

## Political Legitimacy through the Narrative of Moderate Islam in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

*This study analyses the use of moderate Islamic narratives as a strategy for political legitimisation in Indonesia. It aims to explain how political actors build legitimacy through moderate Islamic narratives and to identify the discursive strategies employed in this process. This study adopts a qualitative approach, using a critical case study design grounded in critical discourse analysis. The findings indicate that moderate Islamic narratives not only represent the values of tolerance, nationalism, and anti-extremism but can also function as political instruments to build public acceptance, strengthen the image of political actors, and manage contestations over religious identity. These narratives are ambivalent, as they can support social harmony while also potentially marginalising groups that do not conform to the dominant definition of moderation. The novelty of this study lies in its critical analysis of moderation as a discursive practice linked to legitimacy, power, and political communication. Consequently, the use of moderation narratives must be accompanied by policy commitments that are more inclusive, participatory, and sensitive to social justice, so that they do not remain mere political rhetoric.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's post-reform political development has been characterised by increasingly complex dynamics in the relationship between religion and the state, particularly amid democratisation and the consolidation of political power (Ayu et al., 2025; Hizbullah et al., 2025). Amid Indonesia's high degree of social pluralism, Islam, as the majority religion, plays a significant role not only in the social and cultural spheres but also in the establishment of political legitimacy. In this context, the narrative of moderate Islam has emerged as a strategic instrument for political actors to secure and strengthen their power. This narrative is generally constructed around the values of tolerance, inclusivity, anti-radicalism, and a commitment to democracy and diversity. This phenomenon has become increasingly relevant in recent years, particularly as identity-based political polarisation has intensified and religious discourse has gained prominence in Indonesian electoral contests.

In practice, the use of the narrative of moderate Islam cannot be separated from the efforts of the state and political elites to respond to the challenges of radicalism and extremism, which are perceived as threats to national stability (Sugitanata, Aminah, et al., 2023). The Indonesian government actively promotes the concept of moderate Islam through various policies, including deradicalisation programmes, international diplomacy, and the strengthening of the role of religious organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah (Nubowo, 2023). On the other hand, political actors also utilise this narrative in political communication to cultivate an image of themselves as both religious and tolerant leaders. This demonstrates that moderate Islam functions not only as a theological or ideological concept but also as a discursive tool with significant political implications. However, the use of the narrative of moderate Islam in the context of political legitimisation is not always neutral or free from vested interests (Latif et al., 2025). In many cases, this narrative becomes a battleground for the contestation of meaning, involving various actors with differing interests.

Some view it as a positive effort to strengthen social cohesion and prevent radicalism, whilst others criticise it as a form of instrumentalisation of religion for the sake of political power (Karam, 2022). This tension reflects the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia, which cannot be understood as either harmonious or purely conflictual, but rather as an ongoing process of negotiation.

Research into the relationship between Islam and politics in Indonesia has expanded considerably, particularly in discussions concerning democratisation, political identity, electoral mobilisation, and the role of religious organisations in public life. Hefner (2019) and Barton (2010) demonstrate that Islam in Indonesia has a relatively compatible relationship with democracy. However, the practice of Islamic politics remains influenced by social context, elite interests, and shifting power configurations. Aspinall and Sukmajati (2016) demonstrate that Indonesian electoral politics is still characterised by vote-buying, patronage, and clientelistic networks, including instances in which political actors utilise religious symbols or rhetoric to secure public support. These studies make an important contribution to explaining the relationship between religion, democracy, and electoral practices. However, their primary focus remains largely on political institutions, elite behaviour, Islamic organisations and electoral dynamics, rather than on how religious narratives are produced as discursive strategies to build political legitimacy.

In a more specific study of moderate Islam, Margiansyah et al. (2025) emphasise that moderate Islamic organisations play a vital role in maintaining social stability and supporting democracy in Indonesia. Davids (2017) demonstrates that moderate Islam is often employed as a political and religious category to counter radicalism, both in national and global contexts.

Monier (2024) subsequently demonstrates that the state also promotes moderate Islam as part of its security policy, diplomacy, and the management of religious life. These studies confirm that moderate Islam is not merely a theological concept, but also a political category utilised by the state, religious organisations, and public actors. Nevertheless, the majority of previous research has tended to focus on the normative and institutional dimensions of moderate Islam, such as the role of Islamic organisations, state policies, and counter-radicalisation discourse. This limitation means that the process of constructing the narrative of moderate Islam as a tool for political legitimisation has not yet been explored in depth.

The specific limitations of previous studies lie in three main areas. Firstly, moderate Islam is often treated as a relatively stable and homogeneous category. In contrast, in Indonesian political practice, this concept has diverse, fluid meanings and can be utilised for different interests. Secondly, previous studies have not sufficiently explained how political actors construct the narrative of moderate Islam through specific choices of language, symbols, moral claims, and representational strategies to gain public acceptance. Thirdly, the digital media dimension has received insufficient attention, particularly in explaining how narratives of moderate Islam are disseminated, reinforced, debated, and consumed in the digital public sphere. However, in the context of contemporary politics, legitimacy is built not only through formal institutions, direct campaigns, or organisational networks, but also through the rapid and repeated production of discourse on social media, online news portals, and other digital communication channels.

The research gap in this study lies in the lack of an adequate body of research linking moderate Islamic narratives, digital media, and the construction of political legitimacy within a single, integrated analytical framework. Studies on Islam and democracy have extensively explained the compatibility of Islam with the Indonesian political system. Studies on moderate Islam have also explained the role of religious organisations and the state in constructing a discourse of moderation. Meanwhile, studies on electoral politics have addressed patronage, mass mobilisation, and the use of religious symbols. However, research specifically analysing how narratives of moderate Islam are produced as discursive practices by political actors, how digital spaces mediate these narratives, and how they are used to build or maintain political legitimacy remains relatively limited.

The novelty of this study does not lie in the claim that moderate Islam or the relationship between Islam and politics has never been studied, as these themes already have a strong research tradition. The novelty of this study lies in its analytical framework, which positions the narrative of moderate Islam as a mechanism of political legitimacy operating through discursive practices within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Thus, the study's novel contributions lie in four interrelated aspects. In terms of context, this study focuses on Indonesia as a democratic Muslim political space characterised by unique dynamics between the state, Islamic organisations, the political elite, and the digital public.

The contribution of this study is conceptual and analytical; it does not seek to make overly broad generalisations. This research does not intend to suggest that all uses of the narrative of moderate Islam are invariably instrumental or manipulative (Sakinah et al., 2025). Rather, this study seeks to demonstrate that moderate Islamic narratives can serve a dual function. On the one hand, they can be a source of democratic values, tolerance, and peaceful religious life. On the other hand, they can also be used strategically by political actors to build legitimacy, manage their public image, respond to critics or distinguish themselves from groups considered extremist. This analytical stance is important to ensure that the study does not

become trapped in a normative perspective that views moderate Islam solely as a positive force, nor does it fall into reductive claims that regard it merely as an instrument of power.

This study aims to analyse how political actors use narratives of moderate Islam to build the legitimacy of their power in Indonesia, particularly through digital political communication spaces. This research also seeks to identify the discursive strategies employed in the construction of these narratives, including how political actors cultivate a moderate image, claim moral authority, emphasise their alignment with religious values, and link moderate Islam to the national agenda, democracy, and social stability. The significance of this study lies in its endeavour to broaden understanding of moderate Islam beyond a merely normative and institutional category to a discursive practice linked to power relations, digital media, and political legitimacy.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, critical case-study design grounded in critical discourse analysis to examine the construction and function of political legitimacy through narratives of moderate Islam, chosen for their ability to reveal the interplay of power, ideology, and discursive practices within the contemporary socio-political context. The focus of the study is operationalised as the representation, articulation strategies, and legitimising effects of moderate Islamic narratives produced by political actors in the public sphere, with the units of analysis comprising texts, utterances, and digital content (speeches, policies, campaigns, and social media) that represent political communication practices.

The study population comprises political actors and their communication products within a specific period, with subjects selected through purposive sampling based on the relevance of the discourse and the intensity of narrative production. The research instrument comprises a discourse analysis framework developed iteratively through theoretical review and initial data exploration, with validity testing conducted through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as intercoder agreement checks to ensure interpretative consistency. Data collection was carried out in stages through documentation, observation of digital media, and archival research into policy documents, which were subsequently analysed using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model (Fairclough, 2023), encompassing text analysis, discursive practices, and social practices, combined with thematic analysis to identify patterns of legitimation, thereby enabling the drawing of reflective, contextual conclusions that align with the study's objectives in uncovering the dynamics of political legitimacy based on religious narratives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Narrative of Moderate Islam as an Instrument of Power Legitimation in Indonesia's Democratic Political Arena**

Indonesia's post-reform political transformation has opened up an increasingly open space for ideological competition, in which religion, particularly Islam, is no longer merely a cultural identity but has also become a strategic source of political legitimacy (Prianto et al., 2024). In the context of an electoral democracy that demands broad public support, political actors are required to build legitimacy that is not merely procedural, but also symbolic and moral. It is here that the narrative of moderate Islam gains its significance as a discursive tool capable of bridging the need for religiosity with the demands of pluralism and democracy. This narrative is constructed through an emphasis on tolerance, non-violence, inclusivity, and a commitment

to diversity, which are simultaneously presented as the antithesis of radicalism and extremism (Karimullah & Sugitanata, 2013).

Within the framework of Weberian legitimacy theory, this strategy can be understood as an effort to build rational-legal legitimacy, reinforced by normative legitimacy grounded in religious values widely accepted by society. However, the narrative of moderate Islam cannot be understood merely as an authentic reflection of religious-social dynamics, but also as a discursive construction produced within specific power relations (Pektas, 2021). Drawing on the perspectives of social constructivism and critical discourse analysis, this narrative is the result of a process of meaning-making involving state actors, political elites, religious organisations, and the media.

The state, for instance, through various deradicalisation policies and programmes, actively promotes moderate Islam as a national identity expected to maintain social and political stability (Karimullah, 2022). In this context, moderate Islam functions as what Gramsci termed cultural hegemony, a mechanism through which certain values are produced and disseminated to secure societal consent, thereby enabling power to be exercised without explicit coercion (Butko, 2004). On the other hand, political elites utilise the narrative of moderate Islam as a political communication strategy to cultivate an image that is both religious and moderate, thereby gaining acceptance across various voter segments (Octavianne et al., 2024). In practice, this narrative is often adapted to the audience and prevailing political interests. For instance, during electoral campaigns, candidates may emphasise their commitment to moderate Islamic values to attract urban Muslim voters who tend to prioritise tolerance and pluralism, whilst simultaneously maintaining a connection with their conservative voter base through specific religious symbols (Karimullah, Faizin, et al., 2023).

This flexibility demonstrates that the narrative of moderate Islam is elastic and can be articulated differently, depending on the configuration of power and the need for legitimacy. Nevertheless, the use of the moderate Islam narrative as an instrument of legitimacy is not without its problems (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). One of the main issues is the potential for the instrumentalisation of religion, whereby religious values are used selectively for short-term political gain. In this context, moderate Islam can function as a normative label attached to specific actors or policies to secure legitimacy, without being accompanied by a substantive commitment to the claimed values. This raises questions regarding the authenticity of such narratives, whilst also opening the door to criticism that moderate Islam has been reduced to mere political rhetoric. The use of this narrative to delegitimise other groups deemed non-moderate can create symbolic exclusion and deepen polarisation within society.

These tensions become increasingly complex when the narrative of moderate Islam is employed in the context of intense political contestation, such as general elections. In such situations, the line between promoting values of moderation and delegitimising the opposition becomes blurred. Political actors may use the discourse of moderation to frame political opponents as a threat to stability or diversity, thereby reinforcing their position as the true representatives of Islam. This practice demonstrates that the narrative of moderate Islam functions not only as a tool of legitimisation but also as an instrument of power that can control the discursive field and define the boundaries of legitimacy in the public sphere.

The process of producing and distributing narratives of moderate Islam cannot be separated from the role of the media, particularly digital media, which has become the primary arena for shaping public opinion (Rohid et al., 2025; Sianipar et al., 2025). In the digital age, narratives are no longer monopolised by the state or political elites. Still, they are also

produced and disseminated by various actors, including civil society, influencers, and religious groups. Social media enables the rapid and widespread reproduction and transformation of narratives, thereby expanding their reach whilst increasing the complexity of the discourse on moderate Islam. Within the framework of mediation theory, this indicates that political legitimacy is now constructed through a dynamic interaction between the production of discourse by elites and its interpretation by the public, which does not always align with the original intentions of the narrative's creators (Sutisna et al., 2025).

At the grassroots level, acceptance of the narrative of moderate Islam varies significantly by individuals' social background, education, and religious experience. Some members of the public accept this narrative as an ideal representation of Islam suited to Indonesia's pluralistic context, whilst others view it as an elite construct that does not fully reflect the reality of their religious lives. From the perspective of audience reception, this indicates that the meaning of a narrative is not fixed but is negotiated through an interpretative process influenced by social context and subjective experience.

This dynamic also reveals a contestation over the meaning of moderation in Islam. There is no single, universally agreed-upon definition, thus opening the door to various competing interpretations. The state and political elites tend to define moderation within a framework that supports national stability and integration, whilst other groups may hold differing understandings based on their theological interpretations or social experiences. This contestation demonstrates that the narrative of moderate Islam is not a static entity but a discursive arena constantly contested and negotiated. Within this framework, it is important to view the narrative of moderate Islam not merely as a tool of legitimisation, but also as a symbolic battlefield reflecting power relations within society. A critical discourse analysis approach enables us to uncover how such narratives are produced, who benefits from them, and how they function in maintaining or challenging existing power structures. Consequently, discussions of moderate Islam in Indonesian politics cannot be separated from broader analyses of hegemony, ideology, and political communication practices.

### **The Contest over the Meaning of Moderation between the State, Islamic Organisations, and Alternative Groups**

The contestation over the meaning of moderation within the contemporary Indonesian political and religious landscape demonstrates that moderate Islam cannot be understood as a singular, fixed, and neutral category (Jubba et al., 2022). This concept is more accurately understood as a space of contested meanings involving the state, mainstream Islamic organisations, and alternative groups with differing social positions and interests. The state tends to define moderation in terms of stability, national integration, tolerance, commitment to the nation, and the prevention of extremism. Mainstream Islamic organisations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, articulate moderation through their respective historical and ideological foundations; for example, through 'Islam Nusantara', which emphasises accommodation of local traditions, and 'Islam Berkemajuan', which emphasises rationality, renewal, and social progress (Budiman et al., 2025; Darajat, 2019; Fallah et al., 2025). Meanwhile, alternative groups are often in a more vulnerable position because their religious expressions may be deemed less in line with the standards of moderation produced by dominant actors.

Several discursive strategies are employed to shape the meaning of moderation. The first strategy is linking moderation to the national agenda. In this strategy, moderation is not only

interpreted as a balanced religious attitude, but also as a sign of loyalty to the state, Pancasila, and national integration (Apandie et al., 2022). Through this strategy, political actors or state institutions can construct an image of a good citizen as religious, tolerant, and compliant with the national framework. The second strategy is the establishment of symbolic boundaries between moderate groups and those deemed non-moderate. These boundaries are usually established through the use of terms such as tolerant, inclusive, non-violent, radical, intolerant, or extreme.' The use of these terms is not merely descriptive but also assigns specific moral values to the groups in question.

The third strategy is legitimisation through mainstream religious authority. In this strategy, the narrative of moderation is reinforced by referring to Islamic organisations that possess historical legitimacy, extensive social networks, and close ties to the community. When the state or political actors partner with mainstream Islamic organisations, the narrative of moderation gains stronger moral and social support (Ghaffari et al., 2025). The fourth strategy is the use of language centred on security and order. In this strategy, moderation is linked to the need to prevent conflict, counter radicalism, maintain social harmony, and protect society from the threat of extremist ideologies. This strategy presents moderation as an urgent public necessity, rather than merely a normative choice. The fifth strategy is the dissemination of narratives through digital media, such as social media posts, official online statements, campaign videos, digital news portals, and religious educational content (Syafie et al., 2026). In the digital sphere, the meaning of moderation can be rapidly reproduced, debated by the public, and used to bolster the image of certain actors.

Narratives of moderation do not always operate through overt or repressive domination. In many cases, these narratives function through the selection of language, the repetition of messages, the application of labels, and the reinforcement of specific authorities. For example, when moderation is consistently associated with stability, nationalism, and the prevention of radicalism, actors who do not employ such language can more easily be positioned as being out of step with the dominant discourse (Van Es et al., 2021). However, these findings cannot be used to conclude that all moderation policies or narratives are always intended to marginalise other groups. The available data merely indicates that the narrative of moderation can serve as a tool of legitimisation when used to determine who is considered legitimate, reasonable, and acceptable within the religious public sphere.

At the level of theoretical interpretation, these dynamics can be analysed through Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Moderation functions as a floating signifier because its meaning is not singular and can be filled with various political, religious, and social interests (Karimullah, 2024; Sakthivel, 2024). The state imbues it with the meaning of stability and order. Mainstream Islamic organisations imbue it with historical values, religious traditions, and reformist agendas. Alternative groups may interpret moderation as a more pluralistic space for expression, but their position is often not as strong as that of dominant actors in shaping public meaning.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the state's production of the discourse of moderation can be understood as a form of governmentality (Jessen & von Eggers, 2020). The state governs society not only through laws and regulations, but also through the production of knowledge regarding the ideal religious citizen. The ideal citizen is portrayed as religious, tolerant, nationalistic, non-violent, and in line with national norms (Karimullah et al., 2025). However, this interpretation must be qualified. Not all moderation programmes can be directly interpreted as state control. The analysis affirms that the language of moderation can shape the subject of citizenship when official institutions predominantly determine its definition.

From a Bourdieuan perspective, the contestation of moderation can also be interpreted as a struggle for symbolic authority. Actors possessing greater social, political, and religious capital have a stronger chance of determining the meaning of moderation that is deemed legitimate. When a particular definition gains public legitimacy, other interpretations may be marginalised. This process does not always take the form of direct prohibition. Still, it may manifest through labelling, stereotyping, restrictions on access, or the disregard of the voices of groups outside the mainstream. Based on this analysis, the contestation over the meaning of moderation in Indonesia demonstrates that moderate Islam serves both normative and political functions. Normatively, moderation can foster tolerance, social harmony, and a peaceful religious life. Politically, moderation can also serve as a discursive strategy to build legitimacy, strengthen the position of dominant actors, and limit the scope of certain religious interpretations.

### **The Effectiveness and Ambiguity of the Moderate Islamic Narrative in Building Long-Term Legitimacy**

In contemporary democratic politics, the narrative of moderate Islam has evolved into a strategic instrument for building and maintaining political legitimacy at both the national and international levels. The success of this narrative in gaining widespread acceptance is inseparable from its ability to bridge the tensions between religiosity and modernity, as well as between religious identity and liberal democratic values. Within the framework of political legitimacy theory, as formulated by Easton, legitimacy is not only related to support for political institutions but also to acceptance of the values that underpin them. The narrative of moderate Islam, with its emphasis on tolerance, inclusivity, and anti-extremism, functions as a symbolic medium that enables political actors to secure diffuse public support whilst simultaneously reinforcing their image as leaders capable of managing diversity harmoniously (Karimullah, 2023; Sugitanata, Karimullah, et al., 2023).

Empirically, the use of the moderate Islam narrative has proven effective in the short term, particularly in the context of political campaigns and public communication. This narrative can create strong emotional and cognitive resonance among voters, particularly in societies highly sensitive to religious issues. From a political communication perspective, this can be explained through framing theory, in which political actors frame themselves as representatives of a friendly and civilised Islam, thereby gaining moral legitimacy that opponents find difficult to match. Furthermore, in the international context, this narrative also serves as an effective tool of public diplomacy, enabling countries such as Indonesia to position themselves as models of moderate Islam compatible with democracy, thereby enhancing their appeal to the global community.

This symbolic effectiveness does not always correlate directly with substantive effectiveness in bringing about sustainable social change. The ambiguity between symbolic success and substantive impact constitutes a key issue in evaluating the narrative of moderate Islam as a long-term instrument of legitimacy. In many cases, this narrative succeeds in enhancing political image and strengthening public support in the short term. Still, it does not address structural issues such as social inequality, discrimination, or identity-based conflicts in a significant way (Jukari et al., 2023; Karimullah, Bahrudin, et al., 2023). Within the framework of performativity theory, the narrative of moderation can be understood as a symbolic act that creates a certain impression of reality, without necessarily leading to profound material transformation. This poses the risk that the legitimacy built is superficial and vulnerable to erosion when public expectations are not met.

Comparisons with various countries show that this phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. In some Middle Eastern countries, for example, governments have adopted narratives of moderation to enhance their international image and attract investment, yet are often criticised for failing to accompany these narratives with substantial political reforms. Similarly, in Western countries, the discourse of moderate Islam is frequently employed in integration policies, but does not always succeed in addressing the social and economic marginalisation of Muslim communities (Suyahman et al., 2025). The success of the moderation narrative depends heavily on consistency between rhetoric and practice, as well as on political institutions' ability to translate moderation's values into concrete, inclusive policies.

Debates over the effectiveness of the moderate Islam narrative as a long-term instrument of legitimacy reveal sharp differences among academics and practitioners (Firdaus & Sidik, 2024). Optimists view this narrative as a productive soft-power strategy that not only strengthens domestic legitimacy but also enhances the state's bargaining position in international relations. From this perspective, moderation is seen as a middle ground that avoids ideological extremism and creates space for dialogue and compromise. This narrative is also regarded as a vital tool in preventing radicalisation and strengthening social cohesion, particularly within pluralistic societies.

The sceptical camp highlights that the narrative of moderate Islam risks becoming a form of political window-dressing that masks the government's inability or unwillingness to implement structural change. Within a critical theory framework, this narrative can be seen as a mechanism of depoliticisation, reducing issues of social justice and structural conflict to matters of harmony and tolerance alone. Consequently, the discourse of moderation may obscure unequal power relations and hinder the emergence of constructive public policy criticism (Ferguson & Wollersheim, 2023). Furthermore, the co-optation of the moderation narrative by political elites may erode public critical capacity, as criticism of authority can easily be labelled as non-moderate or even radical.

This ambiguity is also evident in its long-term impact on public trust and political participation. In the short term, the narrative of moderation can boost trust in the government and encourage participation in the democratic process. However, if not accompanied by tangible results, such trust may wane and even turn into cynicism. From the perspective of political trust theory, sustained legitimacy requires consistency between promises and their fulfilment, as well as transparency in decision-making. Without these elements, the narrative of moderation risks becoming an empty signifier, losing its meaning and appeal.

Longitudinal measurements of the impact of moderate Islamic narratives indicate that their effectiveness depends heavily on the broader social and political context. In countries with strong democratic institutions and relatively low levels of inequality, narratives of moderation tend to be more effective in building long-term legitimacy. Conversely, in contexts where significant structural injustice exists, this narrative is often viewed as empty rhetoric. This suggests that legitimacy cannot be built solely through the production of discourse, but requires support from material conditions that enable the realisation of the claimed values.

In a global context, the use of the moderate Islam narrative also has implications for a country's image and position within the international system (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). States that successfully promote themselves as representatives of moderate Islam can gain benefits, including enhanced reputation, international cooperation, and access to global resources. However, this success also carries risks, particularly if there is a gap between the international

image and domestic reality. In such cases, the narrative of moderation can become a source of criticism and delegitimation, from both domestic and international actors.

The effectiveness and ambiguity of the moderate Islam narrative in building long-term legitimacy cannot be understood in dichotomous terms as a success or failure, but rather as a complex and contextual process. This narrative has the potential to be a constructive tool in strengthening democracy and pluralism, but also risks becoming a hegemonic instrument that obscures injustice and limits the space for criticism. Therefore, a more reflective and critical approach is required when evaluating the use of this narrative, taking into account not only its symbolic impact but also its substantive implications for social justice, political participation, and the quality of democracy.

## CONCLUSION

The narrative of moderate Islam in Indonesian politics can be understood as an ambivalent instrument of legitimation. This narrative can strengthen public acceptance of the state or the political elite through the language of tolerance, nationalism, stability, and anti-extremism. However, it also opens the door to contestation over meaning, as the definition of moderation is not always singular or neutral. In some contexts, moderation can be used to distinguish between groups considered legitimate and illegitimate within the religious public sphere. This study contributes by linking discourse analysis, political communication, and political legitimacy to explain how the meaning of moderation is produced and disseminated, particularly within the digital public sphere. Consequently, moderation policies need to be formulated in a more inclusive, participatory manner that is sensitive to the diversity of religious interpretations. However, as this study is still based on discourse analysis, further research should examine these dynamics through empirical studies spanning different regions, actors, and time periods, to better understand the relationship between narratives of moderation, the quality of democracy, and social justice.

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