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Research Paper

Institutionalizing Religious Moderation as Public Policy: Strategies for Addressing Social Polarization

Mukhtar Alshodiq[1]*
Center for Information and Development Studies [CIDES] – ICMI se-Indonesia

Ni'mah Fathin[2]
UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, Kediri – East Java, Indonesia

Marcus Noeh Fiedl[3]
Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

Corresponding Author's E-mail: nurmukhtar@gmail.com

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Abstract

Religious moderation has increasingly entered public-policy agendas in Indonesia, yet existing scholarship often examines its educational, community, institutional, and communicative dimensions separately, leaving their integration as an institutional policy process insufficiently explained. This study examines how religious moderation is institutionalized as public policy for addressing social polarization, the strategies and implementation conditions involved, and the monitoring and evaluation arrangements relevant to implementation and social outcomes. A qualitative documentary analysis was conducted using official Indonesian policy and strategic documents on religious moderation issued or enacted between 2020 and 2025, complemented by scholarly literature on documented implementation experiences and relevant social processes. The materials were examined through thematic analysis involving familiarization, analytical coding, cross-source comparison, and interpretive synthesis. The findings show that religious moderation has acquired a formal institutional architecture through policy direction, organizational mandates, implementation arrangements, coordination, and monitoring. Substantive implementation, however, depends on institutional capacity, multi-level coordination, meaningful participation, local adaptation, educational practice, rights safeguards, and public communication. The analysis further distinguishes implementation indicators from social-outcome indicators, showing that administrative activities and formal institutionalization do not by themselves demonstrate reduced polarization. The study therefore conceptualizes religious moderation as a layered institutional process in which its relevance to social polarization operates through institutional and intergroup processes. This framework provides a more precise basis for implementing and evaluating religious-moderation policy without equating policy adoption with demonstrated social effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Religious diversity is a defining feature of contemporary societies, but sustaining social cohesion in plural settings requires more than formal recognition of difference; it also depends on institutional practices that support tolerance, equal participation, and constructive interaction across religious boundaries (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Jubba et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2025). These challenges have become more complex as religious identities and public narratives are increasingly negotiated through digital communication, where religious discourse can be rapidly circulated, contested, and reframed (Tabroni et al., 2024; Zaimina, 2025). In Indonesia, religious identity was mobilized around the 2016–2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018), and an Islamist–pluralist cleavage structures party competition (Fossati et al., 2020).

Within this context, religious moderation has developed beyond a theological discourse into educational, social, and institutional agendas concerned with balanced religious understanding, tolerance, coexistence, and engagement with diversity (Afwadzi et al., 2024; Akil et al., 2024; Anzaikhan, 2022; Muslih et al., 2023). Educational institutions have become important settings for translating these principles into curricula and pedagogical practices, although implementation may remain predominantly cognitive, textual, or formalistic rather than fully embedded in institutional and social practice (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Chotimah et al., 2025; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025). The Kuwaiti study is used only for comparison; the other studies concern Indonesian settings.

These developments position religious moderation not merely as an individual disposition or educational value but increasingly as a public-policy concern involving the institutional translation of normative principles into practices relevant to social polarization. Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 defines religious moderation as religious outlook, attitude, and practice that protect human dignity and the common good on the basis of justice, balance, and the Constitution, with four indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local tradition (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Article 1 and Annex); the concept is contested as a state-defined category of acceptable religiosity (Cholil, 2023; Jubba et al., 2022).

Recent scholarship has also developed along several interconnected but still largely separate strands. Educational research examines how moderation is incorporated into curricula, teaching practices, and institutional environments, while also identifying gaps between policy aspirations and implementation (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Chotimah et al., 2025; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025). Research on interfaith

and community relations emphasizes dialogue, grassroots participation, youth engagement, and locally embedded interaction as important dimensions of moderation in plural settings (Jati & Bachtiar, 2024; Jati et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025; Muslih et al., 2023).

A related body of scholarship approaches religious moderation through institutional and policy implementation, drawing attention to policy dissemination, organizational responsibility, coordination, implementation mechanisms, and the relationship between national policy objectives and institutional practice (Hakim et al., 2025; Qoumas et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, studies of digital religious discourse demonstrate that policy communication operates within contested public environments in which religious-moderation narratives are interpreted alongside competing social, religious, and political discourses (Tabroni et al., 2024; Zaimina, 2025). Collectively, these studies have advanced understanding of the educational, community, institutional, and communicative dimensions of religious moderation, but these dimensions are often examined as distinct domains rather than as interconnected components of a public-policy process.

This fragmentation leaves an important issue unresolved: how can religious moderation be institutionalized as public policy by connecting normative commitments with institutional coordination, meaningful participation, locally grounded implementation, accountable communication, rights-conscious practice, and evaluation? Existing studies provide substantial evidence on individual mechanisms but offer a less integrated account of how these mechanisms can be connected within a coherent institutional approach (Hakim et al., 2025; Jati & Bachtiar, 2024; Jati et al., 2024; Qoumas et al., 2024; Zaimina, 2025).

This issue is particularly important because hierarchical, predominantly textual, or weakly coordinated implementation may limit grassroots participation, produce fragmented institutional practices, or leave moderation insufficiently embedded in everyday institutional and community settings (Chotimah et al., 2025; Hakim et al., 2025; Jati et al., 2024).

The research gap therefore lies in the limited integration of these dispersed dimensions within a public-policy perspective that explains the institutional conditions and strategies through which religious moderation can be operationalized in relation to social polarization. Accordingly, this study examines how religious moderation can be institutionalized as public policy through interconnected institutional strategies for addressing social polarization. This study adds to Hakim et al. (2025) and Zakiah (2025) a comparison of the national instruments, an implementation/outcome distinction from results-based evaluation (Kusek & Rist, 2004), and a proposed monitoring structure (Table 2).

Problem Identification

The central problem is not the absence of religious moderation initiatives, but the limited understanding of how religious moderation can be institutionalized as a coherent public-policy process for addressing social polarization. Existing scholarship has examined

education, interfaith dialogue, grassroots participation, institutional implementation, and digital communication, yet these domains remain insufficiently connected in explaining how normative commitments are translated into coordinated and context-sensitive institutional practices.

This fragmentation makes it difficult to determine how institutional coordination, stakeholder participation and local ownership, implementation capacity, rights safeguards, public communication, and monitoring and evaluation should interact within a consistent policy framework. The problem is particularly significant because institutionalization that is predominantly top-down, symbolic, or weakly coordinated may limit meaningful participation and leave religious moderation disconnected from everyday institutional and community practices.

Therefore, the key scientific problem concerns how dispersed institutional mechanisms can be connected within a public-policy framework that operationalizes religious moderation in ways relevant to addressing social polarization while maintaining inclusive citizenship and freedom of religion or belief. Substantively, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 and Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 3 of 2024 require monitoring and reporting but no measure of polarization or intergroup relations (Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2024, Articles 6–9; Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 10–13).

Research Questions

1. How is religious moderation conceptualized and operationalized as public policy for addressing social polarization?
2. What institutional strategies and implementation conditions shape the institutionalization of religious moderation as public policy?
3. What monitoring and evaluation structure would allow the implementation and relevant social outcomes of religious moderation as public policy to be assessed?

Research Objectives and Significance

This study aims to examine how religious moderation can be institutionalized as public policy for addressing social polarization by examining its conceptualization and operationalization within a public-policy perspective, identifying the institutional strategies and implementation conditions that shape its institutionalization, and examining how monitoring and evaluation can be structured to assess policy implementation and relevant social outcomes. RQ3 is normative; its answer is a proposal derived from the analysis.

The study seeks to provide a more integrated understanding of religious moderation by connecting its normative foundations with institutional implementation and evaluation, while offering an analytical basis for considering how coordination, participation,

context-sensitive implementation, communication, rights safeguards, and evaluation can be incorporated into institutional strategies for addressing social polarization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious moderation can be understood institutionally as a process through which normative commitments to balance, tolerance, coexistence, and respect for diversity are translated into organizational structures and recurring practices. The literature indicates that this translation occurs across interconnected domains rather than through a single policy instrument. Educational institutions can embed moderation within curricula, teaching practices, and organizational environments, although formal curricular incorporation does not necessarily produce substantive institutional practice (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Chotimah et al., 2025; Mukhibat et al., 2024).

These patterns indicate that the analytical problem is not simply whether religious moderation has been formally adopted, but how normative commitments are translated through institutional structures, implementation capacity, stakeholder participation, context-sensitive communication, and mechanisms for assessing implementation and relevant social outcomes. This synthesis provides the basis for a framework that treats religious moderation as an institutional public-policy process whose dimensions must be examined in relation to one another.

Critical scholarship treats moderation as a state project that defines acceptable religiosity, in tension with freedom of religion or belief (Cholil, 2023), and shows that official discourse frames radicalism as the threat (Martalia et al., 2024) while the labels "moderate" and "conservative" are contested (Jubba et al., 2022), so moderation discourse may sharpen the boundaries it seeks to soften.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study conceptualizes the institutionalization of religious moderation through policy implementation and institutional capacity. Policy institutionalization depends on how formal objectives are translated into organizational responsibilities, authority, resources, coordination, and implementation routines (Polverari, 2021; Sager & Gofen, 2022). Because implementation may involve government institutions, religious organizations, educational institutions, civil society, and community actors, collaborative governance provides an additional lens for examining how responsibilities and decision-making are distributed across institutional boundaries (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2022).

Such collaboration also requires accountability mechanisms that clarify responsibilities, facilitate information exchange, and enable institutional actors to account for implementation processes (Lee & Ospina, 2022). These perspectives position institutionalization as an organizational and governance process rather than the formal adoption of religious moderation as a policy objective. Implementation research supplies mandates and capacity; collaborative governance and accountability supply

coordination; Scott's pillars separate formal from substantive institutionalization; rights research supplies safeguards; polarization and contact research supply outcome domains.

In this article, institutionalization refers to the process through which a normative commitment becomes embedded in an organization's structures and routines, and it is distinguished from formal adoption. Institutions combine regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements (Scott, 2014); formal institutionalization corresponds to the regulative element, that is, policy direction, mandates, and instruments, whereas substantive embedding requires that these provisions be carried into organizational routines, resources, and shared expectations. The term "staged institutionalization" ("layered" in the abstract) refers to the three analytical stages used in this study, namely formal institutionalization, substantive implementation, and social-outcome assessment. It is not used in the sense of institutional layering, in which new rules are added alongside existing ones without replacing them (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

Institutionalization in the domain of religious diversity is also bounded by principles of equal citizenship and freedom of religion or belief. Formal commitments to inclusion do not automatically ensure religious equality in institutional practice, making rights safeguards relevant to both policy design and implementation (Tadros, 2022).

This consideration is particularly important in state-led religious moderation because institutional interventions may create tensions between policy objectives and the protection of religious freedom when the boundaries of legitimate religious expression are defined administratively (Cholil, 2023). The framework therefore treats rights safeguards as a condition of legitimate institutionalization alongside coordination, implementation capacity, participation, and accountability, rather than regarding social harmony as the sole criterion for assessing policy implementation.

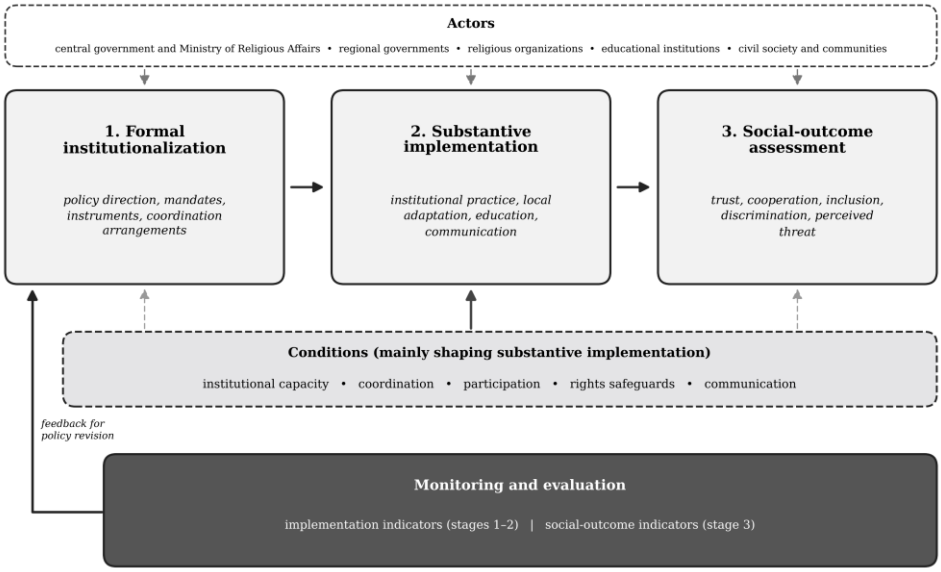
Social polarization is used here to mean the widening of social distance, hostility, and mutual distrust between groups defined by religious identity, that is, affective and identity-based polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019), as distinct from divergence in policy positions or ideology. The concept of affective polarization was developed mainly in research on the United States and is used here as a general definition, not as evidence about Indonesia. In Indonesia, the concern has been discussed in relation to digital religious discourse (Tabroni et al., 2024; Zaimina, 2025) and to state-led moderation policy itself (Cholil, 2023). This study does not measure polarization: it treats polarization as the policy problem to which moderation policy is addressed and as the broader outcome domain from which implementation is distinguished in the Results.

Social polarization is positioned as the broader policy problem rather than as a predetermined consequence of successful or unsuccessful institutionalization. Intergroup research indicates that the relationship between interaction and intergroup attitudes depends on the character and context of contact, with constructive contact associated with lower prejudice and more inclusive social identification under particular conditions (Maiti et al., 2022; Reimer et al., 2022). This builds on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), whose conditions of equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional

support were supported meta-analytically (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and can guide programme design.

Religious and group norms can also shape intergroup attitudes through perceived threat and anxiety, while religiously diverse environments do not automatically eliminate social boundaries (Simsek et al., 2022; Smith & Minescu, 2021). Accordingly, the framework integrates normative and rights-based foundations with institutional structures and implementation conditions, while considering how participatory and intergroup processes relate to the monitoring of policy implementation and relevant social outcomes. This integrated perspective provides the analytical basis for examining religious moderation as public policy without assuming that its institutionalization necessarily reduces social polarization. The intergroup studies cited in this section (Maiti et al., 2022; Reimer et al., 2022; Simsek et al., 2022; Smith & Minescu, 2021) come from settings outside Indonesia, such as India and Western Europe. They are used as general evidence on the mechanisms of contact and group norms, not as evidence of how these mechanisms operate in Indonesia, and their transferability to Indonesian religious settings is an assumption that this study does not test. Figure 1 summarizes the resulting framework.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Institutionalization of Religious Moderation as Public Policy



Note. Figure 1 is a conceptual framework and does not represent a tested causal model. The arrows indicate the analytical order of the three stages, not a causal sequence, and the stages are distinguished so that formal institutionalization or administrative activity is not read as evidence of reduced polarization. Source: Authors' conceptualization.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative documentary analysis supported by scholarly literature to examine how religious moderation is institutionalized as public policy and how its institutional strategies are relevant to addressing social polarization. Documentary analysis was selected because it enables systematic examination of policy objectives, institutional arrangements, implementation mechanisms, and administrative

responsibilities contained in official policy materials (Dalglish et al., 2020). Following READ, documents were assembled from official repositories, extracted with a template (issuer, legal status, definition, actors, funding, monitoring; Appendix Table A1), coded, and distilled by research question.

The primary documentary sources consisted of official policy and strategic documents on religious moderation issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and related national policy instruments, including the *Roadmap for Strengthening Religious Moderation 2020–2024*, Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 92 of 2022 on the Working Group for Strengthening the Religious Moderation Program, Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 93 of 2022 on Guidelines for Strengthening Religious Moderation for Civil Servants of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation, and the *Roadmap for Strengthening Religious Moderation 2025–2029 (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022a, 2022b; Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023)*. Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 3 of 2024 was added in revision (Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2024); the RPJMN 2020–2024 and Director-General's Decision No. 137 of 2023 are treated as context.

These documents, published or enacted between 2020 and 2025, were selected because they directly address the policy orientation, institutional responsibilities, implementation arrangements, and strategic direction of religious moderation in Indonesia. Each document is listed in the References, and specific provisions are cited by article or section. Their provisions are compared in Appendix Table A1. Scholarly literature was used as a complementary evidence base to examine documented implementation experiences and the relationship between institutional strategies and social processes relevant to polarization. Studies were searched in [databases] using [search strings] for 2020–2025 in English and Indonesian; [n] records were screened, and the 20 evidence studies are listed in Appendix Table A2.

The documentary and scholarly materials were examined in accordance with the three research questions. For the first research question, the analysis focused on how religious moderation is defined, positioned, and operationalized within public policy, including its normative foundations and institutional objectives. For the second research question, attention was directed to institutional responsibilities, coordination arrangements, implementation capacity, stakeholder participation, local adaptation, rights safeguards, and public communication.

For the third research question, the analysis examined monitoring and evaluation arrangements and their relationship to relevant social outcomes, including intergroup trust, cooperation, inclusion, discrimination, and social relations across religious boundaries. Official policy documents were treated primarily as evidence of policy design, institutional architecture, and formally established implementation arrangements, whereas scholarly studies were used to examine reported implementation patterns, constraints, and social processes associated with these arrangements. This distinction was maintained to avoid interpreting formal policy provisions as evidence that particular social outcomes had necessarily occurred.

The materials were analyzed through thematic analysis involving familiarization, analytical coding, cross-source comparison, and interpretive synthesis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterned meanings across documentary and scholarly materials while maintaining alignment between the analytical procedure and the study's research questions (Gale et al., 2013).

Initial coding was informed by the theoretical and conceptual framework, particularly institutional capacity, coordination, participation, accountability, rights safeguards, intergroup processes, and monitoring of relevant social outcomes, while additional patterns identified in the evidence were retained when relevant to the research questions. Coding combined deductive framework codes with inductive codes, following the framework method (Gale et al., 2013) rather than reflexive thematic analysis. The chronological comparison ordered the documents by date on the template categories. Evidence from official policy documents was compared across the 2020–2025 policy period to identify continuity, development, and changes in the institutionalization of religious moderation, while scholarly evidence was compared with these formal arrangements to identify convergent patterns, implementation constraints, and context-dependent practices.

The resulting themes were then synthesized into institutional strategies that structure the presentation of the Results. Claims concerning social polarization were interpreted as policy-relevant relationships and documented social processes rather than as evidence of causal effects of religious moderation policy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The analysis identified three interconnected patterns corresponding to the research questions: the institutionalization of religious moderation within a public-policy framework, the institutional strategies and implementation conditions through which policy objectives are translated into practice, and the distinction between monitoring policy implementation and assessing relevant social outcomes.

Across the documentary materials, religious moderation is positioned through policy direction, institutional responsibilities, implementation arrangements, coordination, strategic actors, and monitoring mechanisms. The scholarly evidence complements this formal policy architecture by documenting implementation practices and constraints across governmental, educational, and community settings.

Religious Moderation as an Institutional Public-Policy Framework

The first finding concerns the positioning of religious moderation within Indonesia's public-policy architecture. The policy documents indicate that religious moderation is not framed solely as an individual religious orientation but is incorporated into an institutional agenda involving governmental responsibilities and organized implementation. The policy trajectory represented by the *Roadmap for Strengthening*

Religious Moderation 2020–2024, Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 92 of 2022, Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 93 of 2022, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, and the *Roadmap for Strengthening Religious Moderation 2025–2029* shows the formal embedding of religious moderation within institutional arrangements (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022a, 2022b; Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023). Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 provides a particularly important regulatory basis by positioning Strengthening Religious Moderation as guidance for the central government, regional governments, and religious communities and by incorporating policy direction, strategic groups, implementation programs, coordination, and monitoring within the policy framework (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 2, 4, 5, and 9–13 and Annex).

Conceptually, the regulation operationalizes its definition through four indicators, eight strategic groups, five strategies, and three strategic areas, describing tolerance qualitatively without targets or baselines (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Article 1 and Annex). Chronologically, the instruments move from Ministry planning (2020–2024 roadmap) and internal guidelines (2022 decrees) to a presidential mandate covering all ministries and regional governments with six-monthly and annual reporting (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 5–7, 11, and 13), and to procedures requiring evaluation of "achievement and impact" without metrics (Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2024, Article 7; Appendix Table A1).

The documentary evidence further shows that institutionalization extends beyond the formal recognition of religious moderation as a policy objective. The ministerial arrangements specify organizational and implementation responsibilities within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022a, 2022b), while the presidential regulation broadens the institutional framework across governmental levels (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 6–7). Decree No. 93 of 2022 requires the Ministry's civil servants to join moderation training and socialization (Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022b), which raises the boundary between professional conduct and freedom of religion or belief (Cholil, 2023).

The subsequent roadmap maintains this institutional orientation by connecting strategic priorities with operational actions (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, n.d.-b). Across these policy instruments, religious moderation is therefore operationalized through a combination of normative direction, institutional mandates, responsible actors, coordination arrangements, and programmatic mechanisms. This pattern indicates that its public-policy character lies not only in the articulation of moderation as a national objective but also in the establishment of institutional arrangements through which that objective is expected to be implemented.

The documentary materials also indicate that implementation is conceived as a multi-actor and multi-level process (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 6–10). Central government institutions provide policy direction and institutional coordination, while regional institutions and other implementing actors operate within different organizational and social contexts. This institutional configuration expands religious moderation beyond a Ministry-specific administrative agenda and situates it within

broader governance arrangements. The first research question is therefore addressed through evidence that religious moderation is conceptualized and operationalized as public policy through the interaction of normative principles, institutional mandates, implementation structures, strategic actors, and coordination mechanisms.

Institutional Strategies and Implementation Conditions

The second finding concerns the institutional conditions through which formal policy commitments are translated into implementation. The available evidence clusters around localization and community participation, interfaith engagement, educational implementation, multi-level coordination, and public communication (Hakim et al., 2025; Kustana & Muhlas, 2025; Martalia et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2025; Zaimina, 2025; Zakiah, 2025). This evidence consists mostly of single case studies, such as Kampung Moderasi Beragama in Bandung and Tasikmalaya and community-based education in Temanggungan, Bogor, West Java, so these conditions are treated as patterns observed in particular cases and not as established regularities. No evidence comes from eastern Indonesia, Muslim-minority regions, or non-Muslim implementing actors.

These strategies operate in different institutional settings but share a common function in connecting formal religious-moderation objectives with organizational and community practices. Evidence concerning *Kampung Moderasi Beragama*, for example, documents interfaith dialogue, educational programming, and social activities in Bandung and Tasikmalaya, showing how national policy objectives are translated into locally organized forms of engagement (Kustana & Muhlas, 2025).

Community participation emerges as an important implementation condition within this process. The evidence describes the involvement of religious leaders, residents, youth, local officials, and community actors through dialogue and shared social activities (Kustana & Muhlas, 2025; Putra et al., 2025). At the same time, participation may remain concentrated among established institutional actors or groups already engaged in interfaith activities (Jati et al., 2024; Kustana & Muhlas, 2025). The evidence therefore distinguishes the formal availability of participatory mechanisms from the breadth and inclusiveness of participation itself. Local implementation is consequently shaped not only by the existence of community programs but also by the capacity of local actors to translate policy objectives into recurring forms of interaction and cooperation. Programmes may thus "preach to the converted"; Table 2 adds the share of participants new to interfaith activities.

Educational implementation shows a related pattern. Religious moderation has been incorporated into educational activities and institutional programs, but the available evidence indicates that implementation may remain predominantly textual, classroom-based, or insufficiently integrated into wider institutional practice (Alabdulhadi & Alkandari, 2024; Chotimah et al., 2025; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Prasetyo et al., 2025). By contrast, evidence from community-based education describes non-formal learning, interfaith service projects, community leadership, and cultural exchange as mechanisms for connecting religious-moderation principles with participatory experience (Putra et al.,

2025). The evidence therefore differentiates between the formal incorporation of moderation into educational settings and forms of implementation that create direct opportunities for interaction across social and religious boundaries.

Multi-level coordination constitutes another implementation condition. The national policy framework establishes coordinated and collaborative implementation (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Article 5), but scholarly evidence identifies gaps between formal coordination arrangements and implementation across institutional levels. Research on regional implementation reports discontinuities in communication among central government institutions, provincial offices, district or city administrations, and educational units (Hakim et al., 2025; Zakiah, 2025). Evidence concerning *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* also identifies institutional overlap with *Desa Sadar Kerukunan*, which may create ambiguity regarding responsibilities among implementing actors (Zakiah, 2025). These patterns indicate that formal mandates provide an institutional basis for coordination but do not by themselves ensure coherent implementation across organizational levels.

Public communication represents a further implementation dimension. The available evidence concerning the Ministry of Religious Affairs' public communication shows that official discourse contributes to defining the meaning of religious moderation and the institutional problems to which it responds (Martalia et al., 2024). Communication therefore forms part of policy implementation because institutional narratives mediate how formal policy objectives are presented in the public sphere. Taken together, these findings indicate that institutionalization depends on the interaction of formal mandates with coordination, participation, local adaptation, educational practice, institutional capacity, and public communication. Table 1 summarizes these strategies, the evidence on which they rest, and their relevance to social polarization. Martalia et al. (2024) also show that this discourse positions the Ministry as the authority on meaning and radicalism as a threat to national unity, without opposing voices, which can mark groups as the problem. No implementation study reports on the inclusion of minority or indigenous-belief communities or on complaints about labelling, so evidence on rights safeguards is absent.

Table 1. Synthesis of Institutional Strategies Identified in the Analysis

Analytical Dimension	Evidence Identified	Implementation Condition	Hypothesised Relevance to Polarization
Policy institutionalization	Policy direction, ministerial arrangements, Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, and strategic roadmaps (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, n.d.-a, n.d.-b; Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022a, 2022b; Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023) [5 policy documents]	Institutional responsibilities and cross-government coordination	Establishes the formal institutional basis for addressing intergroup relations
Localization and participation	Community-based dialogue and activities within Kampung Moderasi Beragama (Kustana	Local ownership and inclusive participation	Provides institutional spaces for interaction across religious boundaries

	& Muhlas, 2025) [1 case study]		
Educational implementation	Curricular activities, non-formal learning, interfaith service activities, and cultural exchange (Chotimah et al., 2025; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2025) [3 studies]	Integration of formal learning with participatory interaction	Connects religious-moderation principles with intergroup experience
Multi-level coordination	Involvement of central, regional, educational, religious, and civil-society actors (Hakim et al., 2025; Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 6–10; Zakiah, 2025) [2 studies; 1 document]	Communication, role clarity, institutional capacity, and coordination	Shapes consistency in policy implementation
Public communication	Official communication and institutional narratives concerning religious moderation (Martalia et al., 2024; Zaimina, 2025) [2 studies]	Context-sensitive and rights-conscious communication	Shapes how policy purposes and religious differences are publicly interpreted
Monitoring and evaluation	Administrative monitoring and attention to relevant social and relational outcomes (Fauzi et al., 2025; Hakim et al., 2025; Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 10–14) [2 studies; 1 document]	Distinction between implementation outputs and social outcomes	Provides a basis for distinguishing policy activity from changes in intergroup relations

Monitoring Implementation and Relevant Social Outcomes

The third finding concerns the distinction between monitoring policy implementation and assessing social outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation are incorporated into the institutional architecture of Strengthening Religious Moderation (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 10–14). Within this framework, monitoring can document institutional responsibilities, program implementation, participation, coordination, and reporting. These elements provide evidence concerning whether and how policy arrangements are implemented but do not independently establish changes in social polarization.

The scholarly evidence reinforces this distinction. Results-based evaluation differentiates administrative outputs, such as activities, participation, and program implementation, from outcomes (Kusek & Rist, 2004), and intergroup research identifies relational outcome domains such as intergroup trust, cooperation, discrimination, perceived threat, acceptance across group boundaries, and institutional capacity for managing disagreement (Maiti et al., 2022; Reimer et al., 2022; Simsek et al., 2022; Smith & Minescu, 2021). Documentation of dialogues, workshops, educational activities, or community programs therefore provides evidence of implementation activity but does not by itself demonstrate that polarization has declined.

The evidence consequently supports a distinction between implementation indicators and social-outcome indicators. Implementation can be assessed through the operation of institutional responsibilities, program delivery, participation, coordination, communication, and reporting. Assessment of social outcomes requires evidence concerning changes in intergroup relations. Trust, cooperation, inclusion, discrimination, perceived threat, and cross-group participation emerge from the analyzed scholarly evidence as relevant domains for such assessment. However, the available documentary and scholarly materials do not establish causal changes in these outcomes attributable to religious-moderation policy. Monitoring and evaluation can therefore be structured to distinguish institutional implementation from the assessment of relevant social outcomes rather than treating administrative activity as evidence of reduced polarization.

To give the third research question a concrete form, Table 2 sets out a structure that follows from the distinction above. It is a proposal derived from this analysis and not an arrangement established in the policy documents. Its reporting cycle is the one provided in Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 11 and 13), and its social-outcome indicators follow the domains identified in the scholarly evidence (Maiti et al., 2022; Reimer et al., 2022; Simsek et al., 2022; Smith & Minescu, 2021). Implementation indicators can be drawn from administrative reporting, whereas social-outcome indicators require additional data collection at baseline and at fixed intervals, and, where feasible, in comparison groups, because activity records alone cannot show change in intergroup relations. The Ministry's Religious Harmony Index (Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama) offers a national baseline but is not linked to programme sites; Table 2 adds validated measures, an independent assessor, and an unintended-effects indicator.

Table 2. Proposed Structure for Monitoring Implementation and Assessing Social Outcomes

Indicator Type	Example Indicators	Data Sources	Timing
Implementation: institutional	Responsibilities assigned at each level; coordination meetings held and role clarity; programs delivered against plan; reports submitted	Administrative records; reports to the Joint Secretariat for religious moderation	Six-monthly reports from regional governments and ministries; annual evaluation reported to the President (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2023, Articles 11–13)
Implementation: participation and communication	Who participates, continuity of participation, and inclusiveness beyond established interfaith networks; contextual and two-way communication; share of participants new to interfaith activities	Attendance and participant records; review of official communication and audience responses	Each program cycle, summarized in the six-monthly reports
Social outcomes	Intergroup trust, cooperation, inclusion, discrimination, perceived threat, and cross-group participation; validated	Repeated surveys of community members, with comparison groups where feasible; interviews or observation	Baseline at the start of a program, then at fixed intervals (for example, annually) over several years

	scales (social distance, feeling thermometer, intergroup trust)	in selected sites; independent assessor (e.g., BPS or universities), linked to the Religious Harmony Index	
Rights safeguards	Whether implementation restricts or defines acceptable religious expression; complaints or reports of exclusion	Complaint and review mechanisms; independent or civil-society review	Reviewed annually together with the evaluation
Unintended effects	Stigmatization of groups labelled non-moderate; perceived partisanship	Survey items; complaints; media review	Reviewed annually

Note. Proposed structure derived from the analysis; the reporting cycle follows Presiden Republik Indonesia (2023).

Discussion

The findings indicate that religious moderation is more appropriately understood as an institutional public-policy process than as the formal adoption of a normative concept. Policy recognition constitutes only one stage of institutionalization because organizational structures and institutional capacity determine how formal objectives are translated into recurring practices (Polverari, 2021; Sager & Gofen, 2022). This interpretation is reinforced by Hakim et al. (2025), who found that religious moderation had entered institutional planning in Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education Institutions, while insufficient technical guidance and standardized implementation mechanisms contributed to fragmented practices. The present findings therefore locate the central institutional challenge in connecting formal policy commitments with operational responsibilities, organizational capacity, and consistent implementation.

The distribution of implementation across governmental levels, educational institutions, religious organizations, civil society, and community actors further demonstrates that institutionalization extends across organizational boundaries. This configuration corresponds with collaborative-governance perspectives in which complex public issues require interaction among actors with different forms of authority, knowledge, resources, and social legitimacy (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2022).

However, the coordination gaps identified in the Results show that institutional plurality does not automatically produce coherent collaboration, consistent with the fragmented implementation identified by Hakim et al. (2025). Collaborative accountability is therefore important because responsibilities must remain identifiable when implementation is distributed across organizations (Lee & Ospina, 2022). Institutionalization consequently requires not only multi-actor participation but also clear responsibilities, coordination, accountability, and adequate institutional capacity. Beyond Hakim et al. (2025) and Zakiah (2025), this study shows that elevating the policy to presidential level extended mandates and reporting but not outcome measurement.

Localization and community participation add a social dimension to this institutional process. Community dialogue and shared activities translate formal policy objectives into

settings where religious difference is encountered through direct interaction. This pattern is consistent with evidence that constructive intergroup contact can be associated with lower prejudice and more inclusive social identification under supportive conditions (Maiti et al., 2022; Reimer et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the presence of participatory programs cannot itself be treated as evidence of these outcomes because participation may remain concentrated among established actors and vary in continuity and inclusiveness. Participation is therefore better interpreted as an implementation condition whose breadth, continuity, and quality influence how religious-moderation policy becomes embedded in community relations.

Educational implementation similarly reveals a distinction between formal incorporation and substantive institutional embedding. Fauzi et al. (2025) identified a mismatch between stakeholder preferences for integrated cross-curricular approaches and the continued prevalence of more limited course-based provision, while Prasetyo et al. (2025) emphasize dialogic pedagogy, integrative curricula, educator involvement, institutional policy, and inclusive social activities as interconnected components of implementation.

This distinction is relevant to social polarization because intergroup boundaries may remain salient in religiously diverse environments, while group norms and perceived threat continue to shape attitudes toward other groups (Simsek et al., 2022; Smith & Minescu, 2021). Educational programs should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of reduced polarization merely because they incorporate the language of tolerance or moderation. Their relevance lies in how curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, and opportunities for meaningful intergroup interaction are connected in practice.

Public communication constitutes another dimension of institutionalization because policy meanings are mediated through institutional discourse as well as regulatory provisions. Zaimina (2025) found that religious-moderation communication by Indonesian state institutions was predominantly normative and one-way, while more contextual and experience-based communication generated more constructive audience responses.

This supports the interpretation of communication as part of policy implementation rather than merely a mechanism for disseminating institutional messages. Communication must also remain connected to rights safeguards because religious equality depends on how religious difference is treated in institutional practice (Tadros, 2022). State-led religious-moderation policy may generate tensions with freedom of religion or belief when institutional definitions delimit legitimate religious expression (Cholil, 2023). Rights safeguards therefore establish important boundaries for implementation and communication while reducing the risk that moderation becomes an administrative classification of acceptable religious identity.

Moderation policy may also contribute to polarization: state-defined boundaries between "moderate" and "extreme" religiosity can stigmatize conservative groups, provoke backlash, or appear partisan (Cholil, 2023; Jubba et al., 2022; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018), which is why Table 2 includes unintended effects.

The findings on monitoring and evaluation further clarify why institutional implementation should be distinguished from social outcomes. Regulations, programs, participation records, coordination arrangements, and reporting mechanisms can demonstrate that policy has acquired an operational form, but they cannot establish that intergroup trust has increased, discrimination has declined, or polarization has been reduced. This distinction applies results-based evaluation (Kusek & Rist, 2004) to religious-moderation policy.

Hakim et al. (2025) similarly identify weak internal monitoring as an implementation constraint, while Fauzi et al. (2025) acknowledge that cross-sectional and self-reported evidence cannot establish causal effects. Implementation indicators can therefore assess whether and how institutional arrangements operate, whereas social-outcome indicators require evidence capable of examining changes in trust, cooperation, discrimination, perceived threat, inclusion, and other dimensions of intergroup relations. Maintaining this distinction prevents administrative activity from being interpreted as evidence of reduced polarization.

Taken together, the findings position religious moderation as a staged institutional process in which policy direction, organizational capacity, coordination, participation, rights safeguards, communication, and evaluation perform interconnected functions. Institutional capacity shapes the translation of policy into organizational practice, collaborative processes structure implementation across actors, rights safeguards establish boundaries for legitimate institutional intervention, and intergroup processes provide the social domain through which the relevance of implementation to polarization can be examined.

The relationship between religious moderation and social polarization is therefore mediated through institutional and intergroup processes rather than established by policy adoption itself. Religious moderation as public policy is consequently best examined by distinguishing formal institutionalization, substantive implementation, and social-outcome assessment without equating the existence of policy arrangements with demonstrated policy effectiveness.

Novelty and Contribution

The study addresses a gap in scholarship that has largely examined religious moderation through separate educational, community, institutional, and communicative domains without sufficiently integrating them as a public-policy process (Hakim et al., 2025; Jati et al., 2024; Qoumas et al., 2024; Zaimina, 2025). Its principal conceptual contribution is an integrated framework that distinguishes formal policy institutionalization, substantive implementation, and social-outcome assessment while connecting coordination, institutional capacity, participation, local adaptation, rights safeguards, communication, and monitoring.

This distinction prevents formal policy adoption or administrative activity from being interpreted as evidence of reduced polarization. By positioning social polarization as a broader policy problem mediated through institutional and intergroup processes, the

study provides a more precise analytical basis for examining religious moderation as public policy. Its most distinctive practical contribution is the monitoring structure in Table 2.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study is limited by its qualitative documentary design and the scope of the policy and scholarly materials examined. The analysis identifies formal institutional arrangements and documented implementation patterns but does not directly observe institutional practices or measure changes in intergroup relations, precluding causal conclusions about reductions in social polarization. Its focus on Indonesia's national policy architecture during 2020–2025 and evidence from particular institutional and community settings also limits transferability across contexts. The scholarly evidence is also drawn largely from single case studies in Indonesia and from intergroup research conducted elsewhere, which further limits the transferability of the findings. Actual monitoring reports under Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 were not analysed, the evidence is predominantly from Muslim settings, and the roadmaps and Decree No. 92 of 2022 are reported only partly.

Future research should therefore use comparative and longitudinal designs across regions and institutions, incorporating interviews, direct observation, and repeated measures of intergroup trust, cooperation, perceived threat, discrimination, and inclusion to examine how institutional implementation relates to changes in social relations over time.

CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that institutionalizing religious moderation as public policy requires more than formal policy recognition. Its substantive implementation depends on the interaction of institutional capacity, coordination, stakeholder participation, local adaptation, rights safeguards, public communication, and monitoring mechanisms. These elements connect national policy objectives with institutional and community practices, while their operation remains contingent on organizational capacity, meaningful participation, contextual responsiveness, and protection of religious equality and freedom.

For RQ1, the documents define moderation through four indicators and operationalize it through mandates, strategic groups, and coordination, without targets for intergroup relations; for RQ2, the evidence shows coordination gaps across government levels, overlap between Kampung Moderasi Beragama and Desa Sadar Kerukunan, participation concentrated among engaged actors, and no evidence on rights safeguards; for RQ3, monitoring records activities but lacks social-outcome indicators, which Table 2 proposes.

The analysis further distinguishes formal institutionalization and implementation performance from social-outcome assessment, suggesting that policy activities alone

cannot establish changes in social polarization. Religious moderation is therefore best understood as a staged institutional process whose relevance to polarization operates through institutional and intergroup processes rather than through policy adoption itself. This perspective provides a basis for implementing and evaluating religious-moderation policy in ways that connect institutional performance with meaningful changes in intergroup relations while avoiding assumptions of policy effectiveness unsupported by social-outcome evidence.

Priority strategies are: (1) the Joint Secretariat adopts Table 2 in the evaluation required by Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 and Regulation No. 3 of 2024; (2) the Ministry commissions independent baseline and follow-up surveys of intergroup relations; (3) the Ministry and regional governments harmonize Kampung Moderasi Beragama and Desa Sadar Kerukunan; (4) implementers recruit beyond established interfaith networks; and (5) the Ministry establishes a rights-complaint mechanism.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Mukhtar Alshodiq contributed to the conceptualization, methodology development, and drafting of the manuscript; **Ni'mah Fathin** contributed to data synthesis, analysis, and critical revision; and **Marcus Noeh Fiedl** contributed to the construction of the policy framework, interpretation of the findings, and final review and approval of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that no competing interests were identified that could have affected the policy analysis, interpretation of documentary evidence, or conclusions presented in this article.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

During manuscript preparation, generative artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited supporting capacity to assist with language editing, organization of arguments, and preparation of visual presentation. The tools were not treated as sources of evidence, and they did not replace the authors' responsibility for the research design, interpretation of the literature, verification of references, or final conclusions. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Comparison of the policy documents analyzed

Document	Issuer and legal status	Scope, actors, and funding	Monitoring and evaluation
Roadmap 2020–2024	Ministry;	Ministry programmes	[to complete]
KMA 92/2022	Minister; decree	Working group for the moderation programme in the Ministry	[to complete]
KMA 93/2022 (in force 26 Jan. 2022)	Minister; decree	Ministry civil servants; training and socialization; state budget	Chapter on monitoring and reporting
Perpres 58/2023 (25 Sept. 2023)	President; regulation	Central and regional governments, religious communities; eight strategic groups; APBN/APBD (Arts. 2, 5–7, 15)	Joint Secretariat; six-monthly and annual reports; no outcome targets (Arts. 9–13)
PMA 3/2024 (13 Feb. 2024)	Minister; regulation	Steering and executing ministers; Joint Secretariat (Arts. 3–4)	Monitoring at least twice a year; annual evaluation of "achievement and impact" without metrics (Arts. 5–9)
Roadmap 2025–2029	Ministry;	[to complete]	[to complete]

Table A2. Scholarly studies used as evidence (n = 20)

Study	Setting	Design	Study	Setting	Design
Alabdulhadi & Alkandari (2024)	Kuwait	Qualitative	Martalia et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Discourse
Chotimah et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Qualitative	Zaimina (2025)	Indonesia	Content
Mukhibat et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Evaluation	Tabroni et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Text mining
Prasetyo et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Review	Jati & Bachtiar (2024)	Indonesia	Qualitative
Fauzi et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Survey	Jati et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Qualitative
Hakim et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Policy analysis	Muslih et al. (2023)	Indonesia	Qualitative
Qoumas et al. (2024)	Indonesia	Policy analysis	Maiti et al. (2022)	India	Experiment
Kustana & Muhlas (2025)	West Java	Case study	Reimer et al. (2022)	India	Survey
Putra et al. (2025)	West Java	Case study	Simsek et al. (2022)	Western Europe	Survey
Zakiah (2025)	Indonesia	Policy analysis	Smith & Minescu (2021)	Western Europe	Survey