

## **Gus Baha, Islamic Nationalism, and Social Diversity Harmony in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

The discourse on the dialectic between Islam and modern political systems has always been a topic of debate in the context of democratic countries. This study aims to identify the thoughts of Indonesian Muslim scholar and exegesis expert KH. Ahmad Bahaudin Nursalim (Gus Baha) regarding the role of moderate Islam in strengthening nationalism in Indonesia. This qualitative study in the form of media observation uses primary data from YouTube channels that contain Gus Baha's views. A descriptive approach and content analysis were used in this study. The results of the study conclude that Gus Baha views the importance of harmony between Islam and nationalism, which can be manifested by Muslims through positive attitudes, the use of common sense, contextual understanding, and anti-radicalism in the name of religion. The contribution of this study confirms that the manifestation of moderate Islam not only strengthens an inclusive religious identity but also strengthens nationalism amid the country's social diversity.

**Keywords:** Gus Baha, Moderate Islam, Indonesia

### **Abstrak**

*Diskursus tentang dialektika antara Islam dan sistem politik modern senantiasa menjadi topik perdebatan dalam negara demokrasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi pemikiran cendekiawan muslim Indonesia pakar tafsir bernama KH. Ahmad Bahaudin Nursalim (Gus Baha) terkait peran Islam moderat dalam memperkuat nasionalisme di Indonesia. Penelitian kualitatif dalam bentuk observasi media ini menggunakan data primer dari chanel You Tube yang memuat konten pandangan Gus Baha. Pendekatan deskriptif dan analisa isi digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa Gus Baha memandang pentingnya keselarasan antara Islam dengan nasionalisme yang dapat dimanifestasikan oleh umat Islam melalui sikap positif, penggunaan akal sehat, pemahaman kontekstual, dan anti radikalisme atas nama agama. Kontribusi penelitian ini menegaskan manifestasi Islam moderat tidak hanya memperkuat identitas keberagamaan inklusif, namun juga memperkuat nasionalisme di tengah kemajemukan sosial bernegara.*

**Kata Kunci:** Gus Baha, Islam Moderat, Indonesia

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and nationalism is one of the important issues that is widely discussed in social, political, and religious studies. In this context, Indonesia, as a country with a Muslim majority population, has ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. It is at this point that moderate Islam plays a strategic role (Choliq, 2011).

Islam plays a very influential role in the current era of digitalization, because the digital era is a period in which technology is central to human activities. Digital technology offers many advantages, but it can also be likened to a double-edged sword. That is, it is beneficial if used properly, but it also has adverse effects if used improperly. Technological advances have influenced the development of da'wah models. In the past, da'wah was only carried out in religious assemblies, prayer rooms, Islamic boarding schools, and other similar settings. Now, with the passage of time and in order to keep up with modern life, da'wah can now be carried out online (without face-to-face contact). This allows people to access and listen to da'wah anytime and anywhere (Andini et al, 2023).

Digital preaching also has a positive impact because it can spread religious teachings more widely without the limitations of space and time. In addition, digital platforms create an inclusive space for discussion, allowing for a deeper understanding of religion. Online da'wah communities also enable audiences to connect and discuss with each other even though they are in different locations. Access to religious lectures and studies has become easier, enabling people from various regions to learn quickly. However, digital preaching also has negative impacts, such as the spread of hoaxes and inaccurate religious information. Radicalization and conflict can arise due to propaganda targeting young people who are still unstable. In addition, dependence on digital platforms can reduce direct social interaction. Digital media algorithms can also create polarization because users only see views that align with their own. Preachers themselves can experience mental pressure due to the demands of creating content and maintaining social validation from their audience (Nawaffani, 2023).

Furthermore, moderate Islamic values are key to overcoming all of these challenges to da'wah. An educational approach that emphasizes a balanced, tolerant, and inclusive understanding of Islamic teachings can create a generation that is not only religiously devout but also has an attitude of respect for diversity and love for the homeland (Muhyidin et al., 2025). Moderate values have played an important role in the process of forming national identity. Since the struggle for independence, moderate scholars have been actively involved in formulating the foundations of the state and maintaining national unity (Fatmawati Wulandari & M. Muizzuddin, 2025).

Gus Baha, in the YouTube video analyzed in this study, said that nationalism and religion are not mutually exclusive. He explained that both can coexist harmoniously based on a moderate and contextual understanding of Islam. Furthermore, Gus Baha said that the truth of Islam as something independent does not need to be pitted against culture or the ideology of nationalism. He also emphasized that peaceful preaching and interactive dialogue are the secrets to true peace in the context of Indonesia's diverse society.

This study aims to identify Gus Baha's thoughts on the role of moderate Islam in strengthening nationalism in Indonesia. The study uses a qualitative interpretive approach. Seeing how Gus Baha's discourse reflects contemporary religious and nationalist thinking. His basic argument is that harmony between religion and nationalism can be achieved through the framework of thinking that religion is a moral-spiritual element, while nationalism is a concrete vehicle for realizing justice, tolerance, and unity when both are lived out in a balanced manner.

Previous studies have shown that discussions about the relationship between Islam and nationalism in Indonesia are not new. Several historical studies explain that since the national movement era, many Islamic figures have been actively involved in building national consciousness and participating in the struggle against colonialism. This idea then developed in more modern studies, such as the concept of Islam Nusantara, which emphasizes that religious teachings can be integrated with local and national identities without losing Islamic values (Fida & Prasetya, 2019). In addition, several studies also highlight that digital media such as online lectures on YouTube now play a major role in shaping how people understand issues of religion and nationalism (Budiman, 2023). However, there are still few studies that specifically analyze religious figures' discourse on digital platforms regarding the relationship between Islam and nationalism, making this topic relevant and worthy of further study.

This research is novel because it focuses not only on religion and its history, but also on lectures delivered through digital media. Lectures such as those given by Gus Baha are now widely consumed by the younger generation through YouTube, allowing them to spread more quickly and shape perspectives on religion and nationality. This approach differs from previous studies that have focused more on the relationship between Islam and nationalism in the context of political history or formal religious organizations (Maryam, 2024). In terms of urgency, this research is important because Indonesian society is currently facing increasingly polarized identities, both in terms of religion and nationalism. This research can also provide a more peaceful and relevant alternative for life in the nation today (Karimullah & Sugitanata, 2025).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

To address the research topic, namely efforts to identify and describe Gus Baha's thoughts on the role of moderate Islam in strengthening nationalism in Indonesia, this study uses a qualitative research method in the form of media observation. Meanwhile, the media referred to here is the YouTube channel that contains Gus Baha's views. Furthermore, a descriptive approach and content analysis were used in this study. The secondary data for this study used various scientific literature that was correlative to the focus of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Relationship between Moderate Islam and State Ideology in Indonesia**

Moderate Islam is a way of practicing religion that avoids extremism by choosing a middle path that emphasizes tolerance and balance in understanding religious teachings. Religious moderation does not change the way people practice their religion. However, it regulates the way people practice their religion so that they do not go to extremes and remain a source of social cohesion. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that religious moderation encompasses various Islamic values, including the following. First, *tawassuth*, which means being moderate, not leaning towards any side. Second, *tawazun*, which means maintaining a balance between worldly and spiritual matters and respecting differences of opinion. Third, *l'tidal*, which means being upright, fair, and proportional for the common good (Heriyudanta, 2023).

The various values of moderate Islam above correlate with Pancasila as the state ideology of Indonesia. This is because the values of Pancasila can be said to be in line with the principle of religious moderation (Haris, 2024). For example, the first principle (Belief in God) contains many religious values, religious plurality, and tolerance by respecting religious differences.

The second principle (Humanity) clearly explains the rejection of or rebellion against acts of violence, the development of mutual humanity, and the instilling of a civilized attitude in various matters and situations. The third principle (Unity) covers behavior that promotes unity by not bullying others, committing to protecting society in various matters that conflict with the state, and loving and taking pride in the Indonesian homeland.

The fourth principle (Democracy) contains an attitude of respecting every voice in decision-making during deliberations, being wise in expressing opinions and also in making decisions. The fifth principle (Justice) includes the value of fairness, for example, not extorting or seizing the rights of others that could harm their lives (Islamy, 2022).

The alignment of moderate Islamic values with the philosophy of Pancasila above confirms that the purpose of studying Pancasila for Muslims in Indonesia is urgent, because Pancasila is the basic ideology of the state that was formulated to unite the diverse Indonesian nation, whether in terms of religion, culture, or social aspects (Widiatama et al., 2020). Pancasila is not a state ideology that separates religion from state affairs, nor is it a state led by the teachings of a particular religion. Pancasila is instead a meeting point that unites various community groups by guaranteeing divine values that accept and respect all religions. Therefore, Pancasila serves as a guiding principle for the nation to maintain social stability, so that all citizens can live harmoniously amid Indonesia's diversity (Islamy, 2022). This can also be seen in the manifestation of love for the homeland, which is a human instinct or nature, and the concept of nationalism is not at all contrary to religion (Latif et al., 2023).

## **Gus Baha's Compromise Paradigm Regarding the Role of Moderate Islam and Nationalism**

Gus Baha uses classical texts as references in his preaching. This is so that all Muslims can obtain authentic references in various fields (Anggrainy et al., 2025). From these ancient books, he explored the opinions of scholars on contextual and contemporary issues. However, he rejected the opinions of scholars who took a fundamentalist stance because they emphasized textual studies without paying attention to what was happening in society. He once quoted the story of the companions at that time who were so enthusiastic about Islam that they forgot how to use polite and courteous language to their God. He advised his congregation to be gentle, to respect other religions without discriminating against them, and to maintain courtesy towards their God.

According to Gus Baha, Islam is a religion that unifies minds and calms hearts and thoughts. Ibn Hajar Al-Atsqalani said that the Prophet was not only handsome in appearance, but also in his intellect and way of thinking, so that when we follow him, we feel very comfortable. Therefore, love for the Prophet must also be built by people who are rational and thoughtful. The Prophet also taught that a servant who believes in Allah SWT and the Day of Judgment should honor fellow Muslims and also honor other religions as long as they do not threaten our religion and property. Of course, we know the limits by not following their teachings, so it is necessary to become a rational community of the Prophet (Syaifuddin & Aziz, 2021).

Gus Baha presents a style of preaching that emphasizes moderation by building a rational religious perspective that is neither extreme nor contrary to the basic values of Islamic teachings. He reconstructs the understanding of miracles and teaches a gentle logic of preaching so that people do not become trapped in fanaticism towards figures or symbols that have the potential to foster radicalism. Through his explanation of the importance of *nāsikh–mansūkh*, Gus Baha reminds us that some verses that appear harsh have been revised by the Sharia of the Prophet Muhammad and therefore cannot be used to justify intolerant actions. He also emphasizes that religious diversity must be accompanied by loyalty to maintaining the integrity of the nation and avoiding judgmental attitudes as if one knows Allah's status towards His servants. In this way, Gus Baha's lecture became a reflection of Islamic moderation that emphasizes balanced reasoning, humanism, and anti-violence (Fathurrosyid, 2020).

What Gus Baha conveyed in his lecture is closely related to the principles of Pancasila. In the first principle, Gus Baha teaches peaceful religious life. Then, in the second principle, Gus Baha explains tolerance and mutual respect. When Gus Baha reminds us of the importance of maintaining national unity by not judging others easily, this is included in the third principle. An analysis of Gus Baha's wise, relaxed preaching style, which prioritizes dialogue, shows that this is an application of the fourth principle. Additionally, the message to care for others and act fairly is a manifestation of the fifth principle. Thus, Gus Baha's preaching not only teaches moderate Islam but also helps strengthen the implementation of Pancasila and community life (Hidayatulloh & Saumantri, 2023).

In his lecture, he expressed the view that Islam and nationalism cannot coexist, especially in today's society, which is divided along identity lines. Conflicts between religion and nationalism often arise due to differences in theological concepts and a lack of national literacy (Murod, 2011). This misunderstanding arises because the public often receives religious content that does not emphasize social context, so digital media is a factor that influences how the public understands religious issues (Budiman, 2023).

Gus Baha responded with soothing advice, stating that national spirit does not conflict with Islamic principles if understood wisely (Muvid, 2025). This opinion is in line with Heriyudanta's (2023) view that a moderate attitude in religion is useful for preventing extreme views and maintaining good relations in a diverse society. Meanwhile, Fida and Prasetya (2019) state that Indonesia's past has been shaped by moderate scholars who took a middle ground, uniting the principles of Islam with a love for the homeland, thereby reinforcing the idea explained by Gus Baha.

Gus Baha's lectures in this study are positioned as a manifestation of moderate Islamic discourse that is relevant in this digital age. This is in line with the findings (Syaifuddin & Azis, 2021) which explain that NU preachers tend to develop a style of preaching that avoids conflict, is open, and rational. The position of lectures as objects of digital study is also in line with studies explaining that the spread of nationalist discourse has created new space for the media (Maryam, 2024). Gus Baha has emerged as a significant figure in building a humanistic religious understanding through online media, which is very appropriate in the digital era.

The findings of this study, as described above, are reinforced by the research of Hidayatullah & Saumantri (2023), which explains that Islamic values and Pancasila have common ground in the aspects of tolerance, unity, and humanity. The attitude described by Gus Baha, which rejects fanaticism, respects differences, and prioritizes dialogue, is a direct practice of the values enshrined in Pancasila. Meanwhile, according to Islamy (2022), Pancasila is not a secular ideology, but rather a framework that allows every religion to develop harmoniously in Indonesia. Thus, Gus Baha's preaching reinforces religious moderation as well as the appreciation of the state ideology.

This study shares the commonality that moderate Islam has long been an important factor in the formation of Indonesian nationalism, compared to previous findings. According to Fida & Prasetya (2019), the role of Islamic scholars has been to unite Islam with Indonesia since the colonial period. This study presents a new perspective that highlights Gus Baha's lectures on YouTube and how digital da'wah shapes moderation today. Digital media has become the main center for the formation of religious social identity, according to a study by Budiman (2023). With this, we conclude that the research we have examined discusses moderation and nationalism in today's digital world.

### **Gus Baha's View on the Importance of Harmonizing Islam and Politics in Indonesia**

The relationship between religion and politics is often understood as a complex and conflict-prone relationship. On the one hand, religion brings noble moral values, while on the other hand, politics is often synonymous with power, interests, and compromise. In the

context of Indonesia, which is both religious and diverse, the encounter between religion and politics is inevitable. However, Gus Baha presents a calm and clear perspective on this relationship, namely by placing religion as a guide to ethics, not as a tool for the struggle for power (Santoso et al., 2025).

Gus Baha repeatedly emphasized that Islam did not come to impose a particular form of government. What is more important in Islam is how its basic values live and work in social life, including in political practice. The values of justice, honesty, responsibility, and compassion are at the core of Islamic teachings and should color the behavior of political actors. This perspective is in line with the idea of moderate Islam, which views religion as a source of public ethics, not a rigid political ideology (Leniawati & Haq, 2024).

In his lectures, Gus Baha often reminds us that when religion is brought into the political realm without wisdom, it will actually cause damage. Religion can lose its spiritual meaning, while politics becomes harsh and full of claims of truth. Therefore, Gus Baha invites Muslims to be mature in their religious practices, especially when faced with differences in political choices. This attitude reflects the principle of Islamic moderation, which rejects extremism and fanaticism in any form (Abdulrohim & Ishaque, 2025).

Gus Baha's view also shows that religion and politics are indeed different domains, but they can still interact in a healthy manner. Religion serves as a moral reminder, while politics is a means of regulating communal life. Within this framework, religion does not dominate the state, but it is also not excluded from the public sphere. This approach is widely supported by contemporary studies that assess that religious moderation actually strengthens democracy and social stability in pluralistic societies (Sulistyoko et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, Gus Baha views Pancasila as a national agreement that does not conflict with Islam. According to him, the values of Pancasila, such as humanity, unity, deliberation, and justice, are actually in line with Islamic teachings. Therefore, nationalism does not need to be opposed to faith. In fact, loving one's homeland can be part of practicing religious teachings, as long as it is directed towards the common good and social justice (Handoyo & Supriyanto, 2023).

Gus Baha is also quite critical of the phenomenon of identity politics in the name of religion. He sees that the use of religious symbols in political contests often lacks moral substance and instead divides society. In his view, religion should be a source of tranquility, not a tool for attacking one another. This stance is in line with academic findings that show that the politicization of religion without a moderate approach has the potential to increase social polarization and political conflict.

Moderate Islam, as practiced by Gus Baha, also emphasizes the importance of common sense and context in understanding religious texts. He often reminds us that a superficial and emotional understanding of religion can easily be exploited for short-term political interests. Therefore, religious literacy is key to ensuring that Muslims are not easily provoked by religious narratives wrapped in political interests. This view is in line with studies that emphasize that moderation and contextual religious education play an important role in maintaining the health of democracy (Hilmin, 2024).

In the relationship between religion and politics, Gus Baha also emphasized the importance of mutual respect. Differences in political choices are natural and should not damage *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) or national unity. He reminded us that Islam does not teach hostility simply because of differences in opinion. A dialogical and consultative approach is the main way to deal with differences, both in religious and political matters. This principle is in line with the idea of moderate Islam, which places tolerance as the foundation of social life (Walad et al., 2024).

In addition, Gus Baha sees that the role of scholars and religious leaders is very important in maintaining healthy relations between religion and politics. Scholars should not get caught up in power struggles, but should function as guardians of public morality. In this position, scholars can offer ethical criticism of political policies without losing their independence. This view is in line with the Indonesian Islamic tradition, which places scholars as moral guides, not political actors.

In the midst of the digital age and information openness, the challenges of religious and political relations are growing. Fragmented religious information is often disseminated to reinforce certain political narratives. Gus Baha responds to this phenomenon with a calm and argumentative approach to preaching, inviting people to think clearly and not reactively. This approach shows that moderate Islam is not just academic discourse, but also a real practice in caring for national life (Widigdo & Awang, 2023).

Thus, the relationship between religion and politics in Gus Baha's perspective shows Islam as friendly, rational, and contextual. Religion is not positioned as an instrument of power, but as a source of values that guides political practices to remain oriented towards justice and humanity. This approach is very relevant for Indonesia as a pluralistic country that needs a balance between religious and national commitments.

Overall, Gus Baha's thinking emphasizes that religion and politics can coexist without dominating each other. Moderate Islam serves as a bridge that allows religious values to be present in political life in an elegant and soothing manner. In this way, religion does not become a source of conflict, but rather a moral force that strengthens national unity and integrity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The core discussion of this study concludes that Gus Baha views the manifestation of moderate Islam as contributing to the strengthening of nationalism in Indonesia. This is because he sees that religion and nationalism are not two mutually exclusive concepts, but can coexist harmoniously when understood and practiced through the values of moderate Islam, such as *tawassuth*, *tawazun*, and *I'tidal*.

This study contributes to the assertion that the manifestation of moderate Islamic religious practices can display inclusive and nationalistic religious characteristics amid social diversity in state life. The research is still limited in identifying and describing aspects of Gus Baha's thinking. Therefore, it is important to conduct further research that examines in depth how Gus Baha practices internalizing moderate Islam and nationalism in his daily social and institutional activities.

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