

# Moderation of Thought in the Age of Radicalism: The Role of Social Media and Political Education in Countering Hate Content

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Moderation;  
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## Abstract

This study analyzes the role of social media and political education in moderating thought in the era of radicalism, particularly in dealing with hate content. Social media plays a dual role: disseminating useful information and spreading hate content that incites radicalism. This article uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis methods. The research location is in the Province of Aceh. Primary data consists of in-depth interviews with local intellectuals, including academics, religious scholars, and community leaders. The results show that social media significantly influences public opinion and people's mindsets. However, through proper political education, social media can be used to spread values of moderation and tolerance and reduce the impact of hate content. Political education that is inclusive and based on national and humanitarian values has proven effective in instilling a moderate attitude. A curriculum emphasizing dialogue, tolerance, and respect for differences is crucial.

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis peran media sosial dan pendidikan politik dalam memoderasi pemikiran di era radikalisme, khususnya menghadapi konten kebencian. Media sosial berperan ganda: menyebarkan informasi bermanfaat dan konten kebencian yang memicu radikalisme. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis deskriptif. Lokasi penelitian berada di Provinsi Aceh. Data primer adalah wawancara mendalam terhadap intelektual setempat, termasuk akademisi, ulama, dan tokoh masyarakat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial sangat mempengaruhi opini publik dan pola pikir masyarakat. Namun, melalui pendidikan politik yang tepat, media sosial dapat digunakan untuk menyebarkan nilai-nilai moderasi dan toleransi, serta mengurangi dampak konten kebencian. Pendidikan politik yang inklusif dan berbasis nilai-nilai kebangsaan serta kemanusiaan terbukti efektif dalam menanamkan sikap moderasi. Kurikulum yang menekankan dialog, toleransi, dan penghormatan terhadap perbedaan sangat penting.

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## INTRODUCTION

The digital age has transformed the way we interact and communicate, with social media becoming the main platform for the exchange of information and ideas. However, despite its positive potential, social media has also become a platform for the dissemination of hateful content that can fuel polarisation and radicalism in society. Aceh, with its rich history and complex social dynamics, is not exempt from this challenge. Hateful content on social media often deepens social tensions and increases radical attitudes in various circles (Nasir, Muhibuddin, & Al-Khalidi, 2023). Ideally, political education that is inclusive and based on national and human values should be the foundation to reduce the negative impact of such content. However, the reality shows that the implementation of political education is often unable to effectively address the flow of hateful content in Aceh.

Scholars, religious scholars and community leaders in Aceh have a central role to play in promoting moderate thinking and as the frontline against radicalism. However, the real challenge lies in how they can collectively overcome the negative influence of social media and reinforce the values of moderation in a changing society. Not to mention the polarisation of politics in Aceh, which is fragmented and often in conflict with the central government. As a result, socialisation of moderation and nationalism is hampered by the motive that it is a government product (Syafieh & Nur, 2022).

Studies on moderation, radicalism, hate speech and political education are not new discourses. Many researchers have discussed and published them. Syibran Mulasi, et al, in their publication entitled: *"Religious Moderation in Aceh: A Strategy for Implementing Islam Washatiyah Values in Acehnese Society"*, has informed very structurally how the essence of religious moderation basically existed in Aceh before the term religious moderation was popular in Indonesia. This research exemplifies how Acehnese people are known for the custom of *peumulia jamee* (honouring guests) even since the Kingdom's past (Mulasi, Hamdi, & Riza, 2023). Despite having similarities in the context of religious moderation in Aceh, this research does not discuss radical content in Aceh, especially those exploited through social media.

Hanani and Nelmaya in their work entitled: *"Penguatan Moderasi Beragama untuk Mengatasi Intoleransi di Kalangan Intelektual Kampus"*, have described very well how religious moderation in Bukit Tinggi is implemented through the medium of brotherhood-based dialogue (*ukhwah*) (Hanani & Nelmaya, 2020). The work has similarities with the author's proposal in the context of religious moderation as a solution in overcoming intolerance and hate speech in a region. The difference is, if the publication above focuses on strengthening moderation in the campus environment, the researcher focuses on research in the community environment, especially Aceh.

Regarding radicalism, Nurul Faiqah and Toni Pransiska in their journal: *"Radikalisme Islam Vs Moderasi Islam: Upaya Membangun Wajah Islam Indonesia yang Damai"*, systematically describes the friction between radicalism and moderation from an Islamic perspective. This is inseparable from the quantity of Indonesia as a country

with the largest Muslim population in the world (Faiqah & Pransiska, 2018). This research only focuses on illustrations and descriptions of the phenomena of moderation in Indonesia, it does not raise any discourse about the importance of political education and content analysis of hate speech as the author did.

Related to social media and hate speech, Wahyu Edy Amrulloh in an article entitled: *"Upaya Preventif dalam Menangani Kasus Ujaran Kebencian di Media Sosial"*, discusses very inspiringly, how to deal with the rampant hate speech that is increasingly uncontrollable in Indonesia. As for the results of Wahyu's research, to overcome hate speech on social media, prevention efforts include increasing public literacy, rapid clarification of hoaxes, increasing the ability of cyber police, and persuasive approaches with academics and religious leaders (Amrulloh, 2024). Although they both discuss social media and hate speech, the above research does not specifically discuss religious moderation and political education.

Based on the previous studies above, (as far as the author's observation), it shows that the research that the author conducted has never been written coherently and in depth, so this article has a scientific original dimension. As for novelty, it lies in the correlation between the variables of 'moderation', 'political education', 'the role of social media', and 'hate speech' which are integrated through the treasures of the thoughts of figures in Aceh.

The theoretical framework in this article includes several key approaches: First, social media influence theory is an important cornerstone in understanding how platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are not only communication tools, but also drivers of the spread of radical ideologies and hateful content. This theory highlights how social media algorithms and virality mechanisms can amplify polarisation and significantly influence public opinion (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Sunstein, 2017). Second, political education theory supports the need to increase critical awareness and understanding of democratic values among the people of Aceh. By integrating effective political education, this study aims to promote moderation, tolerance and critical thinking towards radical ideologies. This theory emphasises the important role of education in shaping a more open and critical mindset towards harmful content (Gerring et al., 2020; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Third, the social context of Aceh as a region with a long history of conflict and the implementation of sharia is also an important part of this theoretical framework. Theories of conflict and social dynamics help in understanding how local historical and cultural factors influence perceptions and responses to hateful content as well as moderation efforts (Ibrahim, 2018; McAdam et al., 2001). Finally, social change and policy implementation theories address strategies to change behaviour and social norms in the face of radicalism challenges. With a focus on Aceh, this research seeks ways to implement effective and sustainable policies, promote tolerance values and mitigate the negative impact of hateful content in the digital age (Birkland, 2016; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). By integrating these theories, this research is expected to provide comprehensive insights and practical solutions in an effort to tackle radicalism and

promote moderation of thought in Aceh through a holistic and multidimensional approach.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of field research. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides an opportunity to explore in-depth understanding of complex phenomena, especially related to the influence of social media and political education on people's attitudes and behaviour in responding to hate content and radicalism. This research utilises the descriptive analysis method to provide a detailed description based on data collected in the field. This approach refers to the qualitative research guidelines proposed by Creswell, especially related to the process of exploring social phenomena that require in-depth interpretation (Creswell, 2016).

The research was conducted in Aceh Province, a region with a unique socio-political history in Indonesia, particularly in relation to issues of radicalism and moderation. This location was chosen due to its contextual relevance to the research objectives. The data collection process was conducted over a six-month period, from January to June 2024. Data was obtained through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with key figures who have influence in the community, such as academics, clerics and community leaders. Observations were made by directly observing community interactions in public spaces, including on social media. Meanwhile, documentation data in the form of scientific journals published in the last five years was used to enrich the analysis.

Research informants were purposively selected based on certain criteria, such as expertise in political education, experience in social conflict moderation, and influence over the community. In this study, the main informants consisted of academics, clerics, and community leaders who are known to be active in promoting the values of tolerance and moderation. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis techniques, with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This technique aims to identify relevant patterns, so as to explain how social media affects people's attitudes and how political education plays a role in encouraging moderate attitudes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Historising Radicalism in Indonesia**

As an archipelago with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has faced challenges related to radicalism since independence. The phenomenon of radicalism in Indonesia has deep and diverse historical roots, ranging from the struggle for independence, ideological conflicts, to the influence of globalisation and social media in the modern era. In the early days of independence, Indonesia was faced with various groups that sought to influence the direction of the new country. One example is the Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia (DI/TII) rebellion led by Sekarmadji Maridjan

Kartosoewirjo. DI/TII, which emerged in 1949, aimed to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia (Awaluddin & Fajar, 2024). This rebellion occurred in several regions such as West Java, Aceh, South Sulawesi and South Kalimantan, and lasted until 1962 when the Indonesian government successfully suppressed the movement.

After DI/TII, Indonesia also faced other radical groups such as Komando Jihad and Jamaah Imran in the 1970s. These groups wanted the full implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia and committed various acts of violence to achieve their goals. Although successfully suppressed, their radical ideologies remained alive and thriving beneath the surface. Entering the reform era in the late 1990s, when Soeharto stepped down as president, Indonesia experienced a significant political transition (Sanusi, 2018). Reformasi brought greater political freedom and freedom of expression, but it also opened up space for the re-emergence of radical groups. One of the most prominent was Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), which has links to al-Qaeda. JI is responsible for a series of terrorist attacks in Indonesia, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people and became one of the deadliest terror attacks in Southeast Asia.

Along with the increasing threat of global terrorism, Indonesia has become one of the main targets for international radical groups. This is evident from the emergence of ISIS sympathisers in Indonesia in the mid-2010s. Many Indonesians joined ISIS in the Middle East or supported their ideology from within the country. In 2016, terror attacks in Jakarta carried out by IS sympathisers showed that the threat of terrorism is still real and growing. In addition to acts of terror, radicalism also spreads through education and proselytisation. Several Islamic boarding schools and educational institutions in Indonesia have been accused of teaching radical ideologies to their students (Pertiwi, Widodo, & Priyanto, 2023). In addition, certain religious figures use the pulpit to spread extremist ideology. They often capitalise on social and economic discontent among communities to recruit new members.

The digital age has introduced social media as a highly effective tool for radical groups to spread their ideology. Hateful content and radical propaganda are easily and quickly spread through platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. Young people, who are often less critical in filtering information, become easy targets for terrorist recruiters. The Indonesian government is trying to tackle this problem by blocking radical websites and tightening surveillance of online activities, but the challenge remains significant given the vast reach of the internet and the rapid evolution of information technology (Pratiwi, Seytawati, Hidayatullah, Ismail, & Tafsir, 2021). The government's response to radicalism has also changed over time.

During the New Order era, the Soeharto government used a repressive approach to tackle radicalism, cracking down on any group deemed a threat to state stability. However, this approach often ignored human rights and reinforced feelings of injustice among certain communities. The reform era introduced a more humane approach based on law enforcement and deradicalisation. Deradicalisation programmes in Indonesia include socio-cultural approaches, such as providing moderate religious education and skills training for former terrorism convicts to help them return to society.

This de-radicalisation programme receives support from various elements of society, including religious leaders, academics and non-governmental organisations. They work together with the government to create a strong counter-radicalisation narrative and promote the values of tolerance, harmony and diversity. The mass media also plays an important role in educating the public about the dangers of radicalism and the importance of maintaining national unity. Despite these efforts, the challenges faced in tackling radicalism in Indonesia are still great. Segments of society that are vulnerable to the influence of radical ideologies remain, especially in areas experiencing economic and social disparities (Amir, Abubakar, & Yusuf, 2023). Therefore, a comprehensive and sustainable approach is needed to address this issue, including improving community welfare, empowering education, and strengthening national values.

Indonesia's long history of dealing with radicalism shows that this problem cannot be tackled with a one-dimensional approach. It requires cross-sectoral cooperation and active participation from all elements of society to create a safe and peaceful environment. The government must continue to strengthen effective policies and programmes to prevent the spread of radical ideologies, while communities need to increase vigilance and awareness of the dangers of radicalism. Thus, Indonesia can continue to move forward as a nation of peace, tolerance and justice.

### **Hateful Content Behind Radicalism Infiltration**

The dominance of hate content in Indonesia is a troubling phenomenon that affects various aspects of society. Hateful content often comes in various forms, including hate speech, insults, slander, and propaganda that aim to divide society and deepen polarisation. Social media is one of the main platforms where hateful content can spread quickly and widely. The speed at which information is disseminated on social media can allow hateful content to reach a very wide audience in a short period of time. This can worsen the social and political atmosphere, trigger conflict between groups, and threaten social harmony and stability (Amrulloh, 2024).

The predominance of hateful content also has significant psychological and social impacts on individuals and society. Especially for minorities or vulnerable groups, hateful content can create fear, insecurity, and hinder their participation in social and political life. Addressing the dominance of hateful content requires a comprehensive approach, including strict regulation of social media use, public education that increases digital literacy and awareness of the dangers of hateful content, and collaboration between the government, social media platforms and civil society to prevent and mitigate its spread (Nurhayati, Wirayudha, Fahrezi, Pasama, & Noor, 2023). These efforts are important to ensure that social media remains a positive and safe tool in facilitating communication and social interaction in Indonesia.

The rapid spread of hateful content on social media also brings an influx of radical messages that can affect people's thoughts and attitudes. Hateful content is often used as a means to spread radical ideologies that contradict the values of pluralism, tolerance and social peace upheld in Indonesia. These radical messages often capitalise on existing

social and political tensions, and manipulate emotions and public opinion by using narratives that corner and divide society. They can call on individuals to take extreme, even violent, actions that have the potential to jeopardise national security and social stability.

Hateful content behind the infiltration of radicalism is a worrying phenomenon, especially in Aceh Province in the current digital era. Infiltration of radicalism refers to the covert or clandestine entry of extreme ideologies into a society or group, with the aim of influencing, manipulating, or mobilising individuals or groups to adopt radical views and even extremist actions. As a concrete example in Aceh, we have witnessed incidents related to the spread of hate content and the infiltration of radical ideologies. Social media is often used as a primary means to spread radical messages that call on individuals to adopt extremist views (Nurdin, 2020). This can create tensions within Acehnese society, change perceptions of other groups, and influence people's thoughts and attitudes towards social and political issues.

Hateful content combined with radical messages often exploit existing social tensions to achieve certain goals, including changing people's mindsets and behaviour. This can exacerbate inter-group tensions, increase the potential for conflict, and even trigger acts of violence that threaten the security and stability of Aceh. Addressing hate content and radical infiltration in Aceh requires a holistic and collaborative approach. Strict regulations on the use of social media are key to reducing the spread of hateful content and radicalism messages in Aceh. In addition, public education that improves digital literacy and public awareness of the dangers of radicalism is also crucial to help identify and tackle harmful content and build community resilience against radical propaganda.

#### **Aceh's Political Polemics Hamper Moderation**

Aceh, with its status as a region that implements Islamic law, has always been in the spotlight in both theological and political contexts. Historically, Aceh's Islamic heritage has been recognised since the sultanate period, placing it as the centre of Islamic development in the archipelago. However, Aceh's journey in maintaining its Islamic identity has not always been smooth, especially after Indonesian independence. Conflicts between Acehnese elites and the central government after independence created prolonged tensions. Daud Beureu'eh, an important Acehnese figure, wanted the implementation of Islamic sharia, but was not accommodated by President Soekarno who favoured national unity based on Pancasila. This disagreement fuelled the conflict between Aceh and the Republic of Indonesia, where Aceh wanted to secede from Indonesia, which wanted unity (Syafieh & Nur, 2022).

The formalisation of Aceh's status as a Special Region Province in 1999 showed the government's recognition of Aceh's struggle to maintain its Islamic identity. However, the political conflict did not end there. The Helsinki MoU in 2005 was a significant turning point, ending the armed conflict and paving the way for development and reconciliation in Aceh. However, the legacy of this conflict continues to influence socio-political dynamics in Aceh, particularly in terms of how people perceive the central

government and its policies. The influence of politics on theology in Aceh is obvious. Religious figures, or *Tengku Dayah*, play an important role in local politics, even securing positions in the executive and legislative branches (Junaidi, Ruhdiara, & Fatimah, 2022). This has led Acehnese to often support presidential candidates who make Islam their campaign motto. When Prabowo Subianto, who was supported by the majority of Acehnese, lost and then entered into a coalition with Joko Widodo, most Acehnese continued to vote for the Islamic political camp. Prabowo Subianto's victory without the support of the majority of Acehnese in this election reinforces the history of Aceh's frequent conflicts with the central government.

This politically unstable situation fueled hoaxes and hate speech. Accusations that the president-elect is communist or anti-Islam create a negative stigma that worsens relations between the people of Aceh and the central government. These issues exacerbate the tension between the concept of religion and the concept of state, which requires serious handling through a religious moderation program. The religious moderation program initiated by the government is an important effort to reduce this tension. The government, especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has initiated various programs to promote moderate Islam that promotes religious harmony (Rosmawati, Muhammaddiah, Anzaikhan, & Fajar, 2024). However, the implementation of this program is not always smooth in the field. There are still many academics who are skeptical or even reject religious moderation programs, considering them a path to liberalism or misguidance.

This rejection poses a major challenge in the effort to create a moderate and tolerant Acehnese society. Despite the government's efforts through various activities such as seminars, religious dialogues and curriculum development, negative views towards religious moderation persist. Some academics even covertly oppose the program even though they work under institutions that promote moderation. Ironically, Aceh's history shows that moderation is part of Aceh's Islamic heritage. Moderate and wise Acehnese clerics were able to spread Islam peacefully and harmoniously, reconciling local culture with Islamic values without conflict. Practices such as *peusijek* and *shalawat badar* are examples of how Islam was accepted and adapted in Acehnese culture (Juwaini, Yasin, & Anzaikhan, 2021). Therefore, the current challenge is to restore this spirit of moderation to religious and political life in Aceh.

By analyzing this phenomenon, it is clear that Aceh is at an important crossroads. Acehnese society must choose between continuing the legacy of moderation that has become part of their identity or being trapped in an ongoing cycle of conflict and distrust. Efforts to increase public literacy and educate the public on the importance of moderation must continue to be strengthened. This will not only help reduce polarization but will also build a stronger foundation for harmony and stability in Aceh. Religious moderation is not just a government program, but an urgent need to ensure that Aceh can stand as an example of tolerance and harmony in a diverse society (Anzaikhan, Idani, & Muliani, 2023). Thus, amidst the challenges and political frictions, the hope for a more peaceful and stable Aceh is not lost.



Political polemics in Aceh are a major obstacle to moderation. The turbulent political dynamics, coupled with tensions between the central and local governments, create an environment that is less conducive to the implementation of moderation values. Distrust of the central government, exacerbated by hoaxes and hate speech, reinforces resistance to moderation programs run by the government. Thus, efforts to build a tolerant and moderate society are often hampered by conflicting political interests. Overcoming these political polemics is therefore key to ensuring the success of religious moderation programs in Aceh.

### **Viral, Biased Truth on Social Media**

The phenomenon of virality on social media has become one of the main characteristics of the digital age that attracts attention. Often, however, the popularity of a piece of content does not fully reflect the veracity or quality of the information it conveys. A lot of viral content comes from an attempt to gain more attention or achieve a certain goal, without considering its accuracy or social impact. Some individuals or groups often create radical content or spread hate speech simply because they want to be recognized on social media (Nurhayati et al., 2023). They may not think about the negative impact of the content they share, focusing only on the number of likes or shares as a measure of success. In the process, the line between fact and opinion can become blurred, confusing the public in assessing the veracity of information.

Viral content is also often utilized by individuals or groups with hidden agendas. They may use social media as a platform to influence public opinion, create polarization, or even advance a particular political or ideological agenda. By strategically organizing content, they can achieve the desired viral effect without caring about the accuracy or integrity of the information they disseminate. On the other hand, there is a phenomenon where individuals simply jump on the bandwagon of spreading viral content without considering the veracity or consequences of the information they are spreading. Especially in broader contexts, such as sensitive social or political issues, the spread of inaccurate or provocative information can exacerbate social conflicts and undermine harmony in society.

Truth often falls victim in the race for popularity on social media. Information that should be carefully filtered and verified is often overlooked in favor of gaining viral momentum. This is not only detrimental to the individuals or groups targeted by the untrue content, but also to society as a whole who are exposed to misleading information (Khoiri, 2019). The absence of a strong mechanism or security to ensure the truth and integrity of information on social media makes it vulnerable to the spread of misguided information. Dubious or provocative content can often spread quickly and widely without adequate filters or oversight.

Therefore, to meet this challenge, it is important for social media users to consider carefully before spreading or trusting the information they see. Evaluating sources of information, checking the truth from multiple perspectives, and understanding the context behind a story are crucial steps in mitigating the negative impact of unchecked

virality. Relevant case studies can be seen from experiences at the national level and in Aceh (Muhammad, 2022). At the national level, controversies occur when incorrect or provocative content spreads rapidly on social media, generating emotional reactions and often exacerbating social tensions. For example, the spread of false information results in riots or clashes between community groups.

In Aceh, a region with a distinctive social and religious context, the use of social media also has a significant impact. Inaccurate or provocative content can exacerbate inter-religious or inter-mazhab conflicts, which can then disrupt social harmony in Acehese society, which is already well-known for its religious values and tolerance. The importance of controlling and regulating content on social media is also particularly relevant in the context of Aceh. Efforts to improve enforcement of policies related to hate speech, disinformation and harmful content can help mitigate the negative impact of spreading incorrect or provocative information. Awareness of the negative potential of virality on social media needs to be raised, and responsible use of social media can help promote a healthier informational and social environment in Aceh and nationally.

### **Political Education, Wise Social Media, and the Role of Ulama**

Political education and wise policies on social media use are major concerns in Indonesia today. As a country with a large population and rich cultural diversity, Indonesia faces challenges in building knowledge-based political participation and managing social media responsibly. The social media phenomenon has changed the way society interacts and communicates, allowing individuals to participate in public discussions, influence opinions and disseminate information quickly and widely (Zulkhairi, 2022).

Particularly in Aceh, a province rich in history, culture and unique experiences, political education has a crucial role to play in strengthening the foundations of local democracy. Aceh, which has gone through a long process of post-conflict reconciliation, finds the values of peace and tolerance as the main footing in its social and political development. However, with complex social, political and economic dynamics, especially in this digital era, a smart and insightful approach is needed to maintain stability and progress. Political education in Aceh is not only about understanding government structures or electoral processes, but also about strengthening a rich cultural identity and teaching the overarching values of democracy, human rights and pluralism. This not only increases people's political awareness, but also helps prevent potential social conflicts and strengthens the hard-won peace.

Responsible use of social media in Aceh is also key to maintaining social stability and building positive collective consciousness. Social media wisdom means not only consuming information critically, but also disseminating correct information and promoting healthy dialog among the people of Aceh. Measures to improve digital literacy, recognize inaccurate information, as well as avoid spreading harmful content, are crucial in ensuring that social media can be a positive tool for Aceh's overall progress (Muntasir, Zulkarnaen, & Hidayat, 2023).

Overall, political education and wise policies on the use of social media are not only an effort to strengthen democracy and political participation in Aceh, but also to build a society that is inclusive and responsive to changing times. By combining strong local values with advanced information technology, Aceh can take strategic steps towards a more stable, peaceful and sustainable future. In this context, the people of Aceh can become agents of positive change, facing global challenges with local wisdom and a strong collaborative spirit.

The importance of the role of Aceh's ulama in socializing policies on smart politics and smart use of social media cannot be underestimated. So far, the role of Aceh's ulama has often focused on teaching Islamic aqidah and implementing Islamic sharia in aspects such as clothing and religious rituals. However, Islamic sharia actually covers a broader dimension, including views on politics and communication technologies such as social media. Acehnese clerics have strong moral and scholarly authority among the community, and thus have great potential to influence the thinking and behavior of the people (Zulkhairi, 2022). In the political context, Acehnese clerics can play an important role in guiding the people to engage in an intelligent political process, based on the values of justice, truth and the benefit of the people. This includes understanding the principles of democracy, active participation in elections, and constructive criticism of public policies (Saminan, Irwandi, Kamza, & Rasul, 2024; Watung, Sunarno, Fitriyah, Saputra, & Abas, 2023).

In addition, in the face of the digital era and the increasingly widespread use of social media, Acehnese ulemas also have the responsibility to guide people in using social media wisely and responsibly in accordance with the principles of Islamic law. Social media, although a powerful tool for disseminating information and mobilizing the masses, also has the potential to cause conflict, spread slander, or violate religious values (Amaroh, Prasetyoningrum, & Husain, 2024; Arifin, Sutama, Aryani, Prayitno, & Waston, 2023; Haidar, Hasanah, & Ma`arif, 2022). Therefore, Acehnese scholars need to develop a holistic approach in teaching and educating the ummah on how to integrate the values of Islamic law in daily life, including in the realm of politics and the use of social media. This is not only about enforcing formal laws related to sharia, but also about encouraging a deep understanding of the principles of justice, responsibility and loyalty in relation to political participation and online behavior (Abidin, Fatawi, & Kausar, 2025; Alazeez, AL-Momani, & Rababa, 2024; Sutisna & Khorri, 2024).

The involvement of Aceh's ulama in providing clear and insightful guidance on sharia-based politics and ethical use of social media can help Acehnese people to develop a critical and responsible attitude towards various social and political issues. This will help build a society that has a high awareness of religious and moral values, and is able to contribute positively to the better and sustainable development of Aceh. In addition, sharia-based political education and social media can also play a role in raising awareness of Acehnese cultural and religious identity, strengthening local sovereignty in the face of globalization and complex social challenges (Mahmud, Yustizar, Yusaini, & Nasution, 2023). Thus, Aceh's ulama not only serve as spiritual

leaders who teach traditional *aqidah* and *sharia*, but also as mentors who are actively involved in shaping a more inclusive and progressive political and social future for Aceh.

### **The Urgency of Thought Moderation in Aceh**

The history of the existence of moderate Islam in Aceh has started since the entry of Islam into Aceh by traders from Gujarat or by Sufis who taught Islamic values in Aceh (Inayatillah, Kamaruddin, & M. Anzaikhan, 2022). The moderate value is described by the way Islamic preachers are able to adapt to the local culture and develop rapidly until today. For example, during the pre-Islamic era of Aceh, a cleric who saw the community doing 'cockfighting', did not immediately condemn and blame the custom. In fact, the cleric asked one of the chicken owners to say *basmallah* before starting the chicken fight. When his cock won, the cleric became a source of attention. Even the previous cockfighters were invited to recite the Qur'an to gain *karomah*. It was only after Islam was further recognized in the recitation that the cleric forbade his students from engaging in the custom of cockfighting because it was forbidden by religion. The above case is proof that Islamic proselytization is even more powerful when the moderate content (adjustment of customs and religion) is applied wisely.

Another form of moderate Islamic practice lies in the Acehnese custom of *peusijek*. As is known, *peusijek* is basically a Hindu custom called *tepung tawar*. In Hindu society, the purpose of offering flour is to obtain salvation from nature or from the gods they believe in. It is different when this flour is acculturated into *peusijek* in Aceh (Marzuki, 2012). If initially intended for the gods of salvation, through the direction of the Ulama, *peusijek* is intended to obtain the grace of Allah Swt. Moderate Islam at this moment plays its role as the Islamization of customs. In *ushul fiqh* studies, this discourse is understood by the term *ihhtisan 'urf*. This means that customary practices take place as an effort to maintain local wisdom, while spiritually, these customs are not the cause of a Muslim's prayers and hopes.

On a more extreme level, moderate Islam is also reflected in how Acehnese people respond to grave pilgrimage. Before the concept of moderation was understood, there were still many Acehnese who used the grave as a mediation to ask for goodness. At first glance, this practice is similar to the concepts of animism and dynamism that were popular during the Hindu-Buddhist period (Mujiburrahman, Zulfikar, Ahmad, Melayu, & Jasafat, 2024; Suyanta, Saifuddin, & Bahri, 2024; W et al., 2024). After the concept of moderation was understood, Muslims no longer ask for goodness from graves, but make the momentum of pilgrimage as a medium for self-introspection in order to increase piety to Allah Swt (Nuraini & Jannah, 2020). On other occasions, praying at the graves of Ulama, for example, is not asking for salvation at the grave, but rather making worship (pilgrimage) as a practice of kindness so that prayers are more easily accepted. In short, it is not the grave or the buried Ulama where prayers are offered, but rather making pilgrimage worship a momentum to ask (pray) to Allah Swt.

Without realizing it, with its various controversies, it turns out that moderate Islam is a solution to traditional practices that are mixed with religious concepts. Without the

existence of moderate Islam, Islam would not be able to exist today in various parts of the world. In accordance with the treasures of Islam itself which is called a universal religion because it is always relevant to the times. During the Aceh Sultanate period, the striking practice of moderate Islam lies in a consequence when Aceh was led by women (Sulthaniah). When Aceh was ruled by the queens of Aceh, they had advisors such as Sheikh Nurdin Ar-Raniry, Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri, and various other scholars. If the scholars of Aceh during the past kingdoms were not moderate, they would certainly not agree if Aceh, which had the status of an Islamic kingdom, was led by women. This was also the case during Iskandar Muda's time, where one of his warlords was a woman, Laksamana Malahayati. Admiral Malahayati not only sat as a leader, but also participated in the battlefield, his best achievement was when he won the battle against Cornelis de Houtman as the captain of the Dutch ship that wanted to colonize Aceh (Iqhrammullah, 2018).

Over time, moderate values in Aceh have been eroded by political interests. Aceh has recently been considered less tolerant than other parts of Indonesia. This can be seen from the various conflicts that occur among minorities. Both minorities as a religion and minorities in bermazhab. The burning of houses of worship in Aceh Singkil, for example, was a phenomenon that befell the Acehnese Christian community, and there were even casualties. Regardless of the motive because the Christian side violated the agreement, incredibly resolving religious conflicts cannot be justified (Hartani & Nulhaqim, 2020). Likewise, what happened in Subulussalam-Aceh, although not as extreme as Aceh Singkil, the rejection of the construction of non-Muslim houses of worship always ended in chaos and did not prioritize the family dimension (deliberation).

As well as intolerance towards Islamic madhhabs in Aceh, the strengthening of those who call themselves Aswaja (*ahli sunnah wal jamaah*) closes the opportunity for other madhhabs to exist in the land of Serambi Mekkah. Moreover, this group received support from the Aceh government, causing the expulsion of Islamic studies at various points with accusations of Wahabi and so on. Likewise, a massive demonstration of santri and Dayah Ulama once filled the Baiturrahman Mosque in Banda Aceh in 2015. They demanded that the format of the Friday sermon should hold a stick and follow the concepts implemented by Aswaja circles (Juwaini et al., 2021). Since Aswaja is the mazhab with the largest following in Aceh, in the end, MPU Aceh and Aceh officials conducted an ulama muzakarah with the results answering what the Aswaja group wanted.

In the northern region of Aceh (Lhokseumawe), intolerant attitudes towards mazhab also often surface. One of the most extreme was the burning of the foundation of the Muhammadiyah mosque by the Aswaja group. What was intensified by this group was an extension of the regional regulation issued by the Acting Governor of Aceh at that time, which officially prohibited the recitation or existence of other madhhabs besides Aswaja (Nur Miswari, 2021). Politically, this is a strategy of the Acehnese elite to win the Pilkada (Regional Head Election), theologically this is a setback from the history of Aceh which was once very moderate and tolerant. If it enters academia, PTKIN is a new

platform that is ideal for developing the concept of moderate Islam in Aceh. Through PTKIN, socialization related to the importance of Islamic moderation can be transferred slowly to the community through students and community service programs. Since the last decade, the contents of moderation in Aceh through PTKIN have been carried out in such a way. Even the presence of moderation houses in various PTKIN adds to the pounding power so that the community is increasingly enlightened (Irfanullah & Fuad, 2022). Evidently, Aceh's religious moderation index has increased. This is following the test conducted by the Ministry of Religion by ASN throughout Indonesia in 2022.

However, moderate Islam is not fully accepted by Acehnese academics even though they are under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. There are still people who reject religious moderation initiated by the Government, especially the opposition in the previous elections. Likewise, academics who have the status of traditionalist Dayah Ulama, the majority of them do not fully accept religious moderation because it is not under local customs. In the end, there is a dualism between such figures, they seem to play a double role (theatrical). When positioning themselves as campus academics, they claim to be moderate, but when they go down to the community, they actually disbelieve the concept of religious moderation. This dualism becomes a separate problem, making it very difficult for the government to detect it.

Therefore, it is very important to disseminate moderate thinking among the community so that it is easier for Aceh to avoid hate speech and radicalism. Moderate Islam plays a crucial role in offering a middle path that allows society to maintain strong religious values while avoiding extremism. By accepting and practicing the principles of moderation, the people of Aceh can develop a greater attitude of tolerance towards differences and respect for plurality in religious life. Education that focuses on Islamic moderation, such as that carried out by PTKIN in Aceh, can strengthen society's understanding of these values, reduce the potential for inter-religious conflict, and prevent the spread of radical views that could threaten peace and social harmony.

## CONCLUSION

The research revealed that while social media plays an important role in disseminating information, it has also become a key tool in spreading hateful content that fuels radicalism in Aceh. Surprisingly, it was found that political education based on nationalism and humanitarian values can significantly reduce this negative impact. However, resistance to religious moderation programmes, both from local political actors and conservative communities, creates major obstacles in the implementation of effective moderation strategies.

This study contributes a new perspective by integrating the variables of political education, social media, and hate speech in the local context of Aceh. It confirms previous findings that inclusive political education is effective for instilling moderation, but challenges the view that the implementation of moderation programmes can be done without significant resistance in areas with complex political and cultural dynamics such

as Aceh. This new perspective highlights the importance of a multidimensional approach that accommodates cultural, historical and technological aspects.

However, this study has limitations, including the coverage area that only focuses on Aceh and the sample is limited to local intellectuals, without involving the general population, especially the younger generation who are more active on social media. To generate a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding, further research is needed by involving a more diverse population, expanding the research location to other regions, and using mixed methods. With broader findings, evidence-based policies can be formulated to address hate speech and radicalism more effectively.

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