

## The Perception of Muslim Converts on Religious Moderation and the Importance of Tolerance: A Study at the Muallaf Center Malang, Indonesia

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article History</b></p> <p><b>Received:</b> September 11, 2023</p> <p><b>Revised:</b> October 30, 2023</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> November 9, 2023</p> <p><b>Published:</b> December 7, 2023</p> <p><b>Keyword:</b> Pancasila; Radicalism; Religious Moderation; Tolerance</p> <p><b>Copyright (c) 2023</b> Ermita zakiyah, Novia Solichah, Nurul Shofiah, Abdul Fattah ; Iqbal Ali Wafa</p> 	<p>This study aims to show how important it is to cultivate the values of moderation in a convert. This is important in order to anticipate the thoughts and attitudes of someone who has just become a Muslim towards the influence of intolerance and radicalism. Researchers used surveys with descriptive analysis techniques to measure the level of religious moderation. In this study, researchers also used qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach aimed at understanding the mindsets and perceptions of participants in diverse moderation. Participants in this study were five converts who were at least 3 years old and studying Islam. The perception of religious moderation among converts at the Muallaf Center Malang is shown through the views, attitudes, and practices of converts who accept the principles of nationhood. The results of the analysis showed that the level of religious moderation among converts in Muallaf Center Malang was in the high category. In addition, converts demonstrate conscious adherence to basic values, harmoniously integrating national aspirations into religious beliefs without contradicting state ideology. They showed a positive attitude towards national commitment, emphasized the importance of the ideals of Pancasila, respected the national flag, and implemented Pancasila in religious life. Their understanding of tolerance is prominent, as evidenced by their recognition of diversity, willingness to share facilities, and efforts to help non-Muslims. It all reflects a commitment to positive social contribution. Converts strongly oppose violence in religious conflicts, which means they are in line with the principles of religious moderation that reject violent extremism. Their adaptive approach to local culture, by embracing diverse practices, shows a willingness to acculturate while still maintaining religious beliefs.</p>
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## Introduction

Religious moderation is a behavior and perspective that takes the middle way, so that an inclusive and proportional attitude becomes an attitude that is understood and practiced in accordance with the teachings of their respective religions (Gultom, 2022), (Martin Lukito Sinaga, 2022) (K. M. Arif, 2021). According to Arifiansyah, moderation is a tool to prevent radicalism (Arifinsyah et al., 2020), because Indonesia is a country with religious pluralism, so it requires efforts to maintain inter-religious harmony (Prakosa, 2022).

All religions certainly teach their adherents to be tolerant of followers of other religions (Saihu, 2022). Religious tolerance is an ideology and goal that are in line with Indonesian nationalism (Syarif & Makkarateng, 2020). But in fact, there are people who, in the name of defending religion, actually behave radically and intolerantly when facing problems that are contrary to their beliefs. Religious sources from the internet and social media are suspected to be one of the triggers for these radicals to obtain religious content without filtering it first (Sahlan et al., 2022). The story of a young man in Makassar who was accosted by the masses for congratulating Natal, and the new year that occurred at the beginning of the new year 2022, is one example. Similar cases also occurred when a number of bombings of non-Muslim places of worship were carried out by individuals in the name of defending Islam, such as the bombing of the Makassar Cathedral Church (28/3/2021) by members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), the embostation of three gejera in Surabaya, the attack on the Oikumene Church, Samarinda, and the bombing of the Oikumene Church, Samarinda, and the attack on the offerings in Bali (Ayu et al., 2022). These various cases create gaps between Islamic values that should be *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, but the opposite happens (Saihu, 2022).

The question that then arises is whether the discourse of "religious moderation" can accurately handle cases of intolerance that are rife in Indonesia or vice versa. A number of studies show that there are many public misunderstandings in interpreting "religious moderation" (Ministry of Religion, 2020). Some interpret the word moderate as an attitude of mixing religious rituals with religions that are different from their beliefs. Moderation is defined as a value that leads to liberalism. They consider that being a moderate person means not being firm and not completely complete in religion, not completely making religion a role model for life. Moderates are considered less sensitive, less concerned, or defensive when, for example, religious symbols are denigrated. These various assumptions make religious believers reluctant to explore and accept the values of religious moderation, whose discourse was initiated by the government.

In March 2022, researchers conducted a pre-survey of a number of converts at the Muallaf Center in Malang, Indonesia. This survey is interesting and important because it aims to see the dynamics of the thinking of people who have recently embraced Islam regarding religious moderation. One of them argues that religious moderation is a wrong concept when applied to the religious life of Muslims in Indonesia. According to him, people who believe in religious moderation mean practicing their religion half-heartedly.

Such perceptions of religious moderation are highly contradictory, especially for converts. The argument is alarming because it only assumes that religious moderation means that all religions are the same. Thus, the appropriate step is to plant and provide an understanding of the value of religious moderation massively, correctly, well, and appropriately, so that the community is not wrong in responding to the concept of religious moderation.

In this case, the education sector is expected to be an important actor in disseminating the values of religious moderation. Teaching educators and all education

stakeholders in Indonesia need to actively campaign for students and the wider community so that they can produce a generation with an accommodating character for the existence of different groups (Husna & Thohir, 2020). The problem is that education actors in Indonesia are still weak in handling the problem of radicalism (Faisal, 2020; Mujizatullah, 2018; PPIM, 2018). In fact, a number of studies show the spread of extremism among high schools (Gultom, 2022); (Muasmara et al., 2022) cases of exclusivism in religious education textbooks at state universities (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2018) (Ministry of Religion, 2020). Muslim student activists have religious understandings that tend to be closed religious activities in the campus environment encourage the growth of exclusive religious views (Wildan & Muttaqin, 2022) (Muthohirin, 2014) infiltration of radicalism and extremism in the campus environment through campus mosques (Ismail, 2019) and 39% of students in 7 state universities are exposed to radicalism (PPIM, 2018) (Octivina, 2016) (Nurdin, 2021).

Starting from this anxiety, researchers have the view that the dissemination of religious moderation values is very important. Referring to the purpose of the government that rolled out the discourse of “religious moderation” being to overcome the problem of intolerant actions from Indonesian citizens, of course, what should be done, especially for university practitioners, is to conduct research studies that show a positive relationship between the cultivation of religious moderation values and tolerance schemes between religious communities.

### **Research Method**

The method used in this study is the qualitative method with a phenomenological approach and a descriptive survey. The study was conducted for approximately 6 months, from January to June 2023. Researchers corresponded first with the Muallaf Center and the research respondents. In addition, Researchers conduct literature studies related to the researcher’s concept, namely religious moderation.

Qualitative methods are used to expose converts’ perceptions of religious moderation. Early surveys were used to determine perceptions of religious moderation among converts. The source of this research data is five converts, with a minimum age of three years studying Islam. The selection of converts was based on an initial observational study conducted over three weeks. Preliminary studies have found that there are a number of converts who still do not know about the concept of religious moderation in Islam, so it is important to conduct an analysis of the ideology of violent extremism-based religion.

Meanwhile, secondary data finding were obtained through a survey method in the form of questionnaires with Likert scales. To facilitate the distribution of questionnaires to participants, surveys are made in the form of a *Google Form*. Questionnaires are used as a measuring tool to determine indications of radicalism and the factors that influence it. The questionnaire was distributed for approximately one week. After obtaining a score from the scale, a hypothetical test analysis was then carried out to obtain a categorization of the level of religious moderation. Then, for qualitative data, researchers obtained it through in-depth interviews with respondents. In this case, researchers encourage respondents to give honest answers to reduce the likelihood of social desirability bias towards the data collected. This is to ensure the reliability of the data collected. Qualitative data were recorded with the explicit permission of the participants. Recording during Wawancara also emphasizes significant aspects and direct impressions. Data from research respondents was obtained in approximately one month.

## Result and Discussion

Tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect and respect for differences of opinion, both between individuals and groups (Prahesti, 2022). Religious tolerance means mutual respect between religious communities. It is important for every religious believer to create harmonious and safe inter-religious relationships (K. M. Arif, 2021). Indonesia, as a multicultural country, aspires to have its citizens get along well in religion. Kminister Agama has been campaigning for the importance of “religious moderation” since 2016. This campaign aims to respond to various intolerant actions between religious communities that occur in Indonesia (Hefni, 2020). Hal tersebut digadang-gadang sebagai jawaban untuk melakukan revolusi mental (Permana & Setiawan, 2021) in order to increase religious harmony in Indonesia.

The concept of “moderasi” contains values with the main principle of upholding human values, justice, and balance between citizens holistically. Religious moderation can be interpreted as attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors that always take a middle position, act fairly and humanely, and are not extreme in religion. Religious moderation means not being extreme, being more open in addressing religious diversity, and finding common ground in differences (Rosidin et al., 2020). According to Pajarianto, religious moderation is defined as a form of placing oneself between extreme attitudes, both right and left, in an effort to observe and solve problems. This is because religious moderation is based on the Qur’an, so it is in the middle, which means there is no preference for the right or left wing (Pajarianto et al., 2022). In addition, religious moderation in Subchi’s research is also understood as a form of tolerance between religious people towards diverse beliefs as well as efforts at self-control and liberalism (Subchi et al., 2022).

In the context of a diverse society such as Indonesia, moderate religious understanding and practice have an important role in maintaining social harmony and interreligious harmony. Mahmud (2022) stated that religious generation is a demand that must be realized in the lives of society, nation, and state that is safe and harmonious among individuals and social groups. The reality of Indonesian society, consisting of various religions, ethnicities, races, cultures, and languages, requires a social order in the form of mutually agreed socio-religious norms as a reference in cooperation, interaction, and wider association (Husna & Thohir, 2020). Religious moderation in Indonesia is seen as a way to reduce religious radicalism and maintain the stability of the country’s security. This emphasizes practicing religious beliefs correctly while still respecting the existence of followers of other religions (Jura, 2021).

Previous research examining the level of religious moderation in converts has been difficult to find in the past decade. There are some that already exist but are limited to the objects of students, adolescents, and society in general (Rijal et al., 2022); (Saruroh et al., 2022); and (Arief, 2022). Meanwhile, there has been no research related to measuring the level of moderation in someone who is new to Islam. It is important to explore how new converts to Islam view the concept of moderation and how their views can contribute to the development of an inclusive and harmonious society.

Based on the results of the interview analysis, it was found that the perception of religious moderation is as follows: *First*, insight into the concept of religious moderation: three speakers stated that they did not know the concept of religious moderation.

“I don’t know,” PMA/PA/P6/NS3.

“Religious moderation—what is religious diversity?” PMA/PA/P11/NS4.

“For me, religious moderation can be dangerous for the Islamic creed because moderation is only half-hearted or at the midpoint. While in religion, we are required to be earnest, wholehearted, and endeavoring. Not half-hearted or moderate.” PMA/PA/P4/NS1.

From these answers, three interviewees did not understand the concept of religious moderation definitively. Meanwhile, the fourth interviewee, after being told the concept of religious moderation, stated that he was unfamiliar with the term moderation. There were significant doubts and incomprehensions related to the concept of religious moderation among the three interviewees. These results reflect doubts and variations in understanding that exist among interviewees related to the concept of religious moderation. Two interviewees expressed incomprehension, while one spoke skeptically of religious moderation.

These results point to the need for a more inclusive approach and better education related to the concept of religious moderation so that individuals can have a better understanding of the importance of moderation in maintaining interreligious harmony and tolerance in diverse societies. The process of adapting to a new religious identity can be challenging, and converts need additional support and guidance to fully understand and embrace the concept of religious moderation (Astuti & Abdul, 2023). Doubts and misunderstandings among converts regarding religious understanding can be influenced by various factors, such as different backgrounds and experiences (Siregar et al., 2020). A lack of clarity and consensus on the definition and interpretation of religious moderation can contribute to doubts and incomprehension experienced by converts. Availability of educational resources (Noviza, 2015), access to knowledgeable instructors (Supriadi, 2018), the presence of supportive communities or religious extension workers, and opportunities for dialogue (Ramlah Hakim, 2016; Rosidin et al., 2020) can also help converts understand religious moderation.

Furthermore, two speakers understood the concept of religious moderation definitively as follows.

“Moderation is an attitude or perspective of religious behavior that is moderate, tolerant, and respects differences between religious communities.” PMA/PA/P7/NS2.

“As far as I know, mutual tolerance for differences in religion, culture, opinion, or not forcing something, especially by force,” PMA/PA/P10/NS5.

The two interviewees had a clearer and more positive understanding of the concept of religious moderation. One of the respondents defined religious moderation as an attitude or perspective in religious behavior that is moderate, tolerant, and respects differences between religious people. This definition reflects the understanding that religious moderation involves a willingness to live religious beliefs with a non-extreme attitude and respect differences in beliefs between individuals and religious groups.

The second speaker defined religious moderation as mutual tolerance of differences in religion, culture, or opinion, or showing rejection of the use of violence to impose certain religious beliefs. This definition reflects the view that religious moderation involves being inclusive, respecting diversity, and rejecting violent acts in an attempt to impose religious beliefs.

Interpretations of these definitions point to a positive understanding of religious moderation as a principle that encourages tolerance, respect for differences, and rejection of extreme acts or violence in religious practice. This understanding reflects the view that religious moderation can contribute to interreligious harmony and the development of a harmonious society. This is in line with Devi’s opinion, according to which religious tolerance is an attitude of patience and refraining from disturbing and harassing other religions or beliefs that are different from hers (Devi Kasumawati, 2021). Tolerant behavior is not always applied to someone who has a different religion. People of the same religion also sometimes have differences between them, such as different

sects or madhhabs.

The following is a table illustrating the results of interviews conducted with a number of converts, involving questions and statements related to their perceptions of religious moderation at the Muallaf Center Malang.

**Table 1:** *Perceptions of Religious Moderation of Converts at the Muallaf Center*

Aspects	Statement	Interpretation
National commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pancasila emphasizes religious harmony, as a citizen it means being obliged to help others despite different beliefs (T1 / KB)</li> <li>• I am aware of other religious groups or Islam that are not compatible with the goals of our country, but as long as we understand the teachings of Islam well I don't think we will be affected. My religious understanding does not affect the ideology of statehood (T2/KB).</li> <li>• Respecting the red and white flag is not against my religion (T3KB).</li> <li>• In my opinion, the ideology of pancasila can be applied in religious life (T41 / KB)</li> </ul>	Views, attitudes, and practices that have allegiance to the basic consensus of nationality
Tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think we should respect not to wait for each other's religions. I don't feel the most right and smart (T1/TT).</li> <li>• I don't mind sharing facilities except for facilities related to halal haram recommended by Islam (T2/ TT).</li> <li>• I have always not discriminated between friends of different faiths, I respect them regardless of religious status (T3/TT).</li> <li>• My family is not yet Muslim, I want to show them that I have a better change (T4/TT).</li> <li>• I will help and continue to cooperate with others without distinction of faith (T5/TT).</li> <li>• I still respect my family even though they have different beliefs. I didn't immediately force them to change their beliefs like me (T1/ TT).</li> </ul>	Not being discriminatory based on differences in beliefs, willing to share and cooperate with individuals from different religious backgrounds, and respecting family members and friends without expecting a change in beliefs.

Aspects	Statement	Interpretation
Nonviolence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no need to blame religious differences. Because the road to heaven can be of various kinds. The difference is natural because the world is not uniform (T1/AK).</li> <li>• Not triggering uninterested conflicts, Islam teaches us to be at peace with others (T2/AK).</li> <li>• Differences of belief, opinions do not need to use violence, need deliberation and cooperation with an open mind (T3 / AK).</li> <li>• If we are religious, yes, we should not be extreme, but so far there is no such influence (T4/AK).</li> <li>• I do not agree that Jihad with fighting is relevant to Indonesia (T5/AK).</li> </ul>	<p>Stressed the importance of avoiding extremism and violence in the practice of religion, and took the middle ground by promoting peace, deliberation, and cooperation in the face of differences of faith.</p> <p>Taking the middle ground</p> <p>Prioritizing public benefit</p>
Accommodating in local culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even though friends of different religions got married, yes, I was still present to congratulate them.</li> <li>• I value religious rituals with different beliefs.</li> <li>• Guided by cultural and religious ethics go hand in hand, there is no need to turn those differences into conflicts</li> </ul>	<p>Accept local traditions and culture in their religious behavior</p>

From the thematic analysis table, a pattern of perception related to national commitment, tolerance, non-violence and local cultural accommodation is shown from the following understanding: *First*, national commitment is shown by the views, attitudes, and practices of converts who accept the principles of nationality contained in the Constitution. A view that has awareness as a citizen of the first country of Indonesia without attaching importance to religious ideology. Religion is the moral benchmark for maintaining unity (Nafi’Muthohirin, 2014). The muallaf considered that religious understanding did not conflict with the ideology of statehood and was committed to upholding national symbols as well as implementing Pancasila in religious aspects. This is in line with Sarippuddin and Azmi, who stated that the values of moderation, such as balance, tolerance, and reform, can contribute to a peaceful and compassionate life, which is in line with national principles (Sarippuddin & Azmi, 2022).

*Second*, the view related to tolerance among the converts is shown by respecting each other, not distinguishing, and still helping each other despite different beliefs. In this context, the importance of religious moderation can be seen in the ability to acknowledge the existence of others, be tolerant of differences, respect diverse views, and avoid the use of violence in an effort to impose beliefs (Muchtar et al., 2022) i’tidal (truth and stability).

*Third*, it relates to the converts' view of the absence of extreme ideologies shown by violence. They also disagree with the use of violent means, especially those in the name of religion, both verbal and physical violence, and do not force religious views and consider that only their views are the most correct. The concept of religious moderation in Islam includes not feeling that one's own views are the most correct, which indicates a rejection of extreme ideology (S. Arif, 2020) but in ways of thinking about the state because the relationship between the state and religious understanding often leads to extreme attitude in religion. Therefore, it requires moderate Islamic thinking, which transcend religious formalization through the state on one side, and the separation of religion and state on the other. On this regard, KH Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur. Islam respects the principles of not acting in extremes (*tawassuth*), balancing the life of the world and the hereafter (*tawazun*), and being fair and impartial (*i'tidal*) (Kusmidi, 2023).

*Fourth*, religious advocacy among Indonesian Muslims includes accommodating culture as one of its dimensions. The convert's view of accommodating behavior towards local culture is shown by a view that still accepts the practice of other religious practices as long as it does not deviate from religious teachings. The view of religious traditions does not show rigidity. Muallaf accepts and respects the religious traditions and rituals of the local culture, upholds religious and cultural ethics in harmony, and is willing to engage in events related to different beliefs in order to respect and support other individuals. Religious moderation encourages accommodating behavior by taking a fair and balanced stance, preventing the spread of radicalism and extremism (Hakim & Mudofir, 2023). The results of Subchi's study show that individuals who have moderate religiosity are more likely to show accommodating behavior towards local culture (Subchi et al., 2022). Thus, through an explanation of the perception of Muallaf in religious moderation, it can be concluded to show inclusive, tolerant, and prioritizing inter-religious harmony.

**Table 2:** *Religious Moderation Categories*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Hypothetical Mean	Hypothetical SD
Religious Moderation	5	30	120	75	0.5

Through the table of categories of religious moderation of converts at the Muallaf Center Malang, the following calculation results were obtained: Of the 5 converts who were respondents to the study, 100% were in the high category, namely a score of more than 75. It is based on categorization: high if the value of X is above 74; medium if the value of X is between 70 and 74; and low if the value of X is below 69.5. That is, results were obtained if all convert respondents in Muallaf Center had a high average understanding of religious moderation. The respondents interpreted that religious belief is an attitude, point of view, and behavior that always takes a middle position, acts fairly and humanely, and is not extreme in religion.

Indicators of the religious moderation questionnaire made by the researchers include national commitment, nonviolence, tolerance, and acceptance of tradition. The high category results obtained by respondents mean that respondents have a good understanding of national commitment, nonviolence, tolerance, and acceptance of tradition. They are not extreme in the religion of Islam.

Then, the following is a description of the response score based on the calculation results of five Muallaf who were respondents to the study at Muallaf Center Malang.

**Table 3:** *Description of Respondent Scores*

Respondens	Score	Category
1	32	Low
2	78	Tall
3	79	Tall
4	71	Keep
5	63	Low

Based on Table 3, it is known that the results of the level of religious moderation of converts in Muallaf Center Malang There are two converts who have scores in the high category. Through several indicators of questions in the questionnaire that include an understanding of religious moderation, namely national commitment, non-violence, tolerance, and acceptance of tradition, the results were one convert who had a medium score and two converts with a low score.

The perceptions of both individuals who received high scores and one person with a medium score category indicated that they had an attitude of meaning religious moderation and how to implement it. Religious moderation is necessary in order to have resistance to the infiltration of religion-based violent extremist ideologies and movements. Two converts who have low scores in religious moderation indicate that an understanding of religious moderation is still needed in order to have attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors that always take a middle position, act justly and humanely, and are not extreme in religion.

An understanding of religious moderation is very important to master first before actually implementing it. Understanding religious texts is an important element that every Muslim needs to have, including a convert to Islam. This is because the text of the Qur'an requires interpretation, which allows it to bring out different perspectives from one another. Various interpretations occur as a necessity because they are created inseparably from the understanding of the interpreter. When mufasir applies textual understanding, the followers of the interpretation also use textual understanding, while mufasir, who tends to use contextual interpretation, will bring up a contextual understanding.

With religious moderation and the concept of unity in diversity, it plays an important role, especially in the Bhinneka Tunggal Ika State, to prevent the emergence of radical ideas (Apandie et al., 2022) motto or watchword is no longer interpreted as values that must be transmitted. This condition also causes polarization in society. The purpose of this research is to identify and elaborate the values contained in Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and Religious Moderation to strengthen conception and practices of pluralism in Indonesia. This research used qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection were performed by Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Thearena, with this, is able to avoid acts of terror and religious conflicts. The form of implementing religious moderation, according to Jamarudin is characterized by tolerance between communities, respect for brotherhood, and respect for all existing diversity. Of course, making essential values guidelines for people in the archipelago is not an exaggeration because the teaching of these values (human values) is found in all religions (Jamarudin et al., 2022). In fact, the importance of religious moderation implications is also growing among Muslim students in Indonesia (Syarif, 2021). Each individual experiences the development of their academic competence, both in terms of reasoning and understanding and in terms of professional skills (Syarif, 2021); (Solichah et al., 2021).

Contextual understanding in understanding interpretation must go hand in hand

with the appropriate interpretation methodology, such as the interpretation recently used, which is the Maudhui method, which is a thematic method in accordance with related themes. If religious moderation is the subject of study (Zakiyah, 2022), then the verses used are verses that are in accordance with religious moderation, so that by using this method, converts will have a much broader paradigm in understanding religious moderation so as to become tolerant and non-violent converts.

### **Conclusion**

This article concludes that the perception of religious moderation among converts at the Muallaf Center Malang is reflected through the views and attitudes of those who accept the principles of nationhood contained in Pancasila and Law Dasar 1945. They show awareness and adherence to the principles of nationhood, which can be seen in the recognition of the importance of peace between religious communities. In general, such converts seek to understand and integrate national ideals into their religious beliefs. They believe that a Muslim who has a good understanding of religion will not contradict the ideology of the state. The converts also have a good attitude towards national commitment by understanding the need to defend the ideals of Pancasila, respecting the red and white flag, and considering the country's contextual ideology to be applicable in religious life. The tolerant attitude of converts is shown by the belief that they are not the truest and smartest. They like to share facilities with followers of other religions and do not discriminate against friends based on religious beliefs.

Meanwhile, Upaya wants to help non-Muslim family members show tolerance and a desire to contribute to positive change. From the perspective of nonviolence, converts oppose the use of violence to resolve religious conflicts. This viewpoint is consistent with the concept of religious moderation, which emphasizes the need to practice religious beliefs in a non-extreme way while avoiding acts of violence. This attitude shows a willingness to adapt to the local culture while maintaining religious beliefs. Despite confusion and skepticism about the concept of religious moderation, some converts showed favorable attitudes towards the values of religious moderation after additional explanation. An inclusive approach and better education on the concept of religious moderation are needed so that people, especially converts, have a better understanding of the need for moderation in maintaining religious harmony.

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