

Religious Moderation and Political Communication: The Strategic Role of NU and Muhammadiyah Post 2024 Election

Keyne Syifaul Izzah¹, Diah Pitaloka Margareta², Sabrina Zarah Azura^{3*}, Ana Wulan Sari⁴

^{1,3,4}State University of Surabaya, Surabaya 60213, Indonesia

²Tomsk State University, Tomsk 634050, Russia

*Corresponding Author

Email address: sabrina.23348@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The 2024 elections reaffirmed the importance of religion in safeguarding Indonesian democracy. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, as the two largest Islamic organizations, contribute to shaping public opinion, maintaining stability, and voicing the values of religious moderation. This study aims to analyze the political communication strategies of NU and Muhammadiyah after the 2024 elections, highlighting the narratives of moderation they have constructed, the responses of the public and the media to their religious political attitudes, and the differences in communication approaches between the two organizations. The approach used is descriptive qualitative with a literature study and document analysis method. The findings show that NU tends to utilize symbolic and traditional approaches through the Islam Nusantara narrative, while Muhammadiyah emphasizes a rational-institutional approach through official media and policy advocacy. Although they differ in communication style and channels, both substantively convey moderate, tolerant, and nation-oriented religious messages. These findings reinforce the position of NU and Muhammadiyah as strategic actors in Islamic political communication in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: NU, Muhammadiyah, Political Communication, Religious Moderation, Moderate Islam, Post 2024 Election.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 elections are an important moment in Indonesian democracy, not only in terms of the transfer of power, but also in terms of reflecting social and ideological dynamics in the public sphere. As in previous elections, this contest is marked by intense identity politics, the spread of religious-based disinformation, and polarization between social groups (Ruslan et al., 2023; Ubaid & Subandi, 2017). This phenomenon raises concerns about deeper social divisions and the weakening of national integration, particularly in multicultural societies facing increasing intolerance (Glas & Remeus,

2019). In such conditions, religious actors play a crucial role, not only as guardians of spiritual values, but also as socio-political mediators. The two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, are at the forefront in responding to this situation. Both have the institutional and historical capacity to ease political tensions while guiding society towards ethical and moderate democracy (Haris et al., 2023).

NU and Muhammadiyah represent two different yet complementary styles of Islamic thought and social engagement. NU is deeply rooted in the pesantren tradition, emphasizing cultural accommodation, spirituality, and local wisdom. Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, is known as a modernist Islamic movement that prioritizes rationality, reform, and purification of religious teachings (Kurniawan et al., 2023). Despite these differences, both organizations have long served as pillars of Indonesia's religious and civic life since the pre-independence period. Historically, during moments of political tension, NU and Muhammadiyah have not only functioned as moral guardians but also as mediators capable of bridging ideological and social divisions (Kustiawan et al., 2023). Therefore, in the post-election context marked by heightened social dynamics, these organizations occupy a strategic position in steering public discourse toward reconciliation and moderation.

Following the 2024 elections, Indonesia's political landscape demonstrates growing complexity. While electoral democracy continues procedurally, strong polarization persists within social media spaces and grassroots communities (Bah & Arif, 2024). Public narratives circulating in the digital sphere often adopt exclusive and antagonistic tones, reinforcing in-group versus out-group sentiments (Akmaliah & Nadzir, 2024). In such conditions, inclusive and calming religious messages become increasingly vital. NU and Muhammadiyah are thus not only expected to act as mediators but also to formulate effective political communication strategies capable of competing with provocative and populist narratives. This responsibility is amplified by their extensive organizational networks, encompassing Islamic boarding schools, educational institutions, charitable organizations, and digital media platforms (Hasanah, 2023).

Political communication conducted by religious organizations goes beyond their positioning toward political power; it also shapes public perceptions of social and political realities. NU and Muhammadiyah possess substantial symbolic, cultural, and communicative capital to influence public opinion. NU, through its clerical authority and pesantren networks, relies heavily on symbolic and ritual-based communication, while Muhammadiyah leverages rational discourse and data-driven messaging through its educational and intellectual institutions (Mashuri & Lubis, 2023). From the perspective of agenda-setting and framing theory, both organizations are capable of determining which issues gain public attention and how these issues are interpreted (Musyarrofah & Zulhannan, 2023). Consequently, examining their post-election political communication strategies is essential to understanding how narratives of religious moderation are constructed and disseminated in Indonesia's public sphere.

Religious moderation has been a central agenda of the Indonesian government since 2019; however, its realization largely depends on socio-religious actors rather than state institutions alone. Salendra (2024) emphasizes that moderation should not be treated merely as political jargon but as a contextual praxis embedded in everyday communication. NU and Muhammadiyah have long embodied moderation through concepts such as *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan*, respectively. These frameworks emphasize tolerance, justice, dialogue, and civic responsibility, contributing to the maintenance of a healthy and inclusive public sphere, particularly in post-election contexts marked by emotional and ideological contestation (Haris et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the strategic role of NU and Muhammadiyah faces significant challenges in the digital era. Despite possessing established media infrastructures, they must compete with populist and aggressive actors who exploit social media to disseminate polarizing religious narratives (Akmaliah & Nadzir, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2024). Social media accelerates the spread of information but also intensifies echo chambers and political polarization. Therefore, the effectiveness of NU and Muhammadiyah's communication depends on their adaptability in framing moderation narratives in formats that resonate with digitally native audiences while remaining socially and politically relevant (Bah & Arif, 2024).

The post-election period also tests the independence and critical stance of NU and Muhammadiyah toward political power. Public expectations demand that religious mass organizations maintain moral distance from pragmatic politics, yet their involvement in advocacy and policy discourse necessitates strategic engagement. Communication strategies thus become essential instruments for asserting ethical authority without being co-opted by partisan interests. This dynamic distinguishes religious political communication from party-based political communication, as it prioritizes moral guidance and public values over electoral support (Wadipalapa & Budiatri, 2025).

Studies on NU and Muhammadiyah's political communication contribute significantly to the development of Islamic political communication theory in Indonesia. Existing research has largely focused on political elites and parties, leaving the role of Islamic mass organizations as shapers of public opinion relatively underexplored. By analyzing their communication strategies, this study seeks to illuminate how moderate Islam is framed, negotiated, and communicated within the context of democratic contestation (Hasanah, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2024). Such insights are valuable for strengthening synergy between religion and democracy in Indonesia.

Therefore, this research holds both academic and social urgency. Amid increasing political fatigue and social fragmentation, moderate religious communication can serve as a societal antidote. NU and Muhammadiyah, as mass organizations with broad legitimacy, bear a responsibility to guide national narratives toward cohesion. By critically examining their communication strategies, this study aims to identify both their potentials and limitations, as well as formulate recommendations to enhance the democratic role of religious organizations.

While numerous studies have examined NU and Muhammadiyah separately from historical, theological, or political perspectives, few have focused specifically on their post-election political communication strategies within the framework of religious moderation. Moreover, comparative analyses explicitly contrasting their communication styles in post-contestation contexts remain limited. This study seeks to address this gap by reconstructing the narratives promoted by both organizations and analyzing public and media responses to their communication efforts. Accordingly, this research aspires

to enrich the literature on Islamic political communication in Indonesia by grounding its analysis in contemporary political realities.

Based on the background described above, this study was designed to answer the following key questions:

1. How do NU and Muhammadiyah's political communication strategies build narratives of religious moderation after the 2024 elections?
2. What are the differences in the communication approaches of NU and Muhammadiyah in responding to post-election political dynamics?
3. How do NU and Muhammadiyah's religious communication contribute to efforts to reduce political polarization in Indonesia?

Theoretical Framework

This study uses several complementary theoretical approaches to understand the political communication strategies of NU and Muhammadiyah in promoting religious moderation after the 2024 elections. These approaches include political communication theory (particularly agenda-setting, framing, and narrative theory), religious moderation theory, and Habermas' communicative rationality as a basis for media analysis.

Political Communication Theory: Agenda-Setting and Framing

Political communication theory provides an important framework for understanding how religious actors convey political messages through the media. In this context, agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) explains that the media including mass media organizations such as NU Online and Muhammadiyah not only tell the public what to think, but also what is important to think about. In other words, religious organizations shape public perception through the selection of issues that are highlighted and linked to religious and national values. Meanwhile, framing theory (Entman, 1993) shows that it is not only the content of the message that is important, but also the way the message is packaged. NU and Muhammadiyah did not just deliver statements, but framed the narrative with their distinctive values: NU with the symbolism of Islam Nusantara and social reconciliation; Muhammadiyah with a framework of rationality and institutional development. This framing is important because it influences how messages are understood and received by the public in a post-

election atmosphere that is prone to polarization.

In the digital context, a study by Yusuf et al. (2024) shows that NU and Muhammadiyah actively use social media to produce and disseminate moderate and calming religious-political messages. This strategy is inseparable from the logic of digital agenda-setting, where algorithms and content virality are also part of the dynamics of modern political communication.

Narrative Theory in Religious Communication

Narratives are an important instrument in conveying religious values. In the framework of religious communication, narratives are not only descriptive but also performative they shape collective identity and social action orientation. Research by Hasanah (2023) states that the religious narratives constructed by NU and Muhammadiyah on their official websites emphasize the values of unity, social ethics, and adaptation to changing times. The "moderate Islam" narrative carried by these two organizations is not merely a slogan, but rather the result of social construction of the contemporary religious-political reality in Indonesia. This narrative is also a form of rejection by of claims of singular truth that tend to be exclusive and radical.

The Theory of Religious Moderation

The concept of religious moderation in this study is not only understood normatively as a "middle way," but as an active position in responding to religious complexity in the public sphere. According to Salendra (2024) religious moderation is a form of communicative rationality in which Islamic values are conveyed with consideration for the context of democracy and plurality in Indonesia. This theory is reinforced by Habermas' concept of communicative rationality, which is used to assess the extent to which NU and Muhammadiyah's communication is inclusive, deliberative, and reflective of socio-political differences. In other words, moderation is not merely rhetoric, but is tested through the way communication is carried out.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because the study aims to describe and analyze in depth the political communication

strategies and narratives of religious moderation developed by NU and Muhammadiyah after the 2024 elections.

Data Collection Methods

The methods used in this study are literature review and document analysis. Data were obtained from various written sources such as scientific articles, books, organizational reports, mass media, and official documents from NU and Muhammadiyah that are relevant to the research theme.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data was analyzed using content analysis and discourse analysis techniques. The analysis was conducted to identify narrative patterns, communication strategies, and differences in approach between NU and Muhammadiyah in building religious moderation in the public sphere after the election.

Data Sources

The main data sources in this study are official documents, media publications, and academic literature discussing political communication strategies, religious moderation, and the role of NU and Muhammadiyah in the Indonesian socio-political context after the 2024 elections.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

NU's Political Communication Strategy After the 2024 Elections

After the 2024 elections, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) reemerged as a socio-religious force advocating the importance of national reconciliation and social stability. Through an official statement delivered by PBNU Chairman KH Yahya Cholil Staquf, NU explicitly called on the public to accept the election results as part of the democratic process that must be respected. This narrative was conveyed amid heightened tensions after the election and reflects NU's commitment to the principle of moderation, both in religion and politics.

NU uses a political communication strategy based on two main pillars: symbolic-cultural power and the grassroots network of Islamic boarding schools. This strategy utilizes social infrastructure based on local Islamic traditions, which have long been

NU's distinctive strength. Religious messages, including responses to political situations, are conveyed through religious forums such as recitations, halaqah, and Friday sermons, which are spread throughout Indonesia. In these spaces, NU elites convey the importance of *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (national brotherhood) and rejection of all forms of hate speech.

One of the strengths of NU's political communication is its ability to reframe political conflicts as part of the dynamics of a healthy democracy. Within the framework of framing theory (Entman, 1993), NU does not explicitly use the political language of " " but rather frames the situation with moral and religious narratives. An example is the use of the term "constitutional jihad" in the context of accepting election results, not as a struggle for power, but as a willingness to maintain national unity.

NU also optimizes digital media through its official channel, NU Online, as the main conduit for disseminating narratives. Research by Hasanah (2023) shows that NU Online actively publishes content that promotes friendly Islam, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue. This content is packaged in the form of articles, interviews with clerics, religious videos, and public opinions that raise the theme of national unity after the election. However, the effectiveness of NU's political communication in the digital era also faces challenges. On the one hand, NU's traditional structure is very strong at the local community level, but on the other hand, not all of its digital channels are able to reach the younger urban segment, which is more exposed to populist narratives on social media. This poses a challenge for NU to adapt its communication to be more contextual and responsive to the digital generation.

Interestingly, NU's political communication is non-verbalistic. This means that many political messages are conveyed not in the form of open political statements, but through symbols, social activities, and cultural approaches. For example, the joint prayer event for Indonesia after the election, which was held simultaneously in Islamic boarding schools, was a strong symbolic form of communication in conveying a moderate religious political stance. NU's communication pattern also shows differentiation between the central elite and the community base. The PBNU elite tends to have a very balanced narrative, but in reality, not all NU members fully understand or accept these messages. This indicates the importance of strengthening horizontal

communication capacity at the intermediate level between the elite and the base.

Within the framework of political communication theory, NU is best approached using narrative framing and cultural brokerage theories, as developed by Bah et al. (2024). NU acts as a cultural broker that frames political conflicts within the narrative of religious narratives that are calming rather than provocative. This model has proven effective in regions prone to polarization, such as East Java, Central Java, and parts of Kalimantan. Thus, NU's post-2024 election political communication strategy demonstrates continuity between tradition, technology, and values. It is not only a representation of a religious institution but also a social tool for managing political tensions and promoting national stability.

Muhammadiyah's Post 2024 Election Communication Strategy

Muhammadiyah developed a model of political communication that is institutional, rational, and tends to be elitist. This approach stems from Muhammadiyah's ideological basis, which emphasizes religious rationality, prophetic ethics, and organizational autonomy from political power. Following the 2024 elections, the Muhammadiyah Central Board has consistently maintained a neutral stance, emphasizing the importance of democratic accountability and calling for national reflection in building dignified politics.

Muhammadiyah conveys its political messages through official channels such as Suara Muhammadiyah, tvMu, and various academic discussion forums. Moreover, Muhammadiyah also relies on charismatic figures, Muhammadiyah relies more on the collective opinions of the Tarjih Council, the Law Council, and Regional Leaders who convey the organization's official narrative. This demonstrates the systematic and structured nature of Muhammadiyah's political communication. In its agenda-setting approach, Muhammadiyah does not engage directly in polemics over election results, but instead chooses to raise moral issues such as electoral justice, political ethics, and political education for the people. A study by Salendra (2024) shows that tvMu raised the theme of "Moral Democracy" in the weeks following the announcement of the presidential election results, featuring Muhammadiyah academics and scholars.

Technically, Muhammadiyah's communication is more oriented towards the production of research-based educational content, such as webinars, policy analysis

articles, and documentation of activities oriented towards social transformation. This strategy reflects a modern organizational communication model that is not reactive to daily issues but builds a long-term framework of thinking. However, this strategy also has limitations. Its intellectual approach often fails to attract the attention of the wider public, especially those who are accustomed to populist communication and emotional narratives. This poses a particular challenge in conveying messages of moderation amid the dominance of sensational social media.

At the grassroots level, Muhammadiyah's communication is still dominated by educational activities in schools, mosques, and universities. Although strong in structural and organizational media, Muhammadiyah has not fully optimized its informal networks among youth or non-academic millennial communities that are growing rapidly on social media. Ideologically, Muhammadiyah seeks to create a critical distance from the state. This influences the way the organization conveys its religious-political message. They emphasize that Muslims should not be tools of practical politics, but should be leaders of social ethics who promote dignified democracy. This is in line with the civic professionalism approach that combines faith and civil rationality.

In the context of digital communication, Muhammadiyah's strategy is systematic but still lacks participation. The YouTube channel tvMu and the official Suara Muhammadiyah account do not yet have the massive reach of more populist Islamic channels. Therefore, a two-way communication expansion strategy is needed so that progressive Islamic messages can enter the interactive digital public sphere.

Comparison of NU and Muhammadiyah Communication Approaches

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are the two largest and most influential Islamic organizations in Indonesia. Both play a strategic role in shaping the moderate face of Islam that is characteristic of Indonesia. Although both promote religious moderation, NU and Muhammadiyah have significantly different approaches to political communication. These differences not only reflect the character of the organizations and their mass bases, but also influence the way they convey religious and political messages to the wider community. In the dynamic context of the post-2024 elections, understanding the differences and complementarities of the communication

approaches of these two organizations is very important for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia.

NU is known for its communication approach that is heavily laden with symbolism and cultural references. The organization is deeply rooted in the pesantren tradition, which has long been the center of religious education and social life for the Indonesian people, especially in Java and other regions. Pesantren are not only places of religious learning, but also centers for the formation of the cultural and social identity.

NU's symbolic approach is reflected in a communication style that uses religious language rich in symbols, rituals, and traditions that are ingrained in people's daily lives. NU utilizes the pesantren network as the main channel for spreading the narrative of religious moderation. Pesantren become spaces where the values of tolerance, pluralism, and moderation are taught directly through social interaction and religious learning. In addition, NU also utilizes majelis ta'lim (religious gatherings) and community-based religious forums as effective means of communication. Majelis ta'lim are places where people gather to learn about religion and engage in discussion, so that messages of moderation can be conveyed in a personal and contextual manner according to the needs of the community.

In the digital age, NU has also developed community-based media such as NU Online, which is managed by young cadres. This media serves as a platform to reach the younger generation, who are increasingly tech-savvy and active in the virtual world. This approach allows NU to remain relevant and adaptive to the times, while maintaining its traditional roots. This symbolic and cultural approach makes NU very effective in reaching grassroots communities that have strong ties to local traditions and values. NU is able to convey messages of moderation in a way that touches the emotional and spiritual aspects of society, making these messages easier to accept and internalize.

Conversely, Muhammadiyah adopts a more rational and institutional approach to communication. This organization has a mass base that is more focused on academic, professional, and urban communities. Muhammadiyah is known as an organization that promotes Islamic modernity with an emphasis on education, health, and social services as means of da'wah and communication.

Muhammadiyah relies on formal educational institutions from elementary to university level as the main channel for spreading the values of religious moderation. Muhammadiyah schools and universities are places where rational and progressive Islamic thinking is developed and taught. This approach positions Muhammadiyah as an organization capable of reaching intellectuals and professionals who have a modern and critical orientation. In addition to education, Muhammadiyah also utilizes hospitals and health facilities as effective social communication media. Through health services, Muhammadiyah not only builds a positive image, but also conveys values of humanity and moderation directly to the wider community. Official media such as Suara Muhammadiyah and tvMu are important communication channels used to disseminate religious and socio-political messages based on rationality and scientific argumentation. These media serve as platforms to educate the public, strengthen the narrative of moderation, and build critical and rational public opinion.

Muhammadiyah's rational and institutional approach makes it very effective in reaching academic communities, the upper-middle class, and policy makers. The narratives conveyed are more based on critical thinking and logical arguments, so that they are acceptable to people with higher education backgrounds and modern orientations. The difference in the communication approaches of NU and Muhammadiyah is greatly influenced by the orientation of their respective mass bases. NU is closer to cultural communities rooted in local religious traditions and practices. NU's mass base is spread across rural areas and Islamic boarding school communities that have strong ties to traditional and spiritual values.

In contrast, Muhammadiyah is more oriented towards academic and urban communities with modern and rational orientations. Muhammadiyah's mass base is mostly found in big cities, among professionals, and in higher education institutions. This is reflected in the communication channels they use, where NU mostly uses community media and pesantren networks, while Muhammadiyah relies more on formal educational institutions and official media. Despite their different approaches, NU and Muhammadiyah do not actually compete directly, but rather occupy different strategic spaces within Indonesia's moderate Islamic ecosystem. In the theory of inclusive political communication, pluralism of approaches becomes a strength in conveying messages of moderation to a diverse audience.

Bah et al. (2024) note that the combination of NU's symbolic approach and Muhammadiyah's rational approach creates a unique "ecology of moderation" in Indonesia. NU is able to reach lower-class communities with a spiritual language rich in symbols and traditions, while Muhammadiyah offers a rational Islamic framework that is acceptable to the middle and upper classes and policymakers. This ecology of moderation allows both organizations to complement each other in building an inclusive and adaptive narrative of moderate Islam in response to social and political changes. Thus, the existence of NU and Muhammadiyah together strengthens the position of moderate Islam as a balancing force in Indonesia's pluralistic and diverse political and social life.

In today's digital age, NU and Muhammadiyah face major challenges in terms of digital audience segmentation. The moderate Islamic narratives they construct often lose out in terms of virality and receive less attention on social media when compared to more provocative, extreme, and sensational narratives. Social media has become the main arena for the public to obtain information and form opinions, so the influence of digital narratives is crucial in shaping public perception. This situation requires NU and Muhammadiyah to adapt quickly and develop more effective and innovative digital communication strategies. Consolidation and synergy between the two organizations in facing these challenges are very important. By combining the strengths of NU's symbolic approach and Muhammadiyah's rational approach, they can create a more comprehensive digital communication strategy that is able to reach various segments of society, especially the younger generation who are very active in the virtual world.

Consolidating a joint communication strategy between NU and Muhammadiyah is essential to address the challenging dynamics following the 2024 elections. This collaboration can be realized through joint programs, integrated religious moderation campaigns, and optimal utilization of digital media. For example, NU can utilize the strength of its network of Islamic boarding schools and traditional communities to disseminate moderation content that is packaged in an attractive and culturally relevant manner. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah can develop content based on research, data, and scientific arguments to reach academic and professional circles. This synergy will strengthen the message of religious moderation so that it can be widely accepted by people from different backgrounds.

In addition, collaboration in training young cadres, joint digital media development, and joint research on the effectiveness of moderation communication can also be strategic steps that strengthen the position of both organizations in facing communication challenges in the digital era. A comparison of the communication approaches of NU and Muhammadiyah provides an important lesson that the success of religious political communication is not only determined by the content of the message, but also by the suitability of the communication channel and the characteristics of the intended audience. NU and Muhammadiyah demonstrate that religious moderation must be communicated in an adaptive, contextual, and pluralistic manner so that the message can be accepted and internalized by the wider community.

This flexible and diverse approach is key to maintaining harmony, tolerance, and socio-political stability in Indonesia's diverse and pluralistic society. With effective communication, moderate Islam can continue to be a soothing force that strengthens national unity. NU and Muhammadiyah, as the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, have different but complementary approaches to political communication. NU uses a strong symbolic and cultural approach in grassroots communities, while Muhammadiyah relies on an effective rational and institutional approach among academics and urbanites. These differences reflect the mass base and social orientation of each organization.

The combination of these two approaches has created a unique and powerful ecology of moderation in Indonesia. However, the challenges of the digital and social media era require both organizations to collaborate and consolidate their communication strategies so that messages of religious moderation can reach a wider and more diverse audience. An important lesson from this comparison is that effective religious political communication must be adaptive, contextual, and pluralistic, taking into account audience characteristics and developments in communication technology. Thus, NU and Muhammadiyah can continue to play a leading role in maintaining religious moderation and social harmony in Indonesia.

NU & Muhammadiyah Communication and Message Distribution Channels

In the post-2024 election era, communication channels play a vital role in distributing soothing religious-political narratives. Both NU and Muhammadiyah have

developed different channels to convey their messages of moderation. NU tends to emphasize the use of traditional networks such as Islamic boarding schools, majelis ta'lim (religious gatherings), and community-based religious forums. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah focuses more on official media such as Suara Muhammadiyah, TVMu, and academic webinars. These channels play an important role in ensuring that the organization's narrative remains consistent and reaches its target audience.

The existence of digital channels has expanded the communication reach of both organizations. NU Online, as NU's official digital mouthpiece, presents news, articles, and multimedia content that frames Islam as a friendly and solution-oriented social force. This media also responds to the dynamics of information developing on social media, although it is often slower in dissemination than popular independent and provocative religious accounts. To address this, NU has developed sub-channels such as TVNU and virtual da'wah programs targeting the millennial generation.

In contrast, Muhammadiyah has developed a more structural information network. TVMu is the official da'wah media with an educational and academic approach. It features lecture programs, national lectures, and panel discussions with Muhammadiyah's internal academics. In addition, the Muhammadiyah Central Board's Library and Information Council actively manages the production of visual and print content that is distributed to all charitable organizations. This strategy reinforces the impression that Muhammadiyah is a communicative and argument-based organization.

However, there are challenges in the effectiveness of using these channels. Although both organizations already have digital infrastructure, they are still unable to compete with the speed and reach of information dissemination by populist Islamic groups that are active on social media. As a result, the narrative of moderation that is conveyed is often drowned out by waves of hate speech and provocation that attract more public attention. A study by Akmaliah & Nadzir (2024) shows that the strength of populist Islamic politics in the last three elections has largely been reinforced by the ability of these actors to aggressively manipulate social media. This serves as a warning to NU and Muhammadiyah that official channels are not enough. They must build alternative media networks that are able to reach digital spaces in a more organic and interactive manner.

It is also important to note that the difference in communication channel approaches is directly related to the character of each constituent. NU, with its rural and Islamic boarding school base, still relies heavily on face-to-face communication and kiai lectures. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah, which is more focused on urban and academic areas, encourages the digitization of standardized and accountable information. However, in facing post-election challenges, these two models need to be combined.

In terms of audience segmentation, NU excels in the grassroots and santri (Islamic boarding school student) communities. NU's communication channels are relational and symbolic, with the teacher-student relationship as the center of authority. In contrast, Muhammadiyah has a more autonomous audience that is accustomed to reading and assessing information rationally. Therefore, Muhammadiyah's communication channels are educational and deliberative. Both organizations need to adjust the design and distribution of their messages so that they are not only "sent" but also "received and understood."

The distribution of messages of moderation by NU and Muhammadiyah after the election is also supported by offline activities such as national seminars, public lectures, and social actions. In these forums, their digital content is reworked into community narratives. Thus, communication channels are not only one-way, but also become a means of social reconstruction of meaning.

From monitoring content on NU Online and Suara Muhammadiyah, shows consistency in narratives about Islam that are tolerant, anti-polarization, and anti-hoaxes. This shows that official channels continue to carry out the organization's agenda-setting function in creating a healthy political-religious discourse. However, to be truly effective, both need to strengthen their multi-channel distribution strategies, expand their internal influencer networks, and dare to enter the arena of digital public opinion debates.

Public and Media Response to NU & Muhammadiyah Communication

Public response to NU and Muhammadiyah's political communication after the 2024 elections shows complex dynamics. On the one hand, the public appreciates the moderate stance of both organizations. On the other hand, there are also skeptical voices

who consider that large Islamic organizations have been too compromising towards power, especially in the context of political position distribution and elite alliances. NU, for example, is often criticized because some of its cadres hold strategic positions in the government. However, surveys conducted by several research institutions such as LSI and CSIS show that NU and Muhammadiyah remain the Islamic organizations with the highest level of trust among the public. This indicates that, in general, the public still sees both organizations as moral references in religious and national life. However, this level of influence is not always directly proportional to their ability to quickly shape public opinion in the digital age. In the mass media, both print and online, the narratives constructed by NU and Muhammadiyah are widely quoted and used as references. Mainstream media outlets such as Kompas, Tempo, and Republika regularly publish official statements from the elites of these two organizations, especially when it comes to issues of nationality, identity politics, and religious conflict. This shows that the media still sees NU and Muhammadiyah as moral actors and strategic stakeholders in maintaining the public sphere. The response on social media tends to be more dynamic and diverse. On the one hand, accounts

The official accounts of NU and Muhammadiyah are quite active in sharing moderate content, peaceful sermons, and clarifications on sensitive issues. However, this content is often slower and less viral than narratives from more aggressive and populist conservative Islamic groups. A study by Akmaliah & Nadzir (2024) notes that moderate content often loses out in the algorithmic mechanisms of platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, which favor provocative videos with high engagement. At the grassroots level, acceptance of messages from NU and Muhammadiyah is also not uniform. Most NU members remain obedient to the directives of clerics and Islamic boarding schools, but others are exposed to sermons outside the structure that are more hardline and exclusive. Muhammadiyah faces similar challenges, especially in urban areas where the flow of information is free and uncontrolled by institutional structures.

However, there are also groups of people who show high symbolic and ideological loyalty to these two mass organizations. The NU student community and the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IMM), for example, reinforce the narrative of moderation in alternative channels such as podcasts, Instagram reels, and educational infographics. This digital activism shows the potential for the regeneration of Islamic

narratives that are adaptive to technology.

The response of political actors to NU and Muhammadiyah communications tends to be calculated. Political elites openly praise the role of mass organizations in maintaining social harmony, but also seek to exploit their influence for electoral gain. This can be seen in the frequent visits by political figures to the PBNU and PP Muhammadiyah offices to gain legitimacy after elections. In this context, NU and Muhammadiyah play a strategic role as gatekeepers of political Islamic narratives in Indonesia. They can determine the direction of public opinion, although they are not always able to control the entire spectrum of responses, especially in open digital spaces that tend to be unstructured. This indicates the need for large Islamic mass organizations to improve the digital literacy and communication resilience of their members.

Responses from other religious organizations are also important to note. Groups such as Persis, LDII, and even interfaith organizations in general have expressed support for the narratives constructed by NU and Muhammadiyah. In several interfaith forums, both organizations have become spokespersons for moderation, demonstrating that the impact of their communication is not only internal but also external in the context of religious pluralism in Indonesia. Thus, even though NU and Muhammadiyah's communication faces challenges of distribution and interpretation in the digital age, the responses from the public, the media, and the elite show that these Islamic organizations still have an important position in guiding public ethics and stabilizing the democratic space after the elections.

Contributions to Post-Election Social Stability and Democracy

After the 2024 elections, the role of NU and Muhammadiyah has become increasingly vital not only in maintaining social order but also in strengthening public trust in democratic institutions. When narratives circulating on social media were filled with hoaxes, slander, and rhetoric delegitimizing the elections, these two organizations acted as a calming influence, calling for rationality and respect for the results of democracy. Their contributions are not only normative but also practical. NU, through its network of Islamic boarding schools, organizes discussion forums to discuss election results from the perspective of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Muhammadiyah, through its campuses and educational institutions, holds public lectures and open discussions that

encourage students to think critically while upholding political ethics.

Research by Wadipalapa & Budiatri (2025) suggests that NU's involvement in the post-election period has created a model of religious brokerage, in which religious elites become social mediators who bridge political interests with religious aspirations. This differs from the model of religious populism, which tends to mobilize religion for the interests of one side. Muhammadiyah's involvement also shows a professional face of Islam that is oriented towards improving the system. They actively provide policy input through the Law and Human Rights Council and the Tarjih Council, which voice the importance of electoral law reform, party budget transparency, and political education for citizens. With this approach, Muhammadiyah plays the role of a civil society watchdog in democracy. Contributions to social stability are also evident in NU's role in easing tensions at the grassroots level. In areas prone to post-election conflict, NU clerics act as mediators respected by all parties. These peaceful efforts are carried out without violence, but through religious dialogue and the teachings of social Sufism, which values diversity.

On the other hand, Muhammadiyah contributes to nurturing nationalism through multicultural education in its schools and universities. They integrate a curriculum that instills the values of Pancasila, tolerance, and inclusive Islam. This provides a strong social foundation for rejecting all forms of political radicalism and religious extremism that could undermine democracy. In the long term, the contributions of NU and Muhammadiyah are not only felt in the electoral cycle, but also in the strengthening of Indonesia's socio-political institutions. They function as ideological buffers that keep democracy from losing its ethical roots, as well as learning actors that continue to adapt to the dynamics of the times. Of course, challenges remain. The threats of digital radicalization, religious populism, and the commodification of religion in politics still haunt Indonesia. However, with their active role and adaptive communication, NU and Muhammadiyah have made a real contribution to strengthening the foundations of a healthy, inclusive, and ethical democracy.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 elections have opened a new chapter in Indonesian democracy, not only as a political contest, but also as a testing ground for social resilience and the quality of

public communication. In this context, the role of religious organizations is crucial in responding to polarization and reducing conflict. NU and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, have adopted political communication strategies that reflect moderate Islamic values. Through soothing narratives, extensive distribution channels, and distinctive approaches, both organizations have successfully played a role in stabilizing society during the post-election period, which is prone to turmoil.

NU's political communication strategy relies on symbolic and cultural power. By relying on its network of Islamic boarding schools, charismatic figures, and media outlets such as NU Online, the organization frames the post-election discourse as a space for reconciliation and *ukhuwah* (brotherhood). The messages conveyed tend to be narrative and spiritual in nature, making them easily accepted by grassroots communities. On the other hand, Muhammadiyah takes a rational and institutional approach. With a strong academic base and educational media such as Suara Muhammadiyah and TVMu, this organization voices the values of political neutrality, democratic ethics, and progressive Islam in response to national political dynamics.

These differences in approach do not cause conflict, but rather complement each other in reaching different segments of society. NU tends to be strong in rural areas and traditional communities, while Muhammadiyah is influential in urban and academic circles. By adopting framing and agenda-setting theories, both are able to frame strategic issues in narratives that suit the characteristics of their respective audiences. This strengthens the dissemination and influence of the messages of moderation that they campaign for, whether in the form of lectures, online media, or social activities.

However, the effectiveness of religious political communication cannot be separated from the challenges of the digital era. NU and Muhammadiyah face narrative competition from conservative religious groups that are more agile in utilizing social media. In this context, large mass organizations are required not only to convey messages, but also to be able to compete in terms of form, distribution, and language of communication that is relevant to the digital-native generation. Despite having digitized their communication, the challenges of social media algorithms and the public's tendency towards populist content remain serious obstacles to the campaign.

Both organizations' communication channels have developed, but they still need to be strengthened in terms of interactivity and penetration into online public opinion spaces. NU and Muhammadiyah already have official media outlets, but they have not yet been able to create a digital ecosystem that is competitive with non-organizational religious accounts. Therefore, in the future, it will be necessary to develop multi-channel communication strategies, involve internal influencers, and optimize public participation in the production and dissemination of moderation content.

Public response to the narratives constructed by NU and Muhammadiyah also shows a positive trend. Public surveys and mainstream media monitoring show that messages from these two mass organizations are still trusted and used as moral references by the wider community. However, in the digital public sphere, the dominance is still held by confrontational and provocative narratives. Therefore, religious political communication must pay more attention to the form of messages and delivery styles that are in line with the current rhythm of information in society.

The contributions of NU and Muhammadiyah do not stop at passive communication, but also shape opinion, reduce the potential for conflict, and strengthen socio-political ethics. NU, with its cultural approach, has proven itself capable of acting as a peacemaker in conflict-prone areas. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah contributes through multicultural education and rational and progressive public policy advocacy. Both demonstrate that moderation is not merely a discourse, but a social practice carried out through systematic and measurable communication.

In the context of democratic stability, the political communication strategies of NU and Muhammadiyah show that religion does not have to be a source of conflict, but can be an instrument of peace and reconciliation. Their success in maintaining religious and political ethics in the post-election period is a real contribution to national life. The values of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin and progressive Islam are not only conveyed through the pulpit, but also practiced through public narratives that humanize opponents and respect differences.

The findings in this study open up opportunities for the development of broader studies on Islamic political communication. The role of religious organizations as actors in public communication has not been widely explored in academic literature, even

though they have a significant influence in shaping public opinion. By examining the strategies of NU and Muhammadiyah, we can understand how moderate Islam is constructed and implemented in the context of electoral democracy, as well as how communication becomes an important medium for articulating religious values in a pluralistic public sphere.

Finally, it can be concluded that the political communication by NU and Muhammadiyah after the 2024 elections is not only a form of institutional articulation but also an ethical expression of the role of religion in democracy. They have contributed to maintaining social cohesion, reducing conflict, and strengthening the national narrative. Going forward, the main challenge is to develop adaptive, data-driven communication strategies that are responsive to the needs of society. Thus, the message of religious moderation that they carry is not only a symbol but truly a transformative force in the life of the nation and state.

REFERENCES

- Akmaliah, W., & Nadzir, I. (2024). The “elective affinity” of Islamic populism, mobilization, and social media. *Studia Islamika*, 31(1).
- Bah, A. B., & Arif, S. (2024). Digitalized electoral democracy, subversive politics, and Islam. *Comparative Sociology*, 23(4).
- Glas, T., & Remeus, P. (2019). *Politics of multiculturalism in an age of intolerance*.
- Haris, M. A., Salikin, A. D., & Sahrodi, J. (2023). Religious moderation among the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah.
- Hasanah, S. (2023). New media, pandemic, and discourse on religious moderation: A study of NU and Muhammadiyah websites.
- Kurniawan, B. D., et al. (2023). Muhammadiyah and religious moderation: Response to actions of Muhammadiyah to prevent modern radicalism.
- Kustiawan, M. T., Rasidin, M., & Witro, D. (2023). Islamic leadership contestation. *An-Nida*, 41(2).
- Mashuri, A. T., & Lubis, A. R. (2023). Construction of religious moderation at Nahdlatul Ulama online media in East Java.

- Musyarrofah, U., & Zulhannan, Z. (2023). Religious moderation in the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah in the era of Industry 4.0.
- Ruslan, I., Irham, M. A., & Halim, A. (2023). The 2024 presidential election: Religious ideology in electoral politics.
- Salendra, I. W. (2024). Religious moderation in digital media discourse: A study of the *nu.or.id* portal from the perspective of communicative rationality.
- Ubaid, A. H., & Subandi, H. B. H. (2017). Political polarization based on religious identities. *Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*.
- Wadipalapa, R. P., & Budiatri, A. P. (2025). The rise of religious brokerage.
- Yusuf, M. Z., Nahar, M. H., & Abror, H. M. (2024). Digital strategies for promoting religious moderation: The role of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama on social media.