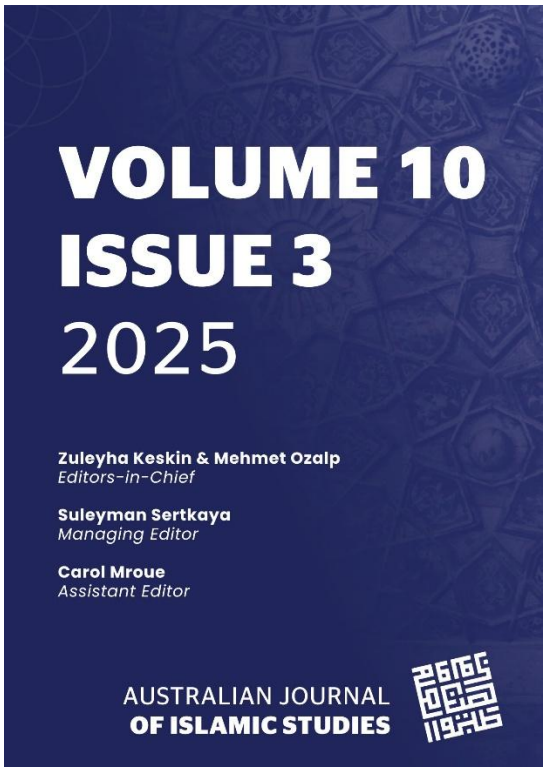

Published online: 12 Dec 2025

Youth, Islamic Social Movements, and Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Digital Public Sphere: The Case of Gerakan Islam Cinta

Zulfan Taufik

To cite this article:
Taufik, Zulfan. "Youth, Islamic Social Movements, and Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Digital Public Sphere: The Case of *Gerakan Islam Cinta*." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 3 (2025): e106. https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v10i3.909..

YOUTH, ISLAMIC SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN INDONESIA'S DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE: THE CASE OF GERAKAN ISLAM CINTA

Zulfan Taufik*

Abstract: In post-Reformasi Indonesia, the digital public sphere has become a key arena for the circulation and negotiation of Islamic ideas, particularly among young Muslims. While existing studies tend to focus on institutional actors and state-led programs of religious moderation, less attention has been paid to youth-led initiatives operating through informal and digitally mediated networks. This article examines Gerakan Islam Cinta (GIC) as a non-institutional Islamic social movement and asks how it articulates religious moderation and engages youth in contemporary public discourse. This qualitative case study draws on 15 semi-structured interviews with organisers and youth participants, longitudinal participant observation (2018–2024), and analysis of selected digital content. The findings indicate that GIC advances an ethical approach to *da'wah* (preaching) centred on compassion, relational engagement, and cultural expression. Its initiatives combine offline activities—such as literacy programs, interfaith dialogue, and training—with digital communication practices that enable participatory and network-based engagement. These findings suggest that youth-led Islamic initiatives shape public religious discourse through culturally embedded and digitally mediated practices. Rather than relying on formal religious authority, such initiatives operate through everyday interactions that reframe religious moderation within Indonesia's evolving digital public sphere.

Keywords: *Islamic social movements*, *youth activism*, *religious moderation*, *digital public sphere*, *Indonesia*

* Zulfan Taufik is an Associate Professor in the Department of Aqidah and Islamic Philosophy at State Islamic University (UIN) Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia. His publications focus on philosophy of religion, religious literacy, interfaith peacebuilding, and freedom of religion or belief in Southeast Asia. His recent research examines youth interfaith engagement, religious moderation, multiculturalism, and the politics of religious diversity in contemporary Indonesia. Scopus author ID: 58867133300. Email: zulfantaufik@uinbukittinggi.ac.id.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, changes in political openness, media technologies, and generational participation have reshaped Islamic activism in many Muslim-majority societies, particularly in post-authoritarian contexts such as Indonesia.[1] Rather than operating solely through hierarchical religious institutions or mass political parties, a growing number of Islamic initiatives—especially those involving young people—now engage public audiences through digitally mediated and network-based forms of mobilisation. Digital platforms enable religious actors to circulate messages, build audiences, and coordinate activities with relatively low organisational barriers, allowing activism to extend beyond established institutional frameworks.[2]

As Bunt explains, cyber-Islamic environments refer to digitally mediated spaces—such as social media platforms, messaging applications, and online forums—where Islamic knowledge, authority, and religious practice are produced and negotiated through everyday online interactions. In these environments, religious authority is no longer derived primarily from formal credentials or institutional position; instead, it is increasingly shaped through visibility, narrative resonance, audience engagement, and peer recognition. Users respond to sermons, share and remix content, debate interpretations, and endorse religious voices, thereby participating in the ongoing construction of legitimacy and influence.[3]

These digital spaces function not only as channels for disseminating religious ideas but as interactive arenas in which ethical orientations and religious meanings are debated and reformulated. For young Muslims, digitally mediated engagement provides opportunities to encounter diverse Islamic discourses, experiment with new modes of religious expression, and participate in conversations that are less constrained by traditional hierarchies.[4]

Youth participation has become a significant factor in shaping contemporary forms of Islamic engagement, particularly where digital media mediate religious expression and public debate. Rather than being understood merely as a demographic category, young Muslims are increasingly recognised as active agents who reinterpret religious norms, experiment with new forms of engagement, and contribute to the reconfiguration of Islamic publics through everyday practices and networked interactions.[5] Recent scholarship highlights a shift away

---

1 Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments are Transforming Religious Authority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Robert W. Hefner, "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam? Islam and Democratisation in Indonesia, 20 Years On," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1625865.

2 Soleh Hasan Wahid, "Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 10 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085; Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Daʿwa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085.

3 Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*; Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Daʿwa."

4 Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019.

5 Martin Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416798; Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and

from exclusive reliance on doctrinal authority toward more experiential, dialogical, and participatory forms of religiosity, in which narrative expression, peer interaction, and lived ethical concerns play a central role.[6] Digital media, in this regard, facilitates these transformations by enabling modes of religious learning and affiliation that privilege affective connection, personal storytelling, and relational authority over formal clerical hierarchies.[7]

This trend is salient in Southeast Asia, where countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have become important sites of youth-led Islamic engagement.[8] Across the region, scholars have documented the emergence of civic-oriented Islamic practices, post-Islamist tendencies, and forms of everyday religious activism that mobilise Islamic values in support of peacebuilding, gender awareness, environmental concern, and interfaith cooperation. These practices often unfold in hybrid spaces that combine offline community activities with digitally mediated campaigns, underscoring the growing role of digital publics in shaping contemporary religious life.[9]

Indonesia provides a strategically significant context for examining these developments due to the dynamic interplay between democratic transition, religious pluralism, and digitally mediated Islamic activism. Since the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, the country has witnessed an expansion of democratic freedoms and proliferation of competing Islamic discourses—ranging from pluralistic to puritanical, and from inclusive to intolerant.[10] Within this contested terrain, digital platforms have become key arenas for shaping public

Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335.

6 Eva F. Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1416758; Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices."

7 Heidi A. Campbell and Giulia Evolvi, "Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research on Emerging Technologies," *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.149.

8 Primitivo Cabanes Ragandang, "Social Media and Youth Peacebuilding Agency: A Case from Muslim Mindanao," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 15, no. 3 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620957572; Syamsul Rijal, "Pursuing Hijrah to Salafi Path: Urban Muslim Youth and the Quest for Self-Transformation in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 19, no. 1 (2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-024-00564-x; Abdul Hamid and Ahmad Fauzi, "Islamist Realignments and the Rebranding of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2008), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/256507.

9 Iim Halimatusa'diyah, *Beyond Slacktivism: The Dynamic Relationship between Online and Offline Activism among Southeast Asian Youths* (ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024).

10 Martin Van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Development in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn* (ISEAS, 2013); David M. Bourchier, "Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia: From Democratic Cosmopolitanism to Religious Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1590620.

perceptions of Islam, with young people positioned as active participants[11] and audiences of competing narratives.[12]

Empirical data from Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) highlights the scale of this dynamic. In 2023, adolescents (11–17 years old) and young adults (18–26 years old) were identified as the demographic most vulnerable to online radicalisation. More than 2,670 pieces of digital content promoting intolerance and extremism were detected, with 1,922 targeted for removal across platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok.[13] Earlier studies similarly indicate that 11.8% of terrorism perpetrators were under 21, and 47.3% were between 21 and 30 years old.[14] These patterns underscore the role of digital ecosystems as key sites of ideological formation and moral negotiation among Indonesian youth.

The drivers of youth susceptibility to such narratives are complex and interrelated, including structural precarity, disillusionment with political institutions, and the emotional appeal of transnational Islamist movements.[15] At the same time, radical actors have adapted effectively to the logic of digital media by producing emotionally engaging and visually compelling content that resonates with youth experience.[16] In response, promoting religious moderation and civic ethics among young people has become an important policy and social concern.

While government initiatives have largely relied on top-down approaches—such as curriculum-based religious moderation, coordinated counter-radicalisation programs, and state-led digital counter-narrative initiatives[17]—civil society organisations and major Islamic

---

11 Dwi Wahyuni and Intan Karlina, "Digital Activism for Peace: Exploring Instagram's Role in Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia," *FUADUNA: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 8, no. 2 (2024), http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v8i2.8719; Zulfan Taufik, Vivi Yulia Nora, and Mardian Sulistyati, "Religious Literacy and Youth Peacebuilding: Interfaith Engagements in Indonesian Communities," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 13, no. 2 (2025), https://doi.org/10.18588/202511.00a547.

12 Rahma Sugihartati, Bagong Suyanto, and Mun'im Sirry, "The Shift from Consumers to Prosumers: Susceptibility of Young Adults to Radicalization," *Social Sciences* 9, no. 4 (2020), https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9040040.

13 BNPT, "Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Outlook" (I-KHub, 2023), https://ikhub.id/produk/outlook/en-i-k-hub-bnpt-counter-terrorism-and-violent-extremism-outlook-2023-49480035.

14 Endra Kurniawan, "Pelaku Terorisme Banyak Dari Usia 21-30 Tahun, Benarkah Anak Muda Mudah Dipengaruhi? Ini Jawabannya" [Many Terrorists are Between the Ages of 21 and 30. Are Young People Really Easily Influenced? Here's the Answer], TribunNews.com, November 18, 2019, https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2019/11/18/pelaku-terorisme-banyak-dari-usia-21-30-tahun-benarkah-anak-muda-mudah-dipengaruhi-ini-jawabannya.

15 Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia," *South Asian Program Publications* 73 (2012).

16 Zulfan Taufik, "The Youth and the Primacy against Religious Radicalism through the Organization of Mahasiswa Ahlith Thariqah Al Mu'tabarah An Nahdliyyah (MATAN) in Indonesia," *TEOSOFI: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2019.9.1.109-130; Bagong Suyanto, Mun'im Sirry, and Rahma Sugihartati, "Pseudo-Radicalism and the De-Radicalization of Educated Youth in Indonesia," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 45, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1654726.

17 Ismatu Ropi, "Whither Religious Moderation? The State and Management of Religious Affairs in Contemporary Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 26, no. 3 (2019), https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v26i3.14055.

institutions have mobilised efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and digital literacy.[18] Nevertheless, limited scholarly attention has been given to non-institutional, youth-led Islamic movements that operate at the intersection of culture, ethics, and digital media. These movements are often informal, fluid, experimental, and tend to prioritise cultural engagement and narrative persuasion over doctrinal authority.

This article addresses that gap by examining Gerakan Islam Cinta (GIC) as a non-institutional Islamic initiative emerging within this context. Rather than approaching GIC as a normative model, the study treats it as an empirical case through which to analyse how youth-oriented Islamic activism is articulated in digitally mediated public spaces. GIC engages young Muslim through activities such as interfaith-oriented narratives, cultural production, and digital literacy initiatives, often organised through platforms including Generasi Islam Cinta (Gen-IC)[19] and the Digital Academy for Young Preachers (Akademi Digital untuk Da'i Muda/ADDEM).[20] Operating through informal networks rather than formal authority, GIC provides a case for examining how ethical discourse and religious moderation are negotiated among youth.

By analysing GIC's modes of engagement, digital narratives, and youth-oriented practices, this study contributes to broader discussions on Islamic social movements, youth activism, and religious moderation in digitally mediated public spheres. It highlights how non-institutional Islamic initiatives articulate moderation, mobilise participation, and negotiate ethical discourse through everyday practices, cultural expression, and digital communication in contemporary Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic Social Movements in the Post-Authoritarian Era

Social movements constitute an essential mechanism for collective action, particularly in societies experiencing political transition, economic disparity, and cultural contestation. Tilly emphasises that movements emerge from shared grievances and are driven by the

---

18 Masdar Hilmy, "Whither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism? A Reexamination on the Moderate Vision of Muhammadiyah and NU," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013), https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2013.7.1.24-48; Jeremy Menchik, "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1627286; Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24.

19 "Literasi Islam Cinta: Menghadirkan Cinta Dalam Ruang Baca Muslim Milenial" [Islamic Literacy of Love: Bringing Love into the Reading Space of the Millennial Muslim], Convey Indonesia, November 3, 2018, https://conveyindonesia.com/id/literasi-islam-cinta-menghadirkan-cinta-dalam-ruang-baca-muslim-milenial/.

20 Robertus Bejo, ed., "60 Peserta Dari Beragam Wilayah Indonesia Ikuti Seleksi Wawancara Akademi Digital Untuk Da'i Muda" [60 Participants from Various Regions of Indonesia Participate in the Digital Academy Interview Selection for Young Preachers], altumnews.com, September 24, 2021, https://altumnews.com/2021/09/24/60-peserta-dari-beragam-wilayah-indonesia-ikuti-seleksi-wawancara-akademi-digital-untuk-dai-muda/.

mobilisation of social networks,[21] while Tarrow identifies four defining features: sustained contentious action, collective identity, political opportunity structures, and long-term mobilisation strategies.[22] Within this framework, Islamic activism can be approached not merely as a religious phenomenon but as a form of social movement shaped by political context, cultural resources, and modes of collective engagement.

Building on these foundational insights, subsequent scholarship has highlighted important shifts in how social movements are conceptualised. Earlier studies focused primarily on movements organised toward material redistribution and direct engagement with state power. By contrast, theorists such as Touraine and Melucci reconceptualised social movements as struggles over meaning, identity, and social recognition.[23] Complementing this perspective, Cohen and Offe emphasised decentralised organisation, symbolic repertoires, and relative distance from institutional politics.[24] Together, these approaches foregrounded culture, identity, and participation as central dimensions of collective action, thereby expanding the analytical scope of social movement theory beyond state-centred explanations.[25]

These theoretical shifts are relevant for understanding Islamic activism in post-authoritarian contexts. Democratic transitions expand political opportunity structures while simultaneously intensifying contestation over moral authority, religious legitimacy, and public identity. As Wiktorowicz and Hefner observe, Islamic movements in such settings do not follow a single trajectory but diversify into multiple forms, ranging from formal organisational politics to informal, issue-based, and culturally oriented initiatives.[26] Islamic activism, therefore, encompasses a broad spectrum of social practices shaped by local contexts and historical contingencies.

In Indonesia, this pluralisation is especially evident in the post-Suharto era. The expansion of civil liberties has enabled Islamic organisations to remain influential while allowing non-institutional initiatives to emerge through informal networks.[27] These initiatives often prioritise ethical discourse, identity formation, and public visibility over doctrinal uniformity or direct competition for state power. At the same time, large-scale mobilisations—such as the 2016 *Aksi Bela Islam*—demonstrate that contentious, mass-based Islamic activism

---

21 Charles Tilly, *Studying Social Movement/Studying Collective Action*, CRSO Working Paper #168 (University of Michigan, 1977).

22 Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movement, Collective Action, and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

23 Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Temple University Press, 1989).

24 Jean L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985); Claus Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985).

25 Leo J. M. d'Anjou and J. van Male, "Between Old and New: Social Movements and Cultural Change," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1998), https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.3.2.mv32162701623653.

26 Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Indiana University Press, 2004); Hefner, "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam?"

27 Menchik, "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia."

continues to shape Indonesian politics, often blending populist rhetoric, legal claims, and religious symbolism.[28]

Scholars have interpreted this ideological fluidity through different conceptual lenses. Hadiz characterises it as Islamic populism, rooted in tensions between political elites, religious authorities, and marginalised groups.[29] By contrast, Bayat's concept of post-Islamism highlights movements that combine Islamic references with democratic norms and inclusive practices.[30] Rather than representing opposing categories, these perspectives point to the hybrid and contested nature of Islamic social movements in post-authoritarian contexts.

For this study, these frameworks provide an analytical lens for understanding non-institutional initiatives such as GIC, which operates beyond formal political structures while engaging ethical discourse and public participation. In this sense, GIC reflects broader patterns of diversification in Islamic activism, where elements of cultural engagement, civic participation, and religious discourse intersect.

Youth participation and digital media further reshape this landscape. Rather than functioning as passive recipients, young Muslims actively reinterpret religious norms through cultural expression, narrative framing, and peer-based interaction.[31] Within digitally mediated public spheres, religious authority and legitimacy are increasingly negotiated through visibility, resonance, and sustained interaction rather than formal institutional credentials.

In this context, GIC can be understood as part of broader ecology of youth-led Islamic initiatives that operates through informal networks, cultural production, and digital communication. Its practices provide a useful empirical entry point for examining how ethical discourse, religious moderation, and collective identity are articulated and negotiated among young Muslims.

Religious Moderation and Civic Engagement in Indonesia

Since the late 2010s, particularly during President Joko Widodo's second administration (2019–2024), the Indonesian government has actively promoted religious moderation as a national development priority. This agenda was institutionalised through the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024 and the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with targets such as improving the national harmony index and

---

28 Muzayyin Ahyar and Alfitri, "Aksi Bela Islam: Islamic Clicktivism and the New Authority of Religious Propaganda in the Millennial Age in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v9i1.1-29.

29 Vedi R. Hadiz, *Political Islam in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia*, CRISE Working Paper No. 74 (Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2010), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b38ed915d3cfd000be4/workingpaper74.pdf.

30 Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005), https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500089240.

31 Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia"; Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*.

addressing religious extremism.[32] Four core indicators define this model: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture.[33]

While widely endorsed in official discourse, critical scholarship cautions against treating religious moderation as a purely neutral or ethical project. Several scholars argue that state-led moderation may function as a technocratic and securitised form of governance, privileging certain interpretations while marginalising others. From this perspective, moderation operates not only as an ethical framework but as a policy instrument that shapes the boundaries of acceptable religious expression.[34]

Within this contested landscape, this study situates GIC as a non-institutional Islamic social movement. Rather than aligning formally with state programs or established religious organisations, GIC operates through informal networks and digitally mediated practices to engage young Muslims in public religious discourse. Its activities—ranging from cultural production and narrative-based outreach to digital literacy initiatives—function as forms of collective engagement through which ethical concerns and religious meanings are articulated in everyday contexts.

From an analytical perspective, GIC's engagement with religious moderation does not replicate the state's indicator-based framework. Instead, moderation is articulated through relational ethics, coexistence, and social responsibility, expressed through cultural and discursive practices. These framings operate as movement narratives rather than formal doctrines, shaping how participants interpret their religious commitments and civic roles.

In this sense, GIC illustrates how a non-institutional Islamic social movement navigates the space between state-led moderation agendas and more rigid forms of Islamist mobilisation. It neither functions as extension of state policy nor positions itself as overt opposition. Rather, it occupies an intermediate position in which youth-led activism engages public issues through cultural production and digital participation.[35]

By situating GIC within debates on religious moderation and civic engagement, this study highlights the importance of examining how moderation is enacted through everyday practices and social movement dynamics. It suggests that religious moderation in

---

32 Aqil Aziz, *Moderasi Beragama* [Religious Moderation] (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), https://www.academia.edu/72374565/Moderasi_Beragama_Menteri_Agama_RI.

33 Busyro Busyro, Aditiya Hari Ananda, and Tarihoran Sanur Adlan, "Moderasi Islam (Wasathiyyah) Di Tengah Pluralisme Agama Indonesia" [Islamic Moderation amid Indonesia's Religious Pluralism], *FUADUNA: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 3, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v3i1.1152; Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.213-241.

34 Zainal Abidin Bagir and Jimmy M.I. Sormin, eds., *Politik Moderasi Dan Kebebasan Beragama: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis* [Politics of Moderation and Religious Freedom: A Critical Review] (PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2022); Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious Intolerance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Accommodation," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 3 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1473335.

35 "Gerakan Islam Cinta" [Islamic Love Movement], accessed July 17, 2020, https://www.islamcinta.co/tentang-gic.

contemporary Indonesia cannot be understood solely through state frameworks but must also be analysed through the practices of non-institutional, youth-led initiatives operating within digitally mediated public spheres.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine how GIC articulates and disseminates religious moderation within Indonesia's digital public sphere. This approach is appropriate given the study's focus on interpretive processes of meaning-making, ethical framing, and youth mobilisation rather than on generalisable causal explanation. GIC was selected due to its sustained digital presence, youth-oriented engagement, and reliance on informal networks rather than formal religious or political institutions.

Data was collected longitudinally between 2018 and 2024 through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and digital content analysis. A total of 15 interviews were conducted, comprising five core organisers (founders, national coordinators, and program facilitators) and ten youth participants actively involved in GIC's activities. Participants, aged 18–35 and including men and women, were drawn from urban and semi-urban contexts in Jakarta, West Sumatra, and West Java. They were selected through purposive sampling based on sustained engagement with the movement and familiarity with its digital outreach.

Participant observation was carried out during key programs, including the *Islam Cinta Literacy Movement* (2018–2019) and the *Akademi Digital untuk Da'i Muda* (2021 and 2024). The researcher adopted a participant-observer role, focusing on interactional dynamics, narrative framing, and ethical discourse. In parallel, digital data was collected from GIC's website and social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and podcast), comprising approximately 50 items such as posts, short videos, campaign materials, recorded sermons, and training resources published between 2018 and 2024. Selection criteria prioritised materials related to youth engagement, explicit references to religious moderation, and evidence of sustained audience interaction.

Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive, treating analysis as an iterative process conducted throughout the research. This involved data condensation through coding and thematic focusing, data display using thematic matrices and comparative summaries, and conclusion drawing through pattern identification and cross-source verification.[36] These procedures were applied across interviews, observational notes, and digital materials to examine how religious moderation was framed, circulated, and negotiated within GIC's practices.

Ethical considerations were integrated throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent. Given that several participants occupy publicly identifiable roles and that parts of the data derive from publicly accessible materials, full anonymity was not

[36] Matthew B. Miles, Michael A. Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (Sage Publications, 2014).

uniformly applied. Instead, participants were informed about the extent of attribution, and pseudonyms were used where confidentiality was requested. Reflexive practice was maintained to account for the researcher's positionality, particularly as a participant-observer, and triangulation across data sources was employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

THE *RAISON D'ÊTRE* OF GERAKAN ISLAM CINTA: CONTESTING RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN POST-AUTHORITARIAN INDONESIA

The emergence of Gerakan Islam Cinta must be situated within the broader transformation of Indonesia's religious public sphere in the post-Reformasi era. The democratic opening following the fall of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998 expanded civil liberties while intensifying ideological contestation over religious authority.[37] Scholars have noted that this period witnessed what is often described as a "conservative turn," characterised by increasing orthodoxy, a growing emphasis on *fiqh*-centric piety, and the marginalisation of more inclusive interpretations of Islam.[38] This development unfolded within a comparative religious marketplace shaped by media expansion, urban middle-class religiosity, and digital communication.[39]

As religious authority became more fragmented and mediated through digital platforms, new actors gained visibility outside traditional institutional hierarchies. Religious narratives increasingly circulated beyond established organisations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, reshaping how legitimacy is constructed and contested.[40] In this context, authority is less monopolised by formal institutions and more actively negotiated through visibility, resonance, and networked interaction. This shift provides an important backdrop for understanding GIC's emergence in 2012 as part of broader reconfiguration of religious authority in Indonesia's digital public sphere.

Founded by Haidar Bagir, a Sufi-oriented intellectual and philanthropist, GIC was conceived amid growing polarisation and the perceived moralisation of public discourse. Rather than positioning itself as a formal religious organisation or political actor, GIC took shape as a non-institutional Islamic social movement operating through cultural production, intellectual engagement, and youth-oriented initiatives. Its *raison d'être* lies not simply in opposing extremism, but in reframing public conversations about Islam through an ethical vocabulary centred on compassion, relationality, and coexistence. This orientation reflects a

37 Bourchier, "Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia"; Zulfan Taufik, "Sharia-Based Custom and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Contemporary West Sumatra, Indonesia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Human Rights* 8, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.19184/jseahr.v8i1.40622.

38 Van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Development in Indonesian Islam*; Kikue Hamayotsu, "Conservative Turn? Religion, State and Conflict in Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2014); Mietzner and Muhtadi, "Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia."

39 Hefner, "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam?"; Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia."

40 Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*; Campbell and Evolvi, "Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research."

broader shift in Islamic activism toward culturally embedded and civic forms of engagement that move beyond rigid ideological binaries.

As Bagir suggests, the movement emerged from concerns that, without alternative narratives, public discourse could become increasingly polarised.[41] This concern is echoed in an interview with Eddy Najmuddin Aqdhiwijaya, GIC's chairman, who emphasised that GIC seeks to counter fear-based and anger-driven religious narratives by cultivating emotional intelligence, dialogical openness, and civic responsibility among young Muslims.[42] This indicates that GIC's founding impulse was not merely reactive but constructive, aiming to reshape the ethical tone of religious discourse rather than directly confront competing actors.

This orientation is reflected in GIC's public initiatives, which combine cultural expression, intellectual discourse, and media engagement. Programs such as the Festival Islam Cinta integrate academic discussion with artistic performances and interfaith dialogue, creating spaces where alternative interpretations of Islamic ethics can be encountered.[43] Similarly, Tausiyah Islam Cinta, broadcast during Ramadan through multiple radio stations and online channels, adopts a reflective and empathetic approach to preaching, emphasising spirituality and social awareness over prescriptive moralism. Rather than functioning solely as outreach activities, these initiatives illustrate how GIC translates ethical concepts into accessible and participatory forms of engagement.[44]

GIC's activities also extend into knowledge production and media dissemination. Through publishing initiatives and collaborative film projects, the movement addresses themes such as religious plurality, civic engagement, and ethical reflection.[45] These cultural productions operate as discursive interventions within Indonesia's mediated religious field, where influence increasingly depends on narrative framing, aesthetic appeal, and digital circulation.[46] This suggests that GIC's strategy is not limited to doctrinal messaging but involves shaping how religious ideas are experienced and interpreted in everyday contexts.

From a social movement perspective, GIC reflects broader transformations in collective action within digitally mediated societies. Contemporary movements often rely on decentralised networks, symbolic repertoires, and connective communication rather than

41 Haidar Bagir, "Mempromosikan Islam Cinta," Islam Cinta, 2012, https://www.islamcinta.co/tentang-gic.

42 Eddy Najmuddin Aqdhiwijaya, chairman of GIC, interview by author, Jakarta, November 30, 2018.

43 Gerakan Islam Cinta, "Festival Islam Cinta," accessed July 20, 2024, http://islamcinta.co. Additional information on GIC's programs and activities is available on its Instagram account, @islamcintaid.co, https://www.instagram.com/islamcintaid.co/.

44 Gerakan Islam Cinta, "Tausiyah Islam Cinta," accessed July 20, 2024, http://islamcinta.co. Archived recordings of these sermons are available as podcast episodes at https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/gen-ic/.

45 Gerakan Islam Cinta, "Buku Islam Cinta," accessed July 20, 2024, http://islamcinta.co. For an overview of GIC's book publications, see https://conveyindonesia.com/id/gerakan-islam-cinta-produksi-20-buku-populer-untuk-milenial-cinta-damai/.

46 Gerakan Islam Cinta, "Film Islam Cinta," accessed July 20, 2024, http://islamcinta.co. Additional information on GIC's film productions is available at https://www.medcom.id/hiburan/film/5b2Y8drN-bersama-gerakan-islam-cinta-hanung-bramantyo-produseri-4-film-religi.

hierarchical structures.[47] GIC's emphasis on festivals, literacy initiatives, and digital dissemination exemplifies this shift toward culturally embedded and networked forms of mobilisation. Youth participation is central to this process, as young Muslims are positioned not merely as audiences but as active contributors who reinterpret religious ideas through cultural and digital practices.[48]

Importantly, GIC does not function as a direct extension of state-led religious moderation, nor does it position itself in explicit opposition to it. Instead, it occupies an intermediary space within Indonesia's post-authoritarian religious field, where state initiatives, Islamist mobilisation, and civic Islamic movements intersect.[49] This positioning suggests that GIC's significance lies in its capacity to navigate competing discourse by articulating an alternative mode of engagement grounded in ethical discourse, cultural production, and digitally mediated participation.

Taken together, these dynamics indicate that GIC's *raison d'être* is closely tied to ongoing transformations in religious authority, youth engagement, and digital communication. Rather than representing a fixed model of religious moderation, it illustrates how Islamic activism is being reconfigured through everyday practices that negotiate meaning, authority, and public engagement Indonesia's evolving digital public sphere.

YOUTH MORAL AGENCY AND THE ETHICS OF *DA'WAH* IN INDONESIA'S DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

One of the defining contributions of GIC to the promotion of religious moderation in post-Reformasi Indonesia lies in its strategic engagement with youth as active agents within Indonesia's digitally mediated Islamic public sphere. In an environment where competing religious narratives circulate rapidly—ranging from pluralist to exclusionary—young Muslims are not merely audiences of *da'wah* (preaching) but participants in the production and dissemination of religious discourse. For instance, in campus-based literacy discussions and digital campaigns organised by GIC-affiliated youth networks, participants actively reinterpret religious themes through dialogue, storytelling, and collaborative reflection, illustrating how meaning is negotiated rather than passively received.

Contemporary scholarship on digital religion emphasises that social media has transformed religious authority from a centralised, institution-based model into a dispersed communicative field in which credibility is negotiated through visibility, interaction, and narrative resonance.[50] GIC's youth-oriented initiatives therefore seek to cultivate moral

47 W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661.

48 Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Daʿwa"; Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia."

49 Menchik, "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia"; Ropi, "Whither Religious Moderation?"; Zulfan Taufik and Muhammad Taufik, "Mainstreaming Religious Moderation Through Islamic Literature," *KnE Social Sciences* 7, no. 8 (2022), https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i8.10783.

50 Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*; Campbell and Evolvi, "Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research."

agency: the capacity of young people to interpret, negotiate, and communicate Islamic ethics in ways that are socially responsive and digitally literate.

Rather than framing youth as passive recipients of religious instruction, GIC positions them as co-producers of meaning capable of shaping public conversations about Islam. This is evident, for example, in literacy forums and interfaith activities where participants do not simply receive religious messages but collectively discuss themes such as tolerance, identity, and civic responsibility. Such practices reflect broader patterns identified in scholarship, where young Muslims increasingly engage religion through peer networks, cultural expression, and everyday practices rather than exclusively through clerical authority.[51]

Within this framework, *da'wah* is reconfigured from a one-directional transmission of doctrine into a dialogical practice embedded in everyday communication, cultural production, and civic engagement. This shift can be observed in GIC's emphasis on discussion-based formats, collaborative content creation, and narrative engagement, which prioritise dialogue over doctrinal instruction. In this sense, *da'wah* becomes a participatory process shaped by interaction rather than unidirectional act of preaching.

Such transformations reflect broader changes in contemporary social movements, where mobilisation often relies on decentralised networks and connective forms of participation rather than hierarchical leadership.[52] Two flagship initiatives—Gen-IC and the ADDEM—provide empirical illustrations of how these conceptual shifts are enacted in practice. Together, they demonstrate how youth agency and dialogical *da'wah* operate within concrete organisational and digital settings.

Generasi Islam Cinta: Youth Networks and Everyday Engagement

Established in 2018 as the youth network of GIC, Gen-IC operates as a decentralised community linking young people across Indonesian cities including Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Bandung, Lampung, Makassar, and Bukittinggi. Its activities combine literacy initiatives, interfaith dialogue, cultural events, and social campaigns, enabling participants to engage religious issues within locally grounded contexts rather than through centralised organisational structures.[53]

A core initiative is the *Literasi Islam Cinta*, which produced a series of popular books addressing contemporary issues through narratives emphasising compassion and coexistence. Developed in collaboration with PPIM UIN Jakarta and Convey Indonesia, this initiative aimed not only to provide alternative interpretations of Islam but also to cultivate critical engagement among young readers.[54] This illustrates how knowledge production functions as

---

51 Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Daʿwa"; Zulfan Taufik, "From Negative to Positive Peace: Strengthening the Role of Youth in Religious Peacebuilding in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra," *AKADEMIKA: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v25i2.2132.

52 Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action."

53 Eddy Najmuddin Aqdhiwijaya, chairman of GIC, interview by author, Jakarta, November 30, 2018.

54 "Gerakan Islam Cinta, Produksi 20 Buku Populer Untuk Milenial Cinta Damai" [The Islamic Love Movement has Produced 20 Popular Books for Millennials who Love Peace], Convey Indonesia,

a form of cultural intervention, shaping cognitive and affective dimensions of religious understanding.[55]

According to Kalis Mardiasih, one of the authors involved in the series, the initiative responded to concern about fragmented and often polarising digital content:

> Many young people learn about Islam from social media fragments that are often harsh and decontextualised. We wanted to present Islam in a language that is humane, reflective, and close to their everyday struggles.[56]

Similarly, Azhar Muhammad Akbar emphasised the project's dialogical intent:

> The goal was not to preach at young people but to accompany them. To discuss issues they actually face, like identity, democracy, religious tolerance, or digital life, without framing everything as a battle.[57]

These statements indicate that literacy initiative was designed not as doctrinal correction but as a platform for conversation. Disseminated through reading clubs, campus discussions, and social media campaigns, the program created spaces where religious ideas could be explored collectively.[58] This suggests that moderation is enacted through interaction and interpretation rather than imposed through authority.

Local chapters further demonstrate how youth agency is shaped by context. In Bukittinggi, for instance, activities emphasised interfaith dialogue and civic solidarity. As Rizky Silaban explained:

> Our activities are not about persuading people to adopt a certain view, but about creating encounters where trust can grow. When young people from different backgrounds collaborate, they discover that religion can connect rather than divide.[59]

This highlights how religious engagement is framed relationally, focusing on interaction rather than persuasion. From an analytical perspective, Gen-IC exemplifies networked youth activism in which religious identity is articulated through participation and shared experience. Social media amplifies these localised interactions, allowing them to circulate more widely and reinforcing patterns of connective action based on personal expression and social affinity.

December 20, 2018, https://conveyindonesia.com/id/gerakan-islam-cinta-produksi-20-buku-populer-untuk-milenial-cinta-damai/.

55 Taufik and Taufik, "Mainstreaming Religious Moderation Through Islamic Literature."

56 Kalis Mardiasih, author of the *Generasi Islam Cinta* book series, interview by author, Jakarta, January 26, 2019.

57 Azhar Muhammad Akbar, author of the *Generasi Islam Cinta* book series, interview by author, Bukittinggi, November 29, 2018.

58 Budi Cahyana, "FEATURE: Menciptakan Islam Ramah di Kalangan Milenial" [FEATURE: Creating a Millennial-Friendly Islam], Harian Jogja, December 10, 2018, https://news.harianjogja.com/read/2018/12/10/500/957897/feature-menciptakan-islam-ramah-di-kalangan-milenial; Gugum Rachmat Gumilar, "Beli Buku dengan Senyum, Program Literasi ala GIC" [Buy Books with a Smile, GIC's Literacy Program], PikiranRakyat, December 17, 2018, https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/bandung-raya/pr-01304506/beli-buku-dengan-senyum-program-literasi-ala-gic.

59 Rizky Silaban, co-founder of Generasi Islam Cinta Bukittinggi, interview by author, Bukittinggi, July 5, 2024.

The Digital Academy for Young Preachers: Forming Ethical Communicators

While Gen-IC focuses on grassroots and peer-based activism, the ADDEM addresses the formation of young religious communicators capable of engaging digital publics. The program responds to the growing influence of online religious figures and the limitations of conventional preaching formats.

According to Eddy Najmuddin Aqdhiwijaya, chairman of GIC and a key architect of the program, the initiative bridges the gap between traditional religious training and contemporary communication practices:

> Many young preachers are sincere but lack the tools to communicate effectively in the digital space. This program equips them to spread messages of Islam that are compassionate, peaceful, and relevant to contemporary audiences.[60]

First held in 2021 and repeated in 2024, the program equips participants with skills in public speaking, digital content creation, and ethical communication. The training combines webinars, mentorship, and project-based learning, with emphasis on addressing misinformation and promoting inclusive narratives.[61]

Participants' reflections illustrate this transformation. Dede Dendi described the program as providing conceptual clarity and practical direction:

> Before joining, I felt lost—like wandering in a dense forest of ideas without knowing how to translate them into meaningful *da'wah*. The academy helped me develop a clear framework grounded in love, compassion, and peaceful communication.[62]

Media reports and program documentation corroborate these accounts, noting that graduates often produce online content addressing personal spirituality, social issues, and interreligious relations.[63] These experiences suggest that religious authority is being reshaped not only through knowledge transmission but also through communicative competence and digital engagement. Graduates' subsequent production of online content indicates that *da'wah* increasingly operates within media ecosystem where influence depends on narrative relevance and audience interaction.

Taken together, the initiatives of Gen-IC and the ADDEM illustrate a broader reconfiguration of *da'wah* as ethical public communication within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Rather than asserting authority through doctrinal certainty or polemical debate, these programs emphasise dialogue, empathy, and responsiveness to social realities. Youth participants become mediators who translate religious teachings into forms meaningful for

---

60 Eddy Najmuddin Aqdhiwijaya, chairman of GIC, interview by author, Jakarta, July 27, 2024.

61 Bejo, Robertus, ed., "30 Peserta Terpilih Diberikan Beasiswa Pelatihan dan Pendampingan di Akademi Digital Untuk Da'i Muda 2021" [30 Selected Participants Awarded Training and Mentoring Scholarships at the 2021 Digital Academy for Young Preachers], altumnews.com, September 25, 2021, https://altumnews.com/2021/09/25/30-peserta-terpilih-diberikan-beasiswa-pelatihan-dan-pendampingan-di-akademi-digital-untuk-dai-muda-2021/.

62 Dede Dendi, participant in the ADDEM 1, interview by author, October 7, 2021.

63 Visual documentation of the ADDEM's activities and digital *da'wah* content produced by its alumni are on GIC's Instagram account (@islamcintaid.co): https://www.instagram.com/islamcintaid.co/.

their peers, operating within relational networks where credibility derives from authenticity rather than institutional status.

Participant observation conducted during ADDEM training sessions and Gen-IC Bukittinggi activities reinforces this interpretation. In these settings, religious moderation was enacted through dialogue across differences, collaborative initiatives, and digitally mediated communication. Activities prioritised discussion and storytelling over authoritative preaching, enabling participants to engage religious ideas in ways that are contextually relevant and socially grounded.

This suggests that youth-led initiatives do not merely disseminate religious messages but actively shape how those messages are understood and practiced. Values such as compassion, coexistence, and civic responsibility are articulated through everyday interaction, illustrating how religious engagement is being reconfigured in Indonesia's evolving digital public sphere.

RECONFIGURING RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND ISLAMIC PUBLICS IN POST-REFORMASI INDONESIA

The case of GIC illustrates how religious moderation in post-Reformasi Indonesia is being rearticulated beyond state-centred frameworks. Although concerns about interreligious harmony and extremism have shaped public policy since the democratic transition of 1998, the discourse of religious moderation was more systematically institutionalised in the late 2010s, particularly through the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Strategic Plans (2015–2019; 2020–2024) and its incorporation into the RPJMN (2020–2024). These policies promote moderation as a framework for strengthening commitment to Pancasila, maintaining social cohesion, and preventing religious extremism through programs such as curriculum reforms, training programs, and nationwide campaigns. While these initiatives emphasise tolerance and national unity, scholars note they often operates through bureaucratic and security-oriented approaches that frame religion as a domain requiring management to prevent conflict.[64] Such approaches tend to privilege formal institutions and doctrinal messaging, sometimes limiting resonance among younger generations whose religious engagement is increasingly shaped by digital culture and peer networks.

In this study, religious moderation is understood not as a fixed doctrinal position but as a socially constructed practice enacted through interaction, communication, and lived experience. Similarly, the term *Islamic publics* refers to arenas—online and offline—where religious meanings, authority, and ethical norms are negotiated through participation rather than determined solely by institutional structures. From this perspective, GIC's initiatives suggest a different trajectory of engagement. Rather than advancing a formal definition of moderation, the movement frames it as an ethical orientation enacted through everyday interaction, cultural expression, and communicative practice.

[64] Menchik, "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia"; Ropi, "Whither Religious Moderation?"

This orientation is reflected in a range of activities, including festivals, public discussions, literacy programs, youth reading clubs, digital campaigns, and training initiatives such as the ADDEM.[65] These programs create spaces where participants engage with religious issues through dialogue, artistic expression, and collaborative learning rather than formal doctrinal instruction. As seen with the literacy programs and interfaith forums, participants actively negotiate meanings of tolerance, identity, and coexistence through conversation and shared reflection. Such practices align with scholarship on post-authoritarian Islamic activism, which highlights the diversification of religious engagement into informal, issue-based, and culturally embedded forms.[66]

A key dimension of this reconfiguration lies in GIC's reliance on cultural strategies. Through festivals, literary production, film collaborations, and public storytelling, the movement intervenes in the symbolic field where meanings of Islam are contested. These activities, as observed in Festival Islam Cinta and related cultural programs, illustrate how aesthetic expression is used to communicate ethical values in accessible ways. Rather than confronting exclusivist narratives through polemics, these interventions reshape affective dispositions—encouraging empathy, dialogue, and recognition across difference. In this sense, GIC's approach reflects forms of cultural activism that emphasise emotional engagement and relational interaction as part of everyday peacebuilding practices.[67]

Digital platforms constitute another crucial arena in which GIC's approach unfolds. Social media, video content, and podcasts enable the circulation of narratives emphasising compassion and coexistence, positioning youth as producers rather than passive consumers of religious discourse. As illustrated by youth-generated content from ADDEM alumni and Gen-IC campaigns, digital engagement often takes the form of short videos, storytelling, and interactive discussions that resonate with peer audiences. Studies of digital Islam suggest that such environments redistribute authority by privileging communicative competence and network visibility over traditional credentials.[68] In this context, GIC's digital practices indicate a shift in how religious messages gain traction within youth communities.

Importantly, these practices unfold within a highly contested political landscape. The mass mobilisation associated with the 2016 "212 movement" demonstrates the mobilising power of religious symbolism in populist politics, while state institutions formalised moderation as a response. GIC's engagement neither directly aligns with populist mobilisation nor operates as an extension of state policy. Instead, it occupies an intermediary space within Indonesia's plural religious field, where civic initiatives, institutional actors, and ideological movements

---

65 Gerakan Islam Cinta, "Festival Islam Cinta." Additional information on GIC's programs and activities is available on its Instagram account, @islamcintaid.co, https://www.instagram.com/islamcintaid.co/.

66 Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera, *Being Young and Muslim* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Hefner, "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam?"

67 Roger Mac Ginty, "Everyday Peace: Bottom-up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies," *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 6 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614550899.

68 Moch Fakhruroji, "Digitalizing Islamic Lectures: Islamic Apps and Religious Engagement in Contemporary Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 13, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0427-9; Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*.

interact and compete.[69] This positioning, as reflected in its programs and narratives, allows GIC to navigate multiple discourse without being fully subsumed under political Islam or state-led moderation.

Concrete examples illustrate how these dynamics unfold in practice. Collaborative initiatives such as the #salingjaga campaign in Bukittinggi mobilised youth across religious backgrounds to coordinate humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literacy programs and reading forums created dialogical spaces where participants engaged religious ideas across differences, while digital outputs from ADDEM alumni—such as sermons, podcasts, and social media posts—emphasised compassion and coexistence. These examples demonstrate how moderation is enacted through interaction, communication, and shared activity rather than through formal proclamation.

At the same time, claims regarding broader transformations—such as the reconfiguration of Islamic publics or shifts in religious authority—should be understood as emerging tendencies suggested by this case rather than as generalisable conclusions. The practices observed in GIC indicate movement toward more distributed and network-based forms of engagement, where authority is negotiated through participation and communication. However, these developments remain context-specific and coexist with enduring hierarchical and institutional forms of religious authority in Indonesia.

While GIC's intermediary position offers potential for bridging polarised discourses, it has limitations. Its reliance on voluntary participation and network-based engagement may constrain its reach beyond certain youth and urban communities. Moreover, its emphasis on cultural and dialogical approaches may have limited resonance among groups oriented toward more doctrinal or formal religious frameworks. These constraints suggest that, while GIC provides an important example of alternative engagement, its impact should be understood within its social and cultural contexts rather than as a comprehensive model of religious moderation.

Taken together, these observations suggest that GIC contributes to ongoing transformations in how religious moderation is articulated within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Rather than representing a definitive shift, the case illustrates how Islamic discourse is being negotiated through culturally embedded, participatory, and digitally mediated practices that coexist with other forms of religious authority and engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how GIC articulates Islamic activism through youth-oriented, culturally embedded, and digitally mediated practices in post-Reformasi Indonesia. The findings indicate that initiatives such as Gen-IC and the ADDEM position young Muslims as active communicators who interpret, negotiate, and disseminate religious ideas within everyday social and digital contexts. As illustrated through literacy programs, interfaith

[69] Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam."

activities, and digital content production, religious moderation is enacted not as a fixed doctrinal position but as a socially negotiated practice embedded in dialogue, interaction, and civic engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to scholarship on Islamic social movements, youth engagement, and digital religion by demonstrating how non-institutional initiatives operate through decentralised networks and communicative practices rather than formal authority. It highlights how religious authority is negotiated through interaction, narrative, and participation in digitally mediated environments, while emphasising the role of youth as moral agents who shape public religious discourse. These findings suggest that youth-led initiatives such as GIC provide insight into emerging forms of Islamic engagement within Indonesia's evolving digital public sphere.

At the same time, these findings should be understood within the limits of a qualitative case study. The analysis is based on a single movement and specific empirical contexts; therefore, it does not produce generalisable conclusions about Indonesian Islam as a whole. Rather, the case of GIC illustrates one possible mode of engagement in which youth, cultural expression, and digital communication intersect, offering a context-specific perspective on how religious discourse is negotiated in contemporary Indonesia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahyar, Muzayyin, and Alfitri. "Aksi Bela Islam: Islamic Clicktivism and the New Authority of Religious Propaganda in the Millennial Age in Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–29. https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v9i1.1-29.

Akmaliah, Wahyudi. "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24.

d'Anjou, Leo J. M., and J. van Male. "Between Old and New: Social Movements and Cultural Change." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1998): 207–26. https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.3.2.mv32162701623653.

Aziz, Aqil. *Moderasi Beragama* [Religious Moderation]. Kementerian Agama RI, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/72374565/Moderasi_Beragama_Menteri_Agama_RI.

Bagir, Haidar. "Mempromosikan Islam Cinta" [Promoting Compassionate Islam]. Islam Cinta, 2012. https://www.islamcinta.co/tentang-gic.

Bagir, Zainal Abidin, and Jimmy M.I. Sormin, eds. *Politik Moderasi Dan Kebebasan Beragama: Suatu Tinjauan Kritis* [Politics of Moderation and Religious Freedom: A Critical Review]. PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2022.

Bayat, Asef. "Islamism and Social Movement Theory." *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005): 891–908. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500089240.

Bayat, Asef, and Linda Herrera. *Being Young and Muslim*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Bejo, Robertus, ed. "30 Peserta Terpilih Diberikan Beasiswa Pelatihan dan Pendampingan di Akademi Digital Untuk Da'i Muda 2021" [30 Selected Participants Awarded Training and Mentoring Scholarships at the 2021 Digital Academy for Young Preachers]. altumnews.com, September 25, 2021. https://altumnews.com/2021/09/25/30-peserta-terpilih-diberikan-beasiswa-pelatihan-dan-pendampingan-di-akademi-digital-untuk-dai-muda-2021/.

Bejo, Robertus, ed. "60 Peserta Dari Beragam Wilayah Indonesia Ikuti Seleksi Wawancara Akademi Digital Untuk Da'i Muda" [60 Participants from Various Regions of Indonesia Participate in the Digital Academy Interview Selection for Young Preachers]. altumnews.com, September 24, 2021. https://altumnews.com/2021/09/24/60-peserta-dari-beragam-wilayah-indonesia-ikuti-seleksi-wawancara-akademi-digital-untuk-dai-muda/.

Bennett, W. Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics." *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 739–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661.

BNPT. "Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism Outlook." I-KHub, 2023. https://ikhub.id/produk/outlook/en-i-k-hub-bnpt-counter-terrorism-and-violent-extremism-outlook-2023-49480035.

Bourchier, David M. "Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia: From Democratic Cosmopolitanism to Religious Nationalism." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49 (2019): 713–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1590620.

Bunt, Gary R. *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments are Transforming Religious Authority*. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Busyro, Busyro, Aditiya Hari Ananda, and Tarihoran Sanur Adlan. "Moderasi Islam (Wasathiyyah) Di Tengah Pluralisme Agama Indonesia" [Islamic Moderation Amid Indonesia's Religious Pluralism]. *FUADUNA: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 3, no. 1 (2019): 1. https://doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v3i1.1152.

Cahyana, Budi. "FEATURE: Menciptakan Islam Ramah di Kalangan Milenial" [FEATURE: Creating a Millennial-Friendly Islam]. Harian Jogja, December 10, 2018. https://news.harianjogja.com/read/2018/12/10/500/957897/feature-menciptakan-islam-ramah-di-kalangan-milenial.

Campbell, Heidi A., and Giulia Evolvi. "Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research on Emerging Technologies." *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.149.

Cohen, Jean L. "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements." *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 663–716.

Convey Indonesia. "Gerakan Islam Cinta, Produksi 20 Buku Populer Untuk Milenial Cinta Damai" [The Islamic Love Movement has Produced 20 Popular Books for Millennials who Love Peace]. December 20, 2018. https://conveyindonesia.com/id/gerakan-islam-cinta-produksi-20-buku-populer-untuk-milenial-cinta-damai/.

Convey Indonesia. "Literasi Islam Cinta: Menghadirkan Cinta Dalam Ruang Baca Muslim Milenial" [Islamic Literacy of Love: Bringing Love into the Reading Space of the Millennial Muslim]. November 3, 2018. https://conveyindonesia.com/id/literasi-islam-cinta-menghadirkan-cinta-dalam-ruang-baca-muslim-milenial/.

Fakhruroji, Moch. "Digitalizing Islamic Lectures: Islamic Apps and Religious Engagement in Contemporary Indonesia." *Contemporary Islam* 13, no. 2 (2019): 201–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0427-9.

"Gerakan Islam Cinta" [Islamic Love Movement]. Accessed July 17, 2020. https://www.islamcinta.co/tentang-gic.

Gerakan Islam Cinta. "Buku Islam Cinta." Accessed July 20, 2024. http://islamcinta.co.

Gerakan Islam Cinta. "Festival Islam Cinta." Accessed July 20, 2024. http://islamcinta.co.

Gerakan Islam Cinta. "Film Islam Cinta." Accessed July 20, 2024. http://islamcinta.co.

Gerakan Islam Cinta. "Tausiyah Islam Cinta." Accessed July 20, 2024. http://islamcinta.co.

Ginty, Roger Mac. "Everyday Peace: Bottom-up and Local Agency in Conflict-Affected Societies." *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 6 (2014): 548–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614550899.

Gumilar, Gugum Rachmat. "Beli Buku dengan Senyum, Program Literasi ala GIC" [Buy Books with a Smile, GIC's Literacy Program]. PikiranRakyat, December 17, 2018. https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/bandung-raya/pr-01304506/beli-buku-dengan-senyum-program-literasi-ala-gic.

Hadiz, Vedi R. *Political Islam in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia*. CRISE Working Paper No. 74. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2010. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b38ed915d3cfd000be4/workingpaper74.pdf.

Halimatusa'diyah, Iim. *Beyond Slacktivism: The Dynamic Relationship between Online and Offline Activism among Southeast Asian Youths*. ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024.

Hamayotsu, Kikue. "Conservative Turn? Religion, State and Conflict in Indonesia." *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2014): 815–25.

Hamid, Abdul, and Ahmad Fauzi. "Islamist Realignments and the Rebranding of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia." *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2008): 215–40. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/256507.

Hasan, Noorhaidi. "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia." *South Asian Program Publications* 73 (2012): 145–69.

Hefner, Robert W. "Whatever Happened to Civil Islam? Islam and Democratisation in Indonesia, 20 Years On." *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (2019): 375–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1625865.

Hilmy, Masdar. "Whither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism? A Reexamination on the Moderate Vision of Muhammadiyah and NU." *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 24–48. https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2013.7.1.24-48.

Kurniawan, Endra. "Pelaku Terorisme Banyak Dari Usia 21-30 Tahun, Benarkah Anak Muda Mudah Dipengaruhi? Ini Jawabannya" [Many Terrorists are Between the Ages of 21 and 30. Are Young People Really Easily Influenced? Here's the Answer]. TribunNews.com, November 18, 2019. https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2019/11/18/pelaku-terorisme-banyak-dari-usia-21-30-tahun-benarkah-anak-muda-mudah-dipengaruhi-ini-jawabannya.

Melucci, Alberto. *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Temple University Press, 1989.

Menchik, Jeremy. "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia." *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (2019): 415–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1627286.

Mietzner, Marcus, and Burhanuddin Muhtadi. "Explaining the 2016 Islamist Mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious Intolerance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Accommodation."

Asian Studies Review 42, no. 3 (2018): 479–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2018.1473335.

Miles, Matthew B., Michael A. Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. 3rd ed. Sage Publications, 2014.

Nasir, Muhammad, and Muhammad Khairul Rijal. "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 213–41. https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.213-241.

Nisa, Eva F. "Creative and Lucrative Daʿwa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia." *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (2018): 68–99. https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085.

Nisa, Eva F. "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 24–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1416758.

Offe, Claus. "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics." *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 817–68.

Ragandang, Primitivo Cabanes. "Social Media and Youth Peacebuilding Agency: A Case from Muslim Mindanao." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 15, no. 3 (2020): 348–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620957572.

Rijal, Syamsul. "Pursuing Hijrah to Salafi Path: Urban Muslim Youth and the Quest for Self-Transformation in Indonesia." *Contemporary Islam* 19, no. 1 (2025): 101–21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-024-00564-x.

Ropi, Ismatu. "Whither Religious Moderation? The State and Management of Religious Affairs in Contemporary Indonesia." *Studia Islamika* 26, no. 3 (2019): 597–601. https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v26i3.14055.

Slama, Martin. "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416798.

Solahudin, Dindin, and Moch Fakhruroji. "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority." *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019.

Sugihartati, Rahma, Bagong Suyanto, and Mun'im Sirry. "The Shift from Consumers to Prosumers: Susceptibility of Young Adults to Radicalization." *Social Sciences* 9, no. 4 (2020): 40. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9040040.

Suyanto, Bagong, Mun'im Sirry, and Rahma Sugihartati. "Pseudo-Radicalism and the De-Radicalization of Educated Youth in Indonesia." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 45, no. 2 (2022): 180–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1654726.

Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Social Movement, Collective Action, and Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Taufik, Zulfan. "From Negative to Positive Peace: Strengthening the Role of Youth in Religious Peacebuilding in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra." *AKADEMIKA: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 2 (2020): 257–76. https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v25i2.2132.

Taufik, Zulfan. "Sharia-Based Custom and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Contemporary West Sumatra, Indonesia." *Journal of Southeast Asian Human Rights* 8, no. 1 (2024): 115–42. https://doi.org/10.19184/jseahr.v8i1.40622.

Taufik, Zulfan. "The Youth and the Primacy against Religious Radicalism through the Organization of Mahasiswa Ahlith Thariqah Al Mu'tabarah An Nahdliyyah (MATAN) in Indonesia." *TEOSOFI: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 1 (2019): 109–30. https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2019.9.1.109-130.

Taufik, Zulfan, Vivi Yulia Nora, and Mardian Sulistyati. "Religious Literacy and Youth Peacebuilding: Interfaith Engagements in Indonesian Communities." *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 13, no. 2 (2025): 231–48. https://doi.org/10.18588/202511.00a547.

Taufik, Zulfan, and Muhammad Taufik. "Mainstreaming Religious Moderation Through Islamic Literature." *KnE Social Sciences* 7, no. 8 (2022): 660–69. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i8.10783.

Tilly, Charles. *Studying Social Movement/Studying Collective Action*. CRSO Working Paper #168. University of Michigan, 1977.

Touraine, Alain. *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Van Bruinessen, Martin. *Contemporary Development in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn*. ISEAS, 2013.

Wahid, Soleh Hasan. "Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis." *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 10 (2024): 101085. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085.

Wahyuni, Dwi, and Intan Karlina. "Digital Activism for Peace: Exploring Instagram's Role in Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia." *FUADUNA: Jurnal Kajian Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 8, no. 2 (2024): 110–23. http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/fuaduna.v8i2.8719.

Wiktorowicz, Quintan, ed. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. Indiana University Press, 2004.

Zaid, Bouziane, Jana Fedtke, Don Donghee Shin, Abdelmalek El Kadoussi, and Mohammed Ibahrine. "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices." *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 335. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335.