

Sustaining Social Tolerance Through the Principles of Religious Moderation in a Pluralistic Society: A Study on the Religious Moderation Village in Sedanau Subdistrict

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Abstract

The Religious Moderation Village in Sedanau Subdistrict serves as a concrete representation of the government's and community's efforts to preserve tolerance within a diverse society. This study aims to analyze how the values of religious moderation such as tolerance, national commitment, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture are applied in the social life of a pluralistic community to maintain harmony, as well as the challenges and strategies involved in sustaining cohesion. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques consisting of interviews, observations, and document studies. The findings indicate that the implementation of religious moderation values including national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture has successfully minimized conflict and fostered social harmony. However, challenges such as religious exclusivism and limited religious literacy still require attention. This study recommends strengthening interfaith education, increasing youth involvement, and institutionalizing routine interreligious dialogue.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Tolerance, Plural Society, Harmony, Sedanau

INTRODUCTION

Sedanau Subdistrict is one of the administrative villages located in Bunguran Barat District, Natuna Regency, Riau Islands Province. Its strategic position as a coastal trading center as well as a gateway for religious and social activities makes this area a miniature of Indonesia's diversity. Demographically, the people of Sedanau come from various religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Four officially recognized religions are practiced by the local

community Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, and Buddhism. Meanwhile, the ethnic composition includes Malay, Bugis, Javanese, and Chinese communities, all of whom live side by side within a harmonious social dynamic.

The diversity embedded in the daily life of the Sedanau community does not make differences a source of conflict. Instead, the residents demonstrate a high level of social and religious maturity in maintaining harmony and social stability. Evidence shows that religiously nuanced conflict has almost never occurred in this area, even since the early establishment of the subdistrict. This represents a social achievement rarely found in other regions with similar pluralistic conditions. For this reason, in 2023, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia designated Sedanau Subdistrict as one of the 1,000 “Religious Moderation Villages” in Indonesia.

This designation not only serves as an acknowledgement of the long-standing culture of harmony but also marks the beginning of a systematic effort to strengthen and preserve the values of religious moderation in the region. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, emphasizes the importance of direct community involvement, particularly social actors such as religious leaders, community elders, religious counselors, and educational institutions, to continually foster the spirit of tolerance in public life. The presence of the state through the Religious Moderation Village program serves as a preventive strengthening against potential horizontal tensions that may arise in the future, especially amid the rapid development of digital media and the uncontrollable flow of information.

In this context, it is important to conduct an academic study that not only explains Sedanau’s success in building interreligious harmony but also reveals the processes, strategies, and underlying values. This study seeks to analyze how the values of religious moderation are implemented in the daily life of the Sedanau community, the supporting and inhibiting factors, and how community engagement

strategies can serve as a model for other regions in Indonesia that face challenges in nurturing tolerance within a diverse society.

Religious moderation is a social and cultural strategy that is highly relevant for Indonesia's pluralistic society. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemenag RI), religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religious life that emphasizes balance (*tawazun*), justice (*'adalah*), and a commitment to universal humanistic and peaceful values (Kemenag RI, 2021). Moderation is not an attempt to homogenize doctrines or beliefs, but rather to transform differences into strengths for building peaceful coexistence.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs identifies four key indicators of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Kemenag RI, 2021). In the context of Sedanau Subdistrict, these four indicators have long been embedded in the community's social structure. National commitment is reflected in the residents' strong sense of nationalism, demonstrated through active participation in Independence Day celebrations, interfaith national ceremonies, and the honoring of national symbols displayed in places of worship. Tolerance manifests in everyday life, such as interfaith community service activities, mutual assistance during religious events, and the shared use of public spaces without discrimination.

The value of non-violence is strongly upheld by community leaders and religious figures in Sedanau. No religious conflicts have ever been recorded in this subdistrict over the past two decades. This condition is largely supported by longstanding traditions of deliberation and conflict resolution through customary practices that remain alive within the community. As for the fourth indicator accommodation of local culture it is prominently reflected in how the people of Sedanau integrate local customs into various communal celebrations, such as the *tepuk tepung tawar* ritual, maritime pilgrimage, and village feasts (*kenduri*

kampung), all of which are attended by members of every religious and ethnic group.

Tolerance is a fundamental pillar in maintaining social cohesion within a diverse society. In sociological terms, tolerance does not merely refer to refraining from harming other groups, but also involves actively seeking to understand, respect, and even protect the religious rights of others (Azra,2006). In communities such as Sedanau Subdistrict inhabited by Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, and Buddhists, and consisting of various ethnic groups including Malay, Bugis, Javanese, and Chinese tolerance is not only an ideal but an everyday necessity.

The implementation of tolerance in Sedanau emerges from habitual coexistence. For instance, during Islamic wedding ceremonies, it is common for religious leaders from Christian and Buddhist communities to attend as a form of moral and social support. Conversely, the Muslim community also assists in the celebration of religious holidays of other faiths. This practice demonstrates that the people of Sedanau have internalized tolerance in practical terms, extending beyond symbolic gestures.

Another factor that strengthens tolerance in Sedanau is the shared experience of living as coastal residents and fishermen. Economic and cultural interdependence encourages collaboration across identities, which in Emile Durkheim's framework can be described as mechanical solidarity, a form of social cohesion built upon shared roles and lived experiences (Durkheim, 1984). This solidarity serves as the foundation for strong tolerance, not due to legal pressure, but because of a collective moral awareness.

Interreligious harmony is not a condition that occurs automatically, but rather the result of a continuous social process. Glock and Stark (1965), in *Religion and Society in Tension*, explain that the stability of religious harmony depends on three main factors: open communication among religious groups, clear social agreements, and a shared sense of justice (Glock&Stark, 1965).

In Sedanau, communication among religious communities takes place both informally and formally. For example, interfaith leaders frequently visit one another during funerals, births, or religious celebrations. Formally, the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB) at the district level actively initiates regular meetings, joint socialization programs, and educational activities for students across schools. Social agreements are also established in the form of unwritten rules accepted by the community, such as the regulation of loudspeaker use during worship times, prohibitions against disparaging other religions, and the rotation of committee roles in interfaith events.

Social justice in Sedanau is reflected in the distribution of informal leadership, which is not monopolized by the majority group. Local Chinese and Christian leaders hold important roles in community decision-making, such as in village meetings or collective work activities. This reinforces Glock and Stark's theory that harmony will be sustained when all parties feel recognized, respected, and treated equally within the public sphere.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand the meanings, processes, and social dynamics occurring within a particular context in depth (Moleong, 2005). This approach was chosen because it aligns with the objective of the research, namely to comprehensively explore how the values of religious moderation are internalized and practiced in the pluralistic community life of Sedanau Subdistrict.

The qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture the complexity of social relations, the roles of local actors, and the symbolic meanings behind community actions in maintaining tolerance and interreligious harmony (Creswell, 2016). This is important because the topic of religious moderation is not limited to normative religious aspects, but is also closely related to social structures, local cultures, and the historical experiences of communities in navigating interfaith life.

Data collection methods in this study include participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted on interfaith socio-religious activities such as joint community service, national celebration events, and religious ceremonies across communities. In-depth interviews were conducted with religious leaders, community figures, interfaith youth, as well as village officials and religious counselors. Documentation was obtained from activity reports of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), the Interreligious Harmony Forum (FKUB), and other supporting documents related to the designation of Sedanau as a Religious Moderation Village.

Data analysis was carried out using techniques of data reduction, data display, and conclusion (Miles and Huberman, 1994). All data were categorized based on the indicators of religious moderation (national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture), and then analyzed thematically to reveal patterns of social practices and the factors influencing the success of religious moderation in Sedanau.

RESLUT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Religious Moderation Village in Sedanau Subdistrict

The Religious Moderation Village is a program initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to establish villages or urban wards characterized by a high level of interreligious tolerance and the creation of harmonious relations among religious communities. The program aims to strengthen a harmonious, diverse, tolerant society while promoting moderate religious attitudes at the village or ward level. The key characteristics of a Religious Moderation Village include the diversity of religious and cultural expressions among its residents, who nonetheless live in peace, demonstrate strong tolerance, and respect one another. These characteristics are also reflected in the minimal almost nonexistent records of interreligious conflict within such communities.

Sedanau Subdistrict possesses the necessary characteristics to meet the criteria for a Religious Moderation Village established by the Ministry of Religious

Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. Covering an area of 20.58 km² and inhabited by 5,903 residents from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, Sedanau reflects strong social heterogeneity. According to data from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Bunguran Barat District, there are 5,516 Muslims, comprising approximately 93% of the population. The remaining 7% consists of 255 Buddhists, 118 Protestants, 10 Catholics, and 4 adherents of Confucianism (Sedanau Subdistrict, 2024). The Protestant Christian community in Sedanau is divided into two denominations: GPDI and GPPS. As stated earlier, the majority of the population consists of Malay ethnic groups, followed by ethnic Chinese, who form the second-largest group. Other ethnic communities such as Javanese, Bugis, Kalimantan, Sundanese, and people of Medanese descent further enrich the cultural traditions of Sedanau. In their daily lives, the residents have long demonstrated harmonious patterns of social interaction, making the subdistrict free from religion-based conflicts.

This long-standing record of harmony is one of the key reasons Sedanau Subdistrict was selected as one of the 1,000 Religious Moderation Villages designated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in 2023. The designation is not merely symbolic; it represents formal recognition of social and religious practices that prioritize inclusivity, tolerance, and peace (Kemenag RI, 2021). In this context, Sedanau's experience offers valuable empirical contributions to the strengthening of religious moderation in Indonesia, particularly within border and archipelagic communities.

Maintaining Tolerance through the Implementation of Religious Moderation Values in the Pluralistic Community of Sedanau

Tolerance and National Commitment

The principles of tolerance and national commitment form the main foundation of harmony in Sedanau. The tangible expression of tolerance in this subdistrict can be seen in interfaith participation in socio-religious activities and national commemorations. For instance, during the celebration of Indonesia's

Independence Day on August 17th, the organizing committee is not composed of a single religious or ethnic group, but instead involves all elements of society without discrimination. Similarly, during the observance of the Prophet's Birthday (Maulid Nabi), Christmas, Lunar New Year and Vesak, it is customary for residents of different faiths to visit one another, exchange greetings, and even share food across households.

National commitment is also reflected in the community's loyalty to Pancasila as the foundation of the state and in their strong sense of nationalism. No groups or individuals have been found expressing anti-Pancasila sentiments or openly promoting religious exclusivism. This reinforces the argument that commitment to national values and tolerance mutually strengthen one another in the context of a pluralistic society (Shihab, 2019).

Non-Violence and Conflict Resolution

One of the indicators of the successful implementation of religious moderation in Sedanau is the absence of religious conflict over the past two decades. A review of village archives, reports from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and interviews with community leaders shows that horizontal conflicts have almost never occurred. Even when differences of opinion arise between individuals or groups, resolution is consistently pursued through deliberation and customary dialogue.

Local wisdom, such as *rapat kampung* and traditional community deliberation (*musyawarah balai*) continues to be practiced and serves as an essential forum for addressing socio-religious issues. This process aligns with the "non-violence" indicator of religious moderation, which emphasizes peaceful conflict resolution grounded in social justice (Azra, 2006).

Accommodation of Local Culture

The people of Sedanau are known for their adaptability to local cultural values, which they utilize as a social cohesive instrument. Interreligious gotong royong (mutual cooperation) remains strongly embedded in daily life, particularly

in activities such as repairing houses of worship, assisting families affected by misfortune, or preparing religious celebrations.

Local traditions such as *tepuk tepung tawar*, *kenduri kampung*, and *ziarah laut* continue to be practiced and serve as cultural mechanisms that involve all elements of the community. Even in interethnic or interreligious marriages (which are legally accommodated), shared rituals often occur, such as multicultural feasts, collaborative dances, and the use of cross-cultural traditional attire. These practices illustrate that the accommodation of local culture functions as a powerful social bond and simultaneously strengthens the cultural dimension of religious moderation. (Rahmadhanty. dkk, 2024) (Ruslan. dkk, 2024).

Moderation Education through Forums and Informal Channels

Efforts to strengthen the values of religious moderation in Sedanau are carried out through various educational pathways, both formal and informal. At the formal level, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) and the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) regularly organize outreach programs with themes such as “Religious Moderation in Youth Life,” “Maintaining Interfaith Harmony in Coastal Communities,” and “The Role of Youth in Preserving Tolerance.” These activities involve schools, mosque youth groups, and interfaith youth communities.

In the informal sphere, themes of unity and interfaith harmony are frequently conveyed through religious sermons delivered by KUA counselors and local religious leaders. Moreover, the younger generation in Sedanau actively utilizes social media to promote messages of tolerance. Educational content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube has become an accessible and relevant medium for disseminating ideas of moderation, particularly for Generation Z. These findings align with studies published in journals such as *Qistie: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Kontemporer* dan *Jurnal Bimas Islam*, which emphasize the importance of digital literacy as an effective strategy for promoting religious moderation among young people (Qistie Journal, 2023).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The successful implementation of religious moderation values in Sedanau is supported by several mutually reinforcing factors. First, the active role of institutions such as the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), and the village administration, which consistently promote interfaith and intercultural activities. Second, the community's collective awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony in a remote region like Sedanau where social cooperation and collaboration are essential for daily life has contributed significantly to sustaining peaceful coexistence. Third, support from national government programs, including the designation of Sedanau as a *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* (Religious Moderation Village), has provided both legitimacy and renewed motivation for the community to preserve social harmony.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain in maintaining and further strengthening religious moderation. One of the notable obstacles is the persistence of internal exclusivism within certain religious groups, which tends to limit engagement in interfaith dialogue. In addition, moderation literacy among younger generations still requires improvement, particularly in the face of rapid and often unverified information circulating on social media. The limited institutionalization of interfaith dialogue spaces and the lack of systematic documentation of activities also present important concerns for the sustainability of the program.

Local Innovative Strategies

To address these challenges, the people of Sedanau together with local government officials and religious leaders have developed several innovative strategies. One of the most prominent is the Sedanau Festival, an annual event that brings together all elements of the community through cultural activities, art performances, and interfaith bazaars. In addition, various sports competitions with thematic concepts are organized and participated in by community members from all religious backgrounds.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The experience of Sedanau Subdistrict in cultivating religious moderation offers significant contributions to the development of both theory and practice in the study of diversity in Indonesia. Theoretically, the social practices in Sedanau validate Glock and Stark's framework emphasizing the importance of open communication, social justice, and shared agreements in fostering interreligious harmony (Glock & Stark, 1965). The local context of Sedanau also demonstrates that the values of religious moderation can be effectively implemented not only in urban areas but also in remote island communities.

Practically, Sedanau's experience can serve as a replicable model for other regions in Indonesia, particularly those with high levels of religious and cultural diversity. Participatory, community-based strategies, along with the involvement of all generations and social groups, are key factors in sustaining moderation programs. With proper documentation and cross-sector commitment, initiatives like the Moderation Village in Sedanau have the potential to become centers for tolerance studies and inspiring social laboratories for strengthening national values in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the practice of religious moderation in Sedanau Subdistrict is the result of social processes deeply rooted in local values, community participation, and state policy support. The success of Sedanau as a Religious Moderation Village is not merely symbolic but is reflected in the daily lives of a religiously, ethnically, and culturally diverse community.

Core values of religious moderation such as tolerance, national commitment, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture have been internalized through interfaith practices passed down through generations. Inclusive religious celebrations, conflict resolution through deliberation, and multicultural mutual cooperation exemplify a community capable of transforming differences into strengths.

Moderation education is carried out through two channels: formal (government institutions, schools, and the Interfaith Harmony Forum/FKUB) and informal (community leaders, social media, and local traditions). This further strengthens the social and cultural foundations of moderation itself. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the Ministry of Religious Affairs' framework of religious moderation and validate Glock and Stark's theory of religious harmony within the Indonesian local context.

Expansion and Replication of the Sedanau Model. Local governments and the Ministry of Religious Affairs may use the experiences of Sedanau and other Religious Moderation Villages as learning models for regions that share diverse social characteristics. Documentation of best practices should be expanded and disseminated as references for national policy development.

Strengthening Moderation Literacy for the Younger Generation. Digital literacy programs, interfaith youth leadership training, and character education based on tolerance must be expanded to schools and youth communities.

Institutionalizing Interfaith Dialogue Forums. There is a need to establish systematic and regular dialogue forums for religious leaders, women, and youth to ensure that the values of religious moderation are continuously internalized through participatory engagement.

Data-Based Evaluation and Monitoring. A periodic monitoring and evaluation system is required for the implementation of Religious Moderation Villages, including qualitative indicators based on local narratives that have not yet been comprehensively mapped in academic research.

Enhancing the Role of Local Academics and Researchers. Greater involvement of universities, LPTQ, and local faith-based organizations whether Islamic boarding schools or Christian/Buddhist educational institutions is needed to ensure that the development of moderation narratives is not solely top-down, but also academically grounded and research-driven.

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