State Intervention in Religious Moderation through the "*Kampung Moderasi Beragama*" Policy: Evidence from Serang City

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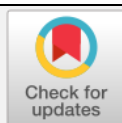
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ABSTRACT

This study examines state intervention in managing religious diversity through the Kampung Moderasi Beragama (KMB) program in Serang City, Banten. Despite the extensive promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia, limited attention has been paid to how such policies operate at the local level and how state formalization reshapes community-based pluralism. Addressing this gap, the study adopts a qualitative exploratory case study involving two urban villages (Kota Baru and Banten Lama) and fifteen key informants drawn from government institutions, religious organizations, and community groups. Data were collected between April and May 2025 through triangulated interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The findings indicate that KMB functions primarily as a state-led process of formalization rather than a grassroots initiative. The dominance of state actors, the limited involvement of non-state groups, and weak intersectoral coordination render the program largely symbolic. Drawing on Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus and Tania Murray Li's notion of rendering technical, this study demonstrates how the state translates complex social relations into bureaucratic projects that promote narratives of harmony while marginalizing the lived realities of pluralism. Theoretically, the study contributes to critical governance scholarship by showing how state-led religious moderation can reproduce ideological control under the guise of tolerance. Practically, it highlights the need for participatory and context-sensitive governance that strengthens local ownership, interfaith collaboration, and cross-sectoral integration, enabling KMB to evolve from a performative initiative into a transformative platform for social cohesion.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is a highly diverse country in terms of ethnicity, language, race, tribe, and religion. This diversity requires effective and inclusive governance to maintain social harmony and cohesion. The state bears the responsibility of ensuring justice and equality for all citizens, regardless of their backgrounds. However, diversity also generates social and political challenges that must be managed carefully. Tensions frequently emerge both vertically, between the state and society, and horizontally, among social groups, due to differences in ideology, interests, and interpretations of belief (Idi & Priansyah, 2023; Subchi et al., 2022). In many cases, religion functions as a powerful mobilizing symbol that can intensify these tensions rather than serve as their primary cause.

Religious-based conflicts and violence targeting religious minorities demonstrate that religion remains a sensitive domain in Indonesia's public sphere. Monitoring conducted by the Setara Institute recorded 171 incidents and 318 actions violating freedom of religion or belief in 2021, indicating persistent challenges in the protection of religious rights and interfaith coexistence (Setara Institue, 2022). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics reported that it had handled more than 3,600 online hate-speech contents related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup hostility since 2018, reflecting the growing entanglement of religious intolerance with digital communication spaces (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia, 2021). Taken together, these findings underscore the need for continuous policy attention and sustained institutional innovation in the governance of religious diversity in Indonesia.

In response to these dynamics, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, institutionalized the Religious Moderation policy within the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). This policy promotes a balanced and tolerant understanding of religion while seeking to counter extremism and intolerance. It positions the state as a central actor in shaping national narratives of religious life as part of broader character-building initiatives. Nevertheless, its implementation has been uneven and, in some cases, contested. Previous studies document resistance from exclusivist groups, the intensification of sectarian polarization, and the expansion of digital radicalism, all of which challenge the inclusive ideals underpinning the policy (Fauzi, 2025; Leniawati & Haq, 2024).

The empirical focus of this research is Serang City in Banten Province, where religious identity politics, historical pluralism, and the rise of radical narratives intersect. In contrast to regions where KMB functions as a conflict-resolution tool, in Serang the program formalizes an existing tradition of interreligious coexistence. This makes Serang a strategic and distinctive case for examining how the state redefines organic social harmony into a bureaucratic model of tolerance. Studying this case provides valuable insight into how religious moderation is transformed from a lived social practice into a state-managed ideology.

The empirical focus of this research is Serang City in Banten Province, a context in which religious identity politics, historical pluralism, and emerging radical narratives intersect. Unlike regions where the KMB functions primarily as a conflict-resolution mechanism, in Serang the program serves to formalize an already existing tradition of interreligious coexistence. This characteristic makes Serang a strategic and distinctive case for examining how the state

transforms organic social harmony into a bureaucratically managed model of tolerance. Studying this case offers valuable insight into how religious moderation shifts from a lived social practice to a state-managed ideological framework.

Theoretically, this study draws on Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 2015) and Tania Murray Li's notion of *rendering technical* (Murray Li, 2022). Althusser's framework explains how state institutions reproduce ideology through religion, education, and bureaucracy, embedding values such as nationalism and harmony into everyday social life. In contrast, Li's perspective illustrates how complex social realities are translated into administrative and measurable categories that appear technical and politically neutral. Integrating these frameworks enables a critical understanding of religious moderation as both an ideological instrument and a technocratic intervention. This theoretical synthesis provides an innovative analytical lens for examining the intersection of state power, policy formalization, and local religious practices.

Accordingly, this study pursues three main objectives. First, it analyzes how the KMB program operates simultaneously as a policy instrument and an ideological apparatus in managing religious diversity in Serang City. Second, it identifies structural and participatory challenges that shape the program's implementation and determine the extent of community involvement. Third, it evaluates whether the KMB functions as a transformative mechanism for interfaith collaboration or merely reproduces symbolic narratives of state-led harmony.

Through these objectives, the study contributes to both theoretical and practical debates. Theoretically, it extends critical governance scholarship by demonstrating how the state's discourse of religious moderation can reproduce ideological control under the guise of tolerance. Practically, it offers recommendations for developing participatory and context-sensitive policy models that empower communities as active agents of harmony. By combining critical theory with empirical evidence, this research provides a deeper understanding of how religious moderation in Indonesia operates at the intersection of ideology, bureaucracy, and local social realities.

2. Literature Review

The discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia has evolved into a central policy narrative aimed at reconciling religious diversity with the national ideal of unity. Conceptually, religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) is promoted as a balanced stance that emphasizes tolerance, the rejection of violence, and respect for cultural and religious differences. Scholars such as Kawangung conceptualize religious moderation as a sociocultural mechanism for fostering social harmony and interfaith coexistence within plural societies (Kawangung, 2019). At the policy level, religious moderation has been formally articulated and promoted by the Indonesian government, particularly through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a normative framework for strengthening national cohesion and character building. In this sense, moderation functions simultaneously as a moral ideal rooted in social values and as a state-led framework for governing religious life.

Much of the existing literature on religious moderation at the community level has concentrated on normative objectives and observable social outcomes, such as harmony, tolerance, and interfaith cooperation. These accounts typically foreground program implementation and community responses, while paying limited attention to the broader political and institutional conditions under which moderation is promoted. As a result, the processes through which the state defines, formalizes, and regulates religious moderation tend to be treated as technical or administrative matters rather than as sites of power and ideological

production. This analytical tendency constrains critical engagement with how state authority, bureaucratic rationalities, and governance logics shape the meaning and practice of moderation at the local level. Consequently, state intervention is often implicitly framed as neutral and benevolent, leaving its ideological implications largely unexamined.

This study departs from that assumption by drawing on critical political theory, particularly Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (Althusser, 1970) and Tania Murray Li's concept of *rendering technical* (Murray Li, 2022). These theoretical perspectives provide analytical tools for understanding how state-led initiatives such as the KMB program do not merely promote tolerance but also reproduce specific ideological configurations of power and control.

According to Althusser, the state maintains social order not only through repressive institutions but also through ideological apparatuses, such as religion, education, and community organizations, that internalize dominant values within citizens' consciousness (Althusser, 1970). From this perspective, the KMB program can be understood as a contemporary ideological apparatus through which the Indonesian state embeds narratives of nationalism, harmony, and moderation into religious life. The formalization of "moderation" as a state program transforms it from a moral value into a political instrument of governance, enabling the state to define and standardize acceptable expressions of religiosity within a bureaucratic framework.

Building on this analysis, Li's notion of *rendering technical* offers a complementary critique (Murray Li, 2022). Li argues that governments often translate complex sociopolitical problems into technical issues that can be measured, managed, and evaluated administratively. This process strips policy implementation of its historical, political, and social contexts. Applied to the KMB program, *rendering technical* explains how the state converts the abstract idea of interfaith harmony into quantifiable indicators, such as the number of interfaith meetings, the diversity of houses of worship, or levels of program participation. Such a process risks depoliticizing the structural roots of social tension and replacing them with administrative routines that prioritize monitoring and reporting over substantive engagement.

By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, this study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it moves beyond descriptive assessments of religious moderation by foregrounding its ideological dimension, demonstrating how the KMB program functions as an instrument of symbolic governance. Second, it reveals the intersection of ideology and technocracy in the implementation of KMB, showing how the program not only disseminates normative values but also restructures local religious practices through managerial rationalities that privilege administrative compliance over community agency. Third, it offers a contextual reinterpretation of Althusser's ISA framework in post-reform Indonesia, illustrating how ideological control can operate through participatory and developmental discourses rather than overt coercion.

Existing scholarship on religious moderation rarely addresses this interplay between ideology, power, and technocratic rationality. Studies emphasize collaboration among religious actors but tend to portray the state as a neutral facilitator rather than as an ideological producer (Fauzi, 2025; Leniawati & Haq, 2024). Similarly, analyses of community-based governance initiatives indicate that participatory programs may reproduce top-down modes of control when embedded within bureaucratic and managerial systems. Rather than decentralizing authority, such initiatives can reconfigure participation into administrative compliance and symbolic inclusion. Positioned at the intersection of religion and state administration, the

Kampung Moderasi Beragama (KMB) program reflects this dual dynamic of empowerment and control, where community engagement operates alongside centralized regulation.

At the same time, Althusser (1970) reminds us that ideology is never total; it is continuously reproduced and contested within social relations. Applying the frameworks of ISA and *rendering technical* therefore allows this study to examine not only how the state seeks to shape social consciousness, but also how communities interpret, negotiate, and at times resist these ideological and technocratic interventions. In the context of Serang City, where interreligious coexistence is deeply rooted historically, the KMB program provides a critical case for analyzing how state formalization interacts with local traditions of pluralism.

In summary, although the KMB program represents a continuation of Indonesia's long-standing tradition of community-based social engineering, its ideological and technocratic dimensions remain insufficiently examined. This study addresses that gap by situating the KMB program within broader debates on the role of the state in governing religious diversity. Through a critical synthesis of Althusser's and Li's theoretical frameworks, it demonstrates how the governance of religion in Indonesia operates simultaneously as a project of ideological reproduction and as a practice of bureaucratic rationalization.

Accordingly, this study employs a critical theoretical framework that integrates Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus and Tania Murray Li's concept of *rendering technical*. Together, these frameworks provide complementary analytical lenses for understanding how the state constructs, manages, and legitimizes religious moderation through the *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* program in Serang City.

2.1. Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and the Reproduction of State Ideology

Althusser argues that every state maintains power not only through repressive mechanisms such as the military or the police, but also through ideological apparatuses that shape people's consciousness (Althusser, 1970). These ideological state apparatuses include institutions such as education, religion, media, and community organizations, which function to internalize dominant ideas and values within society. Ideology, in this sense, is not imposed primarily through violence but is reproduced through everyday practices and beliefs that appear natural or taken for granted.

Within this framework, religion constitutes one of the most effective ideological apparatuses because it regulates moral behavior and collective ethics. The state therefore often positions itself as the guardian of religious harmony to ensure that social order aligns with national objectives. In the Indonesian context, programs such as Religious Moderation and the *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* (KMB) can be understood as institutional efforts to reproduce a state-defined version of tolerance, nationalism, and unity. By promoting moderation as a civic virtue, the state embeds ideological narratives within local communities and aligns religious life with its broader vision of nationhood.

However, Althusser's theory also allows for the recognition of contestation. Ideology, while pervasive, is never absolute. Social subjects may reinterpret, negotiate, or resist the messages conveyed through ideological apparatuses. In the case of the KMB program, the ideological production of harmony is not uniformly internalized but may be contested by local actors who hold their own interpretations of religious coexistence. This perspective opens analytical space to examine how the state's formal narrative of moderation interacts with local moral universes in Serang City.

2.2. Rendering Technical and the Bureaucratization of Social Relations

While Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus explains how ideology operates at the level of consciousness and values, Tania Murray Li's notion of *rendering technical* provides a lens for analyzing how ideology is operationalized through bureaucratic and technocratic practices (Murray Li, 2022). According to Li, development programs frequently translate complex social and political realities into technical problems that can be addressed through projects, indicators, and administrative procedures. This process simplifies the multidimensional nature of social relations into measurable categories and, in doing so, reinforces the authority of experts and institutions that control the technical domain.

Applied to the KMB program, *rendering technical* highlights how the Indonesian state transforms the abstract idea of interreligious harmony into an administrative framework with defined outputs and indicators. The emphasis on measurable achievements, such as the number of interfaith dialogues or the frequency of community meetings, reflects a bureaucratic logic that prioritizes quantifiable progress over substantive social transformation. This technical framing can obscure underlying inequalities and power asymmetries that shape interfaith relations. Consequently, the program risks becoming more performative than transformative, prioritizing policy visibility rather than genuine inclusion and meaningful dialogue.

The analytical strength of Li's framework lies in its capacity to reveal how seemingly neutral programs function as political instruments that depoliticize social conflict. By rendering pluralism a technical issue, the state removes it from the realm of public debate and reframes it as an administrative task. This process legitimizes bureaucratic control while marginalizing alternative, community-based approaches to peacebuilding and coexistence.

2.3. Integrating ISA and Rendering Technical: Ideological and Technical Governance

The integration of Althusser's and Li's frameworks enables a multidimensional analysis of the KMB program as both an ideological and a technocratic project. Althusser helps explain how the state deploys ideology to cultivate obedience, nationalism, and moral unity, while Li illuminates how this ideology is enacted through technical and bureaucratic instruments (Althusser, 1970; Murray Li, 2022). Together, these perspectives reveal that the governance of religion in Indonesia operates through the interdependence of meaning and management.

In the context of Serang City, this integrated framework allows for an examination of how the state's ideological project of religious moderation is institutionalized within local administrative structures. The KMB initiative functions as an ideological apparatus that legitimizes the moral authority of the state, while simultaneously operating as a technical apparatus that organizes social practices into measurable outcomes. This dual character enables the state to exercise soft power: governance is achieved not through coercion, but through participation, persuasion, and procedural control.

Analytically, this study applies the integrated framework across three key dimensions. First, it examines the ideological narratives embedded in KMB discourse, including themes of harmony, tolerance, and national unity. Second, it investigates the administrative mechanisms through which these narratives are translated into programs, indicators, and institutional routines. Third, it analyzes the responses and negotiations of local actors, such as religious leaders, community organizations, and residents, in accepting, negotiating, or challenging the ideological and technical framing of the KMB program. By interrogating the interplay between ideology and technocracy, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding of religious moderation as both a discourse of state power and a field of community negotiation. It

enables the study to move beyond assessing program effectiveness and instead examine the deeper structures of meaning and governance that underpin the KMB initiative in Serang City.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative exploratory approach with a case study design. This approach was selected because the research examines a contemporary and complex social phenomenon that requires contextualized and in-depth understanding. As noted by Creswell and Poth, case study research investigates a bounded system using multiple sources of data, including interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case examined in this study is the implementation of the *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* (KMB) program in Serang City, with a specific focus on two urban villages: Kota Baru in Serang District and Banten Lama in Kasemen District. These sites were selected because they have served as pilot locations for the KMB program since 2023 and represent distinct socio-religious characteristics within the city.

Fieldwork was conducted over a two-month period, from early April to the end of May 2025, involving approximately six weeks of direct engagement in the field. This included repeated visits to both study locations for observation and contextual verification. Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). In total, fifteen informants participated in the study, comprising six government officials from the Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, five religious leaders representing different faith communities, four community leaders, three members of youth or social organizations, and four residents actively involved in KMB activities. Prior to data collection, all participants provided verbal informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa in early 2025.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives and their direct involvement in the KMB program. Inclusion criteria comprised individuals who had participated in the planning, implementation, or evaluation of KMB, as well as those possessing substantial knowledge of interreligious relations within their communities. During the fieldwork process, snowball sampling was also employed to identify additional participants recommended by earlier informants. This iterative process continued until data saturation was reached, indicated by the absence of new themes or perspectives in subsequent interviews. This strategy enabled the collection of a diverse range of viewpoints concerning the implementation of the KMB program.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, FGD notes, and supporting documents were coded manually using an inductive–deductive approach. Initial open coding was applied to identify emerging concepts directly from the data, which were subsequently refined into thematic categories aligned with the analytical frameworks of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus and Tania Murray Li's concept of *rendering technical*. Manual coding was employed to facilitate close engagement with the data and to enhance reflexivity during interpretation. To strengthen the validity of the findings, the study applied triangulation across sources, methods, and time. Source triangulation involved comparing data obtained from state officials, religious leaders, and community representatives. Method triangulation was achieved by cross-checking evidence from interviews, FGDs, field observations, and document analysis. Time triangulation was ensured through follow-up interviews conducted at different stages of the fieldwork to verify consistency and credibility.

To enhance analytical transparency, the interview protocol was organized around several thematic clusters: (1) participants' understanding of the concept of religious moderation; (2) experiences with the implementation of the KMB program; (3) perceptions of interfaith relations within their neighborhoods; (4) interactions between government and community actors; and (5) reflections on the sustainability and inclusivity of KMB activities. These thematic clusters functioned as a flexible guide, allowing participants to elaborate freely while ensuring that the core dimensions of the research focus were systematically addressed.

In addition to primary data, secondary sources were collected from academic literature, government policy documents, and digital media reports related to religious moderation and interfaith governance in Indonesia. These materials provided theoretical grounding and contextual insight that supported the interpretation of empirical findings. The integration of multiple data sources and triangulation strategies ensured that the findings accurately capture the dynamics of KMB implementation in Serang City. Overall, this methodological design offers credible and context-sensitive insights into how the state manages religious diversity through community-based policy instruments.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1. The Existing Socio-Religious Landscape of Serang City

Serang City has long been recognized as one of the centers of Islamic civilization in Banten Province. The historical roots of Islam in the region can be traced to the establishment of the Banten Sultanate in the sixteenth century, when Maulana Hasanuddin consolidated Islamic teachings alongside political authority. Under his leadership, Banten flourished as both a trading hub and a religious center that integrated Islamic values with local cultural traditions. Historical records indicate that religious minorities, including Buddhist communities and Chinese migrants, were permitted to practice their faith freely, as symbolized by the coexistence of the Avalokitesvara Vihara and the Great Mosque of Banten within the same area.

This historical experience has profoundly shaped Serang's collective identity and contemporary social fabric. The legacy of inclusivity and peaceful coexistence inherited from the Sultanate continues to influence how residents perceive diversity today. Various religious communities maintain close spatial and social proximity, reflected in the presence of churches, temples, and mosques within the same urban neighborhoods. As one community leader from Banten Lama explained, "Since long ago, people here have lived side by side peacefully. We respect differences because this has been part of our custom inherited from our ancestors" (Interview, Community Leader, April 2025). This continuity demonstrates that pluralism in Serang is deeply embedded in everyday social practice rather than imposed through external norms or state directives.

Despite this long-standing pluralistic tradition, recent developments reveal emerging challenges to interreligious relations. Several incidents indicate that expressions of intolerance periodically surface in public life. The 2016 case involving the confiscation of food vendors' goods during Ramadan, as well as Serang's classification as the city with the highest potential for radicalism in a report by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), illustrate the fragility of tolerance in practice. A member of a youth organization reflected on this tension, stating, "We are proud of Banten's religious history, but sometimes policies or actions by authorities do not reflect that spirit of tolerance" (FGD, Kota Baru, May 2025). These findings suggest that historical harmony alone is insufficient to guarantee sustainable inclusivity without ongoing institutional support and public awareness.

These conditions provided the rationale for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to introduce the *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* (KMB) program in 2023. The program was intended to strengthen interfaith harmony by revitalizing local social capital rooted in Serang's historical pluralism. Kota Baru and Banten Lama were selected as pilot areas due to their symbolic significance and religious diversity. However, findings from this study indicate that the KMB program has not yet succeeded in translating this cultural legacy into active community participation. Many residents perceive KMB primarily as a government-driven initiative rather than a collaborative social movement. As one resident from Kota Baru noted, "We have heard about KMB from the village office, but we never knew what activities were planned or how we could be involved" (Interview, Resident, May 2025).

Moreover, several religious leaders expressed concern that the program prioritizes administrative formality over substantive interfaith dialogue. A representative of a local Islamic boarding school in Banten Lama remarked, "The government talks about harmony, but most of the programs are ceremonial. The real work of maintaining peace is already being done by the community and the religious teachers" (Interview, Ulama, April 2025). These statements underscore that while KMB promotes the discourse of religious moderation, its implementation often reflects bureaucratic control rather than grassroots empowerment. This finding aligns with Tania Murray Li's argument that state interventions frequently simplify complex social dynamics into technical projects defined by measurable outputs (Murray Li, 2022).

Overall, the historical legacy of Serang City remains a crucial foundation for sustaining religious harmony, yet it simultaneously exposes the tension between inherited pluralism and state formalization. The coexistence of multiple faiths in the city illustrates a living tradition of tolerance, but the institutionalization of that tolerance through the KMB program reflects an ideological and bureaucratic mode of governance. As one official from the Ministry of Religious Affairs acknowledged, "We aim to preserve harmony through policy, but involving the community deeply is still a challenge" (Interview, Ministry Official, May 2025). This tension between state-led ideology and local agency constitutes the central analytical concern in understanding how the KMB program operates as both an ideological and technocratic apparatus within Serang's socio-religious context.

4.2. The Initiation of the Religious Moderation Village Program: Approaches and Key Stakeholders Involved

The establishment of the Religious Moderation Village (*Kampung Moderasi Beragama*, hereafter KMB) in Indonesia represents a state-led response to growing challenges related to religious diversity, intolerance, and faith-based radicalism in contemporary social life. This initiative is consistent with findings from the Setara Institute (Setara Institue, 2022), which, despite reporting a general increase in the national tolerance index, documents the continued occurrence of violations of freedom of religion and belief across various regions. In response to these conditions, the Ministry of Religious Affairs initiated the KMB program as a community-based approach intended to raise public awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence free from religious discrimination. The program forms part of a broader national strategy to strengthen religious moderation, which has been institutionalized as a government policy priority since 2019.

Designed as a participatory and locally grounded intervention, the KMB program formally involves key community actors, including religious leaders, community figures, youth groups, and religious and educational institutions. The conceptual foundation of religious moderation embedded in the program is structured around four core pillars: (1) national commitment, (2)

tolerance of difference, (3) rejection of violence, and (4) acceptance of local culture. In addition, the program seeks to strengthen the role of the Forum for Religious Harmony (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*, FKUB) and to extend interreligious dialogue into everyday social practices. In this regard, the KMB initiative functions not only as a symbolic policy instrument but also as a practical mechanism intended to facilitate social reconciliation rooted in local values.

The adoption of the "village" (*kampung*) model as a social and developmental policy strategy has long been embedded in Indonesia's public policy tradition. This approach is evident in earlier initiatives such as *Kampung Tangguh* (Resilient Village), *Kampung Literasi* (Literacy Village), and *Kampung Iklim* (Climate Village). The Religious Moderation Village program continues this tradition by focusing specifically on the governance of interreligious relations within local social contexts. Research conducted by The Wahid Institute (Hasyim & Junaidi, 2023) suggests that strengthening moderation through community-based social infrastructures is more effective in enhancing societal resilience against the penetration of extremist ideologies. Accordingly, the KMB program is envisioned as a space for education, value integration, and collective learning grounded in local culture and social realities.

In Serang City, the Religious Moderation Village program was initiated in 2023, with two areas designated as pilot sites: Kota Baru Subdistrict (Serang District) and Banten Subdistrict (Kasemen District). According to an official from the Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, selected locations were required to meet specific eligibility criteria. These criteria included the presence of a religiously plural society with multiple houses of worship representing different faith communities, as well as patterns of social interaction characterized by tolerance and the absence of overt discrimination or radicalism. Conversely, areas that were culturally and religiously homogeneous were considered unsuitable for KMB designation.

Kota Baru Subdistrict hosts 31 houses of worship, comprising five mosques, sixteen prayer rooms (*mushola*), eight churches, two Buddhist temples (*vihara*), and one Hindu temple (*pura*). In 2023, the population totaled 10,464 individuals, consisting of 6,953 males and 3,411 females. The religious composition is predominantly Muslim (90%), followed by Catholics (5.6%), Christians (2%), Buddhists (2.1%), and Hindus (0.3%). Located in the city center, Kota Baru functions as a hub for trade and services, contributing to its social and religious diversity. Nevertheless, this diversity remains asymmetrical, with the Muslim population numerically dominant and other religious groups constituting small minorities. Despite this imbalance, the subdistrict meets the formal criteria established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and was therefore deemed eligible for inclusion in the KMB program.

Similarly, Banten Subdistrict contains 29 houses of worship, including ten mosques, eighteen prayer rooms, and one *vihara*. The population stands at 14,769, with 7,175 males and 7,383 females. The religious composition is overwhelmingly Muslim (99%, or 14,725 individuals), alongside small minority populations of Christians (four individuals), Catholics (thirty), Hindus (five), and Confucians (five). Historically, this area is significant as the former center of the Banten Sultanate, and the existing *vihara* represents one of the few surviving religious structures from the pre-modern period. Its coastal location has further contributed to cultural interaction and diversity. Like Kota Baru, Banten Subdistrict exhibits a numerical imbalance favoring the Muslim majority; however, due to its compliance with formal eligibility criteria, it was also selected as a KMB site. The designation of these two locations was considered appropriate given the absence of other subdistricts in Serang City with comparable levels of religious heterogeneity and multiple houses of worship representing different traditions.

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Figure 1. Launch of the Religious Moderation Village in Serang City
Source*: Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2023)*

The establishment of Religious Moderation Villages in Serang City was formally ratified by the Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on July 4, 2023. This formalization was reinforced through the issuance of Decree No. 244 of 2023 by the Head of the Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, designating Religious Moderation Villages for the year 2023. The inauguration ceremony was held at the Avalokitesvara Vihara Hall in Kasemen Subdistrict and was attended by the Mayor of Serang, regional government officials, and representatives of interfaith communities.

The Religious Moderation Village was conceptualized as a social laboratory aimed at strengthening interfaith solidarity, developing deliberative mechanisms for conflict resolution, and promoting character education through a moderate religious framework. Core activities include interfaith dialogue, support for multicultural families, and tolerance training for youth leaders. The Serang City Government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs collaborated with religious organizations and community leaders to promote the sustainability of the program at the grassroots level.

The Head of the Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs stated:

"Through this Religious Moderation Village, it is hoped that people will no longer view one another through the lens of religion or ethnicity, thereby eliminating discrimination and fostering a peaceful and harmonious interfaith community. Kasemen and Serang have been designated as Religious Moderation Villages; they are home to Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians who live together in harmony"*(Interview, April 12, 2025).*

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The establishment of Religious Moderation Villages in Serang reflects the application of a locality-based policy model aimed at de-escalating social tensions. This approach aligns with deliberative perspectives on social development that position communities as central agents of value transformation. By mobilizing local socio-cultural capital, the KMB program functions as an institutional bridge between national values of religious moderation and the lived practices of faith communities. As noted by Siswanto et al. (2024), the effectiveness of such villages depends heavily on the active participation of religious leaders, local facilitators, and the continuity of inclusive dialogue forums. In this sense, the KMB program is not merely symbolic but represents a concrete manifestation of state and community commitments to pluralism and the prevention of radicalization.

From a structural perspective, the formation of KMBs in Serang City also illustrates the central role of the state, bureaucracy, and formal regulation in shaping social behavior. This perspective suggests that social change, including the promotion of inclusive religious values, is not solely the product of community-driven initiatives but also a result of systematic state intervention through public policy, resource allocation, and institutional design. In this context, the state acts not merely as a facilitator but as the principal actor defining agendas, objectives, and implementation mechanisms for religious moderation at the local level.

In Serang, this structural intervention materialized through programs formulated by the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and implemented by the Serang City Religious Affairs Office, with support from local government agencies and the FKUB. The establishment of KMBs in Kota Baru and Banten Subdistricts followed a predominantly top-down model, in which site selection, program design, and performance indicators were determined within a national regulatory framework. The program institutionalized four core indicators of religious moderation: (1) national commitment, (2) tolerance of difference, (3) rejection of violence, and (4) accommodation of local culture. Through these mechanisms, the state seeks to direct religious discourse toward a form of moderation aligned with national priorities.

This dominance of state actors is evident in the initiation and governance of the KMB program, while non-state actors largely assume supplementary roles. Field observations indicate that several residents were unaware of the program's objectives or activities. For example, an informant from the Christian minority in Banten Lama Subdistrict reported limited knowledge of the KMB initiative (Interview with Elisa, May 10, 2025). Similarly, the Chairperson of the Interfaith Youth Forum of Banten Province acknowledged unfamiliarity with the KMB program initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Interview, April 25, 2025).

State dominance is further reflected in the composition of the KMB Working Group established in 2023, which consists primarily of officials from the Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and leaders of major Islamic organizations, including the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), the Dewan Masjid Indonesia, the Association of Islamic Boarding Schools, the Qur'anic Recitation Development Council, and the Nahdlatul Ulama branch council. The program is administered under the authority of the district-level Religious Affairs Office. Notably, no formal organizational structure exists to incorporate non-state actors, such as minority religious communities or local civic leaders, into the governance of the KMB program. This underscores its character as a structural intervention driven by formal state institutions through a top-down mechanism.

This structural orientation is also evident in the consolidation of institutional roles to build networks of religious moderation. The Serang City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs has mobilized religious counselors as "moderation ambassadors," strengthened religious

education curricula in schools and *madrasas,* and provided religious moderation training for religious leaders. Simultaneously, the local government has institutionalized the program through a mayoral decree that formally recognizes the KMB as a legitimate social entity.

Consistent with Althusser's (Althusser, 1970, 2015) structuralist perspective, state institutions, such as schools, religious bodies, and bureaucratic organizations, function as ideological state apparatuses that shape public consciousness in accordance with state agendas. From this standpoint, the KMB program operates not merely as a social space but as an instrument for disseminating religious ideologies compatible with Indonesian nationalism and pluralism. Nevertheless, this structural approach presents inherent challenges. Resistance from groups adhering to exclusivist religious interpretations and perceptions of the program as an attempt to homogenize religious values pose obstacles to its effectiveness. Moreover, without strong horizontal support from civil society, structural interventions risk remaining symbolic and unsustainable. Consequently, the success of Religious Moderation Villages in Serang City depends on reinforcing structural initiatives with participatory mechanisms that enhance legitimacy at the grassroots level. By integrating structural and cultural approaches, the KMB program holds the potential to become a transformative instrument for building a religiously tolerant and socially inclusive community on a sustainable basis.

4.3. The Religious Moderation Village Program in Everyday Community Life: A Critical Evaluation and Implementation Dynamics

The establishment of Religious Moderation Villages (*Kampung Moderasi Beragama,* hereafter KMB) in two areas of Serang City has contributed to the promotion of inclusive socio-religious interactions among residents. Fundamentally, the KMB program represents a formalization of harmonious coexistence that has long characterized Serang's pluralistic society. In this context, the role of the state functions primarily to reinforce pre-existing values of tolerance rather than to introduce them anew. This situation contrasts with contexts marked by radicalism, terrorism, or communal conflict, where the effectiveness of such interventions may be more directly observable. In Serang, by contrast, residents already demonstrate adaptive and peaceful relations across religious and cultural differences regardless of the formal KMB designation. Nevertheless, the program serves an important symbolic role by constructing a replicable model of tolerance that can be promoted elsewhere. Moreover, institutionalizing such a program provides a normative framework that encourages social groups to maintain their commitment to shared values of coexistence.

Following its official designation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, through its Serang City Office, intensified interfaith activities aimed at promoting inclusivity. Operationally, the management of KMB falls under the authority of the Subdistrict Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama,* KUA). Several Islamic religious counselors (*penyuluh agama*) affiliated with the KUA were assigned to monitor and report on religious diversity practices within the KMB on a regular basis. However, the exclusive reliance on Muslim counselors highlights the limited inclusion of non-Muslim religious groups in formal governance roles, thereby constraining the program's inclusivity at the institutional level.

Although the presence of KMB offers a symbolic representation of interfaith tolerance, field observations indicate that the program has yet to generate a significant impact on everyday community practices. This limitation is largely attributable to its top-down, state-centered implementation. The designation of KMB villages prioritized administrative recognition over substantive social transformation. Many residents in designated areas were unaware of the

program's objectives and did not perceive themselves as participants in its implementation (Interview with Christian Pastor, Mangga Dua, April 17, 2025). This finding points to a notable deficiency in community participation during both the formulation and execution of the program. Furthermore, post-establishment activities have tended to be ceremonial and normative, consisting primarily of symbolic interfaith events such as joint prayers or panel discussions among religious leaders. These activities rarely address deeper structural mechanisms necessary for strengthening interfaith collaboration in everyday social life. Consequently, the KMB program appears more as a bureaucratic response than as an expression of grassroots social needs.

As a result, the program has not sufficiently engaged with the sociological foundations that shape interfaith relations at the community level. The absence of meaningful structural transformation means that the establishment of KMB villages has not significantly altered existing patterns of social interaction. For many residents, daily life continues largely unchanged, with no discernible improvement in social cohesion or reinforcement of tolerant practices. In some cases, a disjuncture emerges between the state's narrative of religious moderation and citizens' lived experiences, particularly among those who perceive their communities as already harmonious without the need for state-imposed labels or interventions. Nonetheless, several endogenous factors continue to sustain peaceful coexistence, most notably Serang's historical legacy of pluralism. Long-standing traditions of tolerance and openness are embedded in collective memory and transmitted across generations, enhancing community resilience in the face of identity-based differences and potential conflict.

Despite this potential, the effectiveness of these supportive factors remains limited by weak inter-institutional coordination. The KMB program is administered almost exclusively by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through subdistrict-level KUAs, with minimal systematic collaboration involving other local institutions such as urban village offices (*kelurahan*), the Agency for National and Political Unity (*Kesbangpol*), or the Departments of Social Affairs and Education. This institutional fragmentation has contributed to the perception that KMB is a sectoral initiative rather than a comprehensive and inclusive government program. When strategic agencies are not actively involved, implementation becomes disjointed, thereby reducing the program's overall effectiveness. As noted by a Religious Affairs Counselor in Serang District:

"The involvement of the local government is still minimal. There has been no cross-government coordination, so the *Kampung Moderasi Beragama* program seems to be solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In fact, religious affairs should be a shared concern" *(Interview, May 20, 2025).*

This perspective was echoed by several informants during interviews and focus group discussions, who emphasized that the implementation of KMB remains heavily dependent on state funding. Reliance on government budget allocations reinforces the perception of KMB as a state-driven project rather than a locally initiated movement. This dependency constrains the emergence of self-sustaining community initiatives that could support the program through voluntary participation and collective action.

To illustrate this dynamic, Table 1 presents selected statements from informants highlighting financial dependency and the absence of community-based management structures. Their testimonies demonstrate that the continuity of the KMB program is closely tied to annual budget cycles, leaving limited scope for innovation or independent action by local actors.

Table 1. Selected Informant Statements on State Budget Dependence in KMB Implementation

Name	Role/Position	Statement
Baihaki	Religious Affairs Counselor, Serang District	"The involvement of the local government is still minimal. There has been no cross-government coordination, so the KMB program seems to be solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Religious Affairs."
Risda	Christian Religious Counselor, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Serang City (Pastor)	"Most of our activities rely on funds from the government. If there is no allocation, we cannot continue the programs independently."
Rosadi	Interfaith Forum Member (FPLA)	"KMB is good in concept, but without consistent budget support, it becomes symbolic rather than transformative."

In addition, the absence of clear and measurable budget planning further undermines the sustainability of the program. The lack of dedicated funding has resulted in KMB activities proceeding without clear strategic direction, often relying on the personal initiative of individual counselors or religious leaders. Sustaining interfaith dialogue requires adequate financial support for community-based programs, tolerance education, and the institutionalization of interfaith communication forums. Instead, most KMB activities remain ceremonial, such as symbolic launches, banner installations, and public declarations of tolerance, which have limited impact on residents' collective consciousness. As a consequence, many citizens remain unaware that their neighborhoods have been designated as Religious Moderation Villages.

When symbolic representation is not accompanied by tangible social praxis, the meaning of tolerance risks becoming superficial. Over time, such conditions may erode public trust in state-led diversity initiatives. Therefore, revitalizing the implementation of the KMB program requires a strategic shift toward bottom-up engagement, cross-sectoral collaboration, and integration with local community empowerment initiatives. These findings suggest that the KMB program in Serang City remains largely symbolic and has not yet developed into a transformative social movement. Enhancing its effectiveness necessitates repositioning communities as active agents rather than passive recipients of state narratives. Existing local initiatives should be recognized, supported, and integrated as foundational elements of an authentic and sustainable movement for religious moderation.

4.4. The Religious Moderation Village Program: State Formalization of Religious Issues

In the context of public policy in Indonesia, state involvement in religious affairs is not a new phenomenon. However, through the Religious Moderation Village (*Kampung Moderasi Beragama*, hereafter KMB) program, the state explicitly positions itself not merely as a regulator or facilitator, but also as an ideological actor that promotes a particular narrative of religious life, one that emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and nationalism. This positioning reflects a broader tendency toward the formalization of previously organic and loosely coordinated socio-religious practices. From the outset, the KMB program was designed and implemented through bureaucratic mechanisms under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, operating within a multi-tiered administrative structure extending from the national to the local

level. In Serang City, this structure is manifested in the dominant role of the *Kantor Urusan Agama* (KUA) as the technical institution responsible for implementation at the subdistrict level, with religious counselors serving as the primary field agents.

Theoretically, state intervention in shaping religious social spaces can be understood through Louis Althusser's framework of the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1970, 2015). Within this perspective, institutions such as religion, education, and the media function as ideological instruments that shape citizens' consciousness in accordance with state values and interests. In the case of the KMB program, the discourse of religious moderation operates as a hegemonic instrument aimed at maintaining social stability and fostering national unity amid diversity. The state thus does not merely respond to existing social realities, but actively reproduces value structures through formal and institutionalized policy schemes.

Empirical findings from this study indicate that state formalization within the KMB program produces several notable consequences. First, the process generates over-institutionalization, whereby informal and culturally embedded practices of tolerance are codified into legal instruments and bureaucratic procedures. Villages selected for the program are designated through official decrees and assessed using formal indicators, such as the presence of diverse houses of worship, narratives of harmony, and the symbolic involvement of interfaith figures. As a result, the village is transformed into a curated social laboratory that not only facilitates public engagement but also projects a state-sanctioned image of diversity. Second, the program's predominantly top-down approach diminishes the sense of community ownership. Many residents interviewed demonstrated limited understanding of the concept of religious moderation, and some were unaware that their neighborhood had been designated as a Religious Moderation Village. The limited participation of non-state actors points to a weak dialogical relationship between the government and society.

These conditions suggest that the KMB policy remains far removed from a co-governance model, which emphasizes collaborative problem-solving between state institutions and citizens (Agger & Sørensen, 2018; Lopes & Farias, 2020; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Torfing, 2019). Rather than functioning as a deliberative space that accommodates the lived experiences of pluralism, the KMB program largely operates as a technocratic project embedded within a hierarchical command structure. In Serang City, for example, the organizational structure of the KMB program is dominated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and major Islamic organizations, such as the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), without formal representation from minority religious groups including Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, or Confucians. This exclusion is problematic, given that diversity itself is a prerequisite for the creation of inclusive and participatory spaces of religious moderation.

Moreover, the KMB program has yet to be meaningfully integrated with other government institutions, such as the National Unity Agency (*Kesbangpol*), the Department of Education, or local administrative offices (*kelurahan*). The absence of cross-sectoral coordination constrains the scope and effectiveness of the program, limiting its capacity to influence related policy domains such as education, social welfare, and urban governance. Compounding this issue is the lack of systematic and dedicated budget allocations, which weakens the ability of KMB villages to design and sustain substantive initiatives. Consequently, most activities remain ceremonial in nature, such as symbolic inaugurations, interfaith celebrations, or dialogues among religious leaders, without addressing deeper structural concerns, including discrimination in public services, religious misinformation on social media, or patterns of social segregation in educational environments.

Taken together, the state's formalization approach through the KMB program reveals a fundamental ambivalence. On the one hand, the state plays an essential role in safeguarding the foundational values of nationalism and pluralism. On the other hand, excessive administrative control, when not accompanied by meaningful citizen participation, risks producing a form of paternalistic governance characterized by vertical and unequal state–society relations (Hicken, 2011; Soedirgo, 2018). Bureaucratically managed moderation may, paradoxically, undermine its deeper meaning as a reflective and context-sensitive internalization of values.

Therefore, if the KMB program is to function as a genuine catalyst for social change, a strategic shift is required, from symbolic formalization toward inclusive and participatory praxis. This shift entails institutionalizing citizen participation, incorporating multi-faith actors into governance structures, strengthening cross-sectoral integration among government agencies, and building local capacity to design contextually relevant and sustainable initiatives. Religious Moderation Villages must operate as spaces for the cultivation of shared values, rather than as showcases of state-curated diversity. As Tania Murray Li cautions through the concept of *rendering technical*, states often reduce complex social problems to technical issues manageable through bureaucratic programs (Murray Li, 2022). The KMB initiative must avoid this technocratic trap. To be transformative, it must grow organically from within society through processes that are authentic, reflexive, and grounded in local values. Only under these conditions can religious moderation move beyond its role as a state policy and evolve into a collective social movement capable of uniting difference within the broader project of nation-building.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the Religious Moderation Village (*Kampung Moderasi Beragama*, KMB) program in Serang City represents, to a greater extent, a process of state formalization of existing socio-religious practices rather than the emergence of a grassroots social movement. Although the program promotes a broad narrative of tolerance and interreligious harmony, its implementation remains largely symbolic and administrative. The dominance of state actors, limited citizen participation, weak cross-sectoral coordination, and the absence of dedicated and systematic budget allocations indicate that the KMB program has not yet developed into an inclusive or sustainable platform for social transformation.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce Althusserian critiques regarding the role of state institutions as ideological state apparatuses that shape social consciousness in line with agendas of nationalism and social order. The predominantly top-down design of the KMB program overlooks local cultural dynamics and everyday community praxis, resulting in a high risk of low embeddedness within citizens' lived experiences. This condition resonates with Tania Murray Li's (2022) argument that states often reduce complex social issues to technical problems managed through bureaucratic projects, rather than fostering reflective and participatory engagement. In this sense, religious moderation is framed as an administrative objective rather than a socially negotiated and internalized value.

From a practical perspective, the KMB program requires revitalization through the expansion of deliberative and participatory approaches. The role of the state should extend beyond structuring and symbolizing moderation to facilitating spaces in which interfaith community members can articulate and negotiate their own narratives of religious coexistence. The program's effectiveness would be enhanced through stronger integration with initiatives aimed at building local community capacity, promoting multicultural education, and developing inclusive cross-sectoral policies. The active involvement of minority religious

leaders, interfaith organizations, and youth across religious and social identities is essential to strengthening the grassroots foundation of the religious moderation agenda.

Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term impacts of the KMB program on patterns of social interaction and interreligious perception. Participatory action research may also provide valuable insights into how citizens cultivate practices of religious moderation outside state-imposed frameworks. In addition, comparative studies across Religious Moderation Villages in different provinces could illuminate variations in implementation and identify more context-sensitive and adaptive approaches to governing religious diversity.

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