state recommendations while pursuing the same goal.

This research unveiled the intricate weaving of religious discourse development surrounding the state's pandemic management strategies. Both NU and Muhammadiyah were observed to employ discursive practices to craft narratives within their respective media channels that align with the government's policy stance while simultaneously preserving their distinctive organizational identities. It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that the moderate religious narratives aimed at fostering stability in both religious practices and government responses to COVID-19, as identified in this study, are primarily confined to the discourse they construct. This research does not delve into the broader spectrum of interactions and influences that open social media platforms can exert on shaping discourse. Consequently, further investigations are warranted to explore how various organizations grapple with the challenges posed by the pandemic in Indonesia and how they engage in discourse struggles.

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This article adheres to the publication norm of not contacting any human or animal subjects.

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Disclaimer

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