

PERSPECTIVES OF INTERFAITH FIGURES ON RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN AN "INTOLERANT CITY": A STUDY IN PADANG

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the perspectives of interfaith leaders in Padang City on religious moderation. This study uses a naturalistic qualitative approach, with data collection techniques of in-depth interviews with Muslim, Catholic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian religious leaders. This study focuses on four pillars or indicators of religious moderation, namely commitment to nation and state, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation to local culture. The results found that interfaith leaders in Padang City strongly support the concept of religious moderation because religious moderation is believed to be relevant to the teachings of each religion, such as the common ideals of building the life of the nation and state for mutual progress, living in harmony amid differences, rejecting acts of violence in the name of religion, and maintaining and respecting local culture. This study also found that interfaith leaders as religious elites spread the values of religious moderation to each of their followers. The interfaith leaders also agreed that Padang City is conducive in terms of interfaith relations, even though the city is ranked low in the tolerance index by a number of research institutions.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation, Interfaith Leaders, City of Padang*

Abstrak

Diskursus seputar persoalan teologi Islam masa klasik yang berkembang selama ini Studi ini bertujuan untuk melihat perspektif tokoh lintas agama Kota Padang terhadap moderasi beragama. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif naturalistik, dengan teknik pengumpulan data wawancara mendalam kepada tokoh agama Islam, Katolik, Kristen, Hindu, Budha, dan Konghucu. Kajian ini fokus pada empat pilar atau indikator moderasi beragama, yakni komitmen berbangsa dan bernegara, toleransi, anti kekerasan, dan akomodatif terhadap budaya lokal. Hasil riset menemukan bahwa tokoh lintas agama Kota Padang sangat mendukung konsep moderasi beragama karena moderasi beragama diyakini relevan dengan ajaran masing-masing agama, seperti kesamaan cita-cita membangun kehidupan berbangsa dan bernegara untuk kemajuan bersama, hidup dengan rukun di tengah perbedaan, menolak tindak kekerasan yang mengatasnamakan agama, serta saling menjaga dan menghargai kebudayaan lokal. Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa para tokoh lintas agama sebagai elit agama menyebarkan nilai-nilai moderasi beragama kepada masing-masing umat mereka. Para tokoh lintas agama juga sepakat bahwa Kota Padang kondusif dalam konteks hubungan antar umat beragama, meskipun kota ini diposisikan rendah dalam indeks toleransi oleh sejumlah lembaga riset.

Kata Kunci: *Moderasi Beragama, Tokoh Lintas Agama, Kota Padang*

A. Introduction

The classification of Indonesia as the world's largest multicultural country (Nurchayono, 2018) is marked, among other factors, by its religious diversity (including Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, etc.), numerous languages (estimated to exceed 700), and the presence of diverse indigenous ethnic traditions handed down from ancestors (Agustianty, 2011). It's intriguing that multicultural reality doesn't just exist on a national scale but also manifests at the local level. Virtually every region across the country showcases diversity, encompassing differences in religion, ethnicity, and language, albeit to varying extents. Nonetheless, specific areas are characterized by the dominance of particular communities. Take Padang city, for example. Apart from being primarily inhabited by the Minang ethnic group, Islam also represents the majority religion among its populace. According to data published by BPS in 2024, over 97% of the population here identifies as Muslim, amidst a minority following other religions.

One of the recent discourses concerning religion and diversity is religious moderation, which is characterized by a perspective, attitude, and behavior marked by fairness, non-extremism, and positioning oneself in the middle ground in religious matters. Among the four pillars of religious moderation, the second pillar is tolerance. Meanwhile, the first pillar is commitment to the nation and state, while the two pillars following it are anti-violence and accommodation towards local culture (Litbang, 2019).

These four pillars are fundamental, particularly in the context of Indonesia, concerning religion. Therefore, religious moderation becomes crucial, and its study extends beyond theoretical conceptualization but also requires practical implementation and contextualization. In this context, the study of interfaith figures' perspectives on religious moderation becomes important, especially in areas often positioned low in religious harmony and tolerance, such as Padang City.

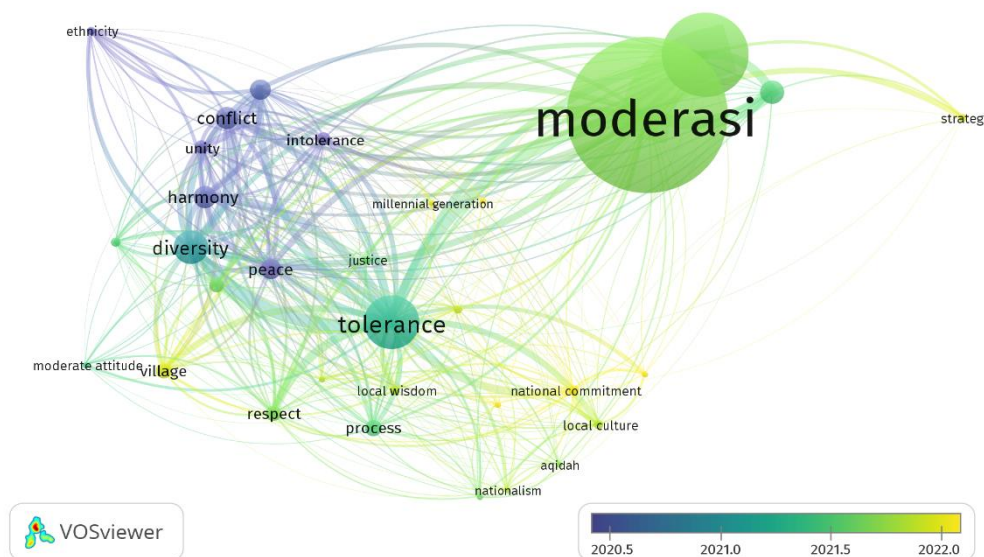
As previously mentioned, besides being predominantly inhabited by the Minang ethnic group as local residents, the population of Padang City is also predominantly Muslim. In Minangkabau tradition or tambo, custom and religion are two integrated entities known as the adage ABS-SBK, or Adat Basandi Syarak-Syarak Basandi Kitabullah. This means that customs are based on syarak or Islamic law, and syarak is based on the Kitabullah or the Quran. This cultural heritage is interpreted by Minang people as an argument to explain their identity, stating that every Minang ethnic must embrace Islam. Moreover, everything related to their lives and livelihoods must also be relevant to the values of Islamic teachings (Amin, 2022). Padang-West Sumatra is one of the eight provinces allocated budget for strengthening religious moderation and also designated as a model for years of tolerance and religious harmony (Rina, 2021). Secondly, the socialization and strengthening of religious moderation activities carried out by the Regional Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of West Sumatra Province on December 6 to 8, 2021, attended by religious leaders, community leaders, customary leaders, youth leaders, and FKUB officials, have brought several indicators of religious moderation including national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, adherence to applicable rules, and respect for local wisdom or culture. Thus, Padang-West Sumatra is currently actively increasing understanding about the map and dynamics of diversity in the community based on these indicators (Wahyudi, 2021).

The study of interfaith leaders' perceptions in Padang City on religious moderation becomes significantly more intriguing because, as mentioned above, this city has been repeatedly positioned by several research institutions at a low rank in terms of religious tolerance and harmony. For instance, the Setara Institute in 2015 placed this city at 79 out of 94 cities in Indonesia. In subsequent years' surveys, Padang has consistently been ranked near the bottom, with the latest release in early 2014 placing it at 91 out of 94 evaluated cities. This means that for almost the past decade, this city has been assessed poorly by the Setara Institute in the context of religious tolerance. The fundamental and pressing question arising from this fact is: what are the perspectives of interfaith leaders in this city regarding issues of tolerance, or in a broader scope, related to religious moderation? In this context, this research becomes urgent and compelling to undertake.

To date, numerous studies have explored religious moderation from various perspectives these include conceptual research on the values inherent in religious moderation (Alibe, 2022; Muhtarom et al., 2020), field studies on the implementation strategies of religious moderation (Akhmadi, 2019; Khotimah, 2020; Litbang, 2019;

Muhtarom et al., 2020; Nurbaiti, 2023; Pute & Parai, 2023; Sutrisno, 2019; Widodo & Karnawati, 2019), models of religious moderation, its role as a medium in addressing radicalism (Choirunissa & Nurdin, 2020), studies on the development of religious moderation for minorities (Iffan et al., 2020; Widodo & Karnawati, 2019), and even a mental revolution in the application of religious moderation (Ramli, 2019), When visualized using VOSviewer tools (Khalil Nurul Islam, 2020). these studies can be observed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. VOSviewer Visualization of Religious Moderation



The image above demonstrates that studies on religious moderation are interconnected with several other significant discourses, such as strategies (2022), religion (2021), radicalism (2021), tolerance (2021), diversity (2021), peace (2020), conflict (2020), and intolerance (2020). Consequently, this study will complement existing research on religious moderation by examining perspectives from interfaith figures in Padang City, often labeled as an intolerant city. Similar research focusing specifically on the views of interfaith figures in regions categorized with low tolerance indexes has not been found to date. Therefore, this research will broaden the scope of studies on religious moderation and serve as a comparison to existing research on Padang City, particularly regarding religious harmony and tolerance.

B. Method

This article is based on field research that employs qualitative analysis with a naturalistic-phenomenological approach. Data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews with informants selected using purposive sampling techniques. The interviews included interfaith figures in Padang City, representing Islam, Christianity,

Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, as primary data sources. Secondary data was obtained from relevant literature related to the study. The collected literature data was processed using VOSviewer tools. Subsequently, the data was analyzed using qualitative techniques, including stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Maleong, 1990:93).

C. Discussion

1. Religious Moderation: Perspectives of Interfaith Figures in Padang City

Etymologically, it can be elucidated that "moderate" is an adjective derived from the word "moderation," signifying "not excessive" or "moderate" (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2021). The incorporation of this term into the Indonesian language, as per the KBBI (Indonesian Dictionary), is construed as the reduction of violence, avoidance of extremism, or attainment of moderation (neither excess nor deficiency). According to Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, former Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and known initiator, the compound term "religious moderation" denotes the disposition to reduce violence or eschew extremism in religious practices. He posits that religious moderation fundamentally embodies the essence of religion, rendering its implementation imperative within Indonesia's plural and multicultural milieu to foster harmony among religious communities (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2021). Put simply, religious moderation encapsulates a perspective, demeanor, and conduct characterized by fairness, moderation, and consistent alignment with a middle ground in religious contexts (Litbang, 2019).

Religious moderation is a proposal put forth by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to foster peaceful and harmonious religious life (Litbang, 2019). This highly urgent proposal certainly did not arise in a vacuum. Indonesia's highly diverse religious social background cannot be viewed solely in a positive and constructive light, but must also be approached with caution. In short, it can be asserted that one of the greatest threats that could result in the disintegration of the nation is conflicts with religious backgrounds, especially those accompanied by acts of violence. This is possible because religion, wherever it may be, inherently involves bias heavily laden with emotional content and high subjectivity, according to Saifuddin, thus creating emotional bonds among its adherents. Even for fervent believers, religion is a sacred, mystical, and revered "object," so instead of leading to a peaceful and tranquil life, extreme fanaticism towards interpretations of religious truths often leads to hostility and disputes (Kemenag, 2021).

Religious moderation can be considered the key to fostering tolerance and harmony, both at the local, national, and even global levels. Choosing moderation by rejecting both extremism and liberalism in religion is crucial for maintaining balance, preserving civilization, and creating peace. In this way, adherents of each religion can treat others with respect, accept differences, and live together in peace and harmony. Therefore, in multicultural societies like Indonesia, religious moderation may not be an

option but a necessity (Ridwan Jamal, 1999: 131). To ensure that religious understanding remains moderate and does not lean towards extremism or liberalism, it is important to utilize religious texts, the constitution of the state, local wisdom, as well as consensus and common agreement. Only with the concept of balance can religious communities live side by side and accept differences. Therefore, religious moderation must be based on the principles of fairness (not biased or partisan) in understanding, responding to, and practicing religious concepts. Secondly, balance is a perspective that always favors justice, humanity, and equality. (Litbang, 2019).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as the leading government sector in religious policy, has issued several publications to serve as guidelines for explaining and promoting religious moderation. One of these publications, seemingly the most important, is the Pocket Book of Religious Moderation (2019), which comprehensively explains the historicity and normativity of religious moderation. In this book, the four pillars, perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors of religious moderation are explained, including (1) national commitment, (2) tolerance, (3) anti-violence, and (4) accommodation of local culture. National commitment relates to loyalty to the state, including forms of implementation such as accepting the nation's principles enshrined in the constitution and legislation, as well as regulations produced by the state. Meanwhile, the pillar of tolerance entails mutual respect, appreciation of differences, always leaving room, and not depriving others of the right to express and convey their opinions. The focus of tolerance in religious moderation emphasizes tolerance among religious communities, within religious communities, as well as social and political tolerance. The anti-violence pillar is closely related to programs aimed at combating radicalism. In this context, radicalism is understood as an ideology that seeks rapid reform in the social and political system using verbal, physical, and mental violence, even deemed coercive (extreme) always under the guise of religion. Lastly, the pillar of accommodation towards local culture involves a moderate attitude of hospitality and easy acceptance of existing differences, such as embracing practices that blend tradition and culture in religion (Kemenag, 2021).

In this study, these four pillars serve as variables for further exploration, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of interfaith figures in Padang City regarding religious moderation. As influential individuals, interfaith figures are perceived as capable of instilling spiritual and religious values within the community (Firmando, 2021). Moreover, they serve as points of reference in religious life and are consistently engaged in resolving religious matters (Usman, n.d.). It is important to acknowledge that the perspectives of these interfaith figures on religious moderation may vary due to their diverse background.

2. National Commitment; Agreeing to Uphold the Values of Togetherness

National commitment is one of the indicators found in the realization of religious moderation. The perspective and religious practices of an individual can be

considered moderate or not, among other things, based on how they live their lives as citizens (ST. Hardianti, 2021). Every religion teaches the values of national and state life. Acceptance of the concept of national commitment in national and state life is implemented by embracing the values contained in the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila.

In the context of national commitment, all interfaith leaders in Padang City who were interviewed, including leaders from Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, unanimously agree on upholding the values of togetherness, justice, and balance that must be embraced by every adherent of religion (Father Sudarma, Made Subawa, Hendri Yazid, Harwan Kasri, Pastor Petrus, Pittarini, and Rev. Salmon, Interview, 2022). Furthermore, according to Pastor Petrus, a Catholic community leader in Padang City, "national commitment also emphasizes the values of togetherness and living side by side with a multicultural society" (Pastor Petrus, Interview, 2022). The implementation of these values of togetherness is interpreted as the ability to build strong brotherhood among religious communities and the ability to live together peacefully with various ethnicities, tribes, races, and religions. Additionally, according to Father Sudarma, a Buddhist community leader in Padang City, religious moderation is closely related to the active role of the government. He stated:

"The realization of religious moderation will be easily achievable if the government provides support by acting fairly and impartially, refraining from discrimination or coercion against specific groups in accordance with the laws of Indonesia," (Romo Sudarma in an interview in 2022)

Textually and conceptually, according to interfaith leaders in Padang City, the obligation of adherents of religion to implement the concept of commitment within the nation has been conveyed in their respective scriptures. For example, in the context of Hinduism, it is found in the Sarasamuscaya Scripture: 31, in Islam in Surah At-Tawbah: 122, and in Christian teachings in the Book of Matthew 22:37-39. These verses serve as a reference for religious leaders in disseminating the values of togetherness, love, and sacrifice in national and state life (Made Subawa, Harwan Kasri & Rev. Salmon, Interview, 2022).

In terms of practical implementation in the field, the realization of religious moderation in the context of national commitment in Padang City can be observed through the presence of educational institutions owned by foundations or religious organizations that are open to the public and incorporate curricula focusing on national commitment. An example of this is the Buddhist educational institution named Manjushri National Plus School, which is owned by the Tri Ratna Padang Foundation and offers education from kindergarten to junior high school levels. At this educational institution, emphasis is placed on character education, including teaching human values and promoting harmonious living among families and communities, thereby contributing to national unity (Father Sudarma & Pittarini, Interview, 2022).

3. Tolerance: An Essential Element in Life

Being tolerant is one of the indicators in the paradigm of religious moderation. This attitude manifests in allowing space and not disturbing the rights of others in their beliefs, expressing beliefs, and voicing opinions. Tolerance is an essential element in life. According to interfaith figures in Padang City, the tolerance indicator in the concept of religious moderation aims "to create a conducive atmosphere among religious communities, foster active harmony, care for each other, facilitate interactions both internally and externally among religious communities, and, of course, foster a moderate attitude in religious practices" (Father Sudarma, Pastor Petrus & Pittarini, Interview, 2022). Furthermore, according to Made Subawa, a Hindu community leader in Padang City:

"Tolerance encompasses not only fostering relationships among fellow human beings but also extends to our relationship with other living creatures such as animals and plants. Fundamentally, all living beings are creations of God, deserving respect and appropriate treatment" (Made Subawa, Interview, 2022).

Tolerance must be present in both thought and action, believing that every individual, regardless of their religion or beliefs, is in an equal position. So far, the role of religious figures in Padang City in advocating for the values of tolerance includes fostering a sense of love among each other, mutual respect, and appreciation for each individual's beliefs, and building good relationships among fellow religious communities. They make these efforts within their respective communities. According to Hendri Yazid, a Muslim leader in Padang City, there are several fundamental values that must be realized and understood by religious communities in the context of tolerance. Yazid explained:

The concept of tolerance is also understood through *tasamuh*, which means mutual respect, depicting an attitude of mutual respect and cooperation within groups of society that differ ethnically, linguistically, culturally, politically, and religiously. Therefore, tolerance is a noble concept that is part of the teachings of religions (Hendri Yazid, Interview, 2022).

The application of tolerance, according to interfaith figures in Padang City, touches every aspect of life, whether social, political, economic, or theological. Thus, the aspirations aimed at maintaining peace and unity among communities can be concretely achieved. This sentiment is affirmed by Pastor Petrus, a Catholic community leader in Padang City:

"The concept of religious moderation serves as a perspective for fulfilling the role of a peace advocate. Its aim is to facilitate interactions to the fullest extent possible within religious communities and among adherents present in Padang City" (Pastor Petrus, Interview, 2022).

In the context of religious teachings, according to interfaith figures in Padang City, the recommendation to lead a tolerant life among religious communities has been

conveyed by each religion. For example, values of harmony are enshrined in the Yajurveda XI.6, Surah Al-Hujurat:10, Acts of the Apostles 17:26, Lun YU II, 14, and John 13:34. Verses in these scriptures serve as a reference for religious leaders to nurture the values of love, mutual respect, and to strengthen morals, ethics, and character among religious communities in fostering tolerance among them. Tolerance becomes a meeting point due to the belief and concern that diversity is one of the triggers for conflict. By instilling the values of tolerance in every adherent of religion, tensions based on these differences will decrease (Made Subawa, Harwan Kasri & Pastor Petrus, Interview, 2022).

4. Anti-violence: Cultivating a Sense of Compassion

In addition to fostering a tolerant attitude among individuals to achieve religious moderation, having an anti-violence stance is also a crucial indicator. Basically, every religious doctrine rejects violence in any form, as emphasized by Reverend Salmon, a Protestant community leader in Padang City, who states that anti-violence applies not only to fellow believers but also generally towards fellow human beings. Reverend Salmon affirms:

"Acts of violence are unjustifiable for Protestants. Rooted in the concept of religious moderation understood by Protestant Christianity, it is the manifestation of unconditional love that radiates and extends to everyone. The concept of loving one another, as conveyed by Jesus, is not limited to those under the umbrella of Protestantism alone but is directed towards all fellow human beings" (Rev. Salmon, Interview, 2022).

Interfaith leaders in Padang City are making various efforts to raise awareness among their followers, urging them to refrain from committing acts of violence. These efforts include consistently instilling and nurturing a sense of compassion and discouraging harm towards others. According to them, violence carried out in the name of religion is still considered taboo in Padang City, but the roots of potential perpetrators are beginning to emerge. Therefore, adherents of religion need to exercise self-control and cultivate sympathy and other noble qualities within themselves. Hendri Yazid emphasizes the importance of wise behavior in controlling the conduct of religious communities, particularly in situations that may lead to violence. Monitoring these situations is crucial, as religious issues have the potential to trigger conflicts within society, including in diverse cities like Padang. Yazid compares religious communities to dry leaves, easily ignited by events exploiting religion. Therefore, he believes that religious communities must understand and acknowledge the diversity present in Padang City. Implementing the concept of religious moderation is essential for managing this diversity effectively. In this regard, the role of religious leaders is crucial in conveying and promoting this concept (Yazid, Interview, 2022).

5. Appreciation of Local Culture; Flexibility in Religion

In addition to national commitment and tolerant behavior, religious practices that accommodate local culture are also indicators of someone's moderate understanding and practice of religion. Moderately religious individuals tend to be more accepting of local traditions and culture in their religious practices as long as they remain within the context of the core teachings of their religion. Conversely, those who are less accommodating to local culture believe that honoring traditions and culture in religion is an act that can compromise the purity of religious teachings.

Regarding the appreciation of local culture in religion, interfaith leaders in Padang City consider it highly important to preserve and revitalize the spirit of local culture amidst changing times. According to Romo Sudarma, a Buddhist community leader in Padang City, as a religion that is flexible and capable of coexisting with local culture, Hinduism and Buddhism have actually advocated for accommodating local culture long before the concept of religious moderation itself was promoted. In Minangkabau, this can be seen through cultural acculturation, such as the abundance of surau or mosques resembling pura models, evident in the architectural design with tiered roofs. Similarly, according to Romo, this is evident in the reliefs or patterns of surau in Padang City. In daily life, the school he oversees also instills cultural values, such as learning traditional dances like tari piriang and tari pasambahan for events held in the Pura (Romo Sudarma, Interview, 2022).

In the context of Minangkabau culture as the predominant local wisdom in the community of Padang City, the implementation of accommodative religious attitudes towards local culture is also reflected in the proverb "adat basandi syara', syara' basandi kitabullah," which describes the relationship between religion itself and tradition. According to Hendri Yazid, a Muslim figure in Padang City, this reality is a manifestation of the concept of Islam Nusantara designed by the organization Nahdlatul Ulama (Yazid, Interview, 2022). The accommodative attitude towards local culture, according to interfaith figures in Padang City, is one way to enhance the existence of religion utilized by religious leaders in Padang City to spread their religious teachings. This is evident from the presence of local cultures, such as the tari piring and tari pasambahan dances used by religious communities in Padang City during religious occasions (Romo Sudarma & Pittarini, Interview, 2022).

According to interfaith figures in Padang City, the appreciation and accommodation of local culture in religion extend beyond merely incorporating that culture into religious activities. Instead, they believe that in developing their mission or preaching, religious leaders must also adapt it to the local culture (Harwan Kasri, Pastor Petrus & Reverend Salmon, Interview, 2022). However, according to Reverend Salmon, a Protestant community leader in Padang City, everything must be done proportionally and not excessively. Salmon explains:

"The principle of accommodation toward local culture, which is one of the indicators of the realization of a moderate society, involves conducting everything in accordance with the context of the surrounding environment. Applying accommodation toward local culture proportionally and not excessively does not compromise human values, let alone deviate from religious teachings." (Reverend Salmon, Interview, 2022).

As elucidated above, local culture has been utilized as a means of spreading religious teachings, and this is certainly done without tarnishing the purity of religious teachings. In this context, interfaith figures in Padang City agree that by maintaining local culture in religious practices, it is also a way of preserving and conserving local wisdom amidst the era of modernization (Romo Sudarma, Made Subawa, Hendri Yazid, Harwan Kasri, Pastor Petrus, Pittarini, and Reverend Salmon, Interview, 2022).

D. Conclusion

The study has revealed that the viewpoints of interfaith leaders in Padang concerning religious moderation align with the framework promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This alignment is evident in their interpretation of the four pillars serving as benchmarks for religious moderation: commitment to the nation and state, tolerance, non-violence, and integration of local cultural practices. Despite Padang being consistently portrayed by various research bodies as a city with a low tolerance index over the years, data suggests that interfaith leaders strongly endorse the principles and ideals of religious moderation. This underscores their role as religious influencers who persistently advocate moderate religious principles within their respective communities. While the perspectives of these interfaith leaders may offer insights into the broader religious community in Padang, they may not be entirely representative. Nonetheless, all interfaith leaders concur that Padang maintains religious tolerance and remains free from violence. Nevertheless, it is essential to remain cautious and vigilant as religious issues hold the potential to ignite conflicts among religious groups, particularly in light of the city's multicultural fabric.

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