

# Moon and Stars Among a Thousand Temples: A Study of Religious Moderation on the Island of the Gods

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**Abstract:** *This study covers the topic of religious moderation in Bali, a place where Hindus make up the majority and where minorities, mostly Muslims, coexist peacefully. Studying religious moderates and their practices—such as tolerance, respect for local customs and culture, rejection of violence, and national commitment—is the primary goal of this research. Interviews, participant observation, and document analysis are all parts of the descriptive qualitative research methodology. According to the findings, Bali's religious leaders see religious moderation as a compromise between two competing ideologies, with the former placing an emphasis on intolerance and the latter on justice and equilibrium. Involvement of ecumenical religious figures in social events, tolerance for other religions' ceremonies, and collaboration in maintaining societal peace are all manifestations of religious moderation in Bali. According to these findings, religious moderation is an effective tool in the fight against extremism and for the preservation of national unity.*

**Keywords:** *Bali; Religious Moderation; Tolerance.*

## Introduction

It is essential to have diversity or multiculturalism. He came into this world according to God's plan. Variety isn't inherently detrimental; in fact, differences rooted in variety may be a source of unity, appreciation, and other positive outcomes. According to the Quran, diversity is a gift from God that helps people understand one another. According to Surah 49:13 of the Quran, Allah SWT states (RI, 1989):

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and then We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. The most noble among you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware."

This passage implicitly lays forth interactions among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Also, this passage's main point is that everyone, regardless of social status or religion, should connect. Faith is the highest kind of honor, as it is the standard by which all individuals are judged by God (Abror, 2020; Aththahirah et al., 2025; Wijayati & Fuad, 2024).

On the other hand, disagreements about religion can cause people to criticize one another, make fun of one another, and even defame one another's faith if left unchecked. From a sociological vantage point, it is clear that every religion makes claims about the truth within its own sphere. However, the issue arises when individuals openly express such claims through blasphemous statements against other faiths (Armeyanto & Cidah, 2023; Azhar & Soponyono, 2020). Disputes are inevitable, especially in light of the prevalence of truth-claiming expressions on social media. An example of foolish religious practice is the case of Muhammad Kace, which "shocked" the public at large some years ago. According to Kace, "I no longer follow the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) because I feel there is no verse that mentions the Prophet being close to Allah." (Sadikin, 2021).

Muhammad Kace's prosecution for blasphemy against Islam was a major demand from Muslims in reaction to this event. In a similar vein, Ustadz Yahya Waloni was "accused" of insulting other religions and then sought to be imprisoned. The consequences for national and state life of engaging in religiously motivated assaults and demonization of one another are far-reaching (Mantri, 2022; Oktaviawati, 2024).

Disputes over religion, especially when they're understandable, nonetheless have the potential for destructive energy and, worse, physical violence. When it comes to matters of faith, or religion, people are very emotional and will resort to any means necessary, even violence, to protect their beliefs (Jamaluddin et al., 2023; Kumalasari et al., 2022).

Indonesia will emerge as a diverse nation-state. Religious diversity is also included in the diversity that is being alluded to, along with cultural, ethnic, linguistic, skin color, etc. The state now acknowledges Islamic, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian faiths.

Religion	Percentage (of total population)	Absolute Number (in millions)
Muslim	87.2	207.2
Christian	6.9	16.5
Catholic	2.9	6.9
Hindu	1.7	4.0
Buddhist	0.7	1.7
Confucian	0.05	0.1

Figure 1. Religious Composition in Indonesia

Religiously motivated extremism and terrorism stem from fundamentalist religious manifestations, which in turn stem from disputes about the veracity of religious claims (Alipah, 2023; Hafid, 2020). When people discuss radicalism in the context of international politics, they're usually referring to religiously motivated political movements that seek to overthrow the current state ideology or acquire power. In Indonesia, the radicalism movement is characterized by three main features: first, the targeting of particular groups with the goal of establishing a new system in place of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution; second, the characterization of extreme political activities, including the use of violence, terrorism, and other extremist tactics; and third, the identification of groups with anti-democratic beliefs and practices.

As the bedrock of all human experience, a person's religious beliefs and practices serve as the foundation upon which their thoughts, deeds, and conduct are built. As a result, religion permeates every facet of human existence, social and otherwise. Religion impacts every facet of human existence, from politics and economics to law and society to culture and even the very foundation of states. In politics, such influence gives birth to identity politics, which bases political action and even state formation on religious principles. As things are in the modern financial system, religiously inspired banking, insurance, and other related operations are "mushrooming." Concerning the law, there is a social movement that seeks to have Islamic law enforced. On a societal level, organized studies carried out through various mediums, including social media and conventional media, are revealing an increasing religious zeal.

"The state guarantees the freedom of every inhabitant to profess their respective religion and to worship according to their religion and belief." This 1945 Constitution guarantees religion and religious practices (expressions) in Indonesia, so the current societal growth of religious awareness and fervor is not negatively impacted (Cristiana, 2022; Jati et al., 2023). The right to freely exercise one's religion is guaranteed under the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia for all citizens. While Indonesia does not adhere to any particular religion, it is a secular state founded on the principles of Pancasila that guarantees religious freedom for all citizens.

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Therefore, it is thought to be essential to start a movement in this area to try to comprehend religion in relation to society, nation, and state. A word that describes this is religious moderation. Religious moderation is an imaginative attempt to cultivate a religious attitude in response to the competing demands for absolute truth, subjectivity, literal interpretation, haughty rejection of religious teachings, radicalism, and secularism. Religious radicalism endangers religious life and has repercussions for social, national, and governmental unity; religious moderation, with its primary commitment to tolerance, is the greatest approach to combat this challenge. Because of its varied religious population, the Island of the Gods (Bali) is an excellent case study in religious tolerance and moderation on a smaller scale than the rest of Indonesia. Bali is a wonderful place to capture images of the religious diversity on the island, including the Muslim minority living amid the Hindu majority.

Given the wide range of faiths practiced in the Unitary Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), the idea of religious moderation is intriguing. Here are a few scholarly viewpoints that support this: As a first point, Indonesian culture and religion are extremely diverse and pluralistic. Secondly, the Constitution of 1945 guarantees all citizens the right to freely exercise their religion or philosophical convictions. Three, there's no denying that Indonesia's religious practice might use some improvement in a more substantive area. Finally, the fact that many religious expressions continue to ignore democratic and tolerant principles is an undeniable reality. Fifthly, many religious activities still incite violence and even try to supplant the ideology of the state.

The numerous scholarly arguments presented above warrant further investigation into religious moderation. In addition to shedding light on more conventional notions of religious moderation, this study will aid legislators in their pursuit of social, national, and state harmony. The first part of this research will be to understand religious moderation among Bali's religious leaders; the second part will be to examine how religious moderation is put into practice in terms of tolerance, respect for local traditions and culture, rejection of violence, and national commitment.

## **Methods**

### **Research Location**

The sacred island of Bali will serve as the site of this investigation. Reasons for picking Bali as the site include the island's religious and cultural diversity. Bali is also a popular tourist spot because of the high level of religious and cultural tolerance there. Because of its rich variety, Bali provides a rare opportunity for people of different faiths to meet and learn from one another, making the island a perfect case study in religious tolerance. The backdrop provides an opportunity for scholars to see firsthand the practice of interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and concord in the face of constantly changing social, economic, and cultural forces.

### **Research Methods**

The goal of this descriptive-qualitative study is to provide a thorough account of the informants' religious moderation experiences by way of a methodical and factually accurate description of the phenomena under investigation. Several elements define qualitative research: Qualitative research takes place in natural settings, or the overall context. The researcher is able to comprehend and value the study object since humans are the research instruments, and there is no separation between them and the thing being examined. After research is finished, the theory can be fully accepted or rejected, or it can lead to the development of new theories; the purpose of using theory is to better comprehend occurrences.

Researchers will use purposive sampling approaches to interview several informants and do non-participant observation. Natural data meeting the standards of qualitative research is anticipated to be produced by this method.

### **Research Paradigm**

A person's religious beliefs and practices are an integral part of who they are and can serve as a moral compass in local, national, and state affairs. A careful examination is necessary to comprehend the role of religion and its offshoots in other areas. This research employs a critical

paradigm that is based on the previously mentioned examination of religious beliefs and practices. The term "paradigm" is defined as follows: "a worldview that defines the nature of the 'world' for its holder..." This definition refers to a collection of fundamental beliefs or metaphysics that focus on ultimates or first principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The researcher will investigate religious leaders' and other stakeholders' perspectives on religious moderation using this critical paradigm.

### **Type of Research**

This research set out to accomplish just that: gain knowledge of religious moderation in Bali and provide a thorough and detailed account of it. As a result, this study employs a qualitative research approach. Data collection methods, such as interviews and participant observation, will address the study emphasis. Sugiyono outlines a number of axioms about qualitative research, these include (Sugiyono, 2016):

- a. The reality that exists is complex, multi-faceted, ever-changing, and ultimately the result of human understanding and construction.
- b. The researcher-researched dynamic is interactive, relying on data sources to derive meaning.
- c. Generalizability is a possibility, but it is limited to the time and context in which it can be applied.
- d. The researcher's and the data providers' values: a constraint.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews were employed to gather data for this study. Scientists will collect information on religious moderation through a series of observations. In addition, the researchers will have various questions ready to ask the informants, including both closed and open-ended inquiries. To get more comprehensive data, the interviewers will ask fundamental questions about radicalism.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis begins with reading, studying, and examining all available data (Moleong, 2006). The data analysis utilized in this research pertains to the interactive analysis approaches proposed by Miles and Huberman. The three main parts of this method—data reduction, data presentation, and deriving and confirming conclusions—make up what is known as an interactive model. In a more detailed manner, the following are the steps involved in this data analysis:

- a. The researcher undertakes data reduction, an integral part of data analysis. Two steps are involved in this data reduction process: The process begins with data editing, followed by grouping and summarizing. Second, to discover themes, groupings, and patterns in the data, the researcher creates codes for notes (memos) on different items, including those pertaining to processes and activities.
- b. Presenting data entails arranging data, specifically linking data sets such that all examined data is actually part of a single entity.
- c. Applying the inductive principle by taking into account preexisting data patterns and trends from the generated data displays and then drawing and testing conclusions.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Understanding of the Concept of Religious Moderation by Religious Leaders in Bali**

According to the results of the study, religious leaders on Bali Island define religious moderation as a way of thinking that places an emphasis on harmony, acceptance, and fairness in the face of religious difference. This idea is presented as a "middle path" (tawasuth) that avoids being too extremist on the right or too liberal on the left, rather than as a way to water down beliefs or blend religious teachings. Moderation, according to interviewees from Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Catholicism, and Buddhism, is essential to preserving harmony in Bali's heterogeneous community. The usage of words like "tawazun" (balance), "i'tidal" (justice), "tatsamuh" (tolerance), and "islah" (improvement), which they believe are important for creating a harmonious social life, lends credence to this vision.

The native cultural knowledge of Bali, particularly the Tri Hita Karana philosophy, greatly impacts the notion of religious moderation within this environment. To illustrate the point, prominent Hindu religious figures stress the need for maintaining balance in one's connections with God (parahyangan), other humans (pawongan), and the environment (palemahan). Balinese Muslims connect the idea of rahmatan lil alamin, which stresses the importance of living things' well-being, with the Tri Hita Karana philosophy. Because of these shared ideals, people of different faiths are able to have productive conversations with one another, with moderation being defined as the meeting point of religious teachings and local customs. According to some Christian and Catholic leaders, religious tolerance in Bali has always been a part of daily life. For example, people of different faiths often visit one another on religious holidays, participate in traditional ceremonies together, and lend a hand to those in need during times of natural or man-made disasters.

Additionally, some data points to a connection between religious moderation and government strategy, namely the mainstreaming program of religious moderation launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. When it comes to making decisions, forming communities, and resolving conflicts, they know that moderation is more than just buzzwords. Given Bali's status as a global tourist hotspot with high levels of religious and cultural exchange, this initiative is significant to them. As a result of transnational ideology, radicalism, and intolerance brought about by globalization, these influential people fear that societal friction might worsen if the ideals of moderation are not internalized. Thus, moderation is portrayed as a stronghold that guarantees peace in the community and enhances Bali's reputation as an inclusive destination.

Balinese religious leaders gained a sense of moderation from their exposure to the island's past. Although there was some tension when other faiths first arrived in Bali, the island's long history of tolerance, acculturation, and dialogue has led to a more peaceful coexistence. Muslim leaders in Bali are trying to model their teachings after those of Java's Wali Songo, who was known for his cultural approach to Islam, respect for local traditions, and avoidance of conflict. The interfaith interactions on Bali follow a similar pattern, with members of different faiths working together to serve the community and spread their message in an approachable, respectful, and dialogical way. Respect for one another, according to Bali's Hindu and Buddhist leaders, is more than just tolerating one another; it's actively engaging in shared communal activities. This is in line with moderation, which is characterized by a combination of unwavering faith and tolerance for diversity.

Theoretical, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of religious moderation are all brought together in the study of Bali's religious leaders. One way in which religion plays a role in society is through the moral and ethical lessons it imparts, which can be found in every major world religion. Their skill in adapting religious texts to the social and traditional setting of Bali while preserving their core principles exemplifies the cultural dimension. In the meanwhile, the pragmatic aspect is shown by their dedication to using moderation in public service, da'wah, and education. To rephrase, moderation is more than a notion for Bali's religious leaders; it's a way of life that dictates how they engage with the varied members of society on a daily basis.

From what we have seen so far, there are four key aspects to the way religious leaders on Bali Island see religious moderation. To begin, a moderate stance strikes a balance between rigid convictions and receptivity to alternative viewpoints. Second, religious teachings and indigenous knowledge, such as Tri Hita Karana, provide the groundwork for moderation. Third, religious tolerance needs to be put into practice via teaching, public service, religious preaching, and participation in social events that bring people of different faiths together. The fourth reason moderation is crucial for tackling global and local issues is that it is a tool for preserving harmony, avoiding confrontation, and enhancing national integration.

### **Religious Moderation Practices in Bali Encompass National Commitment, Tolerance, Rejection of Violence, and Respect For Local Traditions**

Social interactions, religious events, and community policies on Bali that promote tolerance, fairness, and unity are all examples of religious moderation in action. Religious moderation may be measured along four primary aspects, according to the research. These dimensions are national

commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and respect for local customs and culture. A look at religious leaders' and communities' formal and informal experiences reveals each of these elements.

### 1. National Commitment

Religious leaders in Bali demonstrate their devotion to the country by actively working to incorporate the principles of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* into their worship and daily lives. In their view, Indonesia's religious variety is an asset, not a liability, and the country should work to preserve it. Religion and patriotism go hand in hand, according to the interviewees, and the practice of religious principles is consistent with protecting the Republic of Indonesia.

Balinese religious ceremonies frequently serve as a unifying force. On national holidays like Independence Day, for instance, members of different religious groups come together to do more than just hoist flags and perform ceremonies; they also host blood drives, clean up local areas, and help out in rural areas. Because it emphasizes that loving one's nation is an integral aspect of faith (*hubbul wathan mynal iman*), religious leaders see this as a somewhat worshipful social practice.

Furthermore, religious leaders' participation in official forums like the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) is another way that national commitment is shown. Among the strategic matters they addressed in this forum was the need to settle disputes over the building of places of worship, the organization of religious festivities that would disturb public peace, and the preservation of an amicable atmosphere in the run-up to the elections. Following the tenets of Pancasila democracy, this is all accomplished by making consensus-building a top priority throughout discussions.

### 2. Tolerance

People of different faiths interact with each other on a regular basis in Bali, demonstrating the island's attitude of tolerance. Religious leaders stressed that words alone are insufficient to demonstrate tolerance; it must be accompanied by deeds. Balinese Hindus, for instance, sometimes hand up their village fields—along with parking and security—so that Muslims may worship Eid al-Fitr. On the other hand, Muslims assist with traffic management and logistical preparations during Galungan and Kuningan celebrations, as well as Ngaben rites, and contribute to maintaining peace.

Another manifestation of living tolerance is the custom of paying each other visits on significant religious festivals. During Christmas, Christians extend invitations to neighbors of other faiths, while during Eid al-Adha, Muslims enjoy meals with neighbors of different faiths. Recognizing the importance of societal peace, this tolerance is grounded in more than just symbolic gestures. Respecting the festivities of other faiths does not imply taking up their ideas; rather, it is a demonstration of reverence for the religious liberty of every person, according to religious leaders.

Educating both the general public and specific groups helps promote tolerance. Students of various faiths are welcome, and their worship requirements are met by a few Bali schools run by religious institutions. The importance of interfaith brotherhood should be emphasized by schoolteachers in order to help students adjust to a diverse world.

### 3. Rejecting Violence

This dimension is prominent in the firm statements of religious figures that violence in the name of religion cannot be justified. They refer to the teachings of their respective religions that command peace and forbid hostility. For example, Islamic figures in Bali cite the principle of *la ikraha fid din* (no compulsion in religion), while Hindu figures emphasize the value of *ahimsa* (non-violence toward living beings).

Rejection of violence is manifested thru various preventive measures, such as anti-radicalism education in *pesantren*, *majelis taklim*, and religious study groups. Community development materials often include explanations of the dangers of intolerance and radicalism, as well as the importance of dialog in resolving differences. In the context of Bali, which is a world-



renowned tourist destination, religious figures are also involved in maintaining security by collaborating with the authorities, both to anticipate potential disturbances during major celebrations and to prevent the entry of extremist ideologies from outside.

Some religious figures interviewed shared their experiences in mediating potential conflicts, such as misunderstandings regarding the use of mosque loudspeakers or processions of traditional ceremonies that blocked roads. With good communication and mutual understanding, these problems can be resolved without violence. This shows that the practice of moderation in Bali is not only normative, but also functional in maintaining peace.

#### **4. Honoring Regional Customs and Heritage**

Religious leaders in Bali consider respect for local customs a crucial component of religious moderation, given the island's rich cultural legacy and long history of religious practice. They believe that culture and religion can complement each other if their basic tenets align with religious teachings. For instance, Balinese language sermons and the use of neutral traditional symbols during religious rituals are two ways that Islamic religious leaders in Bali adapt proselytization to the local culture.

Even though they practice various faiths, Bali's religious groups are accustomed to taking part in traditional events. In the days leading up to Eid al-Fitr, for instance, Muslims assist in Ngaben preparation while Hindus work together to clean mosques. Rather than a mixture of beliefs, religious leaders stressed that this involvement was a sign of community and reverence for history.

Environmental preservation is an integral aspect of traditional rituals, and it is clear that people of different faiths are working together to keep local customs alive. There is harmony between religious teachings on the care of God's creation and the sustainability principles ingrained in traditions such as Subak, an irrigation system. Because it shows that religious and cultural identities can coexist, learning about and enjoying Bali's indigenous culture is a great way to help people be more moderate in their religious practices.

In sum, Bali's moderate religious practice demonstrates the interdependence and reciprocal reinforcement of these four aspects. Respect for local traditions fosters a sense of connection to the country, national commitment establishes a shared framework that includes all people, tolerance fosters bridges between faiths, rejecting violence upholds social stability, and so on. Thanks to the interplay of these four factors, Bali exemplifies how religious moderation is not only a theoretical possibility but also a practical reality.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, religious moderation in Bali is understood and practiced by drawing on a blend of local wisdom, long-standing societal experiences with diversity management, and religious teachings. Various religious leaders see moderation as a compromise stance (*tawasuth*) that allows one to be both deeply religious and tolerant of others' perspectives and practices. Tri Hita Karana's indigenous philosophy and theological principles like *tawazun*, *i'tidal*, *tatsamuh*, and *islah* form the basis of this knowledge. On Bali, moderation is not just an ingrained social and cultural principle but also an essential part of daily life.

On Bali, you may see the moderate religious practice in action across four key areas. The first way that Indonesian religious leaders have shown their dedication to the country is by taking part in national forums like the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) and by incorporating the principles of Pancasila and the Unitary Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) into religious practices. Secondly, there has to be real tolerance shown via things like helping each other out at religious events, building places of worship that are open to many faiths, and teaching diverse principles from a young age. Thirdly, they work together with security forces to uphold peace, combat extremism via education, and settle disputes through dialogue. Involvement of religious communities in traditional activities, adaptation of religious teaching to the Balinese cultural

context, and environmental preservation as part of spiritual ideals all attest to the fourth point, respect for local customs and culture.

That religious moderation in Bali is more than just a program—it is a deeply embedded social culture—is demonstrated by the combination of modest knowledge and consistent practice. In the face of ideological and social problems brought about by globalization, the cooperation of religious leaders, society at large, and the state is crucial to preserving peace. Bali has successfully managed its diversity by integrating religious, cultural, and national principles.

The results of this study provide several options for further investigation. To start, to keep the principles of tolerance and unity alive, religious moderation education programs that include many generations, particularly youth, need to be strengthened. The second way that the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local governments may help interfaith dialog forums thrive is by providing more funding for both ceremonial events and joint community service projects. Third, Bali's religious leaders may create da'wah and community guidance models that are more relevant to the local context by combining Islamic principles with local expertise. As a fourth point, managing social media to spread moderate narratives and oppose hate speech requires particular effort. By taking these measures, we can build on Bali's religious moderation as a model for the rest of Indonesia and demonstrate that our nation can peacefully, equitably, and sustainably manage its variety.

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