



MODERATE ISLAM, GLOBAL PEACEBUILDING AND INDONESIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract: Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, has consistently incorporated the principles of moderate Islam into its foreign policy. This orientation has underpinned Indonesia's long-standing commitment to promoting peace and stability in Asia and the Middle East, particularly through its diplomatic engagement in conflict-affected regions such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Palestine. This article aims to analyze Indonesia's foreign policy in promoting global peace and to examine the role of moderate Islam in shaping that foreign policy. In addition to document analysis, this study employs qualitative interviews with stakeholders and experts related to Indonesian diplomacy in international peace. This study yields three main findings. First, the moderate Islamic character has a positive influence on global trust in Indonesia's role in international peace mediation and development efforts. Second, Indonesia's foreign policy is implemented by involving Indonesian Islamic organizations so that it has a sustainable peace impact. Third, Indonesia is expected to play a more active role in creating international stability and peace. The conclusion of this article is that moderate Islam is a soft power of Indonesia's foreign policy in creating sustainable global peace. This research has a strong contribution to the study of diplomacy, international relations, and conflict resolution.

Keywords: foreign policy; global peace; Indonesia; moderate Islam; peacebuilding

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Introduction

INDONESIA is the world's largest Muslim-majority country and the third-largest democracy, after India and the United States. These characteristics provide Indonesia with significant potential to exercise global leadership, particularly in fulfilling its

constitutional commitment to promoting world peace. This article examines how the state and civil society interact to construct an identity of moderate Indonesian Islam that contributes effectively to global peacebuilding. Drawing on Robert Putnam's two-level game theory, it argues that Indonesia's capacity to advance international peacebuilding is contingent upon the interplay between stable domestic political dynamics and effective international diplomacy. The state and civil society should therefore evolve in a mutually reinforcing manner to strengthen Indonesia's global competitiveness, both economically and as the world's largest Muslim-majority country with the capacity to exercise leadership in advancing global justice. Within this context, a growing body of scholarship has examined the respective roles of the state and civil society in shaping Indonesia's foreign policy.¹

Marzuki, Barton, and Hefner stated that Indonesia has contributed to regional and global leadership, including actively overcoming the Rohingya and Palestinian crises.² Indonesia, with its strong experience in pluralistic society and mature experience in overcoming national conflicts, is a good example of a Muslim country in global leadership. Indonesia and other countries also collaborate in disaster mitigation and expand peace diplomacy at the levels of Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.³

¹ Robert W. Hefner, "Islam and Covenantal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Critical Juncture Analysis," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2020): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2020.1753946>; Agus Salim, "Islamic Identity and Foreign Policy Discourse: Indonesia's Responses to the US War in Afghanistan (2001-2002)," *Studia Islamika* 27, no. 1 (2020): 35–72. <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v27i1.10035>.

² Zuly Qodir and Robert W. Hefner, *Minority, Cultural Citizenship, and Indonesian Islam: Challenges in a Pluralistic Society*, in *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2024): 409–439. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v14i2.409-439>; Rachael Diprose, Dave McRae, and Vedi R. Hadiz, "Two Decades of Reformasi in Indonesia: Its Illiberal Turn," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49, no. 5 (2019): 691–712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1637922>.

³ Keoni Marzuki and Tiola, "Indonesian Humanitarianism: Foundations, Characteristics and Contributions," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6, no. 4 (December 2021): 330–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911211058144>; Greg Barton, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morison, "Authoritarianism, Democracy,

Indonesia's great potential is a world attraction for the role of Indonesian diplomacy in overcoming global problems, including easing tensions, international conflicts, and maintaining global peace. Indonesia maintains a balance in diplomatic relations with the great powers between the United States and China. Indonesia's balanced, free, and active foreign policy, as well as non-aligned foreign policy, makes Indonesia dynamically prioritize foreign policy in accordance with national interests. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono emphasized Indonesia's leadership at the ASEAN and regional levels, amidst pressure from China's rise in the region.⁴ The peace values developed in Indonesia are not yet fully optimized at the ASEAN level. Indonesia, under President Joko Widodo, brings Indonesia to a higher level, namely the Indo-Pacific, including the increase in Indonesia's diplomatic relations in the Middle East.

According to Syukur et al., the majority Muslim population makes Indonesia unique, and it is challenged to unite democratic practices and Islamic values. Islam and democracy have developed hand in hand in Indonesia.⁵ Even when democracy was suppressed for four decades in political history in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, activists, non-governmental organizations, and Muslim intellectuals became the backbone of Indonesia's civil society movement.

Moderate Islam in Indonesia's foreign policy is a strategic approach that aims to promote global peace, stability and security through collaboration between the Indonesian state and civil

Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641>.

⁴ Aleksius Jemadu and Floranesia Lantang, "Contested Interpretations of Indonesia's International Leadership in the Foreign Policy of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo," *Journal of ASEAN Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021): 199–217, <https://doi.org/10.21512/JAS.V9I2.7478>; Ali Maksum and Surwandono, "Indonesian Defence Policy Under Jokowi Administration: Continuity or New Direction?," *Geopolitics Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2024): 237–60, <https://doi.org/10.22034/igq.2024.422239.1810>.

⁵ Abdul Syukur et al., "Empowering Islamic Community in Understanding Democracy and Shura Through the Wasathiyah Da'Wa Movement in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 18, no. 1 (2024): 98–126, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2024.18.1.98-126>.

society. This concept is rooted in Indonesia's identity as the largest Muslim-majority country in the world and reflects its commitment to fostering a peaceful international environment.

Indonesia continues to strengthen its Islamic diplomacy portfolio. An important element here is the dissemination of moderate Islamic discourse for the maintenance of global peace. In doing so, the country seeks to balance Arab dominance in Islamic discourse and promote Indonesia's image as a progressive pioneer for the Islamic world.

Indonesia's status as the largest economy in Southeast Asia and an important member of the G20 has approached GCC countries to improve diplomatic and economic relations. With a large Muslim population of around 260 million people, Indonesia is viewed by GCC countries as an attractive investment destination and a lucrative export market. Indonesia's geographical location offers a strategic gateway for GCC countries to position themselves in the Asia and Pacific region.

In the role of global leadership, Indonesia has the soft power to bring a moderate Islamic character that develops strongly in society, and becomes the face of Indonesia's foreign policy diplomacy. Muslim-majority Indonesia with an open and tolerant character has succeeded in building an image of a bridge of global peace. In addition to Indonesia, Arab Muslim countries also present a moderate Islamic face in cultural and religious diplomacy, as well as position themselves as actors in international geopolitics. Moderate Islam is also a European strategy in forming liberal and moderate Muslims who are good to support Western projects in Africa. The West sees moderate Islam as the best alternative after the strong pressure of the development of radicalism and terrorism that haunts international security.

This strength and potential bring Indonesia's role of Indonesia's foreign policy in creating international peace in Asia and the Middle East. Among Indonesia's roles are mediating conflicts in Afghanistan, Myanmar and Palestine. The Indonesian government and Muslim civil society mediate and maintain peace through various programs facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and international organizations. Following the first Taliban regime, Afghanistan's

political transition was marked by divisions between civil society and the Afghan government. Indonesia has supported Afghanistan's democratization process.⁶

Indonesia's commitment to global leadership can be traced back to its first president, Sukarno, who laid the foundation for the country's active role in international diplomacy. This study examines Indonesia's contribution to mediating and resolving international conflicts, with particular attention to its peace diplomacy in Asia and the Middle East during the administrations of Presidents Abdurrahman Wahid, Megawati Soekarnoputri, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Joko Widodo, and Prabowo Subianto. These administrations involved Islamic organizations that develop moderate values, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah in diplomatic activities, including interfaith dialogue activities in collaboration with the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NU carried out Religion Twenty (R20) and Muhammadiyah carried out World Peace Forum (WPF) activities.⁷

A member of the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama who is actively involved in developing international peace, Ahmad Suaedy, said that Nahdlatul Ulama contributed strategically to

⁶ Malahayati Rahman et al., "Bridging Global Protocols and Local Wisdom: Innovating Refugee Assistance Through a Harmonized Protection Model," *Jambe Law Journal* 7, no. 1 (2024): 195–232, <https://doi.org/10.22437/home.v7i1.181>; Fajar Hermansyah, Arif Rachman, and Mhd Halkis, "INDONESIA'S ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFGHANISTAN THROUGH SOFT POWER," in *International Journal of Islamic Education, Research and Multiculturalism (IJIERM)*, no. 2 (2023), 5:304–13, <https://journal.yaspim.org/index.php/IJIERM/index>; Arief Rachman et al., "Indonesia's Role in Strengthening Regional and International Commitments for Peace Process in Afghanistan," *Elementary Education Online* 19, no. 4 (2020): 3413–16, <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2020.04.764735>.

⁷ Kasmuri Selamat, "Moderate Islam to Reduce Conflict and Mediate Peace in the Middle East: A Case of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15, no. 1 (March 2023): 280–300, <https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.2023.4116>; Mu'min Mu'min, Dina Yulianti, and Ootong Sulaeman, "Islam Nusantara and Religious Peacemaking: Nahdlatul Ulama's Ideas in Creating Peace in Afghanistan," *Walisono: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 29, no. 2 (2021): 181–210, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.29.2.8945>; Syamsul Arifin et al., "The Dimensions of Leadership in Strengthening and Institutionalising Religious Moderation in Muhammadiyah," *Legality: Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum* 33, no. 1 (2025): 69–92, <https://doi.org/10.22219/ljih.v33i1.37219>.

complementing Indonesia's foreign policy on regional peacebuilding.⁸ K.H. Said Agil Siradj, during his period as the Head of Nahdlatul Ulama, confirmed that Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim civil society with a moderate character in Islam, has become a strategic diplomatic partner of Indonesia in promoting peace in Afghanistan, including supporting the Taliban's democratic transition.⁹

Existing studies on moderate Islam in Indonesia have largely focused on its domestic dynamics, with limited attention to its international role. By contrast, global political discourse continues to be dominated by representations of radical Islam, reinforcing Islamophobia amid the rise of religious extremism. Terrorist attacks carried out by extremist groups have further strengthened negative perceptions of Islam. As a result, the contributions of Indonesia's moderate Muslims, and those in many other Muslim-majority countries, remain largely overlooked in global discussions. Despite constituting the "silent majority," their role in promoting peace and interreligious coexistence has received limited international recognition."¹⁰

The many roles of Indonesian diplomacy in international conflict resolution have not received sufficient scholarly attention from international relations experts. Indonesia's foreign policy for addressing global conflicts has not sufficiently involved scholars and experts who are able to comprehensively write about Indonesia's role in international conflict resolution.

Indonesian diplomacy in overcoming international conflicts has not optimally carried the role of Indonesian Muslim civil society diplomacy. The Indonesian government and civil society together with international organizations and the world community are addressing the growing forces of religious extremism and terrorism. Therefore, Indonesia's foreign policy commitment in promoting moderate Islam is also in order to suppress the development of extremism, radicalism and national

⁸ Ahmad Suaedy, "Interview with Ahmad Suaedy," May 7, 2026.

⁹ Said Aqil Siradj, "Interview with K.H. Said Aqil Siradj," August 18, 2019.

¹⁰ Steven Vincent, "Where Are the Moderate Muslims?," *American Enterprise* 16, no. 3 (2005): 24–28; Takashi Shiraishi, "Whither Indonesia?," *Critical Asian Studies* 32, nos. 1–2 (2000): 83–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2000.10415789>.

and global terrorism. Post-conflict transitions sometimes give rise to new, larger conflicts when the division of power between actors does not meet the sense of justice. Indonesia's experience in resolving religious and ethnic conflicts through moderate Muslim leadership can be an instrument of Indonesian diplomacy to help ease tensions and resolve conflicts across different regions. Strengthening moderate Islam helps solve global problems in overcoming radicalism and terrorism, defusing conflict zones and maintaining regional peace.

The dominance of career diplomats in Indonesian diplomatic missions has limited the involvement of Indonesian Muslim civil society in efforts to stop conflicts, mediate disputes, and maintain global peace. Civil society is an important actor in democratic discourse and also plays a significant role in Islamic political participation.

Some political scientists have emphasized the increasing importance of religion in the study of international relations. But academically, this concept has not received adequate attention from theorists and experts in international relations. Religious factors are prominent in the origins of human rights. Religion has contributed to a new historiography in the study of international relations.¹¹ Although religion in a limited historical interpretation is considered to be contrary to liberalism. In the discipline of international relations, religion is underestimated academically as an important and strategic study directly related to international relations, scientific policies, and traditions. The theory of international relations also adopts the dichotomy of religion, tradition, and modernity. They have a zero-sum relationship. Religion is often considered problematic because it is viewed as creating division and being irrational.

¹¹ Nayef Al-Shamari, "Islamic Paradigm of International Relations in Times of Peace and Conflict: A Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 1 (2024): 40–54, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.141.03>; Salim, "Islamic Identity and Foreign Policy Discourse: Indonesia's Responses to the US War in Afghanistan (2001-2002)"; Aisyah Songbatumis, "The Role of Islam in Indonesian Foreign Policy: A Case of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono Introduction," *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 50, no. 2 (2021): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202119>.

Based on the literature review, this study will fill the gap in the literature on religion and international relations, especially how religious moderation is effectively employed in the Indonesian foreign policy to shape global peace. Religious studies constitute a relatively new dimension in the traditional discussion in international relations; therefore, this study contributes to the religious factors in foreign policy studies.

This article is based on observations, interviews, surveys, and document analysis. Observations of Indonesia's diplomatic process in conflict mediation and peacebuilding at the Southeast Asian and Middle East levels show the level of international confidence in Indonesia's leadership capabilities, including the potential and ability of Muslim civil society to stop conflicts and assist the dialogue process for sustainable peacekeeping. Interviews with several diplomats in the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that moderate Islam, which is growing strong and dominant in Indonesia, carries the character of Indonesian Islam that is inclusive, open, and tolerant. This is one of Indonesia's diplomatic missions in order to develop global peace. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of Indonesian Muslim civil society from Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah that helped strengthen Indonesia's foreign mission in peace diplomacy in Afghanistan. The interviews indicate that moderate Indonesian Muslims are accompanying the process of Afghanistan's transition to inter-factional peace.

Indonesia succeeded in bringing together all the warring camps in Afghanistan to sit together to build a more peaceful Afghanistan. Nahdlatul Ulama leads the mission of the civil society alliance for peace in Myanmar. M. Ali Yusuf, chairman of the PBNU Disaster Management and Climate Change Institute, stated that NU, together with Indonesian activists and civil society leaders, implemented economic empowerment programs and established economically based community encounter centers for the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Rakhine State.¹² Yusuf,

¹² NU Online, "Bantu Pengungsi Rohingya, Aliansi Kemanusiaan Indonesia Bertolak Ke Bangladesh," *Nuonline.or.id*, September 14, 2017; Md. Ayub Ali, "Bangladesh's Claim for Reparation from Myanmar Due to Rohingya Influx:

who is also the executive chairman of the Indonesian Humanitarian Alliance for Myanmar (AKIM), stated that Indonesia's assistance consists not only of mediation but also of tangible humanitarian support such as food, medicine, water, health, and education for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Myanmar.¹³

The article is organised as follows. The first section examines the conceptual debates on the relationship between the state, civil society, and moderate Islam. The subsequent sections analyse how moderate Islam has shaped Indonesia's foreign policy. It argues that moderate Islam constitutes a strategic identity underpinning Indonesia's peace initiatives and its contribution to international conflict resolution.

Religion and International Relations

The study of international relations and the practice of diplomacy have traditionally paid limited attention to religion, often regarding it as an irrational factor rather than a strategic element in international affairs. The activities of religious communities in maintaining stability, security, and peace is not included in the main research of international relations studies.¹⁴ Muslim civil society carries the values of Islam that are open and inclusive in fostering a peaceful life without receiving sufficient attention from governments and state institutions. Although

Options and Challenges," *SocioEconomic Challenges* 4, no. 1 (2020): 65–74, [https://doi.org/10.21272/sec.4\(1\).65-74.2020](https://doi.org/10.21272/sec.4(1).65-74.2020).

¹³ Ardli Johan Kusuma et al., "Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis of the Rohingya in Myanmar: A Comparison between the Role of State and Ngos," *Journal of Human Security* 17, no. 1 (2021): 23–34, <https://doi.org/10.12924/johs2021.17010023>.

¹⁴ Derek Bolton, "Security, Society, and the Perennial Struggles over the Sacred: Revising the Wars of Religion in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 78, no. 2 (2024): 224–58, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818324000109>; Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and International Relations: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050328>; Zikun Yang and Li Li, "Positioning Religion in International Relations: The Performative, Discursive, and Relational Dimension of Religious Soft Power," *Religions* 12, no. 940 (2021): Article 940. <https://doi.org/https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/11/940>.

religion had long been overlooked in mainstream international relations, it gained renewed attention among scholars and practitioners following the 11 September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks in the United States.¹⁵

Therefore, in the history of global politics, moderate Islam has had only a limited presence because it has not been the main agenda in international diplomacy, and has not received enough scholarly attention and documentation from international relations researchers and practitioners of global diplomacy. In addition, there is a gap in interpretation, ideology and Islamic practices that are different from various Muslim countries. Often these differences have contributed to tensions and conflicts between Muslim communities. Islamic practices in Southeast Asia are seen as different from Islamic teachings and traditions in the Middle East.

This difference is decreasing along with the socio-religious transformation that has occurred in various countries, including in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and other Middle Eastern countries are undergoing social transformation to support economic progress and a stronger leadership role in global politics.¹⁶ These countries have positioned themselves as supporters that supports the implementation of tolerant and open religious values.

In Indonesia, tolerant and open Islamic practices have been practiced for centuries. The acculturation of Islam with local cultures has created a friendly Indonesian Islamic character and

¹⁵ Brian J. Phillips, "How Did 9/11 Affect Terrorism Research? Examining Articles and Authors, 1970–2019," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 35, no. 2 (2023): 409–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1935889>; Noor Huda Ismail, *How Jemaah Islamiyah Has Morphed Since Its Disbandment How Jemaah Islamiyah Has Morphed*, no. July (2025).

¹⁶ Mohammed Al Thani, "Channelling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 38, no. 17 (2021): 1729–1752, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1988932>; S. Yaqub Ibrahim, "False Negotiations and the Fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban," *International Journal* 77, no. 2 (2022): 168–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207020221135299>; Hamdullah Baycar and Mehmet Rakipoglu, "The United Arab Emirates' Religious Soft Power through Ulema and Organizations," *Religions* 13, no. 7 (2022): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13070646>.

thereby accommodating local values. Local wisdom, embracing Islam in local culture, is among the characteristics of religious moderation based on the guidance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.¹⁷

Muslims and religious minorities coexist in Indonesian society. This practice is strongly lived in rural communities, with village governments and customary authorities sharing leadership roles in the community.

The promotion of moderate Islamic values became an important component of Indonesia's foreign policy following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of these attacks, representations of Islam in global public discourse became increasingly associated with terrorism and religious extremism.¹⁸ The international community condemned radical Islamic teachings that were perceived to be spreading rapidly, with some receiving support from actors in Muslim-majority countries. Meanwhile, the moderate Islamic teachings and values that had developed within society received comparatively little support or international visibility.¹⁹ State and international organizational support is needed to promote moderate Islam at the global level. Open, tolerant religious understanding and participation in interfaith dialogue make an important contribution to the promotion of global peace.

The world has criticized the passivity and silence of the Muslim majority who claim to be tolerant and inclusive. In addition to the lack of research and publication on the role of moderate Islam in the diplomacy of countries, their opportunities and capacity to play a global role also have limitations. Even moderate Islam in

¹⁷ Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

¹⁸ Vincent, "Where Are the Moderate Muslims?"; Rhea Rahman, "Racializing the Good Muslim: Muslim White Adjacency and Black Muslim Activism in South Africa," *Religions* 12, no. 1 (2021): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010058>; D. I. Ansusa Putra, "Representing the Belief of Muslims: Role and Actions of Qatar to Encounter Islamophobia during 2022 World Cup," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 13, no. 1 (2023): 14–33, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.131.02>.

¹⁹ Syarif, "Interview with Syarif on Counterterrorism in Indonesia and the Middle East," March 13, 2026.

some countries is under pressure and discrimination due to the state's limited understanding of religious and social movements.

Moderate Islam and Indonesian Diplomacy

The policies of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs promote a moderate Islamic identity. These policies strengthen moderate Islamic civil society to reach a broader role in supporting the interests of the Indonesian government globally. The involvement of moderate Muslims in Indonesia's foreign policy addresses doubts regarding the strategic role of religion in the international system, foreign policy, and regional security. These policies help curb the growing threat of radicalism and terrorism as a concern for global security and government experts.

Independent civil society organizations have the ability to maintain power relations constructively so that they are able to support democratization which tends to regress. The independence of civil society gives them the ability and leeway to carry out the role of non-state diplomacy and bring the interests of the state in creating global justice, development and stability.

Indonesia's foreign policy is guided by the constitutional mandate to promote world peace. Close cooperation between the government and civil society enables Indonesia to a stronger and broader role in implementing conflict resolution, and implementing conflict resolution and maintaining global peace. Among Indonesia's roles is mediating conflicts between factions in Cambodia and Myanmar, accompanying the democratization and peace process in Afghanistan, and Indonesia's active efforts in supporting Palestinian independence.

The government involves moderate Islamic organizations in global conflict resolution policies. This approach can reduce the negative impacts of international interventions that fail to establish a just and sustainable peace. Improper state intervention and post-war peacebuilding have fatal consequences, namely the resurgence of terrorist groups and extremist communities. This happened in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq. In the theory of democratic peace, a strong civil society becomes a foundational institution of democracy that supports the sustainability of peace.

Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the world's two largest Muslim organizations, are active with the Indonesian government and international organizations in developing moderate Islamic values, creating economic strengthening and maintaining global peace. The Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama plays a significant role in mediating Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim and Buddhist communities in Rakhine. In an interview with the NU management, it was stated that NU and Indonesian civil society received considerable trust to create peaceful conditions in Rakhine State, and was encouraged to mediate through the Joint Market as a shared meeting space for different ethnic and religious communities. In addition, NU also complements the Indonesian government's efforts in creating a post-war political transition in Afghanistan. Indonesia provides democracy training to Afghan clerics and assists the Taliban community in establishing community organizations to strengthen public confidence in democracy, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. In addition, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) assists the Taliban community in women's empowerment initiatives. Muhammadiyah also promotes moderate Islamic values as a guiding principle for broader contributions to development, educational advancement, and global peace. In addition to its contribution through the World Peace Forum, Muhammadiyah has represented Indonesia in mediation efforts between Moro Muslims in the southern Philippines and the Government of the Philippines, as well as establishing Muhammadiyah schools abroad, including in Australia and Malaysia.

The Indonesian government and Muslim civil society also support Palestinian independence through international diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building initiatives for Palestinian government officials and civil society organizations. The Palestinian government and civil society representatives receive a series of good governance training programs in Indonesia. In the field of education, the Government of Indonesia and Indonesian universities provide scholarships for Palestinian citizens. Scholarships for Palestinian students make a strategic contribution to the future of peace in Palestine. When peace is achieved and Palestinian independence is internationally

recognized, the need for qualified Palestinian human resources will become increasingly important.

Indonesia's support for Palestine is fully carried out through the Indonesian government in international diplomatic missions, as well as by the Indonesian Muslim community. The Indonesian government actively voices Palestinian independence in international meetings at the United Nations, OIC, and other multilateral forums. OIC countries include Indonesia as a leading country in defending the rights of Palestinian citizens.

Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah continuously help humanitarian actions through their charitable organizations, namely NUCare-LAZISNU, the zakat and infak institution of Nahdlatul Ulama, and LAZISMU, the institution of zakat and infak of Muhammadiyah. Humanitarian assistance and social programs are carried out on an ongoing basis through this charity, as well as other related institutions such as universities, Islamic boarding schools, and hospitals. M. Ali Yusuf, the head of Indonesian Humanitarian Alliance (IHA), stated that IHA coordinated and managed a US\$2 million program called Humanitarian Assistance for Sustainable Community (HASCO) in 2017, focusing on the development of schools, traditional markets, and hospitals in Sittwe, Maungdaw, and Rathedaung, Rakhine State.²⁰ Yusuf argued that the decision to develop hospitals, schools, and markets in these places is a meeting point for all ethnic and religious groups in Rakhine State. It is expected that community members naturally interact during their daily basic activities.²¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Retno Marsudi, approached the OIC to donate \$25 million for humanitarian assistance in Rakhine State. The Indonesian state and civil society actively collaborated to mediate a more permanent peace in Rakhine State.²²

²⁰ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), *Indonesia and the Rohingya Crisis*. Report No. 46. Jakarta: IPAC, 2018.

²¹ M. Ali Yusuf, Interview with M. Ali Yusuf on Peacebuilding in Myanmar, August 18, 2019; M. Ali Yusuf, "Interview with M. Ali Yusuf on Indonesian Humanitarian Alliance Program in Rakhine State," May 7, 2026.

²² Yusuf, "Interview with M. Ali Yusuf on Indonesian Humanitarian Alliance Program in Rakhine State," May 7, 2026.

Indonesia's foreign policy have therefore contributed to play a strategic role in creating global peace. Indonesia supports interreligious peace in the process of diplomacy and dialogue in Myanmar and Palestine. The concept of interreligious peace includes the absence of violence and physical conflict between religions, as well as the establishment of positive and deep cooperation between interreligious communities.

The above analysed happenings also counter argue scholars of international relations initially reluctant to accept the importance of religion in the study of international relations. This supports Reus-Smit's notes that culture and religion were ignored in the study of International Relations until the al-Qaeda attacks on the Pentagon and the New York WTC on 9/11.²³

Religion has often been treated as a peripheral or security issue in international relations because of its perceived absolute, divisive, and irrational character. However, contemporary international relations scholarship acknowledges that religion influences politics across all three levels of Waltz's analysis: the individual, the state, and the international system. It shapes domestic and foreign policy, as well as the formation of international norms.

Religious moderation is strategically important to Indonesia's foreign diplomacy, both by the state and civil society. There is a strong need for the world of education to include the values of religious moderation as a provision for Indonesian youth in continuing Indonesia's leadership at the global level, especially in international politics, to create global security and peace. This view is reflected in a Google Form survey of experts in diplomacy, international relations, and religion in Indonesia from 2018 to 2025 illustrated at the following figure 1.

²³ Jeffrey Haynes. "Religion and International Relations: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?" *Religions* 12, no. 5, 328 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050328>.

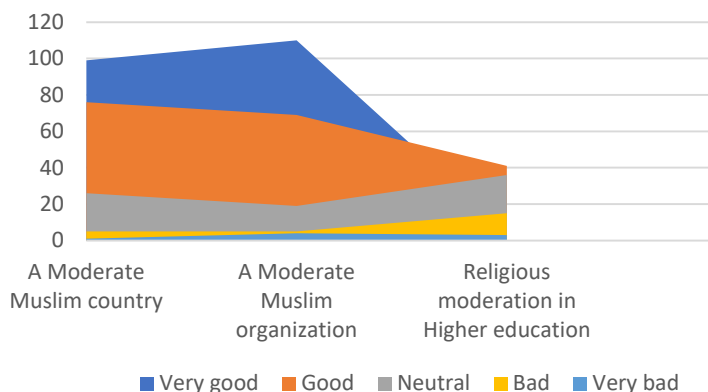


Figure 1. Moderate Muslims of Indonesia²⁴ (Source: researchers' analysis)

Among the 207 respondents, 175 (84.5%) perceived Indonesia as performing well or very well in advancing its role as a moderate Muslim-majority country with global leadership, particularly through its media representation and contribution to international peace. 131 people (63 percent) stated that Islamic organizations have a strong role in developing the value of religious moderation. On the other hand, the majority of respondents (56 percent) stated that the teaching of religious moderation values is still very poorly taught in universities. A similar need exists for teaching the values of religious moderation at the primary and secondary education levels.

Accordingly, Muslim civil society organizations, especially from the two largest Muslim organizations - Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, are believed to preserve religious moderation. They also contributed to Indonesian diplomacy in mediating conflicts and building peace in Asia and the Middle East. They were involved in mediating peace between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Government of the Philippines in 1993, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of the Philippines in 2012²⁵, peacebuilding

²⁴ Khaeron Sirin and Badrus Sholeh, *Ormas Islam dan gerakan moderasi beragama di Indonesia*, Cetakan ke-1. Depok: PT RajaGrafindo Persada, 2021.

²⁵ Trajano Julius Cesar, "Bottom-up Peacebuilding: Role of Grassroots and Local Actors in the Mindanao Peace Process," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 8, no. 2 (November 2020): 357–72, <https://doi.org/10.18588/202011.00a097>; Taniguchi

initiatives between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban from 2019 to 2021, and conflict mediations among religious and ethnic groups in Rakhine State, Myanmar, from 2017 to 2021.²⁶

Indonesian civil society organizations are also expected to actively empower peacebuilding initiatives in Southern Thailand, where the Muslim minority still struggles to have equal rights to other ethnic and religious groups in Patani, Yala, Narathiwat, and other regions of Southern Thailand. Hundreds of Muslim students from the South currently study in the higher education institutions in Indonesia and learn from Indonesian civil society movements how to build a resilient society.²⁷ The following table 1 resumes those.

Table 1. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah on Global Peacemaking²⁸

No	Regional Peacemaking	NU	Muhammadiyah
1	Mediating peace in Southern Philippines (MNLF – GoP) in 1993	X	
2	Mediating peace in Southern Philippines (MILF – GoP) in 2012		X
3	Conflict mediations in Rakhine State, Myanmar, 2017-2025	X	X
4	Peacebuilding in Afghanistan	X	X
5	Peacebuilding in Palestine	X	X
6	Peacebuilding in Southern Thailand	X	X

Source: Researchers' analysis

Based on survey data, interviews, and document analysis, this article argues that religious moderation has become a key element

Miyoko, "Rethinking 'Liberal Peacebuilding': Conflict, Violence, and Peace in Mindanao," *Social Transformations Journal of the Global South* 7, no. 1 (May 2019), <https://doi.org/10.13185/2799-015X.1108>.

²⁶ Sirin and Sholeh, *Ormas Islam dan gerakan moderasi beragama di Indonesia*; Suaedy, "Interview with Ahmad Suaedy," May 7, 2026; Yusuf, "Interview with M. Ali Yusuf on Indonesian Humanitarian Alliance Program in Rakhine State," May 7, 2026.

²⁷ HIPPI, "Discussions with Himpunan Pelajar Patani Di Indonesia (HIPPI)," (Jakarta), July 16, 2025.

²⁸ Yusuf, *Interview with M. Ali Yusuf on Peacebuilding in Myanmar*, August 18, 2019; Suaedy, "Interview with Ahmad Suaedy," May 7, 2026; Sirin and Sholeh, *Ormas Islam dan gerakan moderasi beragama di Indonesia*.

of Indonesia's diplomatic identity, enabling the country to mediate conflicts and promote sustainable peace in Asia and the Middle East. Indonesia's identity as the world's largest moderate Muslim-majority country has enhanced its international credibility as a mediator in conflict resolution. This role is reflected in Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace, an international initiative established by U.S. President Donald Trump in January 2026 to advance peacebuilding and conflict resolution. However, the initiative has faced criticism over its credibility, particularly in light of the U.S., Israeli, and Iranian military confrontations between February and April 2026.²⁹

Muhammadiyah called on the Indonesian government to reconsider its membership in the Board of Peace (BoP) should the conflict continue and the organisation act contrary to Indonesia's national interests. This position reflects Indonesia's long-standing *bebas dan aktif* (free and active) foreign policy, rooted in Vice President Mohammad Hatta's 1948 doctrine of *Mendayung di Antara Dua Karang* ("Rowing Between Two Reefs"), which advocates maintaining strategic autonomy amid great-power rivalry. This doctrine subsequently informed Indonesia's leadership at the 1955 Bandung Conference and its active role in the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement. Consistent with this tradition, international relations scholars argue that Indonesia, like other middle powers, should pursue a hedging strategy by expanding economic cooperation with China while maintaining maritime security partnerships with the United States.³⁰ IR

²⁹ Tarek Ali Ahmad, "Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Turkiye, Indonesia, Pakistan Join Trump's 'Board of Peace,'" *Arab News*, January 21, 2026. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2630145/saudi-arabia>; BPMI Setpres, "Presiden Prabowo Tegaskan Diplomasi Realistis Dan Prinsip Kehati-Hatian Indonesia Dalam Board of Peace," *Presiden Republik Indonesia*, February 4, 2026, <https://www.presidentri.go.id/siaran-pers/presiden-prabowo-tegaskan-diplomasi-realistis-dan-prinsip-kehati-hatian-indonesia-dalam-board-of-peace/>.

³⁰ Yehezkiel Hasiholan Simamora, "Effective Efforts in Resolving International Disputes: A Review of the Principles of International Law in the Case of the Ligitan and Sipadan Island Disputes," *International Law Discourse in Southeast Asia* 2, no. 2 (2023): 305–332; I. Gede Wahyu Wicaksana and Moch Faisal Karim, "Approaches to Indonesia's Foreign Policy: Area Studies, FPA Theory,

scholars argue that Indonesian leadership, like other middle power countries, should keep hedging diplomatic strategies by developing economic cooperation with China, and keep maritime security partnership with the United States.³¹

Middle power countries like Indonesia can keep their leadership regionally by strengthening their national interests in economy and politics, and develop their roles in mediating smaller countries towards a more fair global politics. Indonesia, during the Covid-19 successfully advocated for developing countries in getting equal rights in vaccine access.³² A hedging strategy makes the Indonesian position strategic among the great powers: the United States, China, and Russia, as referred to by John Mearsheimer's neorealism argument.³³

Therefore, Indonesia can survive global anarchy by keeping a stable economy in the last two decades, preserving democracy, and building regional and global geopolitical leadership in Asia and the Middle East. Indonesia is among the influential member states after Saudi Arabia in the Organization of Islamic

and Global IR," *Journal of ASEAN Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 161–80, <https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v10i2.9059>.

³¹ İsmail Numan Telci et al., "Hedging as a Survival Strategy for Small States: The Case of Kuwait," *All Azimuth* 10, no. 2 (2021): 213–29, <https://doi.org/10.20991/ALLAZIMUTH.960945>; Iis Gindarsah, "Indonesia ' S Defence Diplomacy : Harnessing the Hedging Strategy Against Regional Uncertainties," in *RSIS Working Paper*, no. 293 (2015); Guy Burton, "Middle Power Behavior under Multipolarity: Indonesia and Malaysia in the Middle East since the Arab Uprisings," *Asian Politics and Policy* 13, no. 2 (April 2021): 228–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12577>.

³² Swagata Saha and Sukalpa Chakrabarti, "The Non-Traditional Security Threat of COVID-19 in South Asia: An Analysis of the Indian and Chinese Leverage in Health Diplomacy," *South Asian Survey* 28, no. 1 (2021): 111–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523121998027>; Emilia Alaverdov, "49 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in a Global Perspective," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 2, no. 2023 (2023): 49–56.

³³ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001); Wicaksana and Karim, "Approaches to Indonesia's Foreign Policy: Area Studies, FPA Theory, and Global IR."

Cooperation (OIC)³⁴ and a respected plural country among the West and the East. Indonesia is expected to take a stronger diplomatic role by mediating them for a just, stable, peaceful, and prosperous geopolitics.

Conclusion

Moderate Islam has become a defining characteristic and an integral element of Indonesia's foreign policy in addressing international conflicts and promoting global peace. Indonesia's international peace mission promotes moderate Islamic values through the involvement of Indonesian Muslim communities and organizations, as well as through Indonesia's Islamic best practices in the development of sustainable peace in Asia and the Middle East. Indonesia's involvement in maintaining peace in Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Palestine demonstrates the strategic role of Indonesia's diplomacy in maintaining global peace. Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have become leading moderate Muslim organizations in supporting Indonesia's global peace mission. Cooperation between the state and civil society strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic mission and enhances its international credibility.

Indonesia's leadership, through the collaboration of state and non-state actors, according to representatives and diplomats of Muslim countries as well as international relations experts, needs to be strengthened through the active participation of government leaders, humanitarian activists, and religious leaders in active diplomacy to promote regional economic development, a just world order, and stable global security.

³⁴ Evan A. Laksmana, "Indonesia's Rising Regional and Global Profile: Does Size Really Matter?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 33, no. 2 (2011): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs33-2a>; Suciyani and Faisol Mamaeng, "Exploring Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah in the OIC's Role in Addressing Muslim Minority Conflicts: A Case Study of Pattani, Thailand," *Al-Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Hukum* 9, no. 1 (2024): 14–28, <https://doi.org/10.22515/alakhkam.v9i1.8141>; Stella Athanasoulia, "From 'Soft' to 'Hard' to 'Moderate': Islam in the Dilemmas of Post-2011 Saudi Foreign Policy," *Religions* 11, no. 4 (April 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11040211>.

The foreign policies of Muslim-majority countries, other nations, and international organizations, recognizing their historical limitations, have not given sufficient attention to supporting open and tolerant religious values. Greater attention to moderate Islam has made it a strategic component of foreign policy that supports economic development and the the long-term maintenance of global peace and security.

The strategic role of moderate Islam in the foreign policy of Indonesia and Muslim countries provides evidence of the importance of religion in the study of international relations. Experts in diplomacy and international relations place religion as an important and strategic new element in the academic outlook. The study of international relations and the practice of diplomacy are increasingly open to new developments in society and relations between countries.

Middle-power countries such as Indonesia have adopted a hedging strategy in global diplomacy by effectively maximizing their national interest, maintaining productive diplomatic relations with the major powers: the United States, China, and Russia, along with other middle power and small countries. The strategy has strengthened Indonesia's leadership in Asia and the Middle East.

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