

Moderate Islam and women's empowerment in Indonesia: Institutional transformation, contextual interpretation, and gender justice

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Article Information	Abstract:
Submitted: 2023-01-10 Revised: 2023-04-27 Published: 2023-05-15	Moderate Islam is often understood primarily as a counter-discourse to radicalism and conservatism, yet it also provides an important framework for women's empowerment through Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, major institutional actors in Indonesia's moderate Islamic landscape. This study examines patterns of moderate Islam, women's empowerment initiatives within NU and Muhammadiyah, and the role of moderate Islamic orientations in advancing women's liberation and gender equality. The study employs a qualitative library research approach, using the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles and Huberman, source triangulation, and data from books, journal articles, and relevant institutional documents. The findings reveal three interconnected patterns. First, NU and Muhammadiyah demonstrate a shift from the traditionalist-modernist dichotomy toward a more inclusive, dialogical, and <i>maslahah</i> -oriented model of moderate Islam. Second, their women's organizations promote empowerment through education, advocacy, leadership development, socio-economic initiatives, and gender-responsive Islamic jurisprudence. Third, moderate Islamic approaches grounded in <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> support contextual interpretations of Islamic teachings that challenge patriarchal interpretations and religious justifications for violence while affirming gender equality and women's empowerment. The study concludes that moderate Islam functions not merely as a religious identity but also as an institutional and epistemological framework that connects Islamic normative commitments to women's empowerment and gender justice. Its contribution lies in linking <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> , contextual interpretation, and institutionalized women's empowerment practices within the Indonesian Islamic context.

Keywords:

Moderate Islam;
Women's Empowerment;
Gender Justice; Maqāṣid
al-Sharī'ah.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian women continue to face gender constraints shaped by patriarchal norms that are often legitimized through religious interpretations, affecting their access to resources, participation, and intergenerational opportunities. The strong influence of religious values on Indonesian social norms and everyday life intensifies these challenges (Bauto, 2016; Anwar et al., 2019; Riady, 2021). Consequently, women's liberation and empowerment strategies that overlook religious factors may be less effective where religious interpretations shape gender relations. Religious discourse, therefore, provides an important platform for challenging restrictive gender norms and advancing women's agency (Agadjanian & Yabiku, 2015; Mocan & Pogorelova, 2018; Forman-Rabinovici & Sommer, 2018). In this context, moderate Islam, as articulated by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah as major institutional actors in Indonesia's moderate Islamic landscape, emphasizes contextual interpretation informed by *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, justice, and contemporary realities (Wulandari et al., 2021; Yumnah, 2022; Haris et al., 2023). Thus, moderate Islam provides a relevant framework for women's empowerment and gender justice.

Existing scholarship on women's empowerment in Indonesia can be grouped into three primary streams. The first examines women's political representation and structural barriers, including gender stereotypes and patriarchal cultures (Shofan, 2021; Ebong & Odock, 2022). The second focuses on economic empowerment through skills training, philanthropy, community participation, and involvement in village development and social organizations (Kasdi, 2019; Diatmika & Rahayu, 2021; Rosdiana, 2015). The third explores progressive gender *ijtihad*, moderate Islamic preaching, and women's experiences within religious and social movements (Nurjanah & Nur, 2022; Assya'bani & Falach, 2020; Habudin, 2019; Crook, 2018). However, limited research has examined how moderate Islam is institutionally translated into women's liberation and empowerment through NU and Muhammadiyah. In particular, the relationship between moderate Islamic interpretation, women's organizational activism, and gender-responsive Islamic knowledge production remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining women's empowerment as a transformative and institutionally mediated process within the moderate Islamic orientations of NU and Muhammadiyah.

This study analyzes the patterns of moderate Islam in Indonesia, identifies the forms of women's liberation and empowerment promoted by NU and Muhammadiyah, and examines the influence of moderate Islamic orientations on these movements. Theoretically, it advances scholarship on moderate Islam and gender by linking *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, contextual religious interpretation, and institutionalized practices of women's empowerment. In practical terms, the study provides policy and institutional recommendations for NU, Muhammadiyah, and other Islamic women's organizations to develop gender-responsive, inclusive empowerment initiatives rooted in Islamic values. The research addresses three central questions: (1) How have the patterns and characteristics of moderate Islam as a mainstream current in Indonesia been formed and developed? (2) What forms of women's liberation and empowerment are promoted by NU and Muhammadiyah within the context of moderate Islam in Indonesia? (3) How do moderate Islamic orientations shape women's liberation and empowerment movements in Indonesia?

This study is based on the argument that moderate Islam in Indonesia, particularly as embodied by NU and Muhammadiyah, has evolved into a dynamic and socially adaptive form of religious engagement. While NU and Muhammadiyah originated from distinct traditionalist and modernist intellectual backgrounds, their current orientations increasingly converge on contextual, inclusive, dialogical, and socially engaged approaches to Islam. Within this

paradigm, women's liberation and empowerment are advanced through autonomous women's organizations, education, advocacy, leadership development, socio-economic initiatives, and gender-responsive Islamic knowledge production. Contextual interpretation, grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, offers a normative framework that links Islamic values of justice and public welfare to contemporary gender issues and challenges patriarchal interpretations and religious justifications for violence. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes moderate Islam not merely as a religious identity but as an institutional and epistemological framework that connects Islamic normative commitments to women's empowerment and gender justice in contemporary Indonesian society.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative library research approach to examine the patterns and characteristics of moderate Islam, the forms of women's empowerment promoted by NU and Muhammadiyah, and the relationship between moderate Islamic orientations and women's liberation and empowerment. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, arguments, and patterns within textual and scholarly sources rather than testing statistical hypotheses (Bazen et al., 2021). Library research was considered appropriate because the research questions require examination of religious, organizational, and scholarly discourses concerning moderate Islam and gender. The approach enabled an interpretive and contextual analysis of how NU and Muhammadiyah articulate, institutionalize, and develop moderate Islamic perspectives regarding women's empowerment (Assarroudi et al., 2018).

Data Sources and Collection

The study utilized primary and secondary sources. Primary sources comprised *Rezim Gender NU* by Jamal Ma'ruf and *Rezim Gender Muhammadiyah* by Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, selected for their substantive discussion of gender relations, women's roles, and institutional responses within NU and Muhammadiyah. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, previous studies, and relevant organizational documents on moderate Islam, NU, and Muhammadiyah, women's empowerment, gender equality, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. A structured literature search used combinations of the keywords "moderate Islam," "NU and Muhammadiyah," "women's empowerment," "gender equality," "women's liberation," and "maqāṣid al-sharī'ah." Sources were screened for relevance to the three research questions and included based on scholarly or institutional credibility and substantive relevance. Sources with insufficient relevance, unclear provenance, or limited engagement with the research topic were excluded. The selected literature was organized into three analytical domains corresponding to the research questions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive qualitative model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Hashimov, 2015). Data reduction involved identifying, extracting, and coding information relevant to the three research questions while excluding unrelated material (Deterding & Waters, 2021). The reduced data were organized into narrative summaries and thematic matrices, generating three interconnected themes: (1) patterns and characteristics of moderate Islam in Indonesia, particularly within NU and Muhammadiyah; (2) institutional forms of women's liberation and empowerment through their autonomous women's organizations; and (3) the role of contextual Islamic interpretation and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* in constructing gender-responsive

understandings of Islam. Conclusions were developed through iterative comparison across sources and themes, focusing on convergences, differences, and recurring patterns, until additional sources generated no substantially new themes or interpretations relevant to the research questions.

Data Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the analysis was strengthened through source triangulation and systematic cross-referencing. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing arguments and findings across the two primary books, peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly publications, and relevant organizational documents. Claims identified in one source were cross-checked against other sources to assess consistency, identify divergent interpretations, and minimize the risk of relying on isolated arguments. Citation verification was also conducted by tracing key claims to their original or authoritative sources where available. In addition, an audit trail was maintained by documenting the search process, source selection, coding categories, thematic development, and analytical decisions. These procedures enhanced the credibility, consistency, and transparency of the interpretive process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Patterns of moderate Islam in Indonesia's mainstream religious landscape

Contemporary Islamic studies demonstrate that Muslim communities respond to modernization through diverse intellectual, institutional, and religious orientations. These responses range from reformist approaches that engage with modernity and rationality to orientations that emphasize preserving established Islamic traditions and seek to limit the influence of Western intellectual frameworks. Within this diverse landscape, moderate Islam in Indonesia has developed through a dynamic process of negotiating Islamic normative commitments with changing social, cultural, and political contexts. The historical trajectories and contemporary institutional orientations of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah provide important evidence for understanding this process.

Table 1

Patterns and Characteristics of Mainstream Moderate Islam in Indonesia

No.	Synthesized Finding	Description	Analytical Implication	References
1	The Emergence of NU and Muhammadiyah as Responses to Social and Religious Change	Muhammadiyah was established in 1912 as a reformist response to colonial modernity, while NU was established in 1926 to preserve the traditions of Ahlul-sunnah wal Jamaah amid changing religious and socio-political conditions.	Both emerged as institutional strategies for negotiating religious continuity, social change, and modernity.	Anis (2019); Fuad (2020); Ilham & Syamsuddin (2021)
2	Distinct but Complementary Intellectual Orientations	NU emphasizes pesantren traditions, classical scholarship, and religious authority, whereas Muhammadiyah emphasizes tajdid, rationality, educational reform, and contextual interpretation.	Their distinct orientations enrich Indonesian Islamic plurality and demonstrate diverse pathways to moderate religiosity.	Rahma (2017); Anis (2019); Bindaniji & Fuadi (2022)
3	From Traditionalist–Modernist Dichotomy to	Despite different intellectual roots, both increasingly adopt contextual, dialogical, and	The traditionalist–modernist dichotomy is historically relevant but insufficient for explaining	Rahma (2017); Mu'ti (2016); Hamami (2021)

	Moderate Convergence	adaptive approaches to social change.	contemporary moderate Islam as a dynamic synthesis of tradition and modernity.	
4	Institutional Manifestations of Moderate Islam	Moderation is expressed through inclusive education, dakwah, community empowerment, philanthropy, tolerance, non-violence, and national values.	Moderation operates as an institutional and social practice supporting welfare, coexistence, and civic engagement.	Mu'ti (2016); Hamami (2021); Baihaqi (2021); Ilham & Syamsuddin (2021)
5	Moderation as an Alternative to Exclusivist Religious Orientations	NU and Muhammadiyah emphasize tolerance, coexistence, <i>maslahah</i> , and dialogue while opposing violent and exclusionary religious expressions.	These orientations strengthen moderate Islam as an influential framework for navigating religious identity within a pluralistic society.	Mu'ti (2016); Hamami (2021); Baihaqi (2021)
6	Institutional and Cultural Influence on Indonesia's Religious Landscape	Extensive educational, religious, social, and community networks extend their influence beyond formal membership.	Their institutional and cultural reach makes them major actors in the reproduction and negotiation of moderate Islamic discourse in Indonesia.	Mu'ti (2016); Hamami (2021); Baihaqi (2021); Suarainvestor (2020)

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the reviewed literature.

Table 1 indicates that mainstream moderate Islam in Indonesia cannot be fully explained by a traditionalist–modernist dichotomy. NU and Muhammadiyah emerged from distinct responses to colonialism and social change: NU preserved and adapted Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah traditions, while Muhammadiyah emphasized *tajdid*, rationality, educational reform, and engagement with modernity. Yet, these distinctions have become increasingly fluid, as both demonstrate contextual, dialogical, inclusive, and socially engaged orientations. This convergence reflects a shared capacity to negotiate Islamic normative commitments with the demands of a pluralistic society without implying doctrinal uniformity. Moderation is manifested through education, *dakwah*, philanthropy, community empowerment, social welfare, and civic engagement. Their extensive educational, *pesantren*, social, charitable, and community networks extend their influence beyond formal membership, facilitating the circulation of moderate Islamic interpretations. However, this influence does not indicate religious homogeneity or the disappearance of conservative, puritan, and exclusivist currents. Overall, the findings indicate a shift toward a dynamic synthesis that negotiates Islamic normative authority with contemporary social realities, positioning NU and Muhammadiyah as major institutional actors in Indonesia's moderate Islamic landscape.

Women's liberation and empowerment movements in NU and Muhammadiyah

Religious moderation in Indonesia not only serves as a theological framework but also as a concrete foundation for women's liberation and empowerment. NU and Muhammadiyah, through their autonomous women's organizations such as Muslimat NU, Fatayat, 'Aisyiyah, and Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah, actively develop education, advocacy, economic empowerment, and gender-focused fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) studies. These efforts have shaped an egalitarian paradigm that aligns with Islamic values while remaining responsive to issues of violence, discrimination, and women's leadership in the public sphere.

Table 2*Women's Liberation and Empowerment Movements in NU and Muhammadiyah*

No.	Synthesized Finding	Description	Analytical Implication	References
1	Moderate Islam as a Foundation for Women's Empowerment	NU and Muhammadiyah address women's issues through religious values, justice, and public welfare (<i>maslahah</i>).	Moderate Islamic orientations provide an important normative basis for gender-equitable interpretations of Islam.	Ma'mur (2015); Fauziyah (2020)
2	Women's Organizations as Platforms for Empowerment	Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, IPPNU, 'Aisyiyah, and Nasyyatul 'Aisyiyah support education, capacity building, and women's leadership.	These organizations expand women's participation in religious, social, and organizational life.	Ma'mur (2015); Dzuhayatin (2015)
3	Advocacy for Women's Rights and Protection	Advocacy addresses violence, discrimination, and women's protection through congresses, training, seminars, and mentoring.	These initiatives strengthen awareness of women's rights and institutional mechanisms of protection.	Ma'mur (2015); Dzuhayatin (2015)
4	Socio-Economic Empowerment	Education, skills training, and economic programs strengthen women's capacities and livelihoods.	Such initiatives support women's independence, agency, and socio-economic welfare.	Dzuhayatin (2015); Ma'mur (2015)
5	Women's Leadership and Organizational Representation	Autonomous women's organizations provide platforms for cadre formation, leadership development, and gender advocacy.	They strengthen women's representation and leadership within religious organizations and wider society.	Ma'mur (2015); Dzuhayatin (2015)
6	Gender-Responsive Islamic Knowledge Production	Research, discussion, and scholarly publication contribute to the development of <i>fiqh al-nisa'</i> and gender-oriented Islamic knowledge.	This knowledge production enables more inclusive and contextually responsive interpretations of Islamic teachings.	Ma'mur (2015); Dzuhayatin (2015); Fauziyah (2020)

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the reviewed literature.

Table 2 indicates that moderate Islamic orientations within NU and Muhammadiyah provide an important normative and institutional basis for women's liberation and empowerment. Through Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, 'Aisyiyah, Nasyyatul 'Aisyiyah, and related organizations, women's empowerment is advanced through education, capacity building, leadership development, advocacy, and socio-economic initiatives. These organizations also address violence and discrimination, and protect women through congresses, training, seminars, and mentoring, thereby expanding women's participation in religious, social, and organizational life.

The findings further show that women's empowerment within NU and Muhammadiyah extends beyond social programs to the production and reinterpretation of Islamic knowledge. Research and scholarly engagement on *fiqh al-nisa'* and gender contribute to more inclusive and contextually responsive interpretations of Islamic teachings. Thus, moderation functions not merely as a theological principle but as a transformative framework through which religious values, justice, and public welfare (*maslahah*) are connected to women's agency and social participation.

Taken together, these findings indicate the emergence of an institutionalized ecosystem of women's empowerment within NU and Muhammadiyah. Women's liberation is articulated through contextual *ijtihad* rooted in Islamic tradition and *maslahah*, rather than through a

single externally derived model of gender emancipation. The combination of organizational activism, education, advocacy, socio-economic empowerment, leadership development, and gender-responsive knowledge production demonstrates how moderate Islam can operate as a transformative resource for advancing gender justice within Indonesian Muslim society.

The spirit of moderate Islam in the movement for women's liberation and empowerment

The values of moderate Islam constitute an urgent necessity in the movement for women's liberation and empowerment in Indonesia, given the country's religious society, which is deeply embedded in religious patterns. Women's liberation to participate in various sectors of life is inseparable from the prevailing religious understandings within society. Religious interpretation possesses a dual power: it can accelerate development but also hinder it. Therefore, women's engagement in religious interpretation becomes a strategic necessity.

Table 3

The Role of Moderate Islam in Promoting Women's Liberation and Empowerment

No.	Synthesized Finding	Description	Analytical Implication	References
1	Moderate Islam as a Foundation for Women's Liberation	Moderate Islam emphasizes justice, <i>maslahah</i> , and equality in promoting and protecting women's rights.	Provides normative religious legitimacy for women's empowerment.	Auda (2015); Shofan (2021); Aminah (2021); Rambe (2021)
2	Contextual Interpretation of Religious Texts	Qur'anic and Hadith interpretations consider social realities and the objectives of <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> .	Enables more responsive and gender-sensitive interpretations of Islamic teachings.	Saeed (2016); Muliana (2022)
3	Rejection of Patriarchal and Gender-Biased Interpretations	Moderate approaches challenge interpretations that subordinate women in religious and social life.	Supports more equitable and egalitarian gender relations.	Islamy (2017); Fauziyah (2020); Nurhayati (2015)
4	Rejection of Violence against Women	Moderate Islam rejects religious justifications for violence based on literalist interpretations.	Strengthens religious and social arguments for protecting women from gender-based violence.	Ma'mur (2015); Dzuhayatin (2015)
5	Gender Equality through Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah	Women's empowerment is linked to justice, virtue, and public welfare as core objectives of Islamic law.	Establishes an epistemic connection between Islamic moderation, gender equality, and human rights.	Auda (2015); Umar (2016)

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the reviewed literature.

Table 3 demonstrates that moderate Islam provides an important theological and epistemological foundation for women's liberation and gender equality. Through contextual interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith that consider social realities and the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, moderate approaches challenge patriarchal and gender-biased interpretations that position women in subordinate roles. They also reject religious justifications for violence against women and frame women's empowerment within the broader principles of justice, virtue, and public welfare (*maslahah*).

The findings further indicate that moderate Islam in Indonesia extends beyond abstract theological discourse toward transformative religious praxis. Contextual interpretation and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* provide an epistemic framework for developing more gender-just understandings of Islamic teachings while challenging patriarchal interpretations and religiously justified violence. Consequently, gender equality can be articulated not only

through secular frameworks but also as an internally grounded Islamic project rooted in justice, public welfare, and ethical responsibility.

Taken together, the findings suggest that women's liberation within Indonesia's moderate Islamic discourse possesses a dual legitimacy: normative-theological and socio-contextual. The normative dimension derives from Islamic principles of justice, *maslahah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, while the socio-contextual dimension emerges from engagement with contemporary challenges concerning discrimination, violence, and women's participation in public life. This intersection provides an epistemic bridge between Islamic normative values and contemporary demands for gender justice, positioning moderate Islam as a potential transformative framework for advancing women's rights within Indonesian Muslim society.

Discussion

The study reveals three interconnected findings. First, NU and Muhammadiyah have shifted from the traditionalist modernist dichotomy toward an inclusive, dialogical, and socially engaged model of moderate Islam, positioning them as major actors in Indonesia's moderate religious landscape. Second, their autonomous women's organizations institutionalize empowerment through education, advocacy, leadership development, socio-economic initiatives, and gender-responsive Islamic jurisprudence, strengthening women's participation and agency. Third, moderate Islam provides a theological and epistemological framework for gender justice through contextual interpretation and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, challenging patriarchal interpretations and religious justifications for violence while legitimizing women's equality and empowerment. Overall, moderate Islam functions not merely as a religious identity but as a transformative framework connecting religious moderation, women's empowerment, and gender justice through contextual, institutional, and emancipatory reinterpretations of Islamic teachings.

The findings of this study have strong social relevance given the persistent incidence of violence against women in Indonesia. According to Komnas Perempuan's Annual Report (2022), gender-based violence against women reached 335,399 cases in the personal sphere, 3,045 cases in the public sphere, and 52 cases in the state sphere. Some interpretations of Islamic legal sources concerning *nusyūz* have also been invoked to legitimize or normalize domestic violence (Zuhdi et al., 2019; Hakim & Alkosibati, 2022). At the same time, some literalist religious approaches that emphasize a return to the Qur'an and Hadith may reinforce restrictive gender roles and women's domestication (Qibtiyah, 2009; Colfer et al., 2015; Habudin, 2019). In this context, the moderate Islamic orientations promoted by NU and Muhammadiyah offer an important justice-oriented framework for addressing gender inequality and violence against women.

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the relevance of Jasser Auda's *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework for understanding women's liberation and empowerment (Auda, 2015; Utsany et al., 2022). Within this framework, justice, virtue, and public welfare are understood as central objectives of Islamic law and can therefore inform approaches to gender relations (Saiful et al., 2020; Tirmizi et al., 2021). This perspective differs from textualist approaches that emphasize the literal meaning of religious texts without sufficiently considering their social context and broader legal objectives (Munir, 2017). Contextual interpretation, moreover, has established roots within Islamic intellectual traditions, although it has sometimes been contested by more literalist or exclusivist approaches (Khulaisie et al., 2019; Asroni, 2021; Fuadi, 2021). The findings therefore support the importance of reconciling textual sources, social context, and universal principles of justice in developing gender-responsive Islamic interpretations (Akmaliyah & Khomisah, 2020; Nafisah, 2022).

The findings further suggest that religious interpretation can function either as a resource for social inclusion or as a mechanism for reproducing restrictive gender norms, depending on how religious texts are interpreted and contextualized. From this perspective, women's liberation does not necessarily require disengagement from religious tradition but can emerge through more humane, contextual, and gender-responsive interpretations of Islamic teachings (Abidin et al., 2020). Historical initiatives associated with Siti Walidah (Nyai Ahmad Dahlan) and KH Ahmad Dahlan illustrate this possibility, particularly through efforts to empower women through skills development and religious education (Dzuhayatin, 2015). The findings also indicate that sustainable social transformation requires institutional mechanisms, including autonomous women's organizations within NU and Muhammadiyah, through which gender equality initiatives can be developed and maintained beyond individual or sporadic interventions.

The findings are consistent with Tirmidzi (2015) and Asmani (2015), who document the development of women's jurisprudence within NU from the 1990s through forums associated with Fatayat and IPPNU, as well as the emergence of scholars such as KH Husein Muhammad and Masdar Farid Mas'udi. This study extends that scholarship by highlighting Muhammadiyah's earlier institutional contributions to women's empowerment through initiatives associated with Siti Walidah, predating the establishment of NU (Dzuhayatin, 2015). In contrast to Fauziyah (2020), which emphasizes the transformation of Islamic theology from an absolutist toward a humanistic-transformative orientation, this study highlights the institutional practices and concrete advocacy developed by both organizations. Similarly, while Islamy (2017) and Nasruloh and Hidayat (2022) primarily critique patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, the present study demonstrates how such critiques are connected to grassroots practices, including women's rights advocacy, training, and workshops for *kiai* and female preachers. Thus, the scholarly contribution of this study lies at the intersection of discursive reinterpretation and institutionalized social action.

Based on these findings, three concrete action plans are recommended. First, women's organizations within NU and Muhammadiyah should strengthen their capacity through regular training in contextual religious interpretation and legal advocacy for victims of gender-based violence. Second, women's jurisprudence and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* should be integrated into the curricula of pesantren, madrasahs, and Muhammadiyah schools to foster gender-equitable awareness from an early stage. Third, crisis centers and community-based counseling services should be progressively developed through selected NU and Muhammadiyah branches, particularly in areas with substantial gender-based violence. At the policy level, the government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs should engage NU and Muhammadiyah as strategic partners in national programs on religious moderation and women's empowerment. Mass media and digital platforms should likewise be utilized to disseminate gender-responsive narratives of moderate Islam as constructive alternatives to exclusionary or restrictive religious narratives in digital spaces.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the moderate Islam articulated through NU and Muhammadiyah functions not merely as a religious identity but as a framework for social transformation that connects religious moderation with women's empowerment. Three interconnected findings emerge. First, both organizations demonstrate a shift from the historical traditionalist-modernist dichotomy toward a more inclusive, dialogical, and *maslahah*-oriented model of Islamic engagement. Second, women's empowerment is institutionalized through autonomous organizations that support education, advocacy,

leadership, socio-economic empowerment, and gender-responsive Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh al-nisa'*). Third, moderate Islamic approaches employ contextual interpretation informed by *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, challenging patriarchal interpretations and religious justifications for violence against women. Taken together, these findings position moderate Islam as an approach that seeks to reconcile Islamic normative commitments with contemporary demands for gender justice.

The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Jasser Auda's *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework to the analysis of gender and women's empowerment. The findings demonstrate how principles of justice and public welfare (*maslahah*) can inform contextual and gender-responsive interpretations of Islamic texts rather than remaining abstract normative ideals. The study also contributes empirically by showing how such interpretations are translated into institutional practices through autonomous women's organizations, including education, advocacy, skills development, leadership formation, and Islamic knowledge production. Practically, this institutional model offers transferable insights for religious organizations seeking to connect Islamic values with contemporary gender-justice agendas, although its applicability requires adaptation to specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

This study has several limitations. First, its predominantly normative-interpretive and library-based approach limits its ability to capture the micro-level dynamics and lived experiences of women participating in empowerment programs. Second, the analysis does not fully examine internal variations within NU and Muhammadiyah across different regions, organizational levels, and social contexts. Future research should therefore employ field-based and ethnographic approaches to examine how women experience, negotiate, and transform empowerment initiatives in everyday settings. Comparative research across Muslim-majority societies could further investigate how moderate Islamic orientations and gender interpretations are produced, institutionalized, and negotiated under different socio-political conditions.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Muhammad Nasrudin: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Project Administration; Writing Original Draft; Validation; Visualization; Writing Review & Editing. **Siti Muliana:** Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Validation; Visualization; Writing Review & Editing.

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