

The Wasathiyyah Political Movements of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in North Sumatra Post-1998 Reform Era

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Abstract

The rise of religious-based organizations, especially Islam, after the 1998 reformation led to a contestation between radical and moderate (wasathiyyah) streams. Organizations within the wasathiyyah group also experienced conflict. This study explores the wasathiyyah political movement by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah in North Sumatra. The method used is qualitative research with a comparative analysis approach, as in the case of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Comparative analysis, or the comparative approach, is part of case study research. The study found that 1) Muhammadiyah's wasathiyyah is based on the thoughts of KH. Ahmad Dahlan, in 7 philosophies of lifarizes the nature of religion, renewal-purification (tajdid), education, and social charity. The theological basis of Al-Ma'un and openness is central to Muhammadiyah's approach. At the same time, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) adopts the term Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah, characterized by tawasut, i'tidal, tawa>zzun, and tasa>muh. The construction of NU's wasathiyyah political movement is rooted in moral and value-based principles, focusing on cultural politics and actively influencing electoral processes through non-formal organizational channels. On the other hand, Muhammadiyah emphasizes cultural politics, modernizing education, health, and social work, alongside charitable efforts and tajdid to purify Islamic teachings in line with the Qur'an and Sunnah. In the context of North Sumatra, NU's wasathiyyah political movement actively engages in electoral politics and strives to enhance religious understanding internally and externally through educational and religious activities, while maintaining religious traditions based on the teachings of Islam Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah. Conversely, Muhammadiyah prioritizes the renewal and purification of Islamic teachings, focusing on education, health, and charitable efforts for its members and externally.

Keywords

Wasathiyyah, Political Movement, Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah.

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1. INTRODUCTION

After the 1998 reform, political Islam rapidly reopened, marked by the re-emergence of various Islamic organizations heavily controlled during the New Order era, such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). At the same time, new policies related to Islamic-affiliated political parties were introduced.



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On the one hand, the resurgence of religious-based organizations, particularly Islamic ones, after the 1998 reform is a positive direction, where freedom of expression, organization, and Islamic preaching is no longer suppressed. However, on the other hand, the division and conflicting views on the relationship between the state and Islam have also intensified, leading to a stronger confrontation between two groups. The first group, Islamic Dawlah, symbolically desires an Islamic caliphate state, or at least the inclusion of Islamic sharia in the state constitution. This group has given rise to radical political movements. The second group, which upholds the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) as long as Islamic values are within the state system and regulations, has led to moderate political movements (Pribadi, 2021).

The first group is represented by Islamic movements such as KISDI (Indonesian Committee for World Islamic Solidarity), FPI (Islamic Defenders Front), Laskar Ahlul Sunnah Wal Jama'ah, Laskar Mujahidin, Majelis Mujahidin, NII (Indonesian Islamic State), Hizbut Tahrir, Laskar Jundullah, and many others who have advocated for the enforcement of Islamic sharia through peaceful or relatively peaceful means (Nur, 2021). The second group is represented by moderate Islamic social organizations, including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Wathan (Lombok), Alkhairaat (Palu), and Jamiyatul Washliyah (Medan). After the 1998 reform, the contestation between Islamic groups intensified. The Wasathiyyah political movement faced challenges as the contestation between moderate Islamic groups and ultra-radical Islamic groups increased, affecting social and political stability. Conflicts in thought and clashes on the ground frequently occur (Rahman, 2020).

Wasathiyyah, or Islamic moderation, refers to balance and the middle path in following religious teachings. This concept is often understood as an effort to avoid extremism and radicalization by emphasizing openness, tolerance, and social justice in interactions with others. In the Indonesian context, Islamic wasathiyyah is crucial in maintaining social harmony within a plural society, providing a foundation for inclusive and moderate Islamic thought. This concept is closely tied to the idea of pluralism in Indonesia, which encourages acceptance and cooperation among diverse religious and cultural groups. By advocating for moderation, wasathiyyah seeks to foster peaceful coexistence and understanding, thus mitigating potential conflicts between religious communities (Kurdi & Inayatussahara, 2019).

Resolving differences in beliefs and religious practices, both externally between religions and internally within the denominations of the same religion, presents various challenges. These conflicts occur both within and outside religious communities, sometimes escalating into violent conflicts. For example, there was a clash between dozens of FPI members and the residents of Sukorejo in Central Java on Thursday, July 18, 2013. Another clash occurred between NU's Banser and FPI in Jakarta in 2017. A similar clash between Nahdatul Ulama's Banser and FPI happened again in Surabaya in 2019, related to support for a trial involving an insult to NU (Zulkhairi, 2023).

Then, in Sampang, Madura, there was a conflict between Sunni and Shia communities in 2011. The trigger for this conflict was a fatwa and call from MUI East Java, PWNU East Java, and Bassara scholars declaring Shia as a deviant sect, requiring its followers to be converted to Sunni. Another conflict related to the burning of an Ahmadiyah mosque in Sintang, West Kalimantan, was carried out by the Islamic Community Alliance, following demands to stop all Ahmadiyah activities in Sintang, which were supported by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Sintang (Adawiyah & Arif, 2022).

Differences in views also occur between Islamic social organizations within the moderate political movement. For example, there are differing views on the election of national leaders and the practice and regulation of practical politics within Muhammadiyah, while in NU in 2011, NU was one of the

organizations that supported the cessation of Shia worship activities in Sampang. On the other hand, NU was the organization that most strongly condemned the burning of the Ahmadiyah mosque in Sintang, West Kalimantan, in 2021 (Rizkita & Hidayat, 2023).

Wasathiyyah refers to a balanced approach in Islam between extremism and passivity, emphasizing values such as openness, tolerance, and social justice. This movement seeks to avoid any form of extremism, encouraging Muslims to live peacefully with others despite differences in belief or culture. The rise of this movement is a response to concerns about radicalization in the Muslim world, offering an inclusive interpretation of Islam that promotes coexistence in a pluralistic society. In Indonesia, wasathiyyah is closely related to the concepts of Islam Nusantara and Islam Berkemajuan, both advocate for an Islam that integrates local culture, values moderation, and emphasizes modernization and progress while staying true to core Islamic teachings. These discourses aim to foster a just and peaceful society, aligning with wasathiyyah by promoting a balance between religious tradition and societal development (Saihu, 2021).

It can be seen that the wasathiyyah political movement faces a crisis in maintaining the consistency of applying moderate values amid the ever-changing political dynamics post-reform. Similarly, the term wasathiyyah, as found in the Quran, is interpreted differently among Islamic groups, leading to varying implementations of the movement. The wasathiyyah movement, expected to unite as a counter-movement against radical political movements, often ends up in internal conflicts and contentious politics (Nasikhin, Raaharjo, & Nasikhin, 2022). Therefore, the author sees the importance of examining how wasathiyyah politics emerges, is constructed, and practiced as a political movement by Indonesia's largest Islamic social organizations, and where this political movement is directed. While Sunyoto and Muridan S. Widjojo divide civil society movements into political and moral movements, the author argues that political movements can also be examined from a moral and value perspective; values in the context of reacting to actions and policies implemented by the state, and values in the context of instilling the beliefs held by the organization into national life. The researcher thus aims to identify the direction of the wasathiyyah political movement of NU and Muhammadiyah, whether it leans towards a moral political movement, a value-based political movement, or both (Bindaniji & Fuadi, 2022).

Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are the two largest social organizations in Indonesia. NU and Muhammadiyah have members in the government. For example, the policy of the Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs, an NU member, requested that prayers from all religions be recited at official events. However, the deputy chairman of MUI, a Muhammadiyah member, harshly criticized this policy. The interpretation of the wasathiyyah Islamic political movement also occurs in North Sumatra (Adi, 2022).

The moderate Islamic movement is shaped by dimensions of knowledge, experience, organizational internalization, and theology, which influence how Islamic groups organize themselves. Symbolic and substantive conflicts, such as the removal of the Buddha statue in Tanjung Balai in 2012, discussed in Faisal Nurdin Idris's thesis, illustrate how Islamism in Medan strengthens Political Islam and creates differing interpretations of Islamic moderation among elites and lower-middle-class Islamic groups in North Sumatra. These conflicts show how differing understandings of Islamic moderation can escalate social tensions and reflect how Islamic groups respond to political dynamics. Meanwhile, Faisal Riza's study of urban Islamic activism explores how Islamic groups use religious identity to pursue political goals, with a pragmatic approach that adapts to existing systems. Riza's analysis provides a deeper understanding of the role of the moderate Islamic movement in urban political dynamics and how social mobilization and political identity shape this movement.

Therefore, the author intends to analyze the wasatiyyah political movement of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, particularly after the 1998 reform, a study that has not been conducted before. This will be done through a comparative approach, tracing the flow of the wasatiyyah political movement, and identifying whether it leans towards a moral political movement or a value-based political movement.

2. METHODS

The method used is qualitative research with a comparative analysis approach, as in the case of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Comparative analysis, or the comparative approach, is part of case study research. As expressed by Yin and Stake in Creswell's work, "a case study is an investigative design found in many fields, particularly evaluation, where the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often in the form of a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2019). The data collected is analyzed to obtain an overview of the research subject using the descriptive-analytical method, which includes data collection, analysis, and interpretation to compare the studied phenomena (Sugiyono, 2017). The author uses source triangulation and method triangulation to maintain data validity. This study includes key informants to provide information related to the study's theme, namely the leadership of the NU North Sumatra Region, the DPW Muhammadiyah North Sumatra, academics, government officials, members of political parties, Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah administrators, and NU autonomous bodies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The History of Islamic Wasathiyah in Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded on January 31, 1926, in Jombang, East Java. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, in 2019, NU had a membership of 91.2 million people spread across all provinces and islands in Indonesia. NU was established by KH Hasyim Asy'ari and several other scholars as a response to the growing Modernist Islamic movement in the Middle East, which had reached the island of Java. Simultaneously, it was also seen as a need to preserve traditional Islamic teachings and strengthen the Muslim community in Indonesia (Ulum & HS, 2019).

The theological concept of wasathiyah (moderation) in NU is heavily influenced by the thoughts of KH Hasyim Asy'ari was also influenced by his teachers in the Middle East. The main foundation of KH Hasyim's thinking, which also forms the basis of NU's ideology, is related to Ahl al-Sunnah wa 'l-Jamā'ah. In this context, al-Sunnah refers to those who adhere to Sunni beliefs. Ahl al-Sunnah represents the path of the Prophet's companions and the tabi'in (followers of the companions).

To affirm the fundamental principles of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari articulated these in the book *Qānūn Asāsi* (Fundamental Principles) and also in the book *I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wa 'l-Jamā'ah*. These two books were later embodied in the Khittah NU, which serves as the foundation and reference for NU members in their social, religious, and political thoughts and actions (Nasrullah, Rama, & Achruh, 2023).

KH. Hasyim Asy'ari's strong belief in Wasatiyyah (moderation) is evident, though he did not explicitly use the term "wasatiyyah" in his available works and thoughts. However, the principles of moderation and the middle path, which are inherent in the concept of "wasatiyyah," are indeed reflected in his approach and views on religion and politics. Hasyim Asy'ari emphasized the importance of accommodation, unity, and inclusivity within the Muslim community, which reflects a moderate stance. According to KH. Hasyim, the main characteristics of Ahl al-Sunnah wa 'l-Jamā'ah al Nahḍiyyah are

the attitudes of *tawasuth* (moderation) and *i'tidal* (balance). This includes maintaining balance in using both *naqli* (textual) and *aqli* (rational) evidence, navigating between the views of *Jabbariyah* and *Qadariyah*, and adopting a moderate stance in facing worldly changes.

In its development, NU scholars in Indonesia consider that the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa 'l-Jamā'ah* taught by K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari represents an effort to institutionalize the principles of *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *ta'adul* (justice). These principles are fundamental to implementing *Ahl al-Sunnah wa 'l-Jamā'ah* (Usman, 2018).

The term *Tawāsut*, which means "moderate" or "middle path," has been a fundamental principle of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) since the organization's founding in 1926. However, the formal and structured use of *Tawāsut* to define a moderate stance in NU teachings was increasingly emphasized during the 27th NU Congress in Situbondo in 1984. At that time, the principle of *Tawāsut*, along with the principles of *tasāmuh* (tolerance), *tawāzzun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice), was declared as a main pillar in the religious and social life of NU members (Fawaid, 2022).

During this 27th Congress in Situbondo, NU introduced the concept of "Islam Nusantara," which emphasized the principles of *wasatiyyah* or moderation as a response to the rise of extremism and radicalism. This concept later became integral to NU's perspective on Islam, emphasizing a moderate, tolerant, and inclusive approach. Although the term "religious moderation" was not explicitly used at that time, the underlying principles, such as *Tawāsut* (moderation), *tasāmuh* (tolerance), and *tawāzzun* (balance), have been central to NU's teachings and practices since that congress. The term "religious moderation" itself began to be more frequently used in official NU discourse and speeches by NU leaders in subsequent years, particularly in response to the new challenges faced by the Muslim community in Indonesia (Najib, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Muhammadiyah Association was founded on 8 Dzulhijjah 1330 H, corresponding to November 18, 1912, in Kauman, Yogyakarta. According to structural strain theory, the emergence of social movements is triggered by a disruption in the balance of the social system. When there is a disconnect between the values upheld and the actual practices in society, the closure of institutional functions, and the presence of dysfunctional elements that disrupt the continuity of the system, it can lead to social imbalance, triggering structural tension, and subsequently sparking social movements. Relative deprivation theory posits that social pressure does not stem from structural deprivation but from subjective feelings. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan founded Muhammadiyah out of his concern for the situation of the Muslim community in Indonesia. According to Sholihin Salam, two factors motivated K.H. Ahmad Dahlan to establish Muhammadiyah: internal and external factors. The internal factors include the weakness and failure of the Islamic *pesantren* education system, which needed to reflect the development and progress of the times, and the isolationist nature of educational life. The external factors include the rampant Dutch imperialism in Indonesia, which must be confronted (Zebua, 2019).

Muhammadiyah is a modernist Islamic movement in Indonesia that remains active today. Muhammadiyah has established 30 special branches abroad in its efforts to promote global peace and social justice, with four of these branches officially recognized. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in 2019, Muhammadiyah had over 60 million members spread across Indonesia, representing various professional, ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

The goal of Muhammadiyah is to create a true Islamic society. However, the benefits of Muhammadiyah's work extend to individuals, groups, and communities from diverse religious, ethnic, and social backgrounds, in line with its mission of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation), which is based on moderate Islam (Sadikin, 2021).

KH. Ahmad Dahlan's learning journey included studying with many scholars in the Middle East who held different views, learning from Budi Utomo, and even from a Catholic priest, Franz Van Lith, to build schools. This process laid the foundation for openness as a theological principle of Ahmad Dahlan, which also reflects his *wasathiyyah* (moderate) way of thinking. The religious ideology held by Muhammadiyah is characterized by openness, *dawah* (propagation), *Sajid* (renewal), and *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam), all viewed through a lens of *wasathiyyah*. Openness was a key principle in KH Ahmad Dahlan's life. *Dakwah* was aimed at spreading the beneficial and excellent face of Islam, *tajdid* represented an adaptive nature of Islamic thought that is always in harmony with the development of science and technology. *Islam Berkemajuan* represents Muhammadiyah's approach to religious practice and worldview. KH. Ahmad Dahlan also emphasized the theology of *Al-Ma'un*, which encourages prayer and good deeds (Miswanto, 2016).

The Construction of Wasathiyyah Political Movements of Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Post-1998 Reform

The 1998 reform brought about a reduction in control and repression over political and religious movements, the elimination of depoliticization approaches that suppressed political movements into cultural movements, and the abolition of political party fusion. In the aftermath of the 1998 reform, the struggle of Islamic politics to realize the envisioned civil society revived. The concepts of *dawah Islam* (Islamic State) and substantive Islam re-emerged. Civil society movements appeared to take over, as the state was no longer seen as capable of serving the people. One indication of this civil society movement was the emergence of religious movements, marking a new awareness among religious people to play a role in finding alternative solutions to the crisis in the country. These movements were no longer sectarian or parochial in their religious approach (Yusdani, 2023).

However, the civil society movement, particularly within Islamic organizations, became sharply divided between radical groups with aspirations of establishing a *dawah Islam* (Islamic State) and moderate Islamic movements that emphasized substantive Islam. In the post-reform era, identity politics framed in the name of religion, with heightened anger and hatred, and an emphasis on differences, became more pronounced. These changes and the ensuing contestation led Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah to reconceptualize their *wasathiyyah* (moderate) political movements.

The construction of NU's *wasathiyyah* political movement is based on the teachings of *Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah*, which are then translated into nine political guidelines for NU members. These guidelines embody four *wasathiyyah* perspectives: *tawāsut* (moderation) and *i'tidal* (balance), which advocate a middle path based on principles of justice and righteousness in communal life; *tasāmuh* (tolerance), which encourages tolerance of differing views in religious matters, especially in secondary issues (*furu'*) or matters of disagreement (*khilafiyah*), as well as in societal and cultural issues; *tawāzzun* (balance), which promotes equilibrium in serving others; and *amar makruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), which emphasizes the need to encourage good deeds that benefit communal life and to reject and prevent anything that could degrade life's values (Alfazri, 2021).

NU is deeply committed to upholding *Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah* in Indonesia, adhering to the five characteristics of *wasathiyyah*. NU's political movement aims to prevent Wahhabi and Shia political ideologies from gaining traction in Indonesia, as these ideologies are considered neither *wasathiyyah* (moderate) nor *tawāsut* (balanced). In framing its political movement, NU transcends religious, ethnic, racial, and national boundaries to unite everyone under its *wasathiyyah* principles. Those who share the same thoughts and movements with NU are considered part of its *amaliyah* (practices) (Firman,

Indriawati, & Basri, 2022).

In its wasathiyyah political movement, NU introduced the concept of Islam Nusantara, which has received both negative and positive responses. However, Islam Nusantara has continued to develop because it is fundamentally a movement. The PWNU of East Java issued a Bahtsul Masail resolution on Islam Nusantara, defining it as: a) Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah Islam practiced, propagated, and developed in the archipelago by its missionaries, to anticipate and protect the community from radicalism, liberalism, Shia, Wahhabi, and other ideologies that do not align with Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah; and b) The methodology (manhaj) of Islamic propagation in the archipelago amidst its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious population, carried out politely and peacefully.

In its religious political movement, it is clear that NU advocates for a wasathiyyah approach. This is reflected in the five characteristics NU uses in its political and religious activities: *tawāsuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzzun* (balance), *tasāmuh* (tolerance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). NU does not choose to practice radical or highly secular interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence. Since 2015, NU cadre and Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, launched the Moderasi Beragama (Religious Moderation) program in response to rising conservatism, such as the Aksi Bela Islam and acts of intolerance. Conceptually, this religious moderation initiative is also based on wasathiyyah Islamiyah, with equivalents of *tawassuth* (moderation), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawāzzun* (balance). In 2019, the Ministry of Religious Affairs published a book on Religious Moderation and declared 2019 the Year of Religious Moderation (Putra, Homsatun, Jamhari, Setiani, & Nurhidayah, 2021).

The construction of Muhammadiyah's wasathiyyah political movement is reflected in its vision: "The management and network are organized to enhance the effectiveness of the Majelis's performance towards a more advanced, professional, modern, and authoritative *tarjih* (prioritization) and *tajdid* (renewal) movement, serving as a solid foundation for improving the quality of the organization and its endeavors."

In framing the unification of identity within its wasathiyyah social and political movement, Muhammadiyah has established 11 (eleven) Muhammadiyah identities, distinguishing itself from other Islamic organizations. These distinctions include:

1. Muhammadiyah is an Islamic movement focused on *dakwah* (propagation), *amar makruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), and *tajdid* (renewal), based on Islam, derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah, to realize a true Islamic society.
2. Muhammadiyah consistently demonstrates a wasathiyyah (moderate) approach to religion and avoids extremism, maintaining steadfastness on Islamic principles derived from the authentic and accepted Qur'an and Sunnah while developing rational thought following Islamic teachings.
3. Muhammadiyah views Islam as a progressive religion (*Dinul hadharah*) that encompasses a complete unity, addressing aspects of *aqidah* (faith), *ibadah* (worship), *akhlaq* (morality), and *mu'amalah duniawiyah* (worldly interactions), without prioritizing one aspect over others. It aims to embody these principles in personal, family, and community life through continuous *dakwah* (Sadikin, 2021).
4. Muhammadiyah's view on *tajdid* (renewal) balances purification and modernization/development, aiming for both purification and dynamic progress.
5. The ideology of Muhammadiyah emphasizes the application of Islamic values and principles in daily life, focusing on building an Islamic society.

6. Muhammadiyah presents Islam as an ideology emphasizing organized and institutionalized practices as manifestations of Islamic beliefs and understanding, ensuring that Islam is concretely realized.
7. Muhammadiyah prefers to engage in dawah (propagation) in societal matters rather than pursuing political paths as political parties do while still fulfilling their national roles.
8. Muhammadiyah accepts the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution as a nation-state, striving together to create a just, prosperous, and divinely approved nation: *Baldatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghafur* (A good land and a forgiving Lord) (Pratama, 2022).
9. In its stance towards the State/Government, Muhammadiyah consistently practices *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) by supporting positive policies and providing wise criticism of harmful policies.
10. Consistent with Muhammadiyah's character, the movement advocates for a tolerant, democratic, peaceful, and intelligent approach in its efforts, collaborating with any group for the common good. It remains firm in principles but flexible in methods, avoiding confrontation and violence.
11. Muhammadiyah operates through an organizational system (*Persyarikatan*) rather than individual efforts, upholding the spirit of collective collegiality, democracy, consultation, and fraternity.

Muhammadiyah began adopting the *wasatiyyah* (moderation) framework by establishing the *Majelis Tarjih* in 1926. This was later formalized in the 48th *Muktamar* in Solo, where Muhammadiyah issued the *Risalah Islam Berkemajuan*, which outlines the characteristics of *wasatiyyah*. Ahmad Dahlan aimed for Muhammadiyah's teachings to be initially based on divine and humanistic principles. The political movement of *wasatiyyah* in Muhammadiyah primarily focuses on *da'wah* (preaching) and practical efforts in education and health rather than direct involvement in state politics. In its practical politics, Muhammadiyah emphasizes the slogan *fastabiqul khairat* (competing in good deeds) as a manifestation of its charitable work and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) (Luhuringbudi, Liza, & Akbar, 2020).

According to Muhammadiyah, since Islam is a *wasatiyyah* (moderate) religion, this characteristic should be prominent in the thinking and behavior of Muslims. *Wasatiyyah* is manifested in social attitudes as follows: (1) being firm in stance, broad-minded, and flexible in attitude; (2) respecting differences in views or opinions; (3) rejecting *takfir* (declaring other Muslims as non-believers); (4) advancing and uplifting society; (5) understanding reality and priorities; (6) avoiding excessive fanaticism towards particular groups or religious doctrines; and (7) facilitating the practice of religious teachings (Yumnah, 2022).

However, Muhammadiyah is very strict in its jurisprudential views on *aqidah* (faith) based on the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. This often leads some to need clarification on Muhammadiyah as an orthodox or even Salafi movement. This misunderstanding is inevitable because Muhammadiyah's jurisprudential principles focus on adhering to the true teachings of Islam based on the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. In religion, Muhammadiyah's role is to purify Islamic teachings from syncretism and mysticism. Howard M. describes Muhammadiyah as an Islamic movement in Indonesia that carries traditional Islamic values developed in the Middle East, called Orthodox. A Muhammadiyah cadre from North Sumatra expressed his view that the *Qur'an* refers to only one *wasatan*, meaning the middle or moderate position. However, regarding religious, social, or political truth, he believes there is only one correct

stance that should align with what is right. According to him, being in the middle implies a lack of principle (Zarro, 2020).

The construction of the wasathiyyah political movement between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah shows both similarities and differences. The similarities include that both organizations apply the principle of moderation (wasathiyyah) in politics. They are crucial in maintaining social and political stability, promoting interfaith dialogue, and rejecting extremism. They also engage in moral politics by criticizing state policies that disadvantage Muslims while supporting community welfare programs (Choirin et al., 2024).

However, NU's approach to wasathiyyah in politics leans toward a balance between tradition and modernity. NU tends to uphold Nusantara Islamic traditions and local values, integrating them into a moderate religious identity. On the other hand, Muhammadiyah focuses more on the purification of Islam, aiming to cleanse religious practices of elements considered inconsistent with the pure teachings of the Quran and Hadith, and emphasizes modernization and education.

In the components of the political movement, there are also differences in the organizational structure and political participation of NU and Muhammadiyah. NU's political movement is more clearly structured through institutions such as Tanfidziyah and Syuriah, with active political participation. In contrast, Muhammadiyah, despite having a strong organizational structure, focuses more on strengthening charitable efforts and education and tends to refrain from engaging directly in practical politics. Regarding protagonists, antagonists, and bystanders in the wasathiyyah political movement, NU is more open to dialogue with groups holding different views, striving to bridge social conflicts by emphasizing moderation. Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, is more critical of groups that do not align with its vision of Islamic purification. However, Muhammadiyah has also facilitated interfaith dialogue in external contexts.

In the direction of wasathiyyah political movements, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah pursue moral political movements. NU's moral and political movement focuses more on criticizing and providing input on government policies deemed disadvantageous to Muslims. NU uses religious and educational forums to reinforce moral values in society and plays an active role in the democratization process post-Reformation. Muhammadiyah's moral and political movement emphasizes the purification of worship and renewal, focusing on charitable efforts such as education, health, and social work. Muhammadiyah is also active in cultural and political movements, highlighting the importance of wasathiyyah values in national life.

While political movements oriented towards value-based politics show that NU implements value-based political movements with a focus on instilling the teachings of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah, which is rich in local and inclusive practices, Muhammadiyah emphasizes the purification of Islamic teachings and avoids practices considered bid'ah. Both organizations actively oppose extremist ideologies like Wahhabism and Salafism, and strengthen the social and political roles of their cadres.

The wasathiyyah political movement of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah is realized through collective action. Both organizations operate in the fields of education and religious understanding in the community. They strive to reinforce moderate (wasathiyyah) Islamic understanding and combat extremist ideologies like Wahhabism and Salafism. However, in their mobilization approaches, NU emphasizes ritualistic social-religious activities such as tahlilan, wiritan, and istighasah. It maintains interfaith harmony through concrete actions like protecting churches during Christmas celebrations. Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, focuses more on education and the purification of Islamic teachings through charitable endeavors such as schools, hospitals, and

orphanages. Their approach tends to be more cultural and independent of practical politics.

Intolerant movements in Indonesia, particularly those developing in North Sumatra, demand a strong response from religious organizations that uphold moderate Islamic values. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), with its ideological strength rooted in the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition, consistently opposes groups that threaten religious and cultural diversity, such as the Wahhabi-Salafi movement. NU is committed to preserving and promoting religious practices that are rooted in local culture, which not only encompass religious rituals but also social and national values. In facing the threat of intolerant groups, NU not only relies on religious doctrine but is also actively involved in raising social awareness about the importance of moderation.

The role of Banser, as NU's security force, has become increasingly important in addressing tensions that often arise between radical groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Front Pembela Islam (FPI). The clashes between Banser and these groups reflect the struggle to preserve moderate values in the face of intolerant ideologies. Therefore, NU emphasizes the need to uphold diversity in religious practices, promote interfaith dialogue, and prioritize balanced principles to maintain peace in Indonesia's multicultural society.

On the other hand, Muhammadiyah also plays a significant role in responding to intolerance issues in North Sumatra, although its approach is more focused on dialogue and structural solutions. This organization emphasizes the importance of education and development to counter radicalization and intolerance. For example, Muhammadiyah's response to the unrest in Tanjung Balai demonstrates their commitment to conflict resolution through social dialogue and a more inclusive legal approach. Muhammadiyah asserts that conflict resolution based on Law No. 7 of 2012 on Social Conflict Management, which focuses on social reconciliation and education, is a more constructive step than legal approaches that could exacerbate polarization and deepen conflict.

Though in different ways, both organizations contribute to creating spaces for moderation, tolerance, and peace in the face of intolerant movements. NU, through strengthening the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition and combating the influence of Wahhabi-Salafi movements, and Muhammadiyah, through an educational approach and more structural conflict resolution, both play crucial roles in maintaining social harmony in Indonesia, particularly in North Sumatra, which often becomes a hotspot for debates on intolerance and pluralism.

4. CONCLUSION

The wasatiyyah political movements undertaken by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah post-Reformation have specific and dynamic characteristics. These movements reflect the collective efforts of both organizations to maintain or change norms, political policies, and social dynamics in the public sphere according to wasatiyyah Islamic principles. This process starts from collective identity through group framing, progresses to collective consciousness, and ultimately leads to collective action. Studies indicate that the history of NU and Muhammadiyah's formation and their theological foundations influence the direction and strategies of their political movements, even though both believe in wasatiyyah politics to champion values of justice, balance, and virtue in national life. The wasatiyyah political movement by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) involves applying principles of moderation, balance, and tolerance in politics. NU promotes the concept of wasatiyyah through various political and social activities, emphasizing preserving the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah tradition, rejecting radicalism and extremism, strengthening moderate religious education and understanding, and indirectly engaging in practical politics. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah's wasatiyyah political movement focuses on

purification and renewal, education and cadre development, non-partisan political participation, rejection of extremism, and contributing to dialogue and harmony.

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