



The Paradox of Secularization: The Dynamics of Religious Moderation and Identity Politics in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia as a country with the largest religious diversity in the world faces complex challenges in balancing secular and religious values in the life of the nation. The growing phenomenon of secularization in the modern era does not necessarily eliminate the role of religion in the public sphere, but rather creates a paradox where religion remains a strong influence in socio-political dynamics. This research seeks to analyze the secularization paradox in the context of the dynamics of religious moderation and identity politics in Indonesia and why religious moderation policies have not been fully effective in reducing identity politics. This research is a descriptive research with a qualitative approach. The data collection method is carried out through library research, namely by collecting secondary data from various relevant written sources. Secularization in Indonesia has different characteristics from secularization in the Western world. Identity politics has become a central phenomenon in contemporary democratic dynamics, where religion is often mobilized as a means of legitimizing power. This situation creates a non-linear form of secularization - not towards the separation of religion and state, but instead towards the consolidation of religion-based political power. The Government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Religious Affairs formulated the Religious Moderation policy in 2019 as a response to the increasing escalation of intolerance and polarization of religious identities in the public sphere. The implementation of Religious Moderation still faces various structural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. To strengthen religious moderation, a comprehensive approach is needed that involves reforming the political system, strengthening digital literacy, and internalizing inclusive values at the community level.

Keywords: Religion, Identity, Moderation, Politics, Secularism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a country with the largest religious diversity in the world faces complex challenges in balancing secular and religious values in the life of the nation (Hadiz, 2016). The phenomenon of secularization that developed in the modern era did not necessarily eliminate the role of religion in the public sphere, but rather created a paradox where religion remained a strong influence in socio-political dynamics, even experiencing revitalization in new forms (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). This paradox becomes even more complex when faced with the reality of Indonesian society, which is plural but still upholds religious values as the foundation of social life.

Classical secularization theory developed by sociologists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim predicted that modernization would reduce the influence of religion in people's lives (Barton, 2010). However, contemporary developments show that religion does not disappear from the public sphere, but rather undergoes a transformation in the way it participates in social and political life (Seligman & Casanova, 1994). In Indonesia, this phenomenon is evident through the emergence of religious movements that are active in practical politics, as well as the development of the discourse of religious moderation as a response to radicalism and extremism (Idi & Priansyah, 2023).

Religious moderation as a concept promoted by the Indonesian government since 2019 aims to create a balanced, tolerant and non-extreme understanding and practice of religion (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). This concept was born in response to the increasing phenomenon of religious radicalism and identity politics that threaten national unity. However, the implementation of religious moderation in practice faces various challenges, especially when dealing with identity politics that utilize religious sentiments for practical political interests (Kurniawan &



Afifi, 2023).

Identity politics in the Indonesian context cannot be separated from the long history of the complex relationship between religion and the state (Abqa, 2020). Since the independence era, debates about the role of religion in the state have become a central issue, from debates about the basis of the state to the implementation of various policies related to religion (Hefner, 2011). This phenomenon has strengthened in the reform era where freedom of expression opens space for various groups to voice their religious aspirations, including in the political arena (Nur, 2019).

The dynamics of identity politics in Indonesia show a paradoxical pattern where on the one hand there is a strengthening of pluralism and tolerance, but on the other hand there is also a strengthening of religious exclusivism and identity politics (Mietzner, 2018). Events such as the 2017 Jakarta elections show how religious issues can be mobilized for political purposes, while also revealing the social vulnerability of society to religion-based identity politics. This phenomenon questions the effectiveness of the religious moderation approach in the face of increasingly strong identity politics (Stevanus et al., 2024).

The paradox of secularization in Indonesia is also reflected in state policies that attempt to balance secular principles of governance with accommodation of religious interests and values. Pancasila as the state ideology reflects an attempt to create a synthesis between universal (Aulia & Arifin, 2023) and particular values, including religious values, but its implementation in practice often faces tensions and contradictions. These tensions become more complex when faced with demands from various religious groups to accommodate their interests in public policy.

The growing phenomenon of religious radicalism in Indonesia also shows the complexity of the secularization paradox, where modernization actually provides space for the development of radical interpretations of religion. Information and communication technology, a product of modernization, is used by radical groups to spread their ideology, challenging the assumption that modernization will reduce the influence of religion in people's lives (Lim, 2017). This shows that secularization is not linear, but full of contradictions and paradoxes. The government's response through the religious moderation policy shows an attempt to overcome this paradox by creating a moderate and tolerant religious understanding. However, the effectiveness of this policy remains a big question, especially when faced with social and political structures that still allow the mobilization of religion-based identity politics (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). Various religious moderation programs launched by the government have not shown significant results in reducing identity politics, and in some cases have even caused new controversies (Malik & Busrah, 2021).

The paradoxical dynamics of secularization in Indonesia are increasingly complex when associated with contemporary developments such as digitalization and social media. Digital platforms have become a new terrain for the articulation of religious identity as well as the spread of intolerance narratives (Lim, 2017). On the one hand, social media facilitates a more plural religious discourse, but on the other hand, it also accelerates polarization through the spread of radical content and SARA hoaxes (Noviandy et al., 2023). This phenomenon complicates religious moderation efforts, as the state is not only dealing with traditional groups, but also with urban youth who construct their religious identity through the filter of digital algorithms (Slama, 2018).

The recent increase in political polarization suggests that religion-based identity politics not only persists, but also evolves in a more fragmented form (Harsono, 2023). The electability of political parties in Indonesia is increasingly influenced by religious sentiments, where voters tend to identify with certain religious groups (Istianah & Saehudin, 2023). This strengthens the thesis that secularization in Indonesia does not lead to the privatization of religion, but to the commodification of religious symbols in the contestation of power (Heryanto, 2014). This phenomenon also questions the extent to which Pancasila as a common platform is still effective in bridging differences.



The role of the younger generation in this dynamic cannot be ignored. Urban millennials and Gen Z have developed hybrid religious expressions - on the one hand accepting global values, but on the other hand remaining critical of Western secularism. They are the main actors in the viralization of religious content on social media, which is sometimes moderate but also has the potential to nurture religion-based "digital populism" (Nisa, 2018). This creates a new battleground of discourse, between the official narrative of religious moderation and the alternative narrative that develops in the digital space.

State policies in response to this paradox are often caught in ambivalence. At the international level, Indonesia actively promotes religious moderation through forums such as the G20 and OIC, but domestically, policies such as the TPKS Law and the revision of the Criminal Code have sparked protests from conservative groups who feel their religious values are threatened. This ambivalence reflects a fundamental dilemma: efforts to moderate religion without acknowledging the structural roots of identity politics - such as economic inequality and marginalization of minority groups - will only be cosmetic (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019).

Based on this background, this research seeks to analyze the secularization paradox in the context of the dynamics of religious moderation and identity politics in Indonesia. The main focus of the research is to understand how the secularization paradox is manifested in the dynamics of religious moderation and identity politics in Indonesia, and why religious moderation policies have not been fully effective in reducing identity politics. Through an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, this research is expected to make theoretical and practical contributions in understanding and overcoming the challenges faced by Indonesia in managing diversity in the contemporary era.

2. METHOD

This research is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach that aims to understand and analyze socio-political phenomena in depth, especially related to the secularization paradox in the context of religious moderation and identity politics in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, dynamics, and complex relationships between religion, state, and society within a particular social and historical framework (Huda, 2021). This research does not focus on hypothesis testing or generalization of quantitative data, but rather on interpretative understanding of social reality constructed by various actors and discourses.

The data collection method was carried out through library research, by collecting secondary data from various relevant written sources (Faisol, 2024). Data sources included academic books, e-books, national and international scientific journals, previous research results, government policy documents, and articles and opinions published in print and online media. These data were obtained through access to credible official websites, scientific repositories and digital archives.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Secularization theory has long been a key framework for understanding the relationship between religion and modernity. However, the traditional view that modernity will automatically relegate religion to the private sphere has been widely criticized by sociologists such as José Casanova, Peter L. Berger, and Grace Davie. They argue that religion has not only survived but also re-asserted its influence in the public sphere, albeit in a different form (Al Abdu et al., 2024). José Casanova offers a more complex understanding of secularization by distinguishing it into three main meanings. First, secularization as the decline of religion, which is not necessarily universal. Casanova asserts that the decline of religious practices is not an inevitable law of history, but rather depends on religion's response to modernity (Knoblauch et al., 2012).



Second, secularization as the privatization of religion, where religion is marginalized from the public sphere and becomes an individual affair. However, this phenomenon is particularly prevalent in Western Europe, where a history of absolute state and unified church marginalized the role of religion. In contrast, in the United States, which has no tradition of an ecclesiastical state, religion remains alive in public discourse (Hudaeri, 2018; Knoblauch et al., 2012; Seligman & Casanova, 1994).

Third, secularization as differentiation, which is the separation of religious institutions from the state, economy, and science. Casanova sees this as a process of emancipation that does not necessarily weaken religion. Instead, religion can continue to play an active role in the public sphere despite its structural separation from the state. Furthermore, Casanova introduced the concept of religious deprivatization, which is the return of religion as a social and political force, as seen in religious movements in Latin America, Poland, and the US (Hudaeri, 2018; Knoblauch et al., 2012; Seligman & Casanova, 1994).

Meanwhile, Peter L. Berger experienced a shift in view from a proponent of classical secularization theory to an observer of religious revival. Initially, Berger believed that modernity would erode the role of religion, but then he realized that the world was actually experiencing desecularization. According to him, religion did not disappear but rather adapted and even revived as a cultural and social force. Berger saw religion as a form of "sacred cosmization"-a framework of meaning that provides a sense of order and awe of the transcendent. He emphasized that religious experience is never entirely individual, but is always connected to social interaction. Religious practice, for him, is the internalization of values that are then expressed in social action. Thus, religion remains relevant because it fulfills the human need for meaning and community (Dixon & Berger, 1968; Williams & Berger, 2001).

Secularization in Indonesia has different characteristics from secularization in the Western world. In the West, especially in the French political tradition (*laïcité*), secularism emphasizes the absolute separation between religion and the state. Religion is considered a private domain, while the state is run neutrally without religious influence (Breit & Plath, 2010). In contrast, in Indonesia, secularization is accommodative-the state does not completely separate itself from religion, but rather regulates it within the framework of maintaining social order and national integration. This can be seen in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution, which affirms that the state is "based on the One True God" and at the same time "guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace their respective religions." In other words, Indonesia is not a formally secular state, but a state that upholds religion but does not adhere to one official religion.

Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat in *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* mention that postcolonial states like Indonesia often experience ambiguity in managing religion (Sutherland, 2003). The state has two conflicting tendencies: on the one hand, it wants to discipline religion so as not to cause disintegration or radicalism; on the other hand, it relies on religious symbols and moral authority to gain legitimacy from the people. For example, the government often involves major religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah in public policy-making, whether in education, family law or social affairs. This shows that religion is not just a socio-belief entity, but also an active political component.

This phenomenon creates what Olivier Roy calls the re-politicization of religion - religion does not undergo substantive secularization, but is reabsorbed by political forces for certain interests (Johnston, 2009). In the Indonesian context, this can be seen in the massive use of religious symbols by politicians, especially during the campaign period or ahead of elections. According to (Burhani, 2018) from LIPI (now BRIN), there is an increasing trend of Islamic populism in post-reform Indonesian politics. Islamic symbols are used as a political mobilization tool to counter nationalist or secular forces. Ironically, this happens precisely when the state intensively promotes religious moderation and tolerance.



Identity politics has become a central phenomenon in contemporary democratic dynamics, where religion is often mobilized as a means of legitimizing power. Francis Fukuyama and Amartya Sen offer different but complementary perspectives in understanding this phenomenon. Fukuyama, in *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (2018), argues that identity politics is rooted in the thymos—the part of the human psyche that craves recognition. When religious groups feel their identity is ignored or denigrated, they tend to fight for that recognition politically, even in exclusive and confrontational ways (Leyva, 2020). However, Fukuyama also warns of the danger of megalothymia, the desire to be recognized as superior, which is often exploited by political elites to mobilize support based on religious sentiments.

Meanwhile, Amartya Sen in *Identity and Violence* rejects the reduction of human identity to a single dimension, such as religion. His childhood experience witnessing sectarian violence in India shaped his belief that humans have multiple identities—as adherents of a particular religion, members of a social class, workers, or citizens. When identity is reduced to only one aspect (e.g., "Muslim" or "Christian"), the potential for conflict increases as other differences that could be social glue are ignored (Adnan, 2021). Sen strongly criticizes the politicization of religion at the expense of solidarity across identities, such as economic commonalities or common interests as citizens (Sen, 2007).

In Indonesia, religious mobilization in politics is often seen in the form of using religious symbols to attract voter support, such as secular politicians who suddenly wear skullcaps or visit Islamic boarding schools during the campaign period. This kind of practice, according to Sen, is a dangerous form of religious instrumentalization because it turns religious identity into a divisive tool instead of a source of shared values. Fukuyama added that exclusive identity politics can deepen social polarization, as happened in Donald Trump's campaign in the US or sectarian conflict in India (Leyva, 2020).

Religious-based identity politics has the potential to divide society if not managed wisely. Fukuyama offers a solution in the form of inclusive recognition of all groups, while Sen emphasizes the importance of promoting alternative identities—such as economic class or citizenship—that can bridge religious differences (Leyva, 2020; Sen, 2007). In the Indonesian context, Pancasila and the motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* can serve as a unifying framework that counterbalances religious identity politics. Islamic perspectives also provide a critical view of religious mobilization. The politicization of religion (*tasywīq dīnī*) that makes religion merely a tool of power is considered a fraud (*ghishh*) and contradicts Islamic political ethics. However, political struggle based on Islamic values—such as justice and anti-corruption—is not mere politicization, but the application of religious teachings in the public sphere. Buya Syafii Maarif's idea of ethical religiosity is relevant here, where the universal values of Islam are prioritized over narrow symbolism.

Based on Fukuyama and Sen's analysis, Indonesian democracy requires a multidimensional approach to reduce identity polarization. First, multicultural education - like the Santiniketan model in India where Sen studied - can teach reasoning and empathy to reduce prejudice. Second, media regulation is needed to limit provocative content that exacerbates racial sentiments. Third, the role of moderate Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah is important in promoting inclusive narratives. Fourth, strengthening deliberative public space as proposed by Habermas (Muttaqien, 2023) can be an arena for dialog between groups. Finally, inclusive economic policies can shift the focus from religious identity to class identity, creating new solidarities that transcend religious barriers.

Indonesia is not only a regulator of religion, but also a producer of religious discourse (Hefner, 2019). The state, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, actively issues regulations on the religious education curriculum, recognition of the six official religions, management of the hajj, and supervision of religious organizations. However, according to a study by Künkler and Stepan in *Democratization and Islam in Indonesia*, the state also plays an often ambiguous role: it supports religious freedom in principle, but in practice often restricts the expression of minority religious groups in the name of public order or majoritarianism (Künkler, 2013).



This situation creates a non-linear form of secularization - not towards the separation of religion and state, but instead towards the consolidation of religion-based political power. In the language of Clifford Geertz, this is political involution, where traditional values (in this case religion) remain the basis of political orientation despite the implementation of modern democratic structures (William & Geertz, 1961). Instead of encouraging a rational and inclusive public space, the state's secularization project strengthens religion as an instrument of mobilization, not just personal spirituality (Herdiansah et al., 2019). That is the paradox: the state encourages moderation, but its socio-political space allows the free expansion of religious identity politics.

The Government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Religious Affairs formulated a Religious Moderation policy in 2019 in response to the increasing escalation of intolerance and polarization of religious identities in the public sphere. The Religious Moderation Roadmap 2019-2024 compiles four main indicators as an operational framework, namely: national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and accommodating local culture (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). The strategic goal of this policy is to shape a way of religion that is friendly to differences, and strengthen national unity without negating expressions of faith.

A number of programs have been launched to support this policy, including training for state civil apparatus (ASN), integration of moderation values in the religious education curriculum, and religious literacy campaigns in the digital space. The government also collaborates with major organizations such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and PGI to expand the social scope of this idea of moderation. However, this policy has not yet shown significant effectiveness in reducing identity politics that are increasingly strengthening, especially ahead of electoral political momentum such as regional elections and elections.

One of the main problems is the implementation approach that tends to be top-down and bureaucratic. As stated by Wahid Foundation (2022), the concept of religious moderation is still not deeply understood by grassroots communities, especially outside the scope of formal institutions. When the values instilled are not culturally internalized, moderation only becomes a state slogan that has no impact on changing people's attitudes. Participatory, dialogic and community-based approaches have not yet become mainstream in the implementation of this policy. On the other hand, religious-based identity politics narratives remain more popular and easily reach public emotions. A number of studies such as Burhanuddin Muhtadi's show that identity politics is able to build solidarity of support through "us vs them" rhetoric, which is much more resonant in a society that is experiencing social and economic uncertainty (Muhtadi, 2019a). Intolerant and sectarian content is also easier to go viral on social media than moderate messages, showing that the digital social terrain has become the main space for the expansion of exclusive religious identity, not moderation.

In the midst of these challenges, the success of the Religious Moderation program is also influenced by the example of political leaders and religious figures. Unfortunately, some political elites are often ambivalent: on the one hand supporting the idea of moderation, but on the other hand utilizing religious symbols for electoral purposes. This situation creates a crisis of trust and makes it difficult to internalize the values of moderation consistently. In addition, the absence of a systematic and measurable evaluation mechanism makes it difficult for the government to identify areas of improvement from the programs that have been running.

Although the religious moderation program has been declared as a national policy and included in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) since 2019, its implementation still faces various structural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. The following is an in-depth analysis of the five main factors that have caused the religious moderation program to not achieve optimal results.

(1) Identity Politics Has Been Institutionalized in the Indonesian Political System. Religious-based identity politics has been deeply rooted in Indonesia's political system, especially since the 2017 Jakarta elections, which became a turning point in the use of religious issues as a mass mobilization strategy. In this context, identity politics played an important role in the 2017 Jakarta elections by



motivating Muslims to elect leaders of the same religion, creating a collective consciousness among Muslim voters. This phenomenon is not only limited to Jakarta, but has become a blueprint that is adapted in various political contestations in Indonesia. According to Burhanuddin Muhtadi's analysis in his work "Vote Buying in Indonesia: The Mechanics of Electoral Bribery", the use of identity politics proved to be more effective than conventional strategies because it was able to create strong emotional ties between candidates and voters (Muhtadi, 2019b). This strategy was then widely adopted by politicians because it was considered cheaper and more effective than program-based campaigns. The institutionalization of identity politics creates a cycle that is difficult to break. When one party successfully uses identity issues to win, the other party feels compelled to use similar strategies to remain competitive. As a result, the narrative of religious moderation that emphasizes tolerance and pluralism becomes marginalized because it is considered less "selling" politically.

(2) Elitist and Top-down Approach in Policy Implementation. One of the fundamental weaknesses in the implementation of religious moderation is its elitist and top-down approach. The religious moderation policy has never been thoroughly evaluated in order to determine the success/failure level of the program over time. This shows that the program is still technocratic without involving active participation from the grassroots community. Research conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the report "Religious Tolerance in Indonesia: Recent Survey Findings" (2021) shows that the majority of religious moderation programs are still at the level of religious elites and government bureaucracy. Meanwhile, people at the grassroots level, especially in conflict-prone areas, have not felt a significant impact from this program. This limitation is also reflected in program designs that tend to be uniform and insensitive to local contexts. For example, a program designed for urban communities in Jakarta may not necessarily suit the social dynamics in rural areas in East Java or West Sumatra. In fact, religious identity-based conflicts often have very specific and contextual root causes. In addition, the lack of involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in policy formulation and implementation is also an inhibiting factor. Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, or various local NGOs actually have strong experience and networks in managing diversity, but their role is still limited as implementers of government programs rather than as strategic partners in policy formulation.

(3) Lack of Legal Firmness against Actors of Religious Politicization. One of the biggest challenges in implementing religious moderation is the state's inconsistency in dealing with actors who use religion for political purposes. Although Indonesia has various regulations governing hate speech and blasphemy, law enforcement is still very selective and inconsistent. A study conducted by Imparsial in the report "The State of Human Rights in Indonesia 2022" shows that there are still many cases of religious-based hate speech that are not followed up legally, especially if the perpetrators are public figures or have certain political affiliations. This inconsistency creates moral hazard where political actors feel safe to continue using divisive narratives due to the possibility of minimal legal sanctions. Concrete examples of this inconsistency can be seen in the handling of various cases involving religious or political figures who use pulpits or public platforms to spread intolerant narratives. While some cases are dealt with firmly, others are left unpunished or only receive a light reprimand. This difference in treatment not only weakens the rule of law, but also sends the wrong signal to the public that the practice of religious politicization can still be tolerated under certain conditions. Research conducted by the Wahid Foundation in the "Annual Report on Freedom of Religion and Belief 2022" also shows that many intolerance actors actually gain legitimacy from this weakness in law enforcement. They feel protected and even legitimized to continue spreading exclusive narratives because there are no clear legal consequences.

(4) Social Media as an Accelerator of Identity Politics. The digital era has fundamentally changed the landscape of identity politics in Indonesia. Social media has not only become a platform for disseminating information, but also a highly effective narrative battleground for identity-based mass mobilization. Research conducted by Drone Emprit Academic in "Digital Hate Speech in Indonesia: Mapping and Analysis" (2020) shows that content containing racial and hate speech elements has a much higher engagement rate than moderate content. This phenomenon occurs because social media algorithms tend to prioritize content that generates high emotional reactions, including controversial



or polarizing content. As a result, religious moderation narratives that tend to invite dialogue and tolerance become less visible than provocative and divisive narratives. Research conducted by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) in "Online Activism and Social Media Usage Among Indonesian Muslims" (2021) shows that radical and intolerant groups are much more adaptive in utilizing digital technology compared to moderate groups. They not only use mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, but also develop their own digital ecosystems through messaging applications and more closed online forums. Another challenge is the echo chamber and filter bubble phenomenon that reinforces polarization. Social media algorithms tend to display content that matches user preferences, creating a homogenous space where intolerant narratives can strengthen without an effective counter-narrative. This situation is exacerbated by the low digital literacy of Indonesians, which makes them vulnerable to disinformation and hoaxes spread through social media.

(5) Weak Cultural Secularism in Indonesian Society. A fundamental challenge faced by religious moderation programs is the weak tradition of cultural secularism in Indonesian society. In contrast to political secularism that separates religion from the state, cultural secularism refers to the ability of society to separate public life from specific religious doctrines while still respecting spiritual values. In the Indonesian context, religion is not only a personal belief system, but also a very strong cultural and social identity. Research conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) in the "National Survey on Tolerance and Radicalism 2021" shows that the majority of Indonesians still have difficulty distinguishing between criticism of certain religious practices and insults to religion as a whole. This phenomenon is in line with the theory proposed by Olivier Roy in "Secularism Confronts Islam" (2007), which states that the failure of secularism often occurs when religion has been "localized" and becomes an integral part of community identity. In the Indonesian context, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism are not only belief systems, but also identity markers that determine one's social and political position in society. This weak cultural secularism makes the discourse of religious moderation paradoxical. On the one hand, this program invites people to be more tolerant of differences, but on the other hand, the approach used is still very dependent on religious legitimacy. As a result, when there is a conflict of interpretation between moderation and religious orthodoxy, people tend to choose the one that is considered more "pure" in terms of religion, even though it is actually more intolerant.

Based on the above analysis, the effectiveness of religious moderation in Indonesia requires a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach. First, structural reforms are needed in the political system that can minimize incentives to use identity politics. Second, policy implementation must be more participatory by involving civil society organizations and local communities as strategic partners. Third, law enforcement against religious politicization actors must be carried out consistently and indiscriminately.

Fourth, a more adaptive communication strategy is needed in the digital era, including the development of engaging and viral religious moderation content. Fifth, there needs to be a long-term effort to develop a culture of cultural secularism that allows harmonious coexistence between various religious groups without sacrificing their respective identities. Without a holistic and consistent approach, religious moderation programs will remain stagnant as an elite discourse that is unable to take root in Indonesia's complex socio-political reality.

4. CONCLUSION

Theories of secularization and identity politics show that religion remains a relevant socio-political force in Indonesia despite the challenges of modernity. José Casanova and Peter L. Berger prove that religion does not experience total privatization, but rather adapts through deprivatization and desecularization, where religious values continue to influence the public sphere. However, the politicization of religion as a tool of identity politics mobilization - as Fukuyama and Sen explain - only deepens social polarization. The government's Religious Moderation Policy seeks to address this



issue, but is hampered by a top-down approach, weak law enforcement, and the dominance of intolerant narratives on social media.

Strengthening religious moderation requires a comprehensive approach that involves reforming the political system, strengthening digital literacy, and internalizing inclusive values at the community level. The main challenge is to transform religion-based identity politics into a more unifying national identity, while maintaining a balance between religious rights and social cohesion. Without systematic efforts, religion will remain a potentially divisive mobilization tool, rather than a source of shared values to strengthen Indonesian democracy.

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