

The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Developing Islam Nusantara: Strengthening Local Wisdom and Global Engagement

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Abstract:

This Article examines the pivotal role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as the architect of Islam Nusantara, a contextual interpretation of Islam that honors archipelagic wisdom while engaging global audiences. Employing a qualitative document analysis of NU communiqués, scholarly works, and pesantren curricula, the study traces how Islam Nusantara was formally articulated in 2015 and institutionalized through national congress resolutions and educational reforms. Findings indicate that NU's pesantren network operationalizes contextual fiqh by integrating local customs deemed noncontradictory to shari'a, thereby preserving community-born knowledge systems. The conceptual triad of tawassuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), and rahmah (compassion) underpins Islam Nusantara's theological framework, reflecting Ahlus Sunnah wa-Jamaah values. Local case studies such as the Minangkabau adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah demonstrate the pragmatic blend of customary law and Islamic ethics in practice. On the international stage, NU has leveraged interfaith forums and digital platforms to project a humanitarian Islam narrative that counters puritanical and extremist ideologies. These dual strategies reinforce Indonesia's cultural diversity, provide a blueprint for contextual Islam in plural societies, and offer resilient models for moderating global religious discourse.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama; Islam Nusantara; Local Wisdom; Global Engagement; Humanitarian Islam.

Abstrak:

Artikel ini mengkaji peran penting Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) sebagai arsitek Islam Nusantara, interpretasi kontekstual Islam yang menghormati kearifan kepulauan sekaligus melibatkan khalayak global. Menggunakan analisis dokumen kualitatif komunike NU, karya ilmiah, dan kurikulum pesantren, penelitian ini menelusuri bagaimana Islam Nusantara secara resmi diartikulasikan pada tahun 2015 dan dilembagakan melalui resolusi kongres nasional dan reformasi pendidikan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa jaringan pesantren NU mengoperasionalkan fiqh kontekstual dengan mengintegrasikan adat istiadat lokal yang dianggap tidak bertentangan dengan syari'a, sehingga melestarikan sistem pengetahuan yang lahir di masyarakat. Triad konseptual tawassuth (moderasi), tasamuh (toleransi), dan rahmah (welas asih) mendasari kerangka teologis Islam Nusantara, yang mencerminkan nilai-nilai Ahlus Sunnah wa-Jamaah. Studi kasus lokal seperti Minangkabau adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah menunjukkan perpaduan pragmatis antara hukum adat dan etika Islam dalam praktiknya. Di panggung internasional, NU telah memanfaatkan forum lintas agama dan platform digital untuk memproyeksikan narasi Islam kemanusiaan yang melawan ideologi puritan dan ekstremis. Strategi ganda ini memperkuat keragaman budaya Indonesia, memberikan cetak biru untuk Islam kontekstual dalam masyarakat plural, dan menawarkan

model yang tangguh untuk memoderasi wacana agama global.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama; Islam Nusantara; Local Wisdom; Global Engagement; Humanitarian Islam.

ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه المقالة الدور المحوري لهضة العلماء بصفتها مؤسسة الإسلام الإسكندنافية، وهو تفسيرٌ سياقي للإسلام يحترم الحكمة المحلية ويخاطب جمهورًا عالميًا. وباستخدام تحليل نوعي لوفائق نهضة العلماء، والمؤلفات العلمية، ومناهج المدارس الإسلامية الداخلية، تتبّع هذه الدراسة كيفية صياغة الإسلام الإسكندنافية رسميًا عام ٢٠١٥ وترسيخه مؤسسيًا من خلال قرارات المؤتمر الوطني والإصلاحات التعليمية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن شبكة مدارس نهضة العلماء تُفعل الفقه السياقي من خلال دمج العادات المحلية التي لا تتعارض مع الشريعة، وبالتالي الحفاظ على منظومة المعرفة المتأصلة في المجتمع. ويُشكّل الثالوث المفاهيمي للوساطة والتسامح والرحمة أساس الإطار اللاهوتي للإسلام الإسكندنافية، مُجسّدًا قيم أهل السنة والجماعة. تُبرز دراسات الحالة المحلية، مثل عادة مينانغكابو "باساندي سيراك، سيراك باساندي كتاب الله"، المزج العملي بين القانون العرفي والأخلاق الإسلامية في الممارسة. وعلى الصعيد الدولي، استثمرت نهضة العلماء المنتديات الحوارية بين الأديان والمنصات الرقمية لعرض خطاب إسلامي إنساني يُناهض الأيديولوجيات المتشددة والمتطرفة. تُعزز هذه الاستراتيجية المزدوجة التنوع الثقافي في إندونيسيا، وتُقدم نموذجًا للإسلام السياقي في مجتمع تعددي، وتُوفّر نموذجًا قويًا لضبط الخطاب الديني العالمي.

الكلمات الأساسية: نهضة العلماء؛ إسلام نسانتارا؛ الحكمة المحلية؛ المشاركة العالمية؛ الإسلام الإنساني

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INTRODUCTION

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), founded in 1926, is the world's largest socio-religious Islamic organization, with over 40 million members committed to a traditionalist Sunni (Shafi'i) orientation that upholds local cultural practices alongside Qur'ānic and Prophetic teachings.(Ali Mursyid Azisi & Agoes Moh. Moefad, 2022). In June 2015, NU formally introduced the concept of Islam Nusantara during its 33rd National Congress, defining it as an archipelagic interpretation of Islam rooted in Indonesia's socio-cultural realities and intended as a counter-narrative to puritanical trends.(K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid, 1999)(Mubarak & Rustam, 2019)(Muhammad & Duderija, 2022).

Islam Nusantara emerges from processes of interaction, contextualization, indigenization, interpretation, and vernacularization of universal Islamic values in the Nusantara region, reflecting centuries of localized Islamic expression(Majidun, 2015). The doctrinal core of Islam Nusantara is encapsulated in five interrelated principles tawassuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), i'tidal (uprightness), and rahmah (compassion) which collectively promote pluralism and anti-radicalism(Afifi, 2022). Central to NU's framework is the integration of kearifan

lokal (local wisdom) into fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), whereby customary laws and communal traditions are affirmed so long as they do not contradict Shari'ah(Thohir, 2022).

NU's extensive pesantren (Islamic boarding school) network functions as the primary incubator for Islam Nusantara, teaching a contextual fiqh that preserves community-born knowledge systems and ensures the transmission of local heritage(Thohir, 2022)(Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). Case studies such as the Minangkabau principle "Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah" (custom based on Islamic law, Islamic law based on the Qur'an) illustrate how adat (custom) and Islamic ethics coexist pragmatically in everyday religious life.(Aldi & Kawakib, 2025). Despite broad organizational support, Islam Nusantara has faced internal critique from conservative NU elders who view contextualization with suspicion, sparking debates over the boundaries of innovation (bid'ah)(Hasyim, 2018).

Key figures such as Chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf and Head of the Supreme Council Miftachul Achyar have been instrumental in articulating and defending Islam Nusantara at national and international forums(Vinet & Zhedanov, 2010)(Benthall, 2023). Institutionalization efforts include incorporating Islam Nusantara into pesantren curricula and leveraging the 2019 Pesantren Law to recognize and regulate pesantren as formal educational entities(Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022).

NU's national outreach extends beyond schools to encompass workshops, seminars, and certification programs that train kyais and teachers in Islam Nusantara methodologies.¹ As soft power diplomacy, Islam Nusantara has been showcased in opinion pieces and cultural exchanges, most notably in The Jakarta Post, as a model for peaceful coexistence in heterogeneous societies.²

The documentary "Rahmat Islam Nusantara" (2015) serves as a visual advocacy tool, highlighting NU's Sufi-inspired compassion and challenging extremist interpretations of the Qur'an.(Schmidt, 2021). On the global stage, NU participates in interfaith dialogues and resolutions at Centrist Democrat International, positioning Humanitarian Islam alongside Western humanist traditions.(Tania et al., 2024) .

NU-Cyber initiatives and social media campaigns constitute a form of digital diplomacy,

¹ https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/indonesia-s-islamic-peace-diplomacy-crafting-role-model-for-moderate-islam?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

² <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2019/02/18/islam-nusantara-a-soft-power-diplomacy.html>

disseminating culturally resonant, moderate Islamic narratives to counter extremist propaganda online.(Basid et al., 2024). In Afghanistan, NU applied its Islam Nusantara principles through religious peacemaking efforts employing peace hermeneutics and empathetic detachment to reconcile factions, including the Taliban.(Mu'min et al., 2021). Beyond dialogue, NU facilitated capacity building and institutional structuring among Afghan actors, exemplifying its commitment to long-term peacebuilding grounded in local norms.(Mu'min et al., 2021).

NU has also acted as a mediator in the Israel–Palestine context, leveraging its moderate traditions and interfaith experience to propose inclusive solutions to protracted conflict(Ervi et al., 2024). Through partnerships with governmental and non-governmental bodies, NU forges humanitarian social partnerships across Asia and Africa, operationalizing its concept of “blessings for all creation” (rahmatan lil-lil'ālamīn)(Shah & Dinham, Thomas, n.d.)(Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024). Together, these domestic and international strategies underscore NU's dual approach rooted in local wisdom and expansive in global engagement offering a replicable blueprint for moderating Islam in plural societies.

Gender inclusion has emerged as a strategic pillar within NU's Islam Nusantara framework, exemplified by the institutionalization of gender equality initiatives. Since its inception in 1938, NU-affiliated women's organizations like Muslimat and Fatayat have advanced women's rights through education and leadership programs, strengthening female representation in both religious and civic spheres.(Irhamisyah & Anshor, 2023). The 2022 Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) marked a historic milestone by convening female scholars to issue fatwas on social justice, environmental sustainability, and gender-based violence, underscoring NU's commitment to inclusive religious authority.(Junaidi, 2023). By elevating women ulama into top decision-making roles, NU demonstrates how Islam Nusantara can foster equitable gender dynamics without departing from traditional jurisprudence.

Environmental stewardship has been integrated into Islam Nusantara through NU's engagement with ecological issues and sustainable development. Critiques of NU's investment in mining highlight tensions between economic interests and green Islamic values, prompting internal dialogues on aligning business practices with environmental ethics³. NU's issuance of fatwas condemning harmful environmental practices, including deforestation and pollution, reflects a

³ <https://fulcrum.sg/nahdlatul-ulama-ventures-into-mining-threat-to-the-green-islam-in-indonesia/>

proactive theological engagement with climate change and global warming (Sobirin & Khasanah, 2023). Furthermore, NU's collaboration with environmentalists has enabled the framing of ecological preservation as an expression of rahmah, situating environmental care within the broader Islamic mandate of stewardship (khalifah)⁴.

The digital transformation of NU's da'wah and educational outreach has accelerated the dissemination of Islam Nusantara principles. Strengthening its moderate Islamic message, NU adopts inclusive digital strategies leveraging social media platforms, digital literacy programs, and online interfaith dialogues to counter misinformation and extremist narratives. (Rosidah & Faizah, 2024). Analysis of NU Online's propagation of Islam Nusantara shows how multimedia content, including infographics and short videos, is tailored to resonate with younger, tech-savvy audiences while preserving theological rigor (Ghofur, 2024).

Engaging youth through modernized pesantren models is critical to sustaining Islam Nusantara's normative framework in the 21st century. Research on the transformation of traditional values within pesantren demonstrates how Islamic boarding schools adapt to social changes, such as shifts in adolescent behavior and digital communications, by integrating psychosocial support and ethical guidance into their curricula (Zaini & Hamidah, 2023). NU's programs that combine technology education with religious studies empower santri to navigate contemporary challenges, ensuring that local wisdom remains relevant amid globalization and cultural change.

Future challenges for Islam Nusantara include navigating geopolitical tensions, climate change denial, and ideological polarization. NU's responses to the normalization of climate skepticism highlighted by controversies over coal investments demonstrate the complexities of aligning organizational strategy with environmental theology in Indonesia's resource-dependent context. Moreover, scholarship on the principles and challenges of Islam Nusantara identifies the need for continuous doctrinal articulation and inclusive policymaking to retain credibility against global extremisms and internal critiques (Murat Kaçer, 2025a). As NU charts its path forward, its ability to balance economic development, theological consistency, and cultural diversity will determine the resilience and replicability of its Islam Nusantara model.

⁴ <https://platform.ilke.org.tr/analyze/exploring-islamic-environmentalism-and-its-impact-in-indonesia?>

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

The development of Islam Nusantara by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) combines various theoretical ideas from Islamic law, cultural studies, and global matters. This approach includes epistemological, sociological, and theological aspects to explain NU's local yet globally relevant model of Islam. It is based on integrating *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, *manhaj al-fikr ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*, and *al-ʿurf*, allowing for flexible reasoning that aligns Islamic teachings with Indonesia's cultural context, promoting an inclusive and moderate Islamic identity (Aminuddin & Ulfah, 2021).

NU's approach to Islam Nusantara employs cultural hermeneutics, interpreting Islamic teachings through the lens of local wisdom. This method emphasizes the compatibility of Islamic values with indigenous cultural practices, promoting a synthesis that respects both religious doctrines and cultural heritage. By doing so, NU fosters a form of Islam that is deeply rooted in the local context while remaining faithful to Islamic teachings (Arifi, 2008).

From a sociological perspective, Islam Nusantara exemplifies the theory of religious adaptation, where religious practices evolve in response to the social and cultural environment. NU's model demonstrates how Islam can adapt to local customs without compromising its core principles, thereby creating a harmonious coexistence between religion and culture. This adaptation is evident in practices such as *halal bi halal* and *tahlilan*, which integrate Islamic teachings with local traditions (Afifi, 2022).

In the context of globalization, Islam Nusantara serves as a counter-narrative to global Islamic movements that advocate for rigid interpretations of Islam. NU's model offers an alternative that emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity. By promoting a localized form of Islam, NU provides a framework for engaging with global Islamic discourses while maintaining cultural authenticity and resisting the homogenizing pressures of globalization. (Hidayatullah, 2020).

The concept of *rahmatan lil-ʿālamīn* (blessing for all creation) is central to NU's theological anthropology. This principle underscores the inclusive and compassionate nature of Islam, advocating for a universal approach to peace and coexistence. By emphasizing this concept, NU promotes an understanding of Islam that transcends sectarian boundaries and fosters global harmony (Basid et al., 2024).

Islam Nusantara promotes a moderate and inclusive interpretation of Islam through civilizational engagement, participating in national and international platforms. NU's educational philosophy

merges traditional Islamic teachings with modern pedagogical practices, offering a curriculum that balances religious instruction with critical thinking and community engagement in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). This model produces graduates skilled in Islamic jurisprudence, prepared to influence global societal norms. NU uses strategic communication theories to promote Islam Nusantara's values in media and communication. NU uses diverse media platforms to promote its message of moderation and tolerance, increasing the visibility and acceptance of Islam Nusantara both in Indonesia and globally.(Hidayatullah, 2020).

Islam Nusantara focuses on interfaith dialogue, which matches peace studies theories that support understanding among various religious groups. NU's efforts to build interfaith relationships help promote social unity and resolve conflicts, leading to peaceful coexistence. Additionally, it embraces feminist theology to encourage women's involvement in religious and social activities, promoting gender equality.(Isnaini, 2021).

Islam Nusantara integrates environmental ethics through Islamic ecotheology, emphasizing the stewardship of the earth as a divine mandate.(Suwandana et al., 2023). NU's advocacy for sustainable practices and its condemnation of environmental degradation align with Islamic principles of conservation and respect for nature.

The concept of social capital is evident in NU's community development initiatives, where trust, reciprocity, and networks facilitate collective action. Through its programs, NU strengthens community bonds and empowers individuals to contribute to societal well-being, embodying the principles of rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn(Basid et al., 2024).

Engaging with critical theory, NU encourages reflexive scholarship that interrogates power structures and advocates for social justice. By promoting critical thinking and self-reflection, NU fosters an academic environment that challenges oppressive systems and supports marginalized individuals.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Islam Nusantara as a Synthesis of Local Wisdom and Islamic Teachings

Islam Nusantara, as articulated by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), represents a harmonious integration of Islamic principles with Indonesia's rich cultural heritage. This concept emphasizes the adaptability

of Islam to local customs, fostering a form of religious expression that is both authentic and contextually relevant. NU's approach counters rigid interpretations by promoting a dynamic and inclusive understanding of Islam that resonates with the diverse Indonesian society (Hidayatullah, 2020).

Since the 16th century, Islam has interacted with the local culture in the archipelago through trade, art, and tradition. This acculturation process allows Islam to be accepted and practiced in the context of Indonesian culture without eliminating the essence of Islamic teachings themselves. NU, as the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, plays an important role in maintaining and developing this form of Islam that respects this cultural diversity⁵.

Islam Nusantara, a form of Islam that blends with local traditions, emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and cooperation. It is reflected in religious practices like tahlilan, slametan, and the Prophet's Birthday celebration. Ulama in the region protect local customs and culture, adapting Islamic teachings to fit the community's context. Despite facing challenges from puritanical ideologies, NU has remained consistent in promoting inclusive and moderate Islam, emphasizing interfaith dialogue and respect for diversity. This approach is relevant in Indonesia and can serve as a model for Muslim communities worldwide, addressing modernity and globalization challenges.

2. NU's Role in Promoting Gender Inclusivity

A significant development within NU's framework is the promotion of gender inclusivity. The establishment of the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) marks a pivotal moment, as it recognizes women's authority in Islamic scholarship and leadership. This initiative not only empowers women within NU but also sets a precedent for broader societal acceptance of female religious leaders, thereby challenging traditional gender norms and advocating for a more equitable interpretation of Islam (Junaidi, 2023).

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, has been instrumental in promoting gender inclusivity through a moderate approach to Islam Nusantara. This approach emphasizes gender equality in religious interpretation and practice, and women's empowerment

⁵ <https://rmol.id/read/2018/07/13/347594/islam-local-wisdom-nusantara>

in social and religious life. NU initiated the Indonesian Women's Ulema Congress (KUPI), which aimed to provide women's space in the clergy world. The Congress produced fatwas supporting women's empowerment and countering religious-based violence, such as child marriage, sexual violence, and female genital mutilation, which influenced national policies and strengthened women's position in society.

In 2022, NU made history by appointing women to its central leadership structure for the first time. Figures such as Khofifah Indar Parawansa and Alissa Qotrunnada Wahid were inaugurated as members of the NU executive board. This step demonstrates NU's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in the structure of the largest religious organization in Indonesia.⁶

NU has developed a comprehensive cadre system for women through organizations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama Women's Student Association (IPPNU), Fatayat NU, and Muslimat NU. These programs are designed to equip women with the knowledge, skills, and leadership necessary to contribute to society and the religious world. This cadre ensures that women have a significant role in decision-making and religious activities at the local and national levels.⁷

NU also demonstrates gender inclusivity through collaboration with marginalized communities, such as the transgender community. Fatayat NU's Yogyakarta branch, for example, collaborates with Al-Fatah Islamic Boarding School, a pesantren for transgender people, by providing religious instruction by women. This collaboration reflects NU's commitment to inclusivity and acceptance of gender diversity in religious practice (Irhamisyah & Anshor, 2023).

The fatwas issued by KUPI have had a significant impact on public policy in Indonesia. Fatwas on child marriage, for example, contributed to raising the minimum age of marriage for women from 16 to 19 years (Rahmawati & Aprilyanti, 2022). In addition, fatwas on sexual violence have prompted the passage of the Sexual Violence Crimes Act in 2022, which provides more protection for victims of sexual violence (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 12 Tahun 2022 Tentang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual, 2022).

Islam Nusantara, a moderate interpretation of Islam, promotes gender inclusivity by emphasizing justice, equality, and human dignity. This approach empowers women in religious and social activities, allowing them to actively participate and influence decision-making, thus fostering their

⁶ <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/profil-khofifah-dan-alissa-wahid-ketua-pbnu-pertama-dari-perempuan-ydrxY>

⁷ <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/waketum-pbnu-nu-menjunjung-derajat-perempuan-TuzzP>

empowerment in Indonesia.

Through these measures, NU has demonstrated its commitment to promoting gender inclusivity, making women agents of change in society, and strengthening their position in religious and social structures. NU's role in this regard is not only relevant in Indonesia, but can also serve as a model for Muslim communities around the world in efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. (Irhamisyah & Anshor, 2023).

3. Environmental Stewardship within Islamic Teachings

NU, Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, has integrated environmental issues into its practices, aligning with Islamic teachings. The organization condemns harmful practices like deforestation and pollution, emphasizing the importance of stewardship over nature. This aligns with the concept of *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn*, which views environmental care as a divine mandate that transcends cultural and national boundaries. (Maghfiroh et al., 2024)

Fiqh al-bi'ah: Islamic environmental jurisprudence NU's commitment to environmental stewardship is evident in its development of *Fiqh al-Bi'ah*, or Islamic environmental jurisprudence. This body of knowledge provides guidance on ecological issues from an Islamic legal perspective. It emerged from the *Bahtsul Masail* forums, where scholars deliberate on contemporary issues, including environmental concerns. The formulation of green fatwas, such as those addressing waste management and plastic pollution, reflects NU's proactive stance in promoting eco-friendly practices among its members (Mufid, 2020).

The Institute for Disaster Management and Climate Change (LPBI-NU) was created to tackle environmental issues from an Islamic perspective. It holds seminars and public meetings to raise awareness about pollution and climate change, stressing the religious obligation to care for the environment. This initiative shows how NU combines Islamic principles with environmental responsibility. Additionally, NU has developed 'Green Pesantren,' Islamic boarding schools that teach environmental education through recycling, organic farming, and conservation, promoting ecological values among students. (Maghfiroh et al., 2024).

NU's community-based environmental initiatives, such as waste management, water conservation, and reforestation, demonstrate their commitment to environmental stewardship. These programs align with *Islam Nusantara*, a synthesis of local wisdom and Islamic teachings. NU views ecological

responsibility as a divine mandate, rooted in Islamic teachings emphasizing the sanctity of creation and the moral obligation to protect it. By framing environmental stewardship as an act of worship, NU encourages sustainable practices as expressions of faith and devotion.⁸

NU faces challenges in promoting environmental stewardship, including resistance from sectors and the complexities of modern issues. To address these, NU advocates for environmental education integration in religious teachings, collaborates with organizations, and shapes policies for ecological sustainability, ensuring environmental stewardship remains a central tenet of Islam Nusantara.

Nahdlatul Ulama's approach to environmental stewardship exemplifies the integration of Islamic teachings with local wisdom to address contemporary ecological challenges. Through initiatives like Fiqh al-Bi'ah, LPBI-NU, Green Pesantren, and community-based programs, NU demonstrates a comprehensive strategy for promoting environmental sustainability. These efforts not only contribute to the preservation of Indonesia's natural heritage but also serve as a model for other Muslim communities worldwide in harmonizing faith with ecological responsibility. (Mufid, 2020).

4. NU's Global Engagement and Transnational Identity

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is introducing Islam Nusantara to the global arena through international initiatives and collaborations. This concept emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and respect for local traditions, building an inclusive transnational identity. NU has expanded its influence globally, establishing branches in countries like the Netherlands, promoting a moderate and contextualized form of Islam, bridging cultural divides, and promoting a more inclusive global discourse on Islam. (Mudzakkir, 2020).

PCINU acts as an ambassador of Islam in the archipelago abroad, promoting Islamic values that are moderate and in accordance with the local cultural context (Taufiq et al., 2022). They organize various religious, social, and cultural activities that reflect the Islamic principles of the archipelago, as well as establish relations with the Muslim community in the countries where they are located.

NU, in collaboration with the University of Indonesia and the Centre for Shared Civilizational Values (CSCV), held an international conference entitled "International Conference on

⁸ <https://nu.or.id/opini/etika-islam-memanfaatkan-sumberdaya-alam-1gf0H?>

Humanitarian Islam". This conference aims to introduce a moderate, inclusive, and universal human values-based face of Islam for world peace. This idea is a global-scale implementation of the teachings of Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah an-Nahdliyah, which emphasizes tawasuth (middle), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (fairness). (Tania et al., 2024)

In the Netherlands, NU has made Nusantara Islam a part of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. Through events like "Nusantara Night," held by the Indonesian Embassy in The Hague, NU shares the archipelago's Islamic values with the global community. This event includes Indonesian ambassadors speaking about Islam in the archipelago. NU views Islam Nusantara as a way to combat cultural uniformity caused by globalization. By preserving local traditions aligned with Islamic teachings, NU aims to uphold Indonesia's unique cultural and religious identity. NU is seen as a transnational Islamic organization, with members around the world and involvement in international religious discussions. (Husni, 2018) (Afkar & Sundrijo, 2023).

NU faces challenges from transnational Islamic movements that tend to be conservative and exclusive. In response, NU strengthens the teachings of Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah an-Nahdliyah through education and regeneration at various levels, as well as involving autonomous organizations such as Fatayat, Muslimat, Ansor, IPNU, and IPPNU in spreading the values of Islam Nusantara, inclusive and moderate. (Parawati, 2024).

Through various global initiatives and international collaborations, NU has succeeded in introducing Islam Nusantara as a model of Islam that is moderate, inclusive, and based on universal human values. This transnational identity not only enriches the world's Islamic treasures but also strengthens Indonesia's position as a country with a distinctive and peaceful Islamic tradition.

5. Educational Initiatives and the Preservation of Local Identity

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is key in developing Islam Nusantara, which connects Islamic teachings with local Indonesian culture. Through educational programs, NU preserves religious traditions while enhancing local cultural identities. The NU Islamic Boarding School is vital for teaching Islamic values across the archipelago, focusing on moderate and inclusive teachings and the history of Islam in the region. Forums like bahtsul masail allow for discussion on current issues with an Islamic perspective. Additionally, religious activities in regional languages, such as tahlilan and yasinan, foster community ties. (Dhofier, 1980).

The curriculum of the NU Islamic boarding school is designed to integrate local values that are in line with Islamic teachings, such as mutual cooperation, tolerance, and respect for nature. Students are not only taught religious knowledge, but also equipped with a deep understanding of local traditions and culture that are an integral part of their identity as Indonesian citizens.(Hasanah, 2015).

NU also develops formal educational institutions, such as madrassas and universities that teach Islam in the archipelago. The postgraduate program at the Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic College (STAINU) Jakarta, for example, offers a concentration in Islamic Cultural History that focuses on Islam of the archipelago. This approach ensures that the younger generation understands and appreciates the cultural heritage and teachings of Islam that are developing in Indonesia.(Rosila et al., 2025) .

The Nahdlatul Ulama Museum in Surabaya is the center of NU's historical and cultural documentation, storing important artifacts and documentation that reflect the organization's journey in preserving the archipelago's Islamic traditions. In addition, the Nusantara Islamic tradition festival held in various regions, such as in Banyuwangi, is a means to introduce and preserve local culture through religious arts and traditions.(Nastiti, 2021).

NU promotes interfaith and cultural dialogue, using education to foster mutual understanding and tolerance. It promotes Islam Nusantara as a model that respects plurality and local traditions, enriching religious understanding and strengthening social cohesion in a pluralistic society. NU's educational initiatives contribute to the development of Islam in the archipelago, strengthening local policies and preserving Indonesia's cultural identity. By integrating Islamic teachings with local culture, NU introduces a moderate and inclusive Islamic model to the global arena, ensuring the preservation of local identity amid globalization.

6. Addressing National Challenges through Islam Nusantara

In the face of globalization and its challenges, NU's Islam Nusantara offers a framework that addresses national issues such as social cohesion and cultural preservation. By promoting a form of Islam that is inclusive and adaptable, NU provides a model for navigating the complexities of modernity while maintaining a strong sense of national identity.(Oktaviani et al., 2024).

NU is a leading institution in Indonesia, promoting interfaith and cultural dialogue through

education. In response to radicalization threats, NU created Islam Nusantara, promoting moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This approach addresses radical ideologies against Pancasila and Indonesia's pluralism, while honoring local culture and preserving cultural heritage. NU's Islamic boarding schools provide inclusive education, integrating Islamic values and teaching diversity and social justice.(Murat Kaçer, 2024).

Playing an active role in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, NU is actively involved in interreligious and intercultural dialogue to build understanding and tolerance in society.(Khoir & Anshory, 2023). Through interfaith discussion and cooperation forums, NU seeks to create social harmony and reduce potential conflicts caused by differences in beliefs and cultures.

In facing global challenges such as climate change, NU developed Islam Nusantara as a relevant local approach. By prioritizing Islamic principles that are environmentally friendly and respect for nature, NU contributes to environmental conservation efforts and sustainable development in Indonesia.(George C. Nche, 2023) .

Through the development of Islam Nusantara, NU not only strengthens local policies but also plays an active role in overcoming various national and global challenges. This approach reflects NU's commitment to building a moderate, inclusive, and just Indonesian society, as well as becoming a model for the Islamic world in facing the dynamics of the times.

7. Theological Foundations and the Concept of Rahmatan Lil-'Ālamīn

The concept of Rahmatan Lil-'Ālamīn (mercy to all creation) is central to the theological framework of Islam Nusantara, as developed and propagated by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This principle emphasizes that Islam is a source of compassion, peace, and harmony for the entire universe, transcending religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries.(Hutagalung et al., 2022).

Islam Nusantara's main idea is rahmatan lil-'ālamīn, meaning Islam is a blessing for everyone. This supports compassion, tolerance, and living together, guiding both local and global actions. The theological basis of NU comes from Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah traditions, mainly the Ash'ari and Maturidi schools, which promote balanced beliefs based on reason and moderation. This adds an inclusive and adaptable approach to Islam. Combining local culture with Islamic teachings leads to an indigenized form of Islam that respects and enriches local traditions and customs. (Esha, 2015).

The principle of *Rahmatan Lil-'Ālamīn* manifests in Islam Nusantara's emphasis on peace, tolerance, and coexistence.(Majidun, 2015). NU actively promotes interfaith dialogue and cooperation, fostering mutual understanding and respect among different religious communities. This approach counters extremism and promotes a peaceful society.

NU's educational institutions, such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), play a crucial role in instilling the values of *Rahmatan Lil-'Ālamīn*. These institutions emphasize moral development, teaching students to embody compassion, humility, and respect for others, thereby nurturing individuals who contribute positively to society.(Afifi, 2022) .

NU extends the concept of *Rahmatan Lil-'Ālamīn* beyond national borders through global humanitarian efforts. It participates in international dialogues and provides aid to communities in need, demonstrating Islam's universal message of mercy and compassion. The theological foundations of Islam Nusantara offer a compassionate, inclusive, and adaptable model of Islam. NU's educational, social, and humanitarian initiatives demonstrate how Islamic teachings can be harmoniously integrated with local wisdom to address contemporary challenges and promote global peace.

8. The Role of NU in Shaping Public Policy

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, has greatly impacted public policies that align with the nation's Islamic values. Its moderate and tolerant stance supports pluralism, social justice, and inter-religious harmony. NU's views on Islamic teachings guide legislative changes, particularly in areas like sexual violence and child marriage, highlighting its commitment to justice and equity. NU advocates for moderation and tolerance in public policy, encouraging the government to emphasize social harmony and cultural diversity, which helps lessen the influence of conservative groups in national Islamic discussions.

NU has a key role in Indonesia's diplomacy and religious policies. It actively engages in a global fight against extremism and works with the government to set up radicalism prevention centers and training programs to counter extremist messages. This shows NU's dedication to fostering a peaceful Islam. Additionally, NU influences social and legal reforms, such as through the Indonesian Women's Ulema Congress (KUPI), which supports fatwas against violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation, impacting national laws.(Rahmawati & Aprilyanti, 2022).

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) focuses on education and community empowerment through Islamic boarding schools, promoting inclusive education based on local values. Their programs highlight tolerance, diversity, and social justice, reflecting Islamic principles. NU influences Indonesian public policy, advocating for moderation and education, thus enhancing the national identity and presenting a relevant model of Islam globally.

9. Interfaith Dialogue and Social Cohesion

NU's commitment to interfaith dialogue fosters social cohesion in Indonesia's pluralistic society. By promoting understanding and cooperation among different religious communities, NU contributes to national unity and peace. This approach aligns with the broader goals of Islam Nusantara, which seeks to harmonize religious beliefs with cultural diversity. (Hidayatullah, 2020)

Foundational principles of Islam Nusantara provide an interpretation of Islam that fits Indonesia's diverse culture. This approach promotes values like moderation (tawassut), tolerance (tasamuh), and mutual assistance (ta'awun), which are crucial for peaceful living in a varied society. By incorporating local customs, Islam Nusantara fosters interreligious harmony and national unity. Additionally, NU engages in interfaith dialogue through programs like Lakpesdam, which trains activists in promoting religious tolerance and understanding, and participates in global events to support interfaith cooperation. (Murat Kaçer, 2025b)⁹.

Strengthening social cohesion through community engagement, NU leverages its extensive grassroots networks to build social capital and strengthen community bonds. By facilitating collaborative efforts among diverse religious groups, NU fosters trust and mutual respect, thereby mitigating potential conflicts and enhancing societal cohesion. These community-based initiatives are pivotal in cultivating a culture of peace and inclusivity at the local level (Gunawan, 2024).

NU's Islamic boarding schools, especially pesantren, promote pluralism and tolerance through curricula that mix religious teachings with civic education. This method prepares students to positively impact a multicultural society and uphold Islam Nusantara's principles. NU's Islam Nusantara model has gained international attention as a counter to extremism, encouraging

⁹ https://civilizationalvalues.org/2023_08_07_asean-intercultural-and-interreligious-dialogue-conference/

interfaith harmony and national unity.

10. Challenges and Future Directions

NU faces challenges in promoting Islam Nusantara due to conservative opposition and complex global politics. To remain relevant, NU needs to promote an inclusive view of Islam, foster dialogue, and adjust strategies. Critics argue that NU's broad concept leads to ambiguity, inconsistent interpretations, and hinders cohesive strategy and messaging.(Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024).

Conservative and puritanical factions within Indonesian Islam view Islam Nusantara's contextualization of local customs with suspicion, labeling certain practices as bid'ah (innovation) and undermining NU's authority.(Jubba et al., 2022). Such internal critiques have occasionally manifested in public debates and scholarly dissent, posing challenges for NU to maintain unity and consensus.¹⁰

Communication and implementation gaps in NU's decentralized organizational structure, spanning thousands of pesantren and local branches, complicate the uniform dissemination of Islam Nusantara principles.(Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024). As a result, grassroots cadres may not receive consistent training or messaging, leading to varied implementation across regions.(Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024).

Digital and extremism countering, while the rise of digital platforms offers new avenues for propagating Islam Nusantara's moderate message, extremist groups often exploit online vacuums to spread radical interpretations(Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024). NU's limited digital infrastructure and capacity constrain its ability to effectively counter misinformation and extremist propaganda online(Rosidah & Faizah, 2024).

Generational shifts and youth engagement demographic changes reveal a growing cohort of young Indonesians with high digital literacy and diverse religious expectations, requiring an updated approach to pesantren education and youth leadership within NU.(Rosidah & Faizah, 2024). Failure to modernize institutional frameworks risks alienating younger santri and diminishing Islam Nusantara's long-term viability.(Hasyim, 2018).

¹⁰ [Islam Nusantara Dan Kritikusnya: Kebangkitan Ulama Muda NU – Analisis – Eurasia Review](#)

Political dynamics and risk of co-optation, government endorsement of Islam Nusantara, while beneficial for institutional support, poses risks of politicization, potentially aligning the concept with shifting political agendas.¹¹ NU's close ties with state actors may generate skepticism regarding its independence and undermine the perception of Islam Nusantara as a grassroots movement.(Hefner, 2016) .

Future directions, clarification, and strategic communication to address conceptual ambiguity, NU must undertake robust doctrinal articulation, developing clear guidelines and scholarly frameworks that delineate Islam Nusantara's principles and applications.(Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024) . Strategic communication campaigns, both internal and external, are essential to ensure a unified understanding among ulama, cadres, and the broader Muslim community.(Hefner, 2016) .

Digital literacy and online diplomacy, enhancing digital literacy among NU's grassroots and senior leadership, will empower the organization to harness social media and online platforms more effectively.(Rosidah & Faizah, 2024) . Investing in digital infrastructure and cyber teams can strengthen NU's capacity to counter extremist narratives and amplify moderate voices in the digital sphere.(Akmaliah, 2022).

Pesantren modernization and youth empowerment, modernizing pesantren curricula to include critical thinking, interfaith education, and digital skills, will align Islamic boarding schools with contemporary socio-cultural realities.(Salim & Sari, 2024). Creating structured leadership pathways for youth within NU's organizational hierarchy can ensure generational continuity and sustain Islam Nusantara's momentum.(Hasyim, 2018).

Academic research and evidence-based policy, expanding partnerships with academic institutions to conduct longitudinal studies and impact assessments, will provide empirical data on Islam Nusantara's effectiveness in promoting moderation and social cohesion.(Murat Kaçer, 2025b). Evidence-based policy recommendations can then be developed to guide NU's advocacy efforts and inform governmental support for Islam Nusantara initiatives.(Akmaliah, 2022).

International partnerships and model dissemination, forging collaborations with global Islamic organizations and interfaith bodies, can position Islam Nusantara as a replicable model for contextualized and moderate Islam in diverse societies.(Arifianto, 2022). Participation in international forums and joint research projects will enhance NU's transnational identity and

¹¹ <https://www.newmandala.org/nahdlatul-ulama-politics-trap/>

expand the reach of the Islam Nusantara principles.¹²

Integrating environmental stewardship, incorporating environmental ethics into Islam Nusantara's narrative, addresses contemporary sustainability challenges and aligns with global climate agendas (Loo, Qile Sara, Suryana, 2024). Developing green fatwas and supporting eco-friendly community programs under NU's aegis can reinforce Islam Nusantara's relevance in advocating for holistic well-being.

This part explains the method in the paper, following the IMRAD structure. Methods must be presented in the past tense. It should provide sufficient details to allow the work to be replicated. Methods may cover design of the study, sources of data (sample/participants), kinds and amount of data, instruments, data collection techniques, and data analysis. Methods already published should be indicated by a reference. Only relevant modifications should be described here.

CONCLUSION(S)

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) advocates for Islam Nusantara, blending universal Islamic values with Indonesian wisdom. It focuses on traditional pesantren education and ulema engagement with local cultures, promoting moderation, compassion, and inclusivity. NU utilizes its pesantrens and social services to integrate Islam Nusantara within local communities, adapting religious practices to regional differences. This promotes local leaders in modifying Islamic teachings to foster community harmony and interfaith dialogue. NU has evolved from a nationally focused movement to a transnational actor by establishing overseas branches and partnerships, such as the VORTEX program with the University of Vienna, highlighting its commitment to countering extremism through scholarship and cross-cultural engagement. These initiatives enhance the global message of Islam Nusantara and establish Indonesia as a model for constructive Islam-modern world engagement. NU must now sustain its moderation agenda in the face of rising global polarization. Ongoing investment in digital outreach, academic collaborations, and youth leadership is crucial for the dynamism of Islam Nusantara. NU's blend of local wisdom and global engagement provides a strong model for a tolerant and inclusive Islamic discourse in the 21st century.

¹² <https://www.hudson.org/node/44724>

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