

## **Pluralism in Religious Moderation from the Perspective of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study aims to analyze pluralism in religious moderation from the perspective of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). This research uses a qualitative approach through a descriptive-analytical method. The results and discussion of this study are trying to find out pluralism and religious moderation from Abdurrahman Wahid's perspective, because Gus Dur is called the father of national pluralism. This study concludes that religious moderation is a conception that can build tolerance and harmony in order to strengthen national unity and integrity. And it is recommended for future researchers to be able to further develop research like this to be even better so that they can complement the deficiencies that exist in this study.*

**Keywords:** *Abdurrahman Wahid, Religious Moderation, Pluralism*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is a very diverse nation. The very diverse, complex and heterogeneous socio-cultural and geographical conditions reflect this. In fact, differences of opinion can always lead to conflict, war, and division, even in matters of religion (G. Lestari, 2015). Naturally, if Indonesia itself perceives six religions. As a result, Indonesian society experiences pluralism problems (Nasihin & Dewi, 2019).

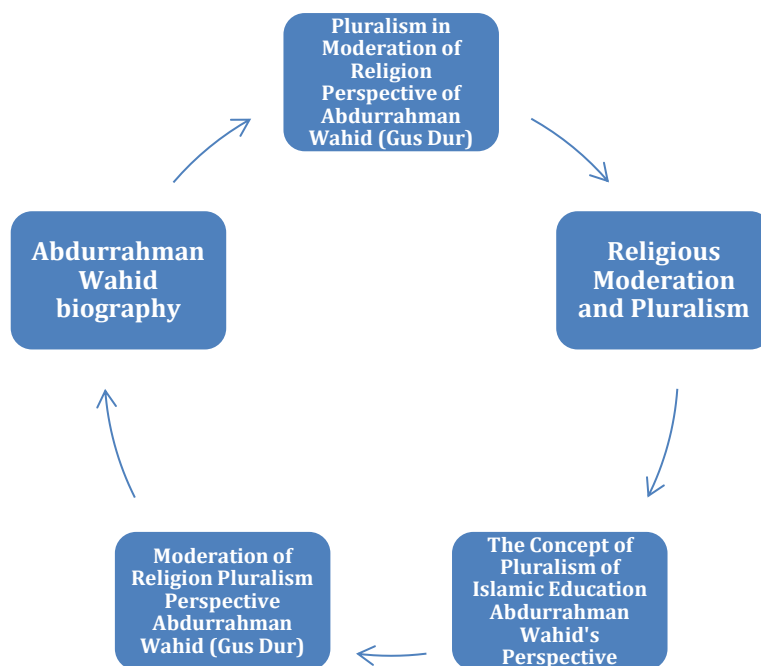
In Indonesia, conflicts triggered by differences in religion, race, and ethnicity started around the 1990s (Nasihin & Dewi, 2019). This shows that Indonesian pluralism has not been fully utilized as a force for good. A society can use differences as its own opportunity to raise issues of division of life. Of course this will have a direct impact on the sovereignty and integrity of a nation.

In essence, difference must be an asset that must be maintained (Wika Alzana et al., 2021). The distinctive strength of a nation will come from the success of cultivating differences (Wika Alzana et al., 2021). In the Indonesian context, the existing diversity and pluralism are bound by the basic principle of unity and oneness, this is where the motto "*Unity in Diversity*" comes from. Regarding religion, pluralism is the source of the concept of pluralism which seems to justify religious differences. It is believed that

pluralism can lead to a society that is peaceful, tolerant and mutually respectful (Arafah, 2020). The ultimate goal of religious moderation is this.

The importance of discussing Abdurrahman Wahid's pluralism is because according to him, pluralism is a view to accept differences as a *sunnatullah* in order to know each other, avoid divisions, develop cooperation by instilling a sense of mutual understanding, mutual belonging and being inclusive, not limiting association with anyone, but still believing in the truth of religion themselves by equating faith in total. In the perspective of Islamic law, Abdurrahman Wahid's thoughts about pluralism have harmony, namely the concept of monotheism. Gus Dur did not mix up the concept of monotheism and other religions in Islam and upheld universal values by developing a sense of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for the rights of other people from various backgrounds (Zakaria, 2016).

### FRAMEWORK OF THINKING



As a logical flow of this research, it is necessary to design a framework of thinking. Abdurrahman Wahid was born on August 4, 1940 in the Denanyar area of Jombang. He is the eldest of six siblings. His father, K.H. Abdul Wahid Hasyim, is the son of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari who is the founder of the Tebuireng Jombang Islamic boarding school and the pioneer of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) *jami'yyah* (organization), the largest organization in Indonesia with more than 40 million members (Setiawan, 2005). Religious moderation

is a step ahead of the mainstream radicalization approach, because it wants to do "improvement from within". Through religious moderation, religious people are not positioned as "sources of problems", but as "proteges" who need to soften their religious understanding without having to shout about religious radicalism. Religious moderation wants to invite religious people to be moderate in religious practices (Arif, 2020). Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is a scholar who has a direction of thought towards the pluralism of society. The main goal is for a society to have a pattern of peaceful coexistence. If the pluralism of a society is not accompanied by a good understanding of pluralism, it will trigger misunderstandings which at some point can invite disintegration (split). More than that, pluralism also teaches about awareness to know each other and have good dialogue which then takes and gives in a society. Pluralism also alludes to collectivity issues that we know in Islam with the terms *ummah*, *jama'ah*, *ra'iyah*, *imamate*, *ukhuwah* (government, leadership, brotherhood) (Sari & Dozan, 2021). Thus, religious moderation from Gus Dur's perspective through his thoughts, we can discover how religious moderation works as a methodology for his Islamic political thought so as to present an understanding of moderate Islamic statehood (Arif, 2020).

Previous research has been carried out by experts. Among others: Muhammad Toha (2022), "Islamic Moderation and the School of Thought of Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Education and Religious Studies*. This study discusses Islamic moderation and schools of religious pluralism. This study uses a qualitative approach to literature study through interpretive philosophical methods. The results and discussion of this study indicate that Islam does not consider all religions to be the same, but Islam treats all religions equally by prioritizing *tasamuh* (tolerance), deliberation among religious adherents, and having a non-discriminatory attitude. (Toha & Muna, 2022).

Eko Setiawan (2005), "Gus Dur's Concept of Pluralism Theology in Hacking Diversity in Indonesia," *Astiki Journal*. This study discusses pluralism in fostering diversity in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach to the approach *library research*. The results and discussion of this study indicate that pluralism is an understanding that recognizes and believes in the existence of differences in society which include differences in religion, race, group, ethnicity, culture and customs. (Setiawan, 2005).

Indo Santalia (2005), "K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid: Religion and the State, Pluralism, Democratization and Indigenization," *Al-Adyan Journal*. This study discusses Gus Dur's <http://proceedings.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/lc-TiaRS/>

mission in his concept of pluralism, which is to try to eliminate attitudes of hatred between religions, because hatred can lead to hostility. The emergence of hostility is contrary to the sacred mission of religion which calls for peace. Pluralism requires openness, tolerance and mutual respect for humanity as a whole (Santalia, 2015).

Previous research has alluded to Gus Dur's concept of the relationship between religion (Islam) and the state (Arif, 2020). In his concept of pluralism, Gus Dur also tries to eliminate the attitude of hatred between one religion and another, because hatred can lead to hostility (Setiawan, 2005). In describing pluralism, Gus Dur often connects it with religion, because religion in reality is often used as a weapon for the majority to "combat and eradicate" minority groups. Gus Dur's thoughts on pluralism can be seen in his attitude which tends to defend minorities and cooperate regardless of differences in beliefs (Santalia, 2015). The difference between this research and several previous studies lies in the implication that this research is more focused on Gus Dur's view of pluralism in religious moderation.

As a theoretical basis in this study, a literature review is needed. Abdurrahman Wahid is a phenomenal figure who has a unique and distinctive style, his thoughts and actions during his lifetime often cause controversy. Abdurrahman Wahid or known as Gus Dur, Gus is the honorary name given to the son of a kiai which means mas. Gus is an abbreviation of a good person who has a noble character (Setiawan, 2005). Religious moderation is needed as our cultural strategy in caring for Indonesianness and diversity. As a country that is very rich with differences, the predecessors of this country have formulated a concept in the life of the nation and state, namely Pancasila as the philosophy of life for the Indonesian people. Pancasila itself has succeeded in reconciling various forms of differences, be it ethnicity, race, ethnicity, and religion is no exception (Abror, 2020). Pluralism is a form of plural society related to different social, political and cultural systems within the structure of society. Pluralism as an understanding and way of life also recognizes and accepts diversity and pluralism within a community, meaning that it accepts pluralism from various aspects, including in terms of religion, ethnicity, race and customs (Asripa et al., 2021). Gus Dur is a figure who emphasizes the basic principles of politics, namely social prosperity, and comes from Islamic values (Arif, 2020).

For research purposes, it is necessary to develop a research formula. The purpose of this study is to discuss pluralism in religious moderation from the perspective of

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Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur). The formulation of the research problem is that there is a discussion of pluralism in religious moderation based on the perspective of Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur). The main problem of this research is regarding pluralism in religious moderation from the perspective of Abdurahman Wahid (Gus Dur). The results of this study are expected to provide beneficial implications, both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the enrichment of Islamic knowledge regarding pluralism in religious moderation. Practically, this research is expected to be able to make references in the application of Abdurahman Wahid's views regarding pluralism in religious moderation.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a type of qualitative approach to the literature study method. The qualitative method is a method that emphasizes more on observation and examines more the meaning of the method (Somantri, 2005). The research data is sourced from primary and secondary data. The primary data source for this research uses Abdurahman Wahid's perspective, in which many books discuss Abdurahman Wahid's pluralism. One of them is a book entitled indigenous Islamic pluralism (tracing Abdurahman Wahid's arguments about Islamic pluralism in Indonesia). While secondary data includes related scientific articles. The data collection technique in this study was carried out by taking an inventory of library data (*library research*).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Biography of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)

Gus Dur's full name is Abdurrahman Wahid al-Dakhil. He was born on August 4, 1940 in Jombang. His father was the son of the pioneer of the Nahdatul Ulama (NU) organization, namely Wahid Hasyim bin Hasyim Asy'ari while his mother was the daughter of K.H. Bisri Syamsuri who is also a well-known Nahdatul Ulama figure Hj. Sholehah (Sa'diyah & Nurhayati, 2019).

Abdurrahman Wahid was naturally introduced to a mixed aristocratic family, of royal blood circles, and moreover a significant scholar of Islam in Java. Gus Dur has the spirit of his father, an NU figure and national hero, and his predecessor, K.H.

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Hasyim Asy'ari, according to his genealogy. Abdurrahman Wahid underwent a long and winding scientific training. Gus Dur was born in this pesantren tradition as a figure with a unique network between Kyai and Santri. He continued his education at the Yogyakarta Economics Junior High School (SMEP) from 1953 to 1957 (Suwardiyansyah, 2017), after completing his education at the People's School (SR) in Jakarta in 1953.

He attended four Islamic boarding schools, including one in Magelang and Tambak Beras. TegalRejo. Wahid taught his junior high school students, including Sinta Nuriyah, whom he later married, when he was only 20 years old. Various cultural institutions and ideas supported his formal education. For his education, he attended Al-Azhar University from 1964 to 1966 and the Faculty of Arts at Baghdad University from 1966 to 1970. He invested much of his energy in reading in the library and cafes because he was disillusioned by the nature of education at Al-Azhar Campus. In addition, he participated in intellectual, political and cultural debates, particularly regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Arab nationalism and socialism. In addition, Baghdad University gave him a more secular, Western-style education. (Santalia, 2015).

## **2. Definition of Religious Moderation and Pluralism**

### **a. Religious Moderation**

The word moderate in Arabic is *al-wasathiyah*, which comes from the letter Al-Baqarah verse 143. This verse gives the meaning of the word that is the best and most perfect. In a hadith, Rasulullah SAW also said that all the best is in the middle, meaning that Islam approaches solving a problem by taking a deliberative approach and always looking at the midpoint of the problem. Likewise when faced with religious differences and internal Islam (*madhhab*). Tolerance (*tasamuh*) is always put forward in moderate Islam by maintaining mutual trust in each other's beliefs. The aim is so that all get-togethers can acknowledge choices in an agile manner, not to cause things that smack of political agitation (Wibowo & Nurjanah, 2021).

According to his book, "Religious Moderation", the Ministry of Religion defines religious moderation as a person's belief in the religious doctrine he adheres to while still acknowledging the truth about religious interpretation.

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Alternately, religious moderation can be interpreted as an attitude of acceptance, openness, and unity with various groups. Latin word *moderatio*, which means moderation, also means self-mastery (Aziz, 2021).

#### **b. Pluralism**

The ideology or ideology of pluralism argues that pluralism has a positive value and that differences can be felt. However, community adjustments and discussions support the positive value of pluralism. Pluralism also raises the issue of acceptance, although it recognizes the importance of diversity (J. Lestari, 2020).

In some segments of society, pluralism has been institutionalized, and is based on an acceptance of differences between members of their own society and the rest of the world. The ideal of equality is upheld in pluralism, which encourages brotherhood between individuals and groups. To achieve the common good, pluralism requires efforts to understand other parties and work together. Pluralism is the idea that everyone has the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else (Sari & Dozan, 2021).

### **3. The Concept of Pluralism of Islamic Education Abdurrahman Wahid's Perspective**

It is a wealth in itself that Indonesian society is diverse, with a diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions and ideologies. Therefore, people from all walks of life, regardless of their religion, skin color, social status, or ethnicity, need to address the diversity of ideology, culture, religion, or ethnicity with wisdom and maturity. We are plural as a nation without mutual suspicion or prejudice against other groups, which results in respect for the diversity of society. Abdurrahman Wahid said this was to promote pluralism. Because they are still prone to the emergence of misunderstandings between groups of people which at any time can lead to disintegration, society does not only lie in a pattern of peaceful coexistence. However, there must be a high respect for pluralism, which means being aware of one another and engaging in genuine conversation so that one group takes from and gives to another (Nugroho, 2016). Understand *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* Liberalism is the basis for traditional Islamic understanding.

Abdurrahman Wahid stressed that Islam should become more inclusive, tolerant, egalitarian and democratic. It must present itself as a nation that unites



people, protects diversity, and is ready to face modern challenges. The spirit of Islam unites in the face of nationalism, such as the indigenization of Islam, values of democracy and human rights, and humanist principles, but universal and essential Islamic values take precedence over symbolic laws. Islam colors the life of the nation and state without bringing Islam's attachment to the diversity of society and the values of equality and justice (Fikri, 2015).

Gus Dur explained, because it involves accepting beliefs, such behavior is actually normal. However, this does not prevent adherents of the three religions from working together in muamalat, which aims to improve shared destiny and achieve material prosperity. Using each other's teachings, they can collaborate to manage material well-being (Fitriatus Shobah, 2010). Meanwhile, pluralism education is seen from the objectives of Islamic Education, according to Abdurrahman Wahid (Nugroho, 2016) have the same goal, especially hoping to make human beings as workers who fear Allah, to lead them to be *khalifatullah fi al-ardl* who can succeed them, and get success, satisfaction in life in this world and in the hereafter. This will be achieved if endeavored to carry out the mandate as *khalifatullah fi al-ardl* by always cultivating peace for fellow creatures of God, developing a genuine sense of mutual understanding towards people of other religions, and not just mutual respect and tolerance; instead, what is needed is a sense of belonging to one another (Akhmadi & Belakang, 2008).

According to Abdurrahman Wahid, the aim of pluralism education is to build a society that views differences as a gift from God and works together despite different religions. By acting and thinking, Abdurrahman Wahid brought pluralism to the world. In acting, or at least, we must be comprehensive, not limiting relationships with other people, even though we have various beliefs. Deep respect for NU's scientific tradition, whose pluralism principles are found in the Al-Qur'an and al-Hadith, underlies Abdurrahman Wahid's pluralism education. by realizing that differences are necessary, God did create them so that humans could know each other and avoid divisions. The idea of pluralism in the view of Q.S. al-Hujurat verse 13, as Abdurrahman indicated, this repetition clearly alludes to the differences that generally exist between people and between different countries or tribes. Therefore, Islam recognizes differences, while division and separation are prohibited. Because each person believes that his own belief is true, he does not completely equate beliefs.



However, we must defend our faith in the truth of our own religion. However, we must continue to cultivate harmony. to clarify that pluralism does not mean that all religions are the same. We as a whole acknowledge and understand that every religion has different lessons. However, these differences are not a cause for discord or division (Sari & Dozan, 2021).

Differences can actually be a catalyst to understand God's grace which is so real that it always knits tolerance and harmony. As a result, there will always be differences and diversity. In addition, there are features in diversity and difference that one group and another can complement and enhance each other (Ginting & Ayaningrum, 2009).

#### **4. Moderation of Religion Pluralism Perspective Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)**

As a cultural strategy to maintain Indonesianness and diversity, religious moderation is needed. The ancestors of the Indonesian nation developed a concept of national and state life known as Pancasila as the nation's philosophy of life. Indonesia is a country that has many differences. Religion is only one example of the many differences that Pancasila is able to reconcile. This nation is declared not as a strict nation, but also does not separate religion and public activities in the public eye. Even among the religious laws recognized by the constitution, religious norms are preserved, actualized, and integrated with customary norms and local wisdom to ensure that religious and cultural life takes place in peace and harmony (Abror, 2020).

His presence as a firm figure, chairman of a mass gathering, educated people or legislators and debates seems to have become an indistinguishable part. In Indonesia, Gus Dur is considered a controversial figure. Strengthening the banner of pluralism was one of Gus Dur's major contributions. As a result, Gus Dur's claim to be the father and supporter of pluralism cannot be denied. Although this statement leaves the two in certain hopes and difficulties (Setiawan, 2005). Gus Dur was of the opinion that pluralism was not only rooted in one's actions, but also in one's thoughts. As a result, some of Gus Dur's ideas set forth in his various writings explore concepts that are often outdated. One idea is that the Muslim holy book, the Koran, explicitly mentions pluralism. In addition, the Al-Qur'an very clearly states that pluralism in all areas of life is a sunatullah, a condition that must be accepted. As a result, these

Qur'anic statements are in direct conflict with various efforts to create a homogeneous society, including those aimed at understanding religious teachings (Ryan et al., 2013).

In Gus Dur's pluralism perspective, religious moderation is essentially a concept that can foster tolerance and harmony in order to increase national unity and integrity. In society, close social interaction produces tolerance. Religious people should strive to bring peace and tranquility to each other within the framework of tolerance so that social stability and ideological friction does not occur between people of different religions. In social-religious life, humans cannot deny the existence of association, both with their own group and with other groups that sometimes have different religions or beliefs (Abror, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that the emergence of hostility is contrary to the sacred mission of religion which calls for peace, and religious moderation from the perspective of pluralism. Gus Dur stated that religious moderation is a conception that can build tolerance and harmony in order to strengthen national unity and integrity. It is hoped that this research will provide benefits and understanding to the public, especially readers, regarding pluralism in religious moderation from Abdurrahman Wahid's perspective. This research has limitations because there is still a lack of reference sources in this study. And the authors recommend that future researchers be able to further develop research like this to be even better so that they can complement the deficiencies that exist in this study.

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