

# Hashtag *Moderasi Beragama*

## A Social Network Analysis

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### Abstract

This study employs social network analysis to examine the use of hashtags associated with oppositional dialectics in the discourse on religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) on Twitter/X. Resistance to and rejection of the state-sponsored moderation discourse have emerged in digital spheres, generating a meta-narrative that amplifies marginalized and dissenting voices. Existing studies on *moderasi beragama* predominantly focus on ontological frameworks, policy implementation, and high-level state narratives. However, limited attention has been given to how the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and other state institutions engage in grassroots conversations, where the discourse is actively contested. This article explores how networked citizens engage with the discourse, forming social networks that either support or critique the state's position. Data were collected and analyzed in three phases in October 2022 using the Netlytic program, focusing on five hashtag cases. The dataset comprises 8,626 uploaders and 15,656 tweets. The findings reveal that the state has largely failed to engage in virtual conversations on *moderasi beragama*. X has arguably become a digital mausoleum of intellectual discourse, yet while the state-defined concept of moderation is familiar to some, its socialization efforts on social media remain significantly weaker than its high-level consortiums and offline initiatives. The study underscores the urgent need for digitally literate ambassadors of *moderasi beragama* to counteract narratives of resentment and mitigate the proliferation of conspiratorial theories surrounding the discourse.

**Keywords:** Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), X, moderatism, Netlytics, digital ethnography, Indonesia



## Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, Muslim-majority nations were compelled to reassess their foreign policies amid growing fears of Islamist movements. The Bush administration framed the attacks as a turning point, declaring, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001; VOA, 2009). This rhetoric justified the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), legitimizing military interventions in the Middle East and North Africa while overlooking historical instances of Western violence (Butler, 2004; Griffin, 2006). The CIA warned that, without U.S. oversight, authoritarian regimes would dominate Muslim-majority states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan (Scheuer, 2004; Coalition Information Centers, 2001). Consequently, the U.S. expanded its military bases and trained security forces in Muslim nations (U.S. Department of State, 2006), reinforcing what Said termed “constitutive others” to serve American and Western geopolitical interests (Said, 1982).

Unlike other Muslim-majority countries that embed ideological tenets in their foreign policies, Indonesia has institutionalized *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation) as its official religious stance and a strategic national development program since 2014. *Moderasi beragama* has been designed as a pivotal mechanism for fostering religious development in Indonesia. In 2021, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), the Indonesian government launched the Strengthening Religious Moderation Program as part of its national development plan (Pokja Moderasi Beragama, 2021; see also RPNJM Tahun 2020-2024, 2020). MoRA has ambitiously sought to propagate *moderasi beragama* across all segments of society, allocating a substantial budget of Rp. 3.2 trillion in 2021 to initiatives encompassing Muslims and adherents of the country’s five other nationally recognized religions (SF, 2022).

The primary objectives of this ideological project are to facilitate interfaith interactions, promote mutual awareness and understanding of the distinctive characteristics of Indonesia’s six officially recognized religions, mitigate what is termed “left- and right-wing extremism,”<sup>1</sup> and prevent religiously motivated conflicts (Balitbang Kemenag RI, 2019). Consequently, in the Indonesian context, the discourse of religious moderation refers to a state-sanctioned national development initiative implemented by MoRA under the Jokowi administration. Its definition is framed as follows:

The essence of *moderasi beragama* is to find a middle ground between two extremes in religious belief. On one hand, there are religious extremists who insist on the absolute truth of a single interpretation of religious texts, dismissing other interpretations as heretical. This group is commonly referred to as ultra-conservatives. On the other hand, there are those who elevate human reasoning to the extent of disregarding the sanctity of religion or compromising religious principles for the sake of excessive tolerance toward other faiths. These individuals are often labeled

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1 The terms “extreme left” and “extreme right” are commonly used in Indonesia, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia to designate liberal humanitarianism and radical pro-violence groups. See Al-Hageel, 2002, pp. 143–204; Kamali, 2015.

as extreme liberals. Both extremes require moderation. Thus, to uphold *moderasi beragama* as a viable solution [to ultra-conservative and liberal groups], one must possess a genuine understanding of the concept (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019, pp. 7–8).

A fundamental limitation of this ideological framework is its exclusive recognition of only six religions, thereby delegitimizing religious traditions beyond these officially acknowledged categories. Resistance to and rejection of this discourse have emerged in digital spheres, generating a meta-narrative that amplifies dissenting and marginalized voices. The promotion of *moderasi beragama* by MoRA, which draws exclusively from the paradigms of the six recognized religions, has struggled to gain traction at the grassroots level through a bottom-up approach. Historical instances of violence linked to moderation-based policies—such as the vandalism of an Ahmadiyya mosque in Sintang and the deliberate arson of the Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar or Millah Abraham) center in Mempawah—highlight the marginalization and aggression faced by minority religious communities, as corroborated by interviews with regional religious administrators (Mohd. Sukarno, personal communication, November 7, 2022; Syafrudin, personal communication, November 6, 2022). Such grassroots-level violence, justified in the name of maintaining *moderasi beragama*, demonstrates the state’s inability to effectively mediate religious differences, particularly at societal and communal levels.

This study addresses this gap by employing social network analysis to examine hashtag activism and oppositional dialectics on X (formerly Twitter). Previous studies have primarily focused on state-driven narratives and MoRA’s role in institutionalizing *moderasi beragama* through policy and high-level discourse. While existing literature has linked the concept to Islamic *wasatiyya* (moderation) and Indonesia’s pluralistic religious landscape, little attention has been given to how digital platforms reshape the discourse and how citizens contest or reinterpret it. No studies thus far have examined the role of social media in fostering meta-narratives for dissenting voices and shaping public perceptions of *moderasi beragama* (Siapera et al., 2018). By analyzing tweets, this study reveals how digital influencers and fragmented online discussions challenge state narratives. Known for its capacity to amplify emotionally charged discourse, X serves as a critical space for capturing virtual contestations over *moderasi beragama*. Ultimately, this article highlights how the discourse of religious moderation is negotiated and contested beyond state control and how new forms of authority emerge within digital spheres.

## Methodology

Research datasets comprising five hashtags on X were collected between October 7 and 27, 2022. Data were extracted using Netlytic, an open-source software designed for scraping and analyzing publicly accessible content tagged with specific keywords or hashtags. The program visualizes each actor (tweet poster) as a node and all forms of social interaction (comments, retweets, and reposts) as connecting lines, thereby mapping the relation-

ships between users. This is particularly crucial for understanding digital dialectics within the virtual public sphere of social media (Gruzd & Mai, 2014a). The collected digital data consist of Indonesian-language tweets, retweets, and threads.

Due to Netlytic's limitations, which allow a maximum of 1,000 data points to be retrieved within a seven-day period, data collection was conducted in three consecutive phases: October 7–13, October 14–20, and October 21–27. The retrieved data were subsequently cross-checked with real-time manual searches on X to account for restricted and private tweets. This data collection process resulted in a dataset of 15,656 posts generated by 8,626 unique users across five hashtags: moderation (*#moderasi*), moderate (*#moderat*), liberal (*#liberal*), radicalism (*#radikalisme*), and deradicalization (*#deradikalisasi*).

The selection of the study's timeframe was based on the emergence of controversial topics related to *moderasi beragama*, such as public reactions to the appointment of Muhammad bin Salman as Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia (September 28), the leak of MoRA's official *batik moderasi beragama* dress code for state apparatuses (October 24), and the lead-up to the G20 Summit in Bali (November 15–16). This study identifies trending topics associated with *moderasi beragama* through hashtag-based data collection on X, measures word frequency, and conducts network analysis, incorporating both actor and chain network models. The actor network maps who posts content and interacts online, while the chain network illustrates response patterns, highlighting who replies to whom (Santarossa et al., 2022).

Social Network Analysis (SNA) provides valuable insights into how digital audiences engage with and contest the discourse of religious moderation on social media. It examines how Indonesian netizens express their opinions, challenge opposing views, and form connections based on shared perspectives on moderation. Moreover, it reveals how patterns of digital interaction facilitate knowledge exchange and data sharing. Understanding netizens as networked citizens, despite the apparent etymological implication, offers novel perspectives on how *moderasi beragama*—a highly contested national development project under the two-term Jokowi administration—has been received and critiqued from a bottom-up perspective by Indonesian audiences.

To enhance analytical depth, the prefigured datasets were supplemented with in-depth content observations using selective sampling methods. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the social relations embedded in online conversations on X. Additionally, centrality and modularity analyses were conducted to identify key accounts and content with high levels of engagement, such as tweets, mentions, and reposts, as well as to assess the influence of specific individuals or institutions. Within the digital media framework, each mention on social media signifies deliberate acknowledgment of the referenced content, while each retweet indicates endorsement (Arbatskaya, 2019; Santarossa et al., 2019; Veidlinger, 2022). Consequently, both actor and chain networks link Indonesian audiences to their virtual behaviors and interactions, connecting social media accounts—whether users disclose their real identities or remain anonymous.

## Moderation in Classical Islamic Sources

*Wasatīyya*, or “Islamic moderation,” broadly aligns with Qur’anic principles such as justice (*‘adl*), gentleness (*rifq*), kindness (*al-khiyār*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), and patience (*ṣabr*). Over the past two decades, scholars and advocates of *wasatīyya* have promoted this concept as beneficial to global society. Muslim scholars frequently reference Qur’anic terms such as *ummataṅ wasaṭan* or *awsaṭ* to formulate their own distinctive interpretations of “Islamic moderation” (Taufik et al., 2023). Contemporary Sunni scholars, including Yusuf al-Qaraḍawī (1999; 2001), Ramaḍan al-Būṭī (1991), Israr Ahmad Khan (2013), and Quraish Shihab (2020), have played a significant role in popularizing these discussions. Their works have subsequently been integrated into digital discourses on Islamic moderation across new media platforms.

In specific legal contexts (*furū‘iyya*), scholars have explored complementary jurisprudential frameworks such as *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* (jurisprudence for minorities), *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* (jurisprudence of priorities), *fiqh al-muwāzanāt* (jurisprudence of balance), and *al-ma‘ālāt* (jurisprudence of consequences). The ontological dimension of Islamic moderation is deeply associated with moral principles such as balance, fairness, tolerance, and justice (Duderija, 2022; Huriani et al., 2022; Shihab, 2020). However, the discourse on moderation in Islam does not always align seamlessly with the universal concept of “moderation” as it is commonly understood.

While the notion of moderation draws broadly from Qur’anic principles, certain equivalences—such as the association of *ṣabr* (patience) with *wasatīyya*—are not found in classical Islamic literature, as detailed in Kamali’s study (Kamali, 2015). In the Indonesian context, the Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Al-Qur’an revised its translation of *ummataṅ wasaṭan* in Surah al-Baqarah [2]:143. The 2002 edition rendered the phrase as ‘the middle people,’ whereas the 2019 edition refined it to “the chosen, best, fair, and balanced people, both in belief, words, attitudes, and actions.” This revision aligns with classical exegetical interpretations from *Tafsīr Muqātil bin Sulaymān* (d. 767 CE) and Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), two authoritative Sunni commentators (‘Abd-Allāh Muḥammad Syaḥātah, n.d., pp. 144–145; Ṭabarī, 2010, pp. 626–627).

Over the past two decades—particularly following the 9/11 attacks in the United States (2001) and the Bali bombings (2002)—initiatives promoting *wasatīyya* have gained traction, both within the Islamic tradition and in contemporary moral frameworks. These initiatives have been positioned as alternative narratives deemed effective for fostering harmony within Indonesia’s diverse, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multicultural society.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Ironically, Indonesian adopts the term *‘moderasi’* from the English word ‘moderation’, which can be traced back to Proto-Indo-European languages—specifically Old French *moderacion*, Latin *moerationem*, and Sanskrit *midiur*. Although Sanskrit is the foundational language for Indonesian, it was not the primary etymological source for the term *‘moderasi.’* Consequently, its literal meaning corresponds to that of the English term, signifying ‘taking the right measure’ (Harper, 2019).

For Indonesian Muslims, *wasatīyya* and religious moderation are largely derived from thematic interpretations of Qur’anic verses containing the concepts of *wasat* (moderation), *wazn* (balance), and *‘adl* (justice). The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) has played a central role in producing and institutionalizing the discourse of Islamic moderation in the early twenty-first century (Hanafi, 2016a, 2016b, pp. 2–16; Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Al-Qur’an, 2009, pp. 8–14). However, in its formulation of religious moderation as a derivative of Islamic moderation, MoRA has largely centered its discourse on a single Qur’anic verse—Al-Baqarah [2]:143. This verse is arguably considered a foundational element in constructing the concept of *moderasi beragama* within the Indonesian archipelago (Balitbang Kemenag RI, 2019, p. 27).

## **Moderation Reinvented: Becoming Moderate Muslims Post-9/11**

The 9/11 attacks marked a critical juncture in strategic studies and international politics. In the aftermath, Americans were indoctrinated with the notion that terrorists are pathological evildoers and that an immediate response—manifested in the global “war on terror”—was necessary to counteract an existential threat beyond human comprehension. For President George W. Bush and other world leaders, the attacks were framed as “the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century” and the prelude to “a very long struggle against evil,” specifically targeting armed Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and Jama’*a* Islamiyya (Stampnitzky, 2013, p. 3).

These fears were reinforced by a series of bombings and terror threats from jihadist groups that urged the Muslim *umma* to mobilize against the so-called American-Israeli alliance, which, according to them, occupied the Land of the Two Holy Places and the Route of the Apostle (Euben et al., 2021, p. 444). In this context, discussions among Muslim societies and Islamic states regarding their global engagement in the post-9/11 world were inevitably shaped by the Bush Doctrine. Under this doctrine, forming political alliances with the United States after 9/11 meant joining the war on terror, promoting democracy in Muslim-majority nations suspected of harboring terrorist ideologies, and restoring the pre-9/11 world order (Bush, 2001; Griffin, 2006, p. ii).

As part of its post-9/11 foreign policy, the United States established military bases in multiple Muslim-majority countries—including Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan—while also training security forces in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Chad, and Kuwait to monitor, counteract, and eliminate individuals identified as extremists on U.S. and international watchlists (Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 2006). Consequently, the U.S. was able to construct what Edward Said termed “constitutive others” in its foreign policy—whether framed as terrorism or authoritarianism—while simultaneously shaping Muslim-majority states into client states that served Western geopolitical interests (Said, 1982). Nevertheless, the rise of anti-American sentiment and widespread disillusionment with the Western-dominated international order prompted shifts in global religious identity and understanding among Muslim communities. This, in turn,

facilitated the development and institutionalization of a ‘moderate’ religious framework.

As U.S. military intervention became a reality, anti-American activism and demonstrations escalated in scale. In Indonesia, paramilitary groups such as Laskar Mujahidin, Laskar Jihad, and Laskar Pembela Islam spearheaded anti-American protests in the early 2000s (Hasan, 2006, 2009; Ressa, 2002). Demonstrators affiliated with these groups expressed their opposition through various means, including burning the American flag, boycotting Western products, and issuing threats against U.S. citizens and individuals perceived as Western. Some paramilitary demonstrators even hailed Osama bin Laden as a hero, praising his role in leading a holy resistance against the *tāghūt* (oppressive tyrants) threatening the Muslim *umma* (Hasan, 2006, pp. 20–21).

Compared to other Muslim-majority nations, the majority of Indonesians (70%) oppose the notion of violent jihad and suicide bombings; however, over a quarter of the population justifies such acts when framed as a defense of Islam (Pew Research Center, 2002). This statistic is alarming not only for Western nations but also for Muslim leaders in Indonesia, particularly in the wake of religiously motivated terrorist attacks such as the 2002 Bali bombings and the 2021 Makassar suicide bombing—incidents that have been linked to the influence of the CIA and ISIS, respectively (Hart, 2021; Indonesians Begin to See Conspiracy as Homegrown, 2024).

Efforts to advance counterterrorism discourse and promote religious moderation in global universities and among social commentators have intensified over the past decade. Early 21st-century studies on religious moderation often framed Semitic religious communities within a conflict-driven East-versus-West dichotomy, encompassing both anti-Americanism in Muslim-majority states and Islamophobic movements in Europe. The ideological bridge between these opposing forces has been the concept of moderatism—a position advocated by scholars such as Suliman Abdul Rahman Al Hageel (2002), the LPMQ of MoRA (2016a, 2016b; 2009), and Raja Nazrin Shah (2010). Research on religious moderation gained further prominence in the 2010s, particularly through the work of scholars such as Afsaruddin (2007, 2009), Saeed (2008, 2014), Duderija (2022), and Kodir (2019), who reframed religious moderation from a discourse of heterodoxy into a structured ideology opposing both liberalism and conservatism.

Academic perspectives on religious moderation remain diverse. Ikhwan’s (2015) dissertation presents the argument that moderate Islamic ideas spread effectively in Indonesia due to the role of *ustādh*-led televised religious lectures. According to Ikhwan, these programs helped establish *moderasi beragama* as a shared platform and religious umbrella uniting various religious and cultural communities. The influence of digital media in disseminating moderation ideology is also evident in the works of Kamali (2015), Jubba et al. (2022), and Rene Latifa et al. (2022). However, academic studies on religious moderation have struggled to address the complexities of multiethnic realities, ethnicization processes, and power relations.

For the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), the use of Surah al-Baqarah [2]:143 as the primary justification for promoting Qur’anic-based religious moderation

reflects an effort to enrich *moderasi beragama* as a set of ideas, movements, and actions. According to Muqātil bin Sulaymān, this verse was revealed a few months after the Prophet Muhammad's migration to Yathrib, during a period when he faced ridicule for shifting the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to Mecca. This event was marked by the revelation of *fa-walli wa-jhaka shaṭr al-masjid al-ḥarām*. Muqātil noted that al-Baqarah [2]:143 was revealed shortly after the final verses of *Surah* al-Qalam [68], which 'Abid Al-Jābirī classified as part of the *Madaniyyah* corpus ('Abd-Allāh Muḥammad Syaḥātah, n.d., p. 145; Al-Jābirī, 2009, p. 415). While *Surah* al-Qalam [68] is traditionally classified as *Makkiyyah* in most Islamic scholarship, Al-Jābirī's analysis highlights the intricate contextual interplay between these verses. Consequently, the discourse on moderation is not exclusive to Islam but is also present in other religious traditions (Taufik, 2021).

Since the National Seminar on Understanding Wasatiyyah and Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur (2012), research on religious moderation has increasingly sought to trace and contextualize moderation values within the history of Muslim civilization—a field now recognized as the historiography of Islamic moderation. The institutionalization of moderatism in Indonesia can be observed as early as 2006, when MoRA established the *Forum* for Religious Harmony (FKUB). This initiative was followed by the mainstreaming of *moderasi beragama* as state policy during the 2014–2019 period, culminating in the Strengthening Religious Moderation program (2020–2024), which enshrined moderate ideology within Indonesia's national legislative agenda (Pokja Moderasi Beragama, 2021; RPNJM Tahun 2020-2024, 2020). Over time, the moderate paradigm in Indonesia has evolved into a framework of social ethics and moral governance, which can be characterized as moderatism.

In this context, the writing team examines the foundations of religious moderation, drawing on various religious and philosophical traditions, including the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* decree, *Puja Tri Sandhya*, *Panca Sembah*, the Six Dharmas, the Four Yugas in Hinduism, *Tridharma*, Buddhist *Dukkha* theology, as well as the concepts of Yin-Yang and *Zhong* in Confucianism. From the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) statement, three key points can be inferred: first, the dialectics of religious moderation are not identical to Qur'anic propositions; second, moderation should be understood as an ongoing and contextual process of meaning-making and negotiation; third, every religious tradition possesses fundamental values that must be studied, internalized, and disseminated across society.

In short, the *moderasi beragama* narrative is not merely a slogan but an ideological policy developed in response to international challenges following the 9/11 attacks. However, its initial character is that of a 'top-down discourse', as the Indonesian state—primarily through MoRA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—has acted as the primary architect and propagator of this narrative, disseminating it both in society and grassroots communities through social and virtual platforms.

Despite these efforts, *moderasi beragama* remains largely inaccessible and incomprehensible from a bottom-up perspective. This is partly due to the discourse being promoted

and disseminated within high-budget, closed forums rather than open-access public and virtual spaces. Consequently, conducting netnographic research on X (formerly Twitter) is essential to understanding the trajectory of public discourse surrounding *moderasi beragama* from a bottom-up approach. This research model has been explored in the works of Prasojo (2017), Ibrahim (2018), Ibrahim and Yusriadi (2020), Helmy et al. (2021), and Yuswanto (2022). However, such studies primarily emerge from conventional ethnographic research methodologies that rely heavily on literature reviews and fieldwork.

Nonetheless, existing studies and ethnographic research on religious moderation remain insufficient in capturing how moderatism is disseminated among unheard and dissenting voices—particularly those that concurrently integrate elements of ethnography, new media, and power relations. Addressing this gap requires a methodological shift that engages with digital spaces as sites of contestation and negotiation over religious moderation discourse.

## Hashtag Moderatism on Twitter: Agent and Chain Networks

This section examines digital activism on Twitter (now X) using the Netlytic data processing engine to map the structural dynamics of conversation networks surrounding *moderasi beragama*. The analysis aims to understand how religious moderation is discussed on the platform through the hashtags *#moderat* and *#moderasi*, alongside their related discourse counterparts, including *#radikalisme*, *#liberal*, and *#deradikalisasi*. The use of Social Network Analysis (SNA) is particularly relevant in the context of Twitter, which was rebranded as ‘X’ in 2023 following its acquisition by Elon Musk. Media analysts and social scientists focus on X due to its extensive reach, as it allows posts to be viewed beyond specific follower groups and remain publicly accessible through external search engines. Twitter content often reflects grassroots opinions, providing a platform for marginalized voices and fostering a sense of connection among users. Its structural mechanisms enable broader dissemination of discourse, making it an ideal medium for studying online narratives on religious moderation.

DATA	Religious Moderation Content Producer				
	#moderasi	#moderat	#radikalisme	#liberal	#deradikalisasi
Amount of Content	1810	2826	7859	2714	447
Number of Uploaders	837	1964	3827	1757	241
Networking (including self-loops)	1033	2331	6027	2211	270
Diameter	9	7	8	7	7
Thickness	0.001076	0.000449	0.000301	0.000293	0.003937
Reciprocity	0.004711	0.015060	0.026110	0.029150	0.016810

Centralization	0.286100	0.131800	0.066030	0.030290	0.168900
Modularity	0.695500	0.869000	0.771000	0.976400	0.816200

**Table 1: Network Components of Moderasi Content Producers on Twitter**

*Source: Researcher’s Personal Data, 2022*

Table 1 indicates that discussions on religious moderation are closely associated with the issue of radicalism, as religious radicalism is often framed as the antithesis of moderate beliefs. Among the five hashtags analyzed, *#moderasi* exhibits the densest network of actors due to the specificity and widespread recognition of the issue. Interestingly, the hashtag *#liberal* shows the highest levels of receptivity and modularity, suggesting that discussions on liberalism extend beyond religious moderation and intersect with broader themes of identity politics and religious polarization.

Table 1 includes several key variables: the number of content posts ( $N$ ), the number of unique uploaders, network diameter, density, reciprocity, centralization, and modularity (Gruzd & Mai, 2014b). While  $N$  represents the total number of tweets within the dataset, the network diameter measures the longest distance between two participants in the conversation network. Density reflects the closeness of interactions, where a value closer to 1 indicates a highly interconnected network. Reciprocity refers to the proportion of mutual interactions within the total number of connections. Centralization quantifies the extent to which key participants dominate the discourse, while modularity assesses whether clusters represent distinct discourse groups—values greater than 0.5 indicate clear divisions, whereas lower values ( $<0.5$ ) suggest overlapping clusters with a core group of dominant nodes (Gruzd & Mai, 2014b; Newman, 2006).

The social network characteristics of these hashtags reveal distinct patterns in discourse dynamics. The hashtag *#moderasi* features  $N = 1,810$  posts and 837 unique uploaders, with a network diameter of 9 and a moderate centralization index (0.2861). This suggests that discussions under *#moderasi* exhibit relatively expansive, decentralized conversations spanning multiple clusters rather than being dominated by a few central actors. The centralization index of 0.2861 indicates a more egalitarian structure, where no single influencer or account exerts disproportionate influence over the discourse. These findings highlight how diverse actors contribute to shaping public perceptions of religious moderation in the digital sphere. The visualization of the social networks within the *#moderasi* hashtag can be seen in the following visualization:



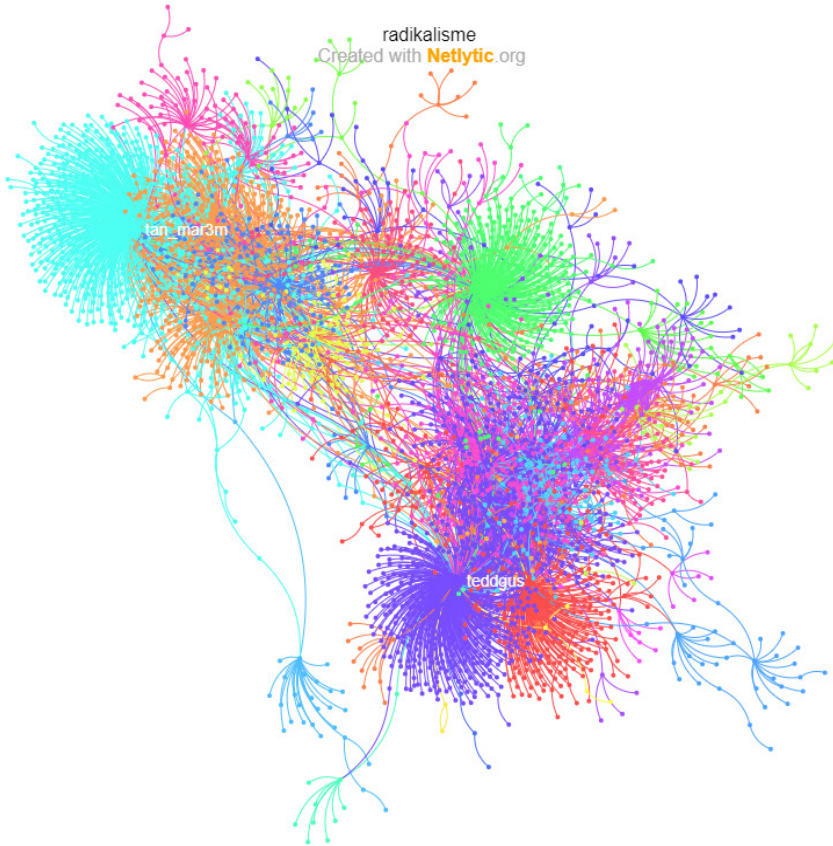
**Figure 1: Visualization of Social Networks in the Hashtag *Moderasi***

*Source: Data Network Analysis “Netlytics”, 2022*

The hashtag *#moderat* exhibits a higher level of engagement than *#moderasi*, with  $N = 2,826$  posts generated by 1,964 unique users. This data indicates a broader and more intense participation in online debates surrounding *moderasi beragama*. Compared to the first hashtag, *#moderat* demonstrates a higher modularity score (0.8690), suggesting that discussions were fragmented into distinct clusters or communities, where virtual user groups engaged in separate yet interconnected conversations rather than a singular, cohesive discourse. In other words, *#moderat* does not serve as a focal point for a unified debate on *moderasi beragama* but rather reflects a more dispersed and less consistent engagement compared to *#moderasi*. Despite this fragmentation, it maintains a moderate network density (0.000449), positioning it between the other hashtags in terms of connectivity and engagement.

The hashtag *#radikalisme* leads all statistical measures, with  $N = 7,859$  posts contributed by 3,827 unique accounts. This finding underscores the prominence of online discussions on X regarding radicalism and religious moderation among Indonesian users. Compared to the first two hashtags, *#radikalisme* displays a low density score (0.000301) but a moderate reciprocity score (0.0261), indicating loosely connected social interactions despite the high volume of discourse. The data suggests that tweets concerning radicalism attract a diverse audience with varying perspectives, resulting in an extensive yet fragmented conversation. In short, while MoRA has positioned *moderasi beragama* as a countermeasure

against radicalism, the discourse on radicalism in the digital sphere does not converge into a unified consensus on religious moderation or deradicalization. As illustrated in Figure 2, this decentralized and polarized structure highlights the ideological diversity and contested nature of debates on radicalism, where multiple individuals and groups contribute to broader, often conflicting narratives.



**Figure 2: Visualization of Social Networks in the Hashtag #radikalisme**

*Source: Data Network Analysis, Netlytics, 2022*

The hashtag #liberal generated  $N = 2,714$  posts from 1,757 unique accounts, attracting fewer discussions compared to #moderat and #radikalisme. Network analysis reveals a medium graph diameter of 7, alongside the highest reciprocity score (0.029150) among all hashtags. This suggests frequent mutual engagement, primarily occurring within homogenous user clusters. However, #liberal records the lowest density score (0.000293), indicating a sparse social network where interactions occur but with relatively weak connections among participants. The most distinctive feature of #liberal is its exceptionally high modularity score (0.976400)—the highest among all analyzed hashtags—signifying extreme discourse fragmentation across multiple ideological subgroups. This combination

of high engagement, low density, decentralized control, and ideological division characterizes *#liberal* as a contested space where different factions engage in debates, reinforcing their respective viewpoints without forming a unified discourse. As a result, the discussions under *#liberal* remain largely disconnected from the expected presence of *moderasi beragama* in the broader field of religious moderation discourse.

Conversely, the hashtag *#deradikalisasi* generated the lowest number of posts ( $N = 447$ ) from 241 unique users, reflecting a stark contrast to the scale of discussions on radicalism. However, despite its relatively low engagement, the conversation on deradicalization exhibits the highest density score (0.003937), indicating a tightly-knit social network compared to the other four hashtags. This communication pattern aligns with the nature of the discourse, as the concepts of “deradicalization” and counter-radicalism remain largely confined to academic and policy-driven discussions rather than gaining widespread traction in public domains.

Further analysis of the dataset suggests that the dominance of *moderasi beragama* discourse is not primarily led by religious education figures from MoRA or state-affiliated content creators. Instead, it is shaped by networked Indonesian audiences, who engage with the topic through distinct clusters, affiliations, and authorities. This distribution of influence is illustrated in Table 2, as follows:

No	User_id	Cluster	Location	Affiliation	User Category	Total Degrees	In-degree	Out-degrees
1	@GunRomli	1	Jakarta	JIL; PSI	personal	584	584	0
2	@AfiffuadS	2	Situbondo	GP Ansor NU	personal	281	280	1
3	@HaedarNs	3	Yogyakarta	Muhammadiyah	personal	133	133	0
4	@moderat_malut	4	Maluku	Muhammadiyah	sympathiser	8	4	4
5	@studentswaganz	4	-	-	sympathiser	106	106	0
6	@tirta_cipeng	5	Jakarta	IDI	personal	108	107	1
7	@dawuhguru	5	Lamongan	Dawuh Teacher	new media	6	6	0
8	@muslimah-newscom	6	-	Muslimah News	new media	56	55	1

**Table 2: Advocation of *#moderasi* on Twitter between 7-27 October 2022**

*Source: Researcher’s Personal Data, 2022*

Table 2 analyses the primary actors advocating for *moderasi beragama* on Twitter (now X) through the use of the *#moderasi* hashtag. It highlights key content creators, their affiliations, and their roles within the network, measured by total degree, in-degree, and out-degree: Total degree represents a node’s overall number of connections, combining both in-degree and out-degree counts. This metric reflects the level of engagement and prominence of each content creator within the discourse. In-degree measures the number of incoming connections to a node (key content creator), indicating their influence by as-

sessing how frequently they are mentioned or tagged in conversations. Out-degree quantifies the number of connections a node initiates, reflecting a user's activity level in engaging with other social accounts.

The table illustrates that the primary actors shaping the *moderasi beragama* discourse are digitally literate intellectuals, charismatic religious figures, and new media platforms. Among them, Guntur Romli (@GunRomli), a politician from the populist-nationalist party Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI) and an affiliate of Jaringan Islam Liberal (JIL), emerges as the most influential figure, garnering the highest national attention.

Following him are representatives from Indonesia's two largest Islamic organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, namely Afif Fuad Saidi (@AfifFuadS) and Haedar Nashir (@HaedarNs) (Nashir, 2024; Saidi, 2018). However, their roles and influence within the discourse differ significantly. Afif Fuad Saidi, a young cadre of NU's youth movement Gerakan Pemuda (GP) Ansor, is highly influential on Twitter but lacks structural authority within NU itself. Haedar Nashir, on the other hand, has served two consecutive terms as Muhammadiyah's leader (2015–2027), making him one of the most authoritative and influential religious figures both institutionally and within virtual networks.

A particularly intriguing finding from the data is the absence of Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) extension staff and state officials in the digital discourse on *moderasi beragama*. Despite being the official proponent of religious moderation policies, MoRA does not actively engage in dialectical discussions on Twitter/X. This absence suggests the state's inability to assert ideological dominance over the *moderasi beragama* narrative in digital spaces. One possible explanation for this shortcoming is the lack of digitally adept personnel within MoRA who can effectively disseminate the government's version of religious moderation in a way that resonates with younger, millennial audiences on social media.

This gap raises concerns about the effectiveness of MoRA's digital communication strategy, particularly in contrast to the active engagement of independent intellectuals, religious figures, and media platforms that are shaping the discourse from the ground up. Without a more robust digital presence, the state's ability to influence public perceptions of religious moderation remains limited, leaving room for alternative interpretations and contestations of *moderasi beragama* in the online sphere.

## **Moderate Muslim as Un-Islamic? Contesting #*moderasi* Online**

This section argues that the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) has been largely unsuccessful in engaging with and participating in broader discussions on *moderasi beragama* on social media. The intense online dialectics surrounding *moderasi beragama* and its various contestations have not supported the state's top-down approach in disseminating and reinforcing religious moderation at the grassroots level. This study examines the wider discourse on religious moderation on Twitter/X while analysing the social networks and contested narratives among Indonesian netizens.

This finding is both concerning and ironic, given that, among all social media platforms, Twitter/X is widely regarded as a virtual mausoleum of intellectuals—a platform where political and intellectual discussions flourish more prominently than on more segmented and obscure digital platforms (Felt, 2016). While the state-defined *moderasi beragama* is familiar to some, the government’s efforts to socialise and promote the moderate narrative on social media appear weak in comparison to its high-level consortiums, offline conferences, and state-led public events.

Data shows that two new media platforms, Dawuh Guru (@DawuhGuru) and Muslimah News Com (@MuslimahNews), are particularly active in using *moderasi beragama*-related hashtags and exhibit the highest levels of interaction online. The former has a lower in-degree rate (6) compared to the latter (55), signifying that Muslimah News Com has the highest number of connections and audience engagement when discussing religious moderation in digital spaces. Its influence surpasses not only other independent media accounts but also official state-affiliated accounts such as @Kemenag\_RI (MoRA’s official Twitter account). An intriguing aspect of @MuslimahNews is the nature of the narratives it promotes on digital platforms and social networks.

@MuslimahNews frequently publishes threads opposing the state’s *moderasi beragama* programme, portraying it as ideological propaganda. For instance, on 29 September 2022, a tweet claimed: “If examined further, the repeated cases of insulting Islam and ending in apologies align with the West’s moderation programme” (Admin Nasional, 2022; Asril, 2021). This tweet was reposted 25 times within three weeks before being removed from X in July 2024. Similarly, on 22 October 2022, content referred to the *generasi moderat* (moderate generation) as: “A generation that does not understand Islam” (Muslimah News Com, 2021). This content is no longer accessible as of 2024. The prominence of a *muslimah*-centric social media platform contesting *moderasi beragama* suggests a gendered resistance and an alternative discourse often overlooked in ontological and state-driven narratives.

Furthermore, @MuslimahNews argues that *moderasi beragama*, as promoted by MoRA, is un-Islamic and deviates from the ‘true’ teachings of Islam. The platform strategically uses keywords that resonate with conservative Muslim audiences, including *pemuda* (youth), *#kapitalisasipemuda* (capitalisation of youth), *#IslamSelamatkanGenerasi* (Islam saves the generation), *pemberdayaan* (empowerment), *kaffah* (wholeness/true Islam), *pendidikan* (education), *bicara* (speak), and *serangan* (assault). It also frequently tags or references prominent Islamic figures, including the Indonesian scholar and politician Mohammad Natsir, the Egyptian cleric Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, and influential Indonesian intellectuals such as Hamka and Quraish Shihab.

This finding aligns with Anoraga and Sakai (2023), who argue that millennial civic nationalism narratives on social media reflect a growing resistance to state-imposed ideological frameworks (Anoraga & Sakai, 2023). @MuslimahNews challenges the state’s version of *moderatism*, depicting it as a Westernised or secularised ideology that threatens traditional Islamic values. These *muslimah*-centric tweets are direct and confrontational,

appropriating the most frequently used keywords in discussions on religious moderation on X, as outlined below:



**Figure 3: Top 100 Ranking Tweet Keywords of #moderati (left) and #moderat (right) on “Twitter”**

Source: Text Analysis “Netlytics”, 2022

The dominant narrative promoted by influential accounts such as Muslimah News Com portrays religious moderation in a negative light, associating it with Western influence and a deviation from authentic Islamic values. This form of media framing has the potential to shape public opinion, particularly among followers who may have limited exposure to alternative perspectives. The high interaction rates and retweeting patterns indicate a tightly connected network of users who amplify and reinforce each other’s messages, contributing to an echo chamber effect (Campbell, 2010).

Understanding these network dynamics is crucial for policymakers and media analysts at the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) who seek to promote a more balanced discourse and counteract radical narratives within Indonesia’s pluralistic society. The constructed identity of *moderat* individuals and *moderati beragama* as inauthentic and deviant interpretations of Islamic teachings exemplifies how “mobile, digital choices and experiences can shape how people feel about the authenticity of their religious identities and practices” (Campbell, 2012; Campbell & Bellar, 2023, pp. 106–108).

Hashtags	Total Degrees	In-degree	Out-degrees
#moderat	56	55	1
#radikalisme	48	47	1
#moderati	34	33	1
#deradikalisasi	31	30	1
#liberal	13	12	1

**Table 3: Hashtags as a Medium for Mainstreaming Alternative Discourse**

Source: Researcher’s Personal Data, 2022

Data also indicates that the state's official accounts, such as @Kemenag\_RI, play a relatively minor role in disseminating content related to religious moderation on Twitter. Despite having a substantial number of followers and high interaction rates, these accounts primarily promote the government's stance on religion-based moderatism without extending their influence to broader audiences or engaging in grassroots conversations.

The necessity of state-funded media influencers—whether organic or artificial—is crucial in countering the rise of resentment narratives against *moderasi beragama* and dispelling conspiratorial theories regarding the state's diplomatic and foreign policy ties with countries such as the United States and China. Some accounts, including @RadioElshinta and @Efendi\_Arief, have been observed retweeting @Kemenag\_RI's posts, thereby reinforcing the messages conveyed by state institutions (Kementerian Agama RI, 2022a, 2022b). The content disseminated by these accounts frequently aligns with government policies on religious moderation, emphasising efforts to counteract radicalism and promote a more moderate understanding of Islam.

The presence of digitally literate media influencers who actively support the government's ideological stance and development initiatives offers a promising outlook for the future of the *moderasi beragama* discourse. More broadly, this engagement reinforces the authority of the state, particularly MoRA, as the primary overseer of Indonesia's religious landscape and the regulator of religious dynamics in society.

## Conclusion

Recent discussions on *moderasi beragama*, as examined through digital platforms, reveal a complex and evolving landscape. The analysis demonstrates that digital media plays a crucial role in shaping and constructing specific identities associated with religious moderatism. While moderation-related hashtags have become a battleground for competing perspectives, the findings indicate that state-sponsored accounts frequently fail to engage meaningfully in grassroots conversations. Instead, tightly-knit user networks create echo chambers that reinforce resentment narratives and actively resist *moderasi beragama*, as exemplified by the cases of Guntur Romli and Muslimah News Com.

The netnographic analysis of X data further reveals that high interaction rates and retweeting patterns contribute to the amplification of certain narratives, enabling them to gain traction and influence public opinion more effectively than others. This also highlights the challenges faced by MoRA in disseminating its message to a broader audience. On the one hand, the findings suggest a growing fatigue in the public domain regarding state-led narratives on *moderasi beragama*. On the other hand, the presence of visible virtual resistance and persistent ideological disputes underscores the urgent need for digitally literate ambassadors to advocate for the official ideology—or, in more radical terms, the necessity of media buzzers—as well as the development of more nuanced and inclusive engagement strategies.

This ethnographic research on the networked society emphasises the need for a deeper

understanding of socio-political dynamics and the development of more effective strategies to shape public perceptions of *moderasi beragama*. Future research could explore the intricate roles of digital influencers and media buzzers in constructing religion-based algorithmic narratives and shaping discourse under the growing pressures of international socio-political and religious disputes.

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## Author Contributions Statement

ETT is the sole author of this article. He independently conducted the social network analysis using the Netlytics analytical tool, carried out the interviews, drafted the manuscript, created key highlights and tables, and managed the article submission process. All datasets and research findings presented in this article are solely attributed to ETT and do not reflect the views or positions of the journal.

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