



Islamic Moderation and the Sustainable Development Goals: Conceptual Foundations and Indonesian Contextual Realizations

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Abstract. This article examines the significance of Islamic moderation (*wasatīyyah*) in supporting Indonesia's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Employing a qualitative, interpretive design, the study integrates an integrative literature review of classical and contemporary scholarship with systematic document analysis and thematic content analysis of key institutional reports. Drawing upon classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary Indonesian religious thought, and empirical examples across Islamic institutions, the study demonstrates that moderation, embodied by organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, provides a culturally grounded framework for advancing inclusive development, contributing directly to SDGs related to poverty alleviation, quality education, gender equality, climate action, and peacebuilding. However, the study also identifies complex challenges, including political polarization, digital radicalization, institutional fragmentation, and resource disparities, that constrain its effectiveness. The article concludes that enhancing policy coordination, expanding religious literacy, and empowering community leaders are essential for maximizing moderation's role in Indonesia's pursuit of the SDGs. Future research should empirically quantify the impact of specific faith-based initiatives on SDG indicators and comparatively analyze the Indonesian model of moderation with other Muslim-majority contexts to assess its broader applicability.

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1. Introduction

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 by 193 member

states of the United Nations¹ represented a global commitment to advancing social justice, human dignity, and environmental stewardship. The sustainability goals are intended to solve ecological, social, and economic issues² For Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, the SDGs are not merely technocratic aspirations but deeply connected to the cultural and ethical foundations of its society. As a nation historically characterized by pluralism, religious coexistence, and community-based development, Indonesia's pathway to achieving its SDG commitments cannot be separated from its religious landscape. In particular, the concept of Islamic moderation (*wasatiyyah*)—with its emphasis on balance, justice, tolerance, and rejection of extremism—has become central to national discourse on sustainable development.

Islamic moderation in Indonesia arises partly as a response to challenges posed by radicalism, exclusivism, and intolerance³. Various works highlight how radicalism emerges from literalist and rigid interpretations of religious doctrine, often accompanied by sociopolitical grievances and psychological vulnerabilities. For instance, radical groups commonly exhibit inflexible doctrinal readings and a tendency to legitimize violence through distorted understandings of concepts such as jihad, which has contributed to destructive social outcomes and public distrust of Islam as a peaceful faith⁴. This context underscores why moderation, rather than mere theological idealism, has become a crucial foundation for societal resilience and developmental progress.

At the global level, the relationship between Islam and sustainable development is increasingly recognized. Studies show that Islamic teachings strongly align with the SDGs, particularly regarding justice, poverty eradication, environmental stewardship, education, and gender equality. For example, a UNDP-supported publication demonstrates extensive synergies between Islamic tradition and the SDG agenda, showing how Quranic and prophetic teachings emphasize equity (*'adl*), compassion (*ihsān*), stewardship (*khalīfah*), and social welfare—principles that parallel SDG priorities such as poverty alleviation, peacebuilding, and sustainable resource management⁵. This connection provides an important theological and cultural foundation for promoting SDGs within Muslim societies.

In Indonesia, the government and major Islamic institutions have increasingly recognized the potential of moderation to support national development. Notably, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah have intensified their collaborative efforts to promote religious moderation as part of a broader strategy for achieving SDG targets, especially SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Yet, despite progress, challenges remain; differing ideological orientations between organizations, uneven implementation, and persistent incidents of intolerance point to the need for stronger cross-sectoral collaboration⁶.

Peace and strong institutions are fundamental prerequisites for sustainable development. Literature on SDG 16 highlights that political stability, social trust, and justice-oriented institutions form the backbone of national sustainability efforts, with peace being strongly correlated with overall SDG performance⁷. Community-level leadership also plays a vital role in peacebuilding, as grassroots leaders exert influence over social harmony and conflict resolution, thereby contributing to community resilience and development capacity⁸. These insights reinforce the argument that Islamic moderation, when operationalized through community institutions, can serve as a powerful tool for advancing sustainable development outcomes.

Within the framework of the global commitment to the SDGs that underscored a universal imperative for social justice, human dignity, and environmental stewardship, the

intersection of religious ethics and development outcomes has garnered increasing attention. Studies have demonstrated a strong conceptual alignment between Islamic teachings and the SDGs, particularly concerning justice, poverty eradication, environmental stewardship, and education^{5,9}. For instance, Islamic principles such as *zakāt* (almsgiving) resonate with SDG 1 (No Poverty)¹⁰, the concept of *khalīfah* (stewardship) aligns with SDGs 13 and 15 (Climate Action and Life on Land)^{11,12}, and the emphasis on knowledge (*‘ilm*) supports SDG 4 (Quality Education)^{13,14}. In the Indonesian context, the world’s largest Muslim-majority democracy, these connections are not merely theoretical. The nation’s historical character of pluralism and community-based development has made its religious landscape a critical factor in achieving its SDG commitments¹⁵.

Previous studies on religion and development have largely examined the compatibility between Islamic values and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the lens of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, Islamic finance, *zakāt*, *waqf*, and ethical economics^{16–19}. Most studies frame religion as a normative or theological foundation that legitimizes the sustainable development agenda, whereas empirical discussions remain concentrated on economic instruments and philanthropic mechanisms^{20–22}. While this literature successfully demonstrates conceptual convergence between Islam and sustainability, it rarely addresses how religious moderation functions as a governance mechanism that shapes institutional coordination, policy implementation, and social cohesion in pluralistic societies. Consequently, a significant research gap remains regarding the role of Islamic moderation as an operational framework for sustainability governance beyond the doctrinal or financial dimensions.

Existing literature also often treats moderation as a theological counter-narrative to radicalism^{3,23} or analyzes the roles of major Islamic organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah in isolation⁶. Few studies have systematically examined how the combined, moderate ethos embodied by these institutions directly and holistically contributes to a wide spectrum of SDGs beyond SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Furthermore, the operational challenges—such as political polarization, digital radicalization, and institutional fragmentation—that hinder the translation of moderate values into sustainable development outcomes are often noted but not deeply analyzed as a core part of the problem^{6,24}.

Although studies on Islamic moderation in Indonesia have expanded considerably over the last decade, much of the existing scholarship tends to focus on moderation primarily within the frameworks of counter-radicalization, religious education, interfaith dialogue, or state religious policy²⁵. Comparatively, fewer studies have systematically examined how Islamic moderation may function as a multidimensional framework for supporting sustainable development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly within the Indonesian socio-religious context. Existing discussions often analyse moderation either normatively or institutionally, without sufficiently integrating ethical foundations, grassroots religious practices, environmental stewardship, social welfare mechanisms, and sustainability governance into a unified analytical framework. Khot *et al.* highlighted that few SDG interaction studies focus on local contexts and/or low-income countries, and SDGs 5, 10, 16, and 17 are the least represented in SDG-interaction studies²⁶.

Furthermore, although Indonesia is frequently recognised internationally as an important model of moderate Islam²⁷, limited research has explored how Indonesia’s moderation discourse can contribute concretely to SDG implementation through religious

institutions, community-based initiatives, and public policy synergy. So, while the synergy between Islamic principles and the SDG agenda is well-established, a significant research gap remains in understanding how the specific Indonesian concept of Islamic moderation (*wasatiyyah* or *moderasi beragama*) functions as a practical, institutional mechanism for advancing these goals. This gap becomes increasingly significant amid contemporary challenges such as political polarization, digital radicalization, ecological crisis, and socio-economic inequality, all of which directly affect sustainable development processes.

This article addresses the gap by posing the central problem: *How does Islamic moderation, as conceptualized and practiced in Indonesia, provide an ethical and institutional foundation for achieving the SDGs, and what are the key challenges that limit its effectiveness?* To answer this, the paper argues that Islamic moderation is not merely a theological ideal but a multidimensional catalyst that, through its emphasis on balance, justice, and tolerance, actively supports poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, environmental stewardship, and peacebuilding. By synthesizing classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary Indonesian religious discourse, and the institutional efforts of NU and Muhammadiyah, this study aims to demonstrate the tangible contributions of moderation to Indonesia's national development trajectory while critically examining the constraints that must be addressed to maximize its transformative potential.

This study differs from previous research in several important ways. First, rather than focusing solely on Islamic economics or ecotheology, this article positions Islamic moderation (*wasatiyyah*) as an integrative paradigm linking ethics, governance, citizenship, and sustainable development. Second, unlike previous studies that rely heavily on textual or conceptual analysis, this study contextualizes the SDGs within Indonesia's socio-political landscape by examining the interactions between state institutions, Islamic organizations, and community-based religious actors⁶. Third, while previous literature generally discusses religion as a moral supporter of development, this study conceptualizes the values of moderation—such as inclusivity, tolerance, balance, anti-extremism, and social justice—as institutional principles capable of strengthening sustainable governance and democratic resilience. Thus, this article shifts the discussion from “religion and development” to “religion as governance infrastructure” within the SDGs framework²⁸.

The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of a hybrid conceptual framework integrating Islamic moderation with sustainability governance. Existing studies typically separate religious ethics, Islamic social finance, environmental management, and governance analysis into fragmented discussions²⁹. Instead, this article proposes that Islamic moderation serves as a mediating framework linking moral legitimacy, institutional trust, policy coordination, and sustained public participation. In the Indonesian context, this study further highlights how institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, NU, Muhammadiyah, Islamic boarding school networks, and local civil society actors contribute to the realization of the SDG agenda through moderation-oriented governance practices³⁰. This institutional perspective extends contemporary studies by demonstrating that religion operates not only as a belief or identity but also as a governance actor capable of shaping sustainability and social resilience policies.

Therefore, this study contributes on three levels. Conceptually, it broadens the study of religion and development by introducing Islamic moderation as a paradigm for sustainability governance, not merely as an ethical complement to development discourse. Institutionally, it offers a framework for understanding collaboration between religious organizations, civil society, and state institutions to implement an inclusive SDG

agenda in Muslim-majority democracies. From a policy perspective, it provides a contextual model for integrating religious moderation into development planning, citizenship education, environmental governance, and social resilience strategies in Indonesia³¹. By positioning Indonesia as a laboratory for faith-based sustainability governance, this study contributes to the broader debate on how religious values can strengthen democratic governance, public trust, and sustainable development in the Global South³².

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative interpretive research design to examine the significance of Islamic moderation in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the Indonesian context. The study primarily utilizes an integrative literature review, combined with systematic document analysis, to synthesize conceptual, institutional, and empirical perspectives on Islamic moderation, sustainability governance, and Indonesian socio-religious development. This approach follows best practices in qualitative inquiry that emphasize the purposeful, concept-driven integration of diverse sources to generate analytical insight rather than statistical generalization³³.

The data sources consisted of scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, policy documents, organisational reports, and institutional publications related to Islamic moderation, SDGs, religious governance, and Indonesian Islamic organizations. The literature and documents were selected purposively based on several criteria: (1) direct relevance to Islamic moderation and sustainable development; (2) contextual relevance to Indonesia or Muslim-majority societies; (3) scholarly credibility and institutional reliability; and (4) recency and significance within contemporary moderation discourse. In addition to classical and foundational works, the study incorporated recent publications from 2020 to 2026 to ensure analytical relevance to current socio-political developments³⁴.

The analytical process employed thematic content analysis following the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña³⁵. The analysis involved iterative reading, coding, thematic categorisation, and matrix display techniques to identify recurring themes and relationships among moderation, education, social welfare, peacebuilding, environmental stewardship, and SDG implementation. Document analysis procedures also followed Bowen's methodological guidance concerning the qualitative interpretation of institutional and policy documents³⁴.

To strengthen contextual analysis, the study additionally incorporated illustrative case-study examples³⁶, including eco-pesantren initiatives, zakāt-based poverty alleviation programs, women's empowerment activities, and moderation-oriented educational practices. These examples were selected based on their relevance to SDG implementation, institutional visibility, and availability of credible documentation. The use of multiple empirical illustrations enabled the study to demonstrate how Islamic moderation operates not only at the conceptual level but also within practical Indonesian socio-religious settings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the conceptual foundations that underpin the relationship between Islamic moderation and sustainable development. It consists of three main

components: 1) the Islamic concept of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), 2) the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 3) the theoretical linkages between the two within the Indonesian context.

3.1.1. Islamic Moderation (*Wasatiyyah*)

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, moderation is not a new concept. The classical scholar Imam al-Ghazali articulated a holistic notion of moderate—*wasatiyyah*—that emphasizes ethical conduct, spiritual well-being, and social responsibility. His works, especially *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*³⁷ and *Mizān al-‘Amal*³⁸, highlight the importance of integrating personal spirituality with societal welfare, encouraging an attitude that avoids extremism and promotes constructive engagement with diverse communities³⁹. Al-Ghazali’s moral framework offers a valuable normative basis for contemporary efforts to build tolerant, harmonious societies capable of addressing complex developmental challenges^{37,38}.

3.1.1.1. Defining Moderation in Islamic Thought

Islamic moderation—commonly expressed through the Qur’anic notion of *ummatan wasatan*—denotes a balanced, just, and inclusive orientation in religious understanding and social practice. Classical Islamic scholarship emphasizes moderation as a key ethical disposition that avoids both excess and negligence. God says in the Holy Qur’an Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:143, “*Thus have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced that ye might be witnesses over the nations and the Apostle a witness over yourselves*”⁴⁰. This verse describes the Muslim community as “a justly balanced nation,” implying that Muslims should embody fairness, justice, and equilibrium in all aspects of life. It encapsulates the ethical calling of the Muslim community to serve as balanced witnesses to humanity, steering clear of extremism and indifference⁴¹. Moderation is an aspect, in its Qur’anic projections, of the self-identity and worldview of the Muslim community, or *ummah*. It also features prominently in almost all major world religions and civilizations⁴².

Within Indonesian discourse, religiosity moderation (*moderasi beragama*) is defined as an attitude that upholds tolerance, rejects extremism, respects diversity, and embraces constructive dialogue^{43,44}. This understanding is reinforced by mainstream Indonesian Muslim scholars who emphasize the necessity of accepting diversity as a divine reality. Quraish Shihab, for example, argues that religious diversity and differences in interpretation are natural and even beneficial, provided they encourage mutual respect and discourage the monopolization of truth^{44,45}. Moderation, therefore, becomes an ethical framework for engaging harmoniously with pluralism, both within Islam and in society at large.

Moderation is also understood as a rejection of radicalism and violent extremism^{3,46}. Radicalism, characterized by rigid scriptural interpretations, exclusivist attitudes, and the legitimization of violence, represents a misapplication of religious doctrine³. Studies of religious radicalism in Indonesia highlight how such movements distort concepts like *jihad* and impose narrow epistemic frameworks that disregard the ethical spirit of Islam⁴. By contrast, moderation seeks to reclaim religious understanding from these distortions, promoting compassion, justice, and universal human dignity.

3.1.1.2. Al-Ghazali’s Contributions to Moderation

Imam al-Ghazali (1058–1111) is one of the most influential figures in the development of Islamic moral thought, and his works offer foundational insights into

religious moderation. Al-Ghazali conceptualizes moderation through the ethical principle of the “middle path,” arguing that virtue lies between extremes of excess and deficiency^{37,38}. In *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* and *Mīzān al-’Amal*, he emphasizes the necessity of balancing spiritual and material needs, integrating personal piety with social responsibility, and cultivating ethical behaviour rooted in Islamic virtues³⁹.

Al-Ghazali’s approach underscores a holistic understanding of human development, one that encompasses spiritual purification (*tazkiyyah al-qalb*), ethical conduct, and the pursuit of societal harmony^{37,38}. Contemporary scholarship notes that his framework helps mitigate the root causes of extremism by encouraging individuals to recognize interconnectedness between personal spirituality and communal well-being, thereby reinforcing tolerance, dialogue, and social cohesion³⁹. Within the Indonesian context, these teachings provide an important normative basis for countering radical tendencies and embedding moderation in religious education and community practices.

3.1.1.3. Moderation in Indonesian Socio-Political Identity

Historically, Indonesian Islam has evolved through peaceful processes of cultural interaction, resulting in a distinctive form of Islam that is inclusive, adaptive, and tolerant. Scholars argue that Indonesia’s moderate character stems from its long history of syncretic engagement with local cultures¹⁵, producing a religious identity deeply rooted in *wasatīyyah* values. Azyumardi Azra describes Indonesian Islam as “Islam with a smiling face”, highlighting its openness to modernity, democracy, and human rights—that is, values often perceived as contentious elsewhere in the Muslim world^{47,48}.

In the Indonesian socio-political landscape, moderation has long been embedded in the identity of mainstream Islamic organizations. The notion of the “moderate Muslim” in Indonesia aligns with scholarly arguments that most Muslims seek social change from the grassroots, reject violence, and work within democratic and societal structures²³. Scholars such as Quraish Shihab and Azyumardi Azra affirm that Indonesian Islam has historically developed through peaceful processes of cultural accommodation, resulting in a distinctive form of Islam that is inclusive, tolerant, and deeply rooted in the principle of *ummataṅ wasatān* (a justly balanced community)⁴⁵. These characteristics position Indonesia well to mobilize Islamic values in support of sustainable development.

Modern Indonesian Muslim organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah embody this tradition. NU promotes *Islam Nusantara*, a contextualized, culturally embedded interpretation of Islam that emphasizes tolerance and social harmony. Muhammadiyah, with its emphasis on rationality, social welfare, and Islam *wasatīyyah*, also positions itself firmly within the tradition of moderation. The literature observes that these organizations—representing the majority of Indonesian Muslims—form the backbone of Indonesian Islamic moderation and serve as a buffer against radicalism and sectarianism²³.

3.1.2. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This section outlines the SDGs’ principles, their alignment with Islamic ethical principles, and specifically discusses SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which is relevant to the article’s theme.

3.1.2.1. Overview of SDG Principles

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, comprise 17 interlinked objectives addressing poverty, inequality, environmental

sustainability, peace, justice, and institutional effectiveness. They are built on the principle of leaving no one behind, calling for inclusive, equitable, and participatory development⁴⁹.

The SDGs highlight the interconnected nature of global challenges: progress in one area often depends on advances in others. For example, peace and justice (SDG 16) underpin all aspects of sustainable development, as societies experiencing conflict or institutional weakness struggle to achieve social or economic progress. Studies have shown a clear correlation between peaceful societies and higher SDG achievement levels⁷.

3.1.2.2. Alignment of SDGs with Islamic Ethical Principles

Islamic tradition offers rich ethical, legal, and normative frameworks that parallel many SDG goals. Islamic teachings emphasize social welfare, economic equity, environmental stewardship, and justice^{9,50}, which are principles foundational to sustainable development. For example: 1) Poverty alleviation (SDG 1) resonates with the Islamic obligation of *zakāt* (alms) and the encouragement of charity (*ṣadāqah*), 2) Education (SDG 4) is central to Islamic tradition, which places high value on knowledge (*‘ilm*), 3) Gender equality (SDG 5) aligns with scriptural emphasis on equity and human dignity, and 4) Environmental protection (SDGs 13 and 15) reflects the Qur’anic concept of humans as stewards (*khalīfah*) of the earth.

The UNDP-supported study examining synergy between Islam and the SDGs underscores how Islamic teachings articulate comprehensive ethical and normative approaches to poverty, justice, community welfare, and environmental conservation⁵. This study argues that integrating Islamic moral frameworks into SDG advocacy enhances community engagement, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts where religious worldview shapes everyday decision-making.

3.1.2.3. SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

SDG 16 is particularly relevant to the discussion of Islamic moderation. The goal aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice, and build effective, accountable institutions. Literature emphasizes that peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development, and strong institutions form the structural backbone for achieving other SDGs. Positive peace, characterized by the presence of justice and social harmony rather than merely the absence of violence, is essential for long-term societal resilience⁷.

Community leadership plays an equally important complementary role. Peace and security at the community level enable local development initiatives, facilitate social cohesion, and empower marginalized groups to participate in development processes. Community leaders, given their proximity to the grassroots, are instrumental in fostering social harmony and preventing conflict, thereby contributing to sustainable community development efforts⁸.

3.1.3. Linking Islamic Moderation (*Wasatīyyah*) and the SDGs

This section outlines the linking of Islamic moderation to SDGs by describing the ethical and normative synergies, the institutional synergies in Indonesia, and community-level integration.

3.1.3.1. Ethical and Normative Synergies

The underlying principles of Islamic moderation and the SDGs share strong ethical affinities. Islamic moderation promotes justice, balance, compassion, and respect for human dignity⁴⁵—values that align closely with the SDGs' call for inclusive development, equality, and peace. Moderation counters exclusivism and sectarianism, thereby creating a social environment conducive to advancing SDG objectives such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and institutional reform.

Furthermore, moderating religious understanding helps prevent radicalism and violence³, which are significant obstacles to achieving SDGs related to peace, justice, and social inclusion. By promoting tolerance and intergroup harmony⁵¹, moderation supports SDG 16 and strengthens the foundations of democratic participation, access to justice, and community resilience.

3.1.3.2. Institutional Synergies in Indonesia

Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs, NU, and Muhammadiyah have played central roles in aligning moderation with national development policy. Their synergy aims to integrate religious moderation into community education, policy implementation, and social programs designed to support SDGs, especially SDG 16. However, research indicates that inconsistent collaboration, differing ideological emphases, and fragmented implementation hinder optimal outcomes⁶. Nevertheless, the existence of these large institutions offers an unparalleled platform for mainstreaming moderation across society. Their influence on education, community engagement, and social services positions them uniquely to promote SDG values at scale.

3.1.3.3. Community-Level Integration

At the grassroots, Islamic moderation strengthens community capacity to manage diversity, resolve conflicts, and cultivate social harmony—all key components of sustainable development. Peace and security are vital for local development initiatives, enabling community members to collaborate effectively with government agencies and NGOs. As studies show, community leadership plays a pivotal role in sustaining peace, reducing conflicts, and enabling development interventions to succeed⁸.

3.2. Islamic Moderation within the Indonesian Socio-religious Landscape

Indonesia's socio-religious landscape is shaped by a rich tapestry of cultural encounters, historical processes, and institutional developments that have given rise to a distinctive form of moderate Islam. Unlike in many regions where Islam spread through conquest or political expansion, Islam in Indonesia was introduced primarily through peaceful trade, scholarly networks, and cultural assimilation⁵². This historical trajectory facilitated an inclusive, pluralistic, and culturally embedded religious identity that continues to influence contemporary Islamic thought and practice in the country. The rise of Islamic moderation in Indonesia, therefore, cannot be understood without examining the interplay between religious institutions, state governance, public discourse, and community life.

3.2.1. Historical Roots of Indonesian Islamic Moderation

Indonesian Islam historically evolved through dialogue and syncretism with local traditions, producing what scholars describe as a deeply rooted ethos of balance and

accommodation. This characteristic contrasts with regions where sectarian conflicts and rigid doctrinal interpretations often fuel polarization. According to Azyumardi Azra, Indonesian Islam embodies Islam *wasatiyyah*, characterized by equilibrium (*tawāzun*) and a middle path orientation (*tawāsut*), which has long served as a cultural buffer against sectarianism and extremism⁴⁷. Azra further observes that Indonesian Muslims have traditionally upheld inclusive religious practices, thereby avoiding the deeply entrenched sectarian divides commonly found in parts of the Middle East and South Asia.

The Indonesian ethos of moderation is also reflected in the acceptance of pluralism and diversity as integral aspects of national and religious identity. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that diversity in interpretation and religious expression is not a threat but a form of divine blessing, as long as it fosters mutual respect and avoids claims of exclusive truth⁴⁴. This perspective reinforces the idea that moderation is not merely a strategic choice in response to contemporary challenges but an integral part of Indonesia's religious heritage.

3.2.2. Institutional Drivers: Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah

The implementation of the SDGs through Islamic institutions in Indonesia reflects a form of collaborative sustainability governance in which religious organizations function not only as moral actors but also as intermediaries between the state and society. In this context, institutions such as NU, Muhammadiyah, Islamic boarding school networks, *zakāt* institutions, and mosque-based community organizations contribute to poverty alleviation, environmental education, social resilience, and inclusive welfare programs aligned with the SDGs targets. This phenomenon can be analyzed through the theory of collaborative governance developed by Chris Ansell and Alison Gash, which emphasizes institutional cooperation between public, private, and civil society actors in addressing complex policy issues⁵³. Indonesia presents a relatively unique model because Islamic institutions have a high level of social legitimacy and societal penetration, allowing SDG implementation to operate through cultural and religious beliefs rather than relying solely on bureaucratic mechanisms. Therefore, Islamic moderation in Indonesia functions not only as a theological discourse but also as a social governance mechanism that strengthens participatory development and citizen engagement⁵⁴.

Among the most influential drivers of Islamic moderation in Indonesia are the mass-based organizations NU and Muhammadiyah. With tens of millions of members combined, these institutions play a pivotal role in shaping religious discourse, educational curricula, and community practices.

3.2.2.1. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

NU's commitment to moderation is expressed through its promotion of *Islam Nusantara*, a culturally grounded interpretation of Islam that emphasizes local wisdom, inclusivity, and peaceful coexistence⁵⁵⁻⁵⁷. NU's extensive network of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) propagates values such as tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, and rejection of extremist ideologies. These pesantren cultivate community resilience by encouraging students to engage constructively with differences and to foster social harmony⁵⁸—values aligned with both Islamic moderation and SDG-oriented development.

3.2.2.2. Muhammadiyah

Muhammadiyah, while taking a more reformist and modernist stance, similarly promotes moderation through rationality, social reform, and community welfare. Its vast educational and health-care networks provide platforms for advancing moderate Islamic thought and addressing social inequalities. Research highlights that Muhammadiyah's socio-political orientation encourages democratic participation and rejects radical ideologies, situating it firmly within Indonesia's moderate religious mainstream²³.

Together, NU and Muhammadiyah serve as institutional pillars of moderation, shaping public perceptions of Islam, promoting civic engagement, and contributing to national efforts aimed at strengthening peace and development^{46,59}.

3.2.3. The Government's 'Moderasi Beragama' Initiative

In recent years, the Indonesian government—particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA)—has adopted a strategic approach to embed religious moderation into national policy. The *Moderasi Beragama* initiative seeks to promote tolerance, anti-violence, respect for tradition, and national commitment as core indicators of moderation⁶⁰. This policy is implemented across educational institutions, civil service training, religious programs, and community outreach.

However, studies suggest that despite its strong conceptual foundation, the implementation of *Moderasi Beragama* faces challenges. Differences in understanding between institutions, uneven local capacities, and variations in ideological orientation among societal actors hinder consistent execution. Research shows that while MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah share broad commitments to moderation, gaps in coordination, program design, and institutional messaging persist, affecting the overall coherence of the initiative⁶.

Nonetheless, the government's commitment to moderation represents a significant attempt to institutionalize peaceful and inclusive religious values, aligning national governance with broader efforts to achieve SDG targets, particularly in areas related to peace, justice, and social cohesion.

Compared with some other Muslim-majority countries, Indonesia exhibits a more decentralized and civil society-oriented approach to faith-based sustainability governance. In countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Islam-related sustainability programs are generally integrated into state-led modernization agendas, including green economy initiatives, renewable energy policies, and Islamic philanthropy managed through centralized governance structures^{61–63}. In contrast, Indonesia relies heavily on mass religious organizations and local religious networks to operationalize development agendas at the grassroots level. Meanwhile, Malaysia presents a hybrid model in which Islamic governance is institutionalized through state religious authorities and halal governance systems, particularly in sustainable halal industries and Islamic social finance⁶⁴. This comparison suggests that Indonesia's distinctive contribution lies in its pluralistic and participatory governance model, where religious moderation serves as a mediating framework between democratic governance, social diversity, and sustainable development goals.

3.2.4. Radicalism and the Challenge to Social Harmony

Despite Indonesia's longstanding tradition of moderation, the emergence of radicalism presents ongoing challenges. Radical groups often reject the inclusive religious interpretations championed by mainstream institutions and instead advocate rigid,

literalist, and exclusionary readings of Islamic texts³. These groups tend to exhibit psychological, theological, and sociopolitical characteristics that distort Islamic teachings—such as misinterpreting jihad, rejecting pluralism, and promoting ideological exclusivity—ultimately contributing to social instability and undermining public trust in Islam as a peaceful faith²³.

The rise of radical narratives, particularly through digital media, has influenced segments of youth populations and marginalized groups, creating social fragmentation²⁴. This situation underscores the importance of strengthening moderate religious education, enhancing community engagement, and promoting counter-narratives that highlight Islam's commitment to justice, compassion, and balance.

3.2.5. The Role of Community Actors and Local Leadership

Community-level leadership is essential in reinforcing moderation and supporting social stability. Leaders such as village heads, religious teachers, and local activists play crucial roles in shaping communal dynamics, mediating conflicts, and fostering cooperation among diverse groups. Studies on peace and community development show that effective local leadership contributes directly to conflict reduction, social harmony, and developmental progress by facilitating participatory governance and strengthening community resilience⁸.

Similarly, institutions that promote justice and peace at the local level underpin national efforts to achieve SDG 16, which emphasizes the need for strong, accountable, and inclusive institutions. Research indicates that the effectiveness of such institutions significantly influences a country's ability to meet broader SDG targets, demonstrating the centrality of grassroots structures in sustaining long-term development⁷.

3.2.6. Views of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals

Indonesian Muslim intellectuals play a substantial role in articulating and disseminating ideas of moderation. Figures such as Quraish Shihab and Azyumardi Azra emphasize that moderation is not only theologically grounded but socially necessary. Shihab contends that recognizing diversity is a divine mandate and that constructive engagement across differences is fundamental to genuine religious practice⁴⁴. Azra highlights that Indonesian Islam's historical tendency towards moderation has protected it from the more divisive forms of sectarianism found elsewhere in the Muslim world, reinforcing national unity and social balance⁴⁷.

These intellectual contributions help create a robust philosophical foundation for moderation, guiding religious institutions, educators, policymakers, and community leaders. The *Wasatiyyah* approach provides a balanced framework for maintaining religious integrity while engaging in socio-political issues. Active participation of '*Ulama* in moderate political governance can enhance the role of religion in supporting SDGs, particularly in fostering just and inclusive governance⁶⁵.

3.3. Contribution of Islamic Moderation to Achieving the SDGs

To clarify the analytical relationship between Islamic moderation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study proposes a conceptual framework that illustrates how the ethical principles of *wasatiyyah* are institutionalized within Indonesian Islamic organizations and translated into practical development strategies. The framework demonstrates the multidimensional pathways through which Islamic

moderation contributes to education, social welfare, gender inclusion, environmental stewardship, peacebuilding, and institutional resilience within the Indonesian context. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model synthesized in this study.

Islamic moderation plays a significant role in supporting Indonesia's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its emphasis on justice, balance, compassion, and peaceful coexistence aligns closely with the ethical foundations of sustainable development. This section discusses the contributions of Islamic moderation to several SDG areas—poverty and inequality, education, gender equality, peace and justice, environmental sustainability, and institutional partnerships—while drawing upon Indonesia's unique socio-religious dynamics. Each subsection demonstrates the ways in which values and institutions associated with moderation help advance national development priorities in accordance with the SDG framework. As illustrated in Figure 1, Islamic moderation in Indonesia operates not merely as a theological discourse but as a multidimensional socio-religious framework involving ethical principles, institutional actors, grassroots implementation, and sustainability-oriented outcomes.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Islamic Moderation Institutionalization

3.3.1. SDG 1 & SDG 10: Poverty Reduction and Reduction of Inequalities

Poverty alleviation and inequality reduction constitute core components of sustainable development. Islamic moderation supports these goals through its integrative social welfare ethos, community-centred values, and institutional mechanisms such as

zakāt, infaq, ṣadāqah, and waqf. These instruments channel wealth to the needy while strengthening social solidarity and mitigating socio-economic disparities.

Within Indonesia, large Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, which embody the values of moderation, operate extensive philanthropic networks^{59,66}. These organizations run welfare programs, health services, microfinance initiatives, livelihood support schemes, and social assistance projects for vulnerable populations. Their actions derive from Islamic ethical imperatives that encourage generosity, justice, and community empowerment—values highlighted in classical scholarship such as al-Ghazali’s teachings, which emphasize ethical balance and responsibility towards others³⁹.

Furthermore, moderation counteracts radical ideologies that often exacerbate social division and marginalization⁶⁷. By promoting social cohesion and rejecting divisive narratives, moderation strengthens the social fabric necessary for poverty programs to succeed. Radicalism, by contrast, often creates distrust, polarization, and conflict, disrupting development interventions and diverting resources away from poverty reduction efforts²³.

The synergy between moderation and socio-economic development is thus essential for ensuring inclusive growth, reducing inequality, and reinforcing social stability in Indonesia.

3.3.2. SDG 4: Quality Education

Education is one of the most influential domains through which Islamic moderation contributes to sustainable development in Indonesia. The country’s Islamic education system—particularly its vast network of pesantren—plays a significant role in promoting moderate values, moral character, and civic responsibility. In the context of 21st-century education, the integration of Islamic values across various disciplines has become an urgent necessity to bridge the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, as well as to respond to contemporary issues such as environmental crises, moral degradation, and radicalism^{13,68}.

The Indonesian government has increasingly institutionalized religious moderation within educational policy through programs initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs⁴³. One notable initiative is the strengthening of *Moderasi Beragama* within pesantren, Islamic universities, and teacher-training programs through curriculum integration, seminars, digital learning modules, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). These programs aim to cultivate tolerance, critical religious literacy, and civic responsibility among students and educators⁶⁰. Such institutionalization demonstrates how moderation is being transformed from a normative discourse into an operational educational strategy aligned with SDG 4 concerning inclusive and equitable quality education⁴¹.

In addition, several pesantren in Indonesia have developed innovative educational models integrating religious learning with environmental awareness and community empowerment. The emergence of “eco-pesantren” programs illustrate how Islamic educational institutions increasingly contribute not only to moral education but also to sustainable environmental practices, waste management, and ecological consciousness^{69–71}.

3.3.2.1. Pesantren as Centres of Moderation

Pesantren affiliated with NU and Muhammadiyah serve as crucial institutions for cultivating moderation⁵⁸. These schools teach traditional Islamic sciences alongside modern subjects, nurturing students who are both religiously grounded and socially

engaged. As highlighted in Indonesian scholarship, these institutions have long acted as agents of peace, tolerance, and cultural preservation, shaping generations to embrace diversity and reject radical ideologies²³.

Their curricula often integrate lessons on pluralism, national identity, social ethics, and moral responsibility, reflecting the moderate ethos advanced by scholars such as Quraish Shihab and Azyumardi Azra. This approach aligns with the SDG mandate to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, as it fosters critical thinking, empathy, and respect for diversity—qualities necessary for peaceful and sustainable societies. As explained by Satiadharmanto and Rohmah, pesantren not only preserve Islamic tradition but also adapt to modern challenges through inclusive and community-based learning⁶⁹.

3.3.2.2. Moderation in Policy through Educational Reform

The government's *Moderasi Beragama* initiative reinforces these efforts at the policy level by embedding moderation into school curricula and teacher training. However, research shows that institutional obstacles—such as uneven coordination between MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah, and inconsistent implementation across regions—limit the initiative's effectiveness⁶. Strengthening collaboration among these institutions can enhance the educational foundations necessary for producing future citizens who uphold democratic values, peaceful coexistence, and sustainable development principles.

3.3.3. SDG 5: Gender Equality

Gender equality is another domain where Islamic moderation plays a vital role. While interpretations of gender roles vary in the Indonesian Muslim community, moderate Islamic teachings emphasize dignity, justice, and the equality of men and women before God.

3.3.3.1. Islamic Ethical Foundations for Gender Justice

Islamic moderation promotes balanced interpretations that recognise women's rights in education, leadership, and social participation. Classical Islamic ethics, such as al-Ghazali's emphasis on virtue and justice, support frameworks that value ethical behaviour and human dignity for both genders³⁹. These principles challenge patriarchal interpretations that restrict women's empowerment and contribute to inequalities.

3.3.3.2. Institutional Support through Moderation

Moderate Islamic organizations in Indonesia have also played a proactive role in promoting gender equality: (1) Muhammadiyah, through 'Aisyiyah, advances women's health, education, and community leadership⁷² and (2) NU supports women's empowerment through Muslimat NU, which provides educational resources and training for women in rural and urban areas⁷³.

By empowering women economically and socially, these organizations strengthen Indonesia's ability to meet SDG 5 targets. Their efforts stand in contrast to radical movements, which often restrict women's roles and oppose gender equality initiatives. Radicalism fosters exclusion and inequality, whereas moderation encourages equitable participation and social justice—critical for sustainable development²³.

3.3.4. SDG 13 & SDG 15: Climate Action and Life on Land

Environmental stewardship is firmly rooted in Islamic ethical teachings. The Qur'anic concept of humans as stewards (*khalīfah*) of the earth establishes a religious duty to protect the environment and ensure sustainable use of natural resources⁷⁴.

The integration of environmental ethics within Islamic moderation has also become increasingly visible in Indonesia's religious discourse^{11,12}. Moderate Islamic organizations have gradually expanded the understanding of *khalīfah* (human stewardship) beyond personal morality toward ecological responsibility and sustainable resource management. Environmental campaigns conducted by pesantren, NU-affiliated communities, Muhammadiyah institutions, and the Assembly of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) demonstrate that religious values can function as important drivers of ecological awareness and have played an active role in environmental conservation efforts⁷⁵.

One important example is the development of Green Pesantren initiatives in several regions, where Islamic boarding schools integrate environmental conservation, organic farming, waste reduction, and renewable-energy awareness into educational and community activities. Such initiatives illustrate how Islamic moderation contributes to environmental sustainability not merely symbolically but through concrete grassroots practices. These developments resonate strongly with the SDGs' emphasis on climate action, environmental justice, and sustainable community resilience⁵.

3.3.4.1. Ethical Foundations for Environmental Sustainability

Islamic moderation encourages balance not only in personal conduct but also in environmental interaction. Moderation discourages wastefulness (*isrāf*), environmental harm, and exploitation of natural resources, aligning with SDG targets on climate action and conservation. Islamic tradition emphasizes that harming the environment is an ethical violation, reflecting broader principles of justice and intergenerational responsibility.

3.3.4.2. Indonesian Faith-Based Environmental Initiatives

In Indonesia, pesantren and Islamic organizations have begun integrating environmental values into educational curricula and community activities. For instance: 1) Eco-pesantren programs promote waste management, tree planting, organic farming, and environmental awareness, and 2) Islamic NGOs run campaigns on water conservation, renewable energy, and sustainable livelihoods, often framed within Islamic ethical teachings.

The synergy between Islamic values and environmental sustainability resonates strongly with findings from international studies, such as the UNDP-supported work showing that Islamic teachings offer a comprehensive moral framework for addressing environmental and social justice issues⁵.

3.3.4.3. Moderation as a Catalyst for Collective Environmental Responsibility

By encouraging balance and responsibility, Islamic moderation can mobilise communities to take collective action on climate challenges. This is particularly important in Indonesia, where vulnerability to climate change poses significant risks to livelihoods, biodiversity, and long-term development. Moderation thus supports environmental SDGs by reinforcing ethical awareness and encouraging environmentally responsible behaviour.

3.3.5. SDG 16 & SDG 17: Peace, Justice, and Partnerships

SDG 16—promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, justice, and strong institutions—is at the very heart of the relationship between Islamic moderation and the SDGs. Peacebuilding, institutional trust, and social cohesion are essential preconditions for achieving all other development goals.

3.3.5.1. Moderation as a Foundation for Peace

Islamic moderation emphasizes tolerance, non-violence, and respect for cultural diversity—aligning directly with SDG 16 objectives. Indonesian scholarship shows that moderate interpretations counter the ideological foundations of violent extremism by promoting balanced religious understanding, acceptance of diversity, and commitment to the common good⁴⁵. A study by Zaluchu *et al.* confirms that religious moderation builds social resilience and is key to harmony in Indonesia’s diverse, multicultural society⁷⁶.

Violent extremism undermines peace and stability, disrupts community life, and diverts resources from development efforts. Studies of deradicalization highlight how extremist ideologies distort Islamic teachings and incite sectarian tension, making moderation crucial for restoring social trust and preventing conflict²³.

3.3.5.2. Institutional Support Through Moderation

Studies on SDG 16 affirm that strong institutions—rooted in transparency, accountability, and inclusivity—are essential for sustaining peace and development. Research demonstrates that peace is positively correlated with overall SDG performance, confirming the centrality of institutional integrity to national development⁷.

Moderate Islamic institutions such as NU and Muhammadiyah, through their extensive community networks, strengthen public trust, mediate conflicts, and promote social harmony. Their efforts complement state institutions, making them key partners in advancing SDG 16 and enhancing governance at both national and local levels.

3.3.5.3. Community Leadership and Local Peacebuilding

Local leadership is fundamental to the realization of SDG 16. Community leaders—religious teachers, village heads, youth activists—often serve as the first line of defence against conflict and social fragmentation. Research highlights the importance of such leaders in maintaining local peace, enabling community development initiatives, and fostering intergroup trust⁸.

Islamic moderation empowers local leaders to advocate for peaceful coexistence, resolve conflicts, and promote collective action. This grassroots engagement strengthens Indonesia’s capacity to advance SDG 16 objectives and supports partnerships (SDG 17) by facilitating collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, and religious institutions.

3.3.5.4. Institutional Synergy Between MoRA, NU, and Muhammadiyah

The partnership between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, NU, and Muhammadiyah represents one of the most significant examples of SDG 17 in action. These institutions collaborate on educational programs, community outreach, and religious guidance to promote moderation.

However, research indicates uneven coordination, divergent ideological emphases, and limitations in joint program execution, which hinder optimal synergy⁶. Strengthening

these partnerships is essential for achieving SDG 16 targets and enhancing the institutional foundations of moderation across Indonesia.

3.4. Summary: Moderation as a Multidimensional Catalyst for SDGs

This Islamic moderation contributes to Indonesia's SDG agenda through: 1) Ethical foundations for justice, compassion, balance, and social responsibility, 2) Institutional networks that promote peace, education, gender equality, and poverty reduction, 3) Community leadership that fosters grassroots participation and local resilience, 4) Environmental stewardship rooted in Islamic teachings, and 5) Peacebuilding and strong institutions that underpin sustainable development across all sectors.

By countering radicalism, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting equitable development, Islamic moderation provides a multidimensional framework that enhances Indonesia's ability to realise its SDG commitments.

3.4.1. Challenges and Limitations

Although Islamic moderation offers a promising framework for advancing Indonesia's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its implementation faces a series of conceptual, social, institutional, and political challenges. Recognizing these limitations is crucial for understanding the gaps between normative aspirations and practical outcomes. This section critically examines the major constraints that hinder the transformative potential of Islamic moderation within Indonesia's socio-religious and developmental landscape.

3.4.2. Political Polarization and Identity-Based Contestation

One of the most significant challenges for the advancement of moderation is the growing political polarization and the instrumentalization of religious identity in electoral and political arenas. Over the past decade, high-profile political events — such as the Jakarta gubernatorial election controversies (2016–2017), identity-based mobilization by competing political groups, and the proliferation of sectarian narratives online — have shown how religion can be weaponized for short-term political gains.

These dynamics erode trust, deepen societal divisions, and undermine the very principles of tolerance and pluralism that moderation seeks to reinforce. When political actors adopt exclusivist religious narratives, it places moderate Islamic institutions under pressure to defend their legitimacy, while also straining their ability to act as neutral moral authorities.

Moreover, political polarization can create suspicion within and between moderate organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, as competing interpretations of “moderation” may appear aligned with particular political affiliations. This complicates efforts to form unified, cross-institutional platforms for promoting SDG-related development and peacebuilding.

3.4.3. Rise of Online Radicalization and Digital Echo Chambers

Despite numerous deradicalization initiatives and extensive educational reforms, the rapid spread of online radicalization presents one of the most persistent challenges to religious moderation. Digital media — particularly encrypted messaging apps and social media platforms — have enabled the rapid circulation of extremist ideologies, conspiracy theories, and intolerant narratives.

As highlighted in studies of radicalization mechanisms, extremist groups often manipulate religious texts, promote binary worldviews, and exploit personal vulnerabilities to attract followers²³. The digital environment amplifies these processes by fostering closed online communities (echo chambers) where individuals are shielded from moderate voices or alternative viewpoints.

This challenge is particularly acute among youth populations, who may lack nuanced religious literacy and critical reasoning skills. While moderate institutions such as NU and Muhammadiyah have strengthened their digital presence, their efforts often lag behind the speed, emotional appeal, and viral nature of extremist messaging.

3.4.4. Institutional Fragmentation and Inconsistent Policy Implementation

A central obstacle to optimising the role of moderation in SDG implementation is the inconsistent institutional synergy among key actors: the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), NU, Muhammadiyah, and smaller Islamic organizations. Research indicates that while these institutions share broad commitments to promoting moderation, differences in their ideological emphasis, internal priorities, and operational capacities hinder effective collaboration⁶.

Several issues emerge from this fragmentation. They include: 1) Overlapping programs without integrated frameworks: Many initiatives function independently, leading to inefficiencies, duplication of effort, or inconsistent community messaging, 2) Uneven implementation at regional and local levels: Provinces and districts vary widely in their resources, institutional cultures, and political contexts, resulting in inconsistent outcomes, and 3) Limited monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: Without robust evaluation systems, it is difficult to assess whether moderation programs are effectively reducing intolerance, strengthening institutions, or supporting SDG targets.

This limits the scalability and impact of moderation initiatives, particularly in remote or underserved regions.

3.4.5. Ideological Diversity and Interpretive Tensions

Indonesia's Muslim population is not monolithic. While moderate and mainstream interpretations dominate, there remains significant diversity in theological orientation, jurisprudential views, and socio-political preferences⁷⁷. This diversity can become a challenge when groups interpret "moderation" differently. For example: 1) Some conservative groups may view moderation as a threat to religious authenticity or a dilution of Islamic principles, 2) Progressive groups may argue that current policies do not go far enough in promoting equality, human rights, or environmental protection, and 3) More literalist or scripturalist communities may be sceptical of concepts perceived as influenced by "Western ideals," even when these ideals are compatible with Islamic ethics.

Such tensions create a fragmented discursive environment in which achieving consensus on moderation as a national agenda becomes more complex.

3.4.6. Social Inequalities and Marginalization

While moderation promotes justice and community solidarity, deep structural inequalities across Indonesia — including disparities in income, education, gender, and rural-urban development — can limit the effectiveness of moderation-based initiatives.

Moderate messages often resonate strongly among communities with stable social structures and reliable access to education. However, marginalized communities — including poor urban settlements, remote rural populations, and groups facing discrimination — may be more susceptible to radical narratives driven by socio-economic frustration, perceptions of injustice, or exclusion.

This phenomenon demonstrates that moderation cannot be sustained without addressing underlying inequalities and providing equitable access to resources — a challenge that directly intersects with SDGs 1, 4, 5, 10, and 16.

3.4.7. Resource Limitations Within Religious and Community Institutions

Moderate Islamic organizations face considerable resource constraints, particularly at the grassroots level. Although NU and Muhammadiyah have national networks, many local branches and pesantren operate with limited funding, lack trained personnel, or face infrastructural challenges. These constraints affect the consistency of educational delivery, the quality of anti-radicalization and peacebuilding programs, the integration of environmental sustainability into religious curricula, and community outreach and social-service provision. Such limitations hinder moderate institutions' ability to function effectively as partners in SDG implementation, especially when competing with better-funded radical groups or populist movements.

3.4.8. External Influences and Global Ideological Currents

Indonesia is not isolated from global religious, ideological, and political movements. Transnational networks — ranging from Middle Eastern political Islam movements to global conservative campaigns — can influence religious discourse and social attitudes within Indonesia^{78,79}. These external currents may introduce more rigid interpretations of Islamic law, encourage ideological contestation within local communities, undermine indigenous forms of moderation rooted in Islam Nusantara or Muhammadiyah's rationalist tradition, and challenge national narratives promoting tolerance and pluralism. Thus, this external environment necessitates the constant renewal of Indonesia's moderation frameworks to ensure resilience against imported ideological tensions.

3.5. Summary

The challenges outlined above demonstrate that while Islamic moderation holds immense potential to support the SDGs, its implementation is neither automatic nor uniformly effective. The obstacles include political and ideological polarization, digital radicalization, institutional fragmentation, interpretive plurality and theological contestation, structural inequalities, resource constraints, and transnational ideological influences.

Recognising these limitations highlights the need for stronger cooperation between state institutions, civil society, religious organizations, and local communities. Only through integrated and sustained efforts can Islamic moderation truly fulfil its potential as a foundation for Indonesia's sustainable development agenda.

To clarify the analytical relationship between Islamic moderation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study proposes a conceptual framework that illustrates how the ethical principles of *wasatiyyah* are institutionalized within Indonesian Islamic organizations and translated into practical development strategies. The framework demonstrates the multidimensional pathways through which Islamic moderation contributes to education, social welfare, gender inclusion, environmental

stewardship, peacebuilding, and institutional resilience within the Indonesian context. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model synthesized in this study.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Islamic moderation in Indonesia operates not merely as a theological discourse but as a multidimensional socio-religious framework involving ethical principles, institutional actors, grassroots implementation, and sustainability-oriented outcomes.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study primarily reflect Indonesia's distinctive socio-religious context, where moderate Islamic organizations, pesantren traditions, and state-religious partnerships have historically shaped the development of pluralistic religious discourse. While certain insights may be relevant to other Muslim-majority societies, the Indonesian experience remains context-specific and shaped by unique historical, cultural, and institutional dynamics. Islamic moderation, rooted in the Qur'anic concept of *ummatan wasaʿatan*, provides both ethical guidance and practical mechanisms for advancing sustainable development. Through its emphasis on justice, balance, compassion, and inclusivity, Islamic moderation complements the normative aspirations of the SDGs, while also offering culturally resonant pathways for their realization in a Muslim-majority society. It contributes to the SDGs in multiple, interrelated ways and strengthens the institutional foundations necessary for sustainable development.

However, the findings also underscore the substantial challenges that complicate the transformative promise of moderation, including political polarization, digital radicalization, and identity-based contestation, which threaten to disrupt social cohesion. Institutional fragmentation, resource disparities, and structural inequalities limit the reach and effectiveness of moderation initiatives. By leveraging its rich moderate traditions and strengthening institutional capacities, Indonesia can more effectively align its religious heritage with global development priorities, contributing to a future that is peaceful, just, equitable, and sustainable. Future studies should explore the implementation of Islamic moderation in a more granular, region-specific manner to better understand variations across Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscapes; to examine how Islamic moderation interacts with sustainable development across different socio-political contexts; and to assess the long-term effectiveness of moderation-based initiatives in achieving measurable SDG outcomes.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Authors Contribution

All authors contributed substantially to the work. **I.N.** and **I.H.** conceived the research idea, designed the methodology, and conducted the data analysis and interpretation. **H.F.**, **H.N.F.**, and **M.T.U.** carried out the data collection and edited the initial article draft. **I.N.**, **I.H.**, and **H.F.** contributed to the manuscript writing and critical revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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