

COEXISTENCE AND INTEGRATION: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL DYNAMICS BETWEEN MUHAMMADIYAH AND NU IN RURAL AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The topic of coexistence and integration between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in rural areas holds high urgency within Indonesia's social context. These two largest Islamic organizations play a crucial role as pillars of societal harmony, particularly in regions vulnerable to social change due to modernization and globalization. This study aimed to analyze the social dynamics between Muhammadiyah and NU in a rural setting, specifically in Mlideg Village, focusing on coexistence and integration as efforts to strengthen community solidarity. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and analysis of related documents. Data triangulation was used to validate the findings. The results indicated that coexistence between Muhammadiyah and NU was achieved through collaboration in social activities such as education and health, despite ideological differences. This study contributed by elevating and modeling the everyday practices of coexistence existing as tacit knowledge into a clear conceptual framework. The "Local Wisdom-Based Functional Collaboration" model offers a realistic and effective middle path for building social harmony, where cooperation for common welfare serves as a stronger foundation than efforts to unify differing religious understandings. The research concluded that this coexistence has positive implications for Indonesia's social stability and suggested further studies using quantitative surveys to measure the long-term impact of such integration.

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INTRODUCTIONS

In the context of Indonesian society, mass Islamic organizations particularly Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) play a pivotal role in shaping socio-cultural structures, influencing not only religious life but also social dynamics, education, and politics across regions (Almu'tasim, 2019). As the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah (founded in 1912) and NU (established in 1926) exhibit distinct historical and religious orientations; the former is often characterized by a moderate, rational approach, while the latter is known for its traditionalist stance and deep influence on pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and local traditions (Milad et al., 2024). Despite these differences, both significantly contribute to promoting moderation and tolerance within Indonesia's diverse socio-religious landscape (Putri et al., 2025), and their ongoing relationship marked by coexistence and integration in communities such as Mlideg Village generates complex dynamics that warrant deeper examination (Rajagukguk et al., 2025).

Mlideg Village, located in a fairly strategic area, has become a meeting place for the influence of both organizations. In this village, residents are actively involved in activities facilitated by both organizations. The coexistence of Muhammadiyah and NU in Mlideg Village is evident in various aspects of social life, including education, religion, and social activities. On the one hand, Muhammadiyah, with its schools and modernized teaching, seems more dominant among some people who want reform. On the other hand, NU, with its pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) and strong traditions, still has a big influence, especially among people who prioritize traditional values in their religious life.

This phenomenon shows the tension between two different approaches, which at some point could potentially create divisions within society. However, over time, adaptation and mutual understanding have emerged, influencing existing social patterns. Therefore, it is important to explore further how these two organizations interact and adapt at the village level, and how this affects social, educational, and religious life in Mlideg.

Previous research has mentioned that Muhammadiyah and NU, despite their differences in educational styles and methods of *ijtihad*, have long coexisted, even before Indonesia's independence (Nafisah, 2022). Muhammadiyah and NU are also often involved in social cooperation such as mutual assistance, religious celebrations, and community programs, without allowing theological differences to hinder social unity (Firmansah, 2025). Meanwhile, the values of *ukhuwah Islamiyyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) are the main foundations for maintaining harmony, supported by intensive communication and deliberation in decision-making (Ida Rahmawati et al., 2025). Adaptation also occurs; for example, Muhammadiyah members in several regions follow NU religious traditions to maintain harmony (Arfan Nusi, n.d.).

The urgency of this research is even clearer considering the increasingly important role of religious organizations in responding to the social dynamics of Indonesian society. Amid ongoing trends of globalization and modernization, various challenges have emerged that shape how people view religion and tradition (Dalimunthe, 2025). In this context, Muhammadiyah and NU often serve as opposing poles in defending their authority to interpret Islamic teachings (Yuliansyah, 2023). On the other hand, villages such as Mlideg show that at the local level, the coexistence and blending of the two can serve as an example for other regions to understand how differences can be respected and managed wisely.

Current trends indicate that, despite potential conflict, rural communities are increasingly aware of the importance of tolerance and cooperation among religious groups (Harahap et al., 2022). In a multicultural society, this awareness is key to fostering harmony and constructive dialogue among religious communities (Tewa, 2023). Based on research by Musdalifah, the emergence of religious moderation movements across several regions has created space for more harmonious relationships among various religious groups, including between Muhammadiyah and NU

(Musdalifah et al., 2021). This is highly relevant to the phenomenon occurring in Mlideg Village, where joint efforts are underway to create an inclusive and peaceful social life despite differences in religious views.

Although numerous studies have examined Muhammadiyah–NU relations at the national level, empirical studies exploring everyday coexistence and integration at the rural village level remain limited. This study addresses this gap by examining micro-level social dynamics in Mlideg Village, including community interactions, the village's geographical and demographic impacts, and unique adaptation mechanisms that have not been sufficiently explored in previous literature. With this approach, the study provides empirical insights into social harmony at the micro level, enriching our understanding of how Islamic values are applied in a village context that may be more complex than the general picture.

The main objective of this article is to analyze the social dynamics between Muhammadiyah and NU in Mlideg Village, focusing on the aspects of coexistence and integration in village life. This article aims to identify the factors that support cooperation between the two organizations and the challenges encountered in creating social harmony. In addition, this article provides an overview of how these dynamics can contribute to more inclusive social development at the village level.

Theoretically, this article is expected to enrich understanding of the relationship between major religious organizations in Indonesia, particularly Muhammadiyah and NU, in the context of village-level social life. On a practical level, the results of this study can serve as a reference for village communities, religious leaders, and policymakers in creating a more harmonious and tolerant social environment. Therefore, it is important to further explore how these two organizations interact and adapt in the daily lives of the people of Mlideg Village, as well as to identify efforts that can improve the quality of their relationship across social, religious, and cultural contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to conduct an in-depth exploration of the social dynamics between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Mlideg Village. The qualitative approach was selected to gain a nuanced understanding of the community's experiences, interactions, and interpretations regarding the relationship between these two organizations within their socio-religious context. This design is effective for examining complex and dynamic social phenomena, allowing researchers to uncover subjective and in-depth perspectives on coexistence and integration between groups with differing traditions (Creswell, 2014).

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in Mlideg Village, Kedungadem District, Bojonegoro Regency. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, involving a total of 20 informants, to ensure they possessed direct, relevant knowledge and experience. The criteria for selection required informants to be actively involved in religious or social activities organized by either Muhammadiyah or NU. The participants included members of both organizations, community leaders, and religious figures within the village, chosen for their ability to provide rich and representative information on the topic (Douglas, 2022).

Data Collection

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources (Khan, 2022). Primary data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants, offering flexibility to explore their views on inter-organizational relationships and their impact on village life. Furthermore, participatory observation was conducted to directly witness and understand the unfolding social dynamics in the field (Elhamma, 2024). Secondary data were obtained through a comprehensive literature review on the history and dynamics of Muhammadiyah-NU relations in Indonesia, along with an analysis of relevant documents pertaining to social life in Mlideg Village.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique applied was thematic analysis. The process began with coding the data transcribed from interviews and field observations. These codes were then analyzed to identify emerging patterns and significant themes related to the research phenomenon (Heriyanto, 2018; ÖZDEN, 2024). Subsequently, the researchers grouped and interpreted these themes to analyze the patterns of interaction and the nature of the relationship between Muhammadiyah and NU within the village context.

Trustworthiness & Ethics

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was utilized by cross-verifying information from multiple sources, including interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the principles of confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained to protect the identities and data of the informants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Research in Mlideg Village revealed four key findings regarding the dynamics of coexistence between Muhammadiyah and NU.

Relationship Change Towards Harmony

The study's results reveal a "qualitative transformation" in the relationship between Muhammadiyah and NU members in Mlideg Village over the past five years. The dynamics of the relationship, which were previously often characterized by tension, caution, and rigid social grouping, have shifted towards a condition that many informants describe as "normal" and friendly. Symbolic conflicts in the past, such as differences in determining the date of Eid al-Fitr or the implementation of certain rituals, which had triggered debate and polarization, are no longer a source of prolonged hostility. This change was made possible by the existence of a "deliberation-based conflict resolution mechanism" involving key figures and representatives from both sides. This deliberative forum functions as a dialectical space that not only resolves technical issues but also builds mutual understanding and prevents the escalation of conflicts into broader social friction.

This transformation towards harmony is fundamentally driven by the intensification of cross-group social interaction in daily collective activities. Practices such as mutual cooperation in cleaning the environment, community service in building public facilities, and joint participation in national and religious celebrations have created recurring shared experiences. Routine and pragmatic interactions in this social sphere serve as a lubricant for relationships that gradually blur organizational and ideological boundaries. Through direct contact and mutually beneficial cooperation, identities as "Muhammadiyah citizens" or "NU citizens" began to be embedded within a broader, more inclusive identity framework: "citizens of Mlideg Village." Thus, coexistence does not only mean the absence of open conflict, but has developed into a functional social integration built from the bottom up.

Daily Social Activities as a Bond

Outside of formal deliberative forums, harmony between Muhammadiyah and NU in Mlideh Village is organically fostered through routine interactions in neutral social spaces. These spaces, free of organizational ideological baggage, serve as everyday infrastructure for social bonding. Activities such as women's social gatherings and community service for the wider community are highly effective platforms. In social gatherings, repeated interactions not only build economic solidarity but also intimate social support networks, where the exchange of stories and practical assistance transcends religious affiliations. Meanwhile, community service transforms the abstract value of "togetherness" into tangible collective action, where each citizen's contribution, regardless of background, is

recognized as an integral part of shared welfare. Through this mechanism, social bonds are strengthened based on the principles of interdependence and communal interests.

However, this study reveals an interesting complexity: harmony in the social sphere does not necessarily imply homogeneity in religious ritual practices. Participation in certain rituals, such as yasinan or tahlilan shows diverse patterns. Some Muhammadiyah members choose not to be fully involved or attend similar events, a choice that consciously reflects methodological differences in understanding the sources of religious authority and forms of worship. This choice can be understood not as a rejection of harmony, but as a strategy for maintaining theological identity amid strong social integration. This phenomenon shows that the people of Mlideg Village have developed a sophisticated implicit social contract: they are able to separate the realm of muamalah (social interaction), where full collaboration is upheld, from the realm of ibadah mahdhah (special rituals), where differences in interpretation are respected without becoming a source of hostility. Thus, coexistence is built not by ignoring differences, but by managing and providing space for these differences within a framework of mutual respect.

Inter-Organizational Marriage and Micro-Integration

More than just a personal phenomenon, marriages between Muhammadiyah and NU members in Mlideg Village serve as a transformative mechanism in village social engineering. This practice directly tests and reconstructs the symbolic boundaries that have separated the two groups. The intense negotiation process, from the proposal through the determination of the marriage contract and the pattern of worship in the new household, becomes a micro-laboratory for the reconciliation of differences. Open dialogue between extended families, often facilitated by traditional or religious leaders respected by both sides, transforms ritual differences from potential conflicts into material for deliberation to find a mutually respectful format. Thus, the institution of marriage changes from one with the potential to trigger tension to an active agent in softening social barriers.

The integrative impact of these cross-organizational marriages extends beyond the domestic sphere, significantly strengthening bridging social capital at the community level. Each household resulting from these mixed marriages becomes a network node that naturally connects extended families, friends, and religious networks from Muhammadiyah and NU. Kinship interactions formed through social gatherings, event invitations, and support in times of joy and sorrow create new channels of communication and flows of socio-economic resources that cross group boundaries. These kinship ties produce cross-cutting loyalties that make absolute polarization difficult. Therefore, this phenomenon not only creates empathetic understanding on a micro scale but also reweaves the social structure of the village to be more resilient to sectarian conflict, as blood and marriage ties have woven the two groups into a complex and interrelated kinship network.

Social Capital of Harmony and Potential Challenges

The harmony maintained in Mlideg Village functions as a highly valuable collective asset (common-pool resource), a form of social capital that is actively reproduced through collaborative rituals such as community service and joint celebrations, and managed through close communication between religious elites and community leaders from both organizations. However, this surface stability is dynamic and constantly interacts with latent ideological fault lines. Fundamental differences in religious methodology—such as how to interpret texts, the authority of clerics, and the status of local traditions—remain an undercurrent that could trigger social upheaval. These tensions rarely surface openly in daily interactions, but they persist in each group's internal discourse and can be activated by sensitive issues, suggesting that the existing harmony is more an agreement to manage differences than an elimination of their roots.

The sustainability of harmony faces its greatest challenge from exogenous political factors. Outside intervention, such as propaganda through digital media or electoral political approaches that instrumentalize religious identity, has the potential to metastasize latent methodological differences into open social conflict. Therefore, reliance

on informal mechanisms and personal ties alone is considered vulnerable. The future of coexistence depends on the community's capacity to institutionalize more formal dialogue mechanisms, such as establishing permanent cross-organizational forums and involving the younger generation. This step must be accompanied by the development of communal vigilance—a form of social immunity built through media literacy education and strengthening national consciousness—to critically filter and counter divisive narratives originating from outside the village social ecosystem.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide an in-depth perspective on how coexistence is practiced and maintained at the grassroots level, drawing on social theories.

Transformation of Relationships and Boundary Management (Boundary Work)

The transformative shift from tense to harmonious relations in Mlideg Village can be analyzed through the lens of a dynamic, participatory boundary-work process (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In this context, the initially rigid symbolic boundaries—built on differences in ideology, rituals, and organizational identities—are not eliminated; rather, their meanings and functions are actively reconfigured by actors at the grassroots level. This renegotiation process occurs continuously through two main channels: formal-informal deliberations that resolve specific disputes (such as determining holidays), and routine interactions in village public spaces such as meeting halls and community service locations. These repeated interactions transform "the other" from an abstract entity into a concrete partner in everyday life, thereby gradually softening the psychological barriers between groups.

The result of this renegotiation process was a fundamental shift in the function of social boundaries. Boundaries no longer function primarily as bright boundaries that affirm group exclusivity, but have evolved into permeable membranes that serve as mechanisms for managing differences (Weaver, 2015). In the coexistence of Muhammadiyah and NU in Mlideg, this is manifested in the community's ability to separate the realm of social collaboration from the realm of ritual beliefs. The community can work together to build roads or organize health posts (social realm) while maintaining differences in the implementation of yasinan or tarawih prayers (ritual realm). Acceptance of this pattern reflects the principle of religious moderation, which emphasizes tolerance, flexibility, and respect for differences (Handayani, 2023) and builds harmony on the basis of an agreement not to impose uniformity.

The pinnacle of this inclusive boundary work is the acceptance of inter-organizational marriages. This phenomenon marks an advanced stage from coexistence to a more intimate blending, where formal ideological boundaries are transcended by stronger primary social bonds. The family and kinship ties born from these mixed marriages create affective bridges and cross-networks of loyalty that make it difficult for absolute horizontal conflicts to arise. In these families, the negotiation of ritual differences becomes a daily practice that gives rise to forms of pragmatic syncretism, while strengthening the structural integration between the Muhammadiyah and NU networks. Thus, in Mlideg Village, boundary work not only produces passive tolerance but also paves the way for the formation of a new organic solidarity rooted in human bonds and common interests, ultimately strengthening the community's overall social resilience.

Social Capital, Cohesion, and Local Strategies

The harmony in Mlideg fundamentally represents a process of social capital transformation. Strong bonding social capital embedded within each organization (Muhammadiyah and NU) has been successfully converted into active bridging social capital that bridges the two networks (Putnam, 2000). This conversion is realized through the practice of real coexistence, where primordial religious ties do not prevent the formation of cross-group relationships. Intergroup marriages and routine collaboration in community social activities (such as community service and national holiday celebrations) create what are called cross-cutting ties. These cross-cutting ties serve to mitigate potential

conflicts, as individuals have dual loyalties and shared interests that transcend organizational boundaries (Belgrade & Lee, 2021). Thus, integration in Mlideg does not erase identity, but builds a functional bridge over it.

This cohesive dynamic is supported by locally developed strategies, demonstrating the sophistication of community agency. The main strategy implemented is a clear separation between social interactions (*muamalah*) and religious rituals (*ibadah*). In the realm of *muamalah*, such as economics, mutual assistance, and village administration, collaboration and equality are fully upheld. Meanwhile, in terms of private or organizational worship, such as Tarawih prayers or methods of determining the start of Ramadan, each group is given space to practice their beliefs and traditions without intervention. The ability to manage these differences stems from endogenous conflict-resolution mechanisms grounded in local wisdom and Javanese collectivist values, such as *tepa selira* (mutual respect), *rukun* (harmony), and *musyawarah untuk mufakat* (consensus-building) (Thohir, 2022). These mechanisms ensure that any friction can be resolved within a shared value framework before it hardens into open conflict.

The model of coexistence and integration in Mlideg is not only a successful empirical example, but also strengthens and sharpens the theoretical framework regarding social cohesion in a pluralistic society. This case shows that sustainable social cohesion does not necessarily require assimilation or the merging of identities, but can be built through recognition of differences and a continuous commitment to dialogue in a shared public sphere (Moustakas, 2023). The harmony in Mlideg shows that effective bridging social capital is born when the bonding social capital of each group is maintained, but accompanied by a willingness to build a productive neutral zone. Thus, the experience of this village offers an important perspective for the study of Muhammadiyah-NU relations nationally, namely that the potential for solid cooperation often takes root and is tested in everyday practices at the grassroots level, where local values and social pragmatism become stronger bonds than abstract ideological discourse.

Sustaining Harmony: Between Institutionalization and External Threats

Findings on potential challenges to harmony in Mlideg confirm that coexistence is dynamic and highly contextual, rather than static. The harmony that has been established is highly dependent on informal agreements (unwritten rules) and the strength of personal bonds between figures and families across generations. This model, although effective on a local scale, is vulnerable to two main pressures: generational change, which may result in a loss of emotional closeness, and the infiltration of more exclusive external values through digital media and external political networks. This dependence on personal factors reveals a weakness in the model's sustainability.

Therefore, the long-term survival of Muhammadiyah-NU coexistence in Mlideg requires a process of institutionalization, namely, transforming informal norms, values of harmony, and family-based dispute resolution mechanisms into more structured and sustainable social mechanisms (Hanifa et al., 2024). This institutionalization can take the form of establishing a permanent cross-organizational forum, codifying mutual agreements in inclusive village regulations, or integrating coexistence values into the village leadership and decision-making structures. This transformation aims to ensure that harmony is not only a collective memory but also a standard operating procedure that is recognized and practiced by all generations.

In addition to institutionalization, resilience-building requires other proactive measures. Digital media literacy education and the strengthening of inclusive national values are crucial (Nurdianzah et al., 2024; Saputra & Azmi, 2022). In Mlideg, this can be translated into a joint program involving Muhammadiyah and NU youth to critically filter religious and political narratives from outside that have the potential to divide. The goal is to build communal vigilance, the community's ability to collectively recognize and counter attempts to politicize identity and exclusive narratives, which are the main triggers of conflict (Hanumbhawono et al., 2024). This resilience will protect shared spaces from external disruption.

The overall analysis shows that the coexistence model in Mlideg is not essentially about achieving religious consensus, but about productive management of differences. This success is achieved through the continuous creation

and reproduction of "common ground" in the social, economic, and civic spheres, where organizational identities are temporarily set aside. The Mlideg case study enriches the practical understanding of religious moderation at a micro level that is alive and contextual. Furthermore, these findings confirm that social capital (bridging social capital) and local wisdom-based conflict-resolution mechanisms are not merely complementary but are crucial and often more effective foundations for long-term social stability in Indonesia's pluralistic society than a uniform, top-down approach.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that sustainable coexistence between Muhammadiyah and NU in Mlideg Village is achieved through a dynamic, grassroots process of transforming social capital and managing boundaries. Key findings include: (1) the qualitative shift from tension to harmony via deliberative conflict resolution and daily social collaboration; (2) the crucial role of neutral social spaces and inter-organizational marriages in building cross-cutting ties and micro-integration; and (3) the community's sophisticated strategy of separating *muamalah* (social collaboration) from *ibadah* (ritual practice) to maintain both harmony and theological identity.

Theoretically, this case enriches understandings of social cohesion in plural societies. It demonstrates that effective bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) can emerge from strong bonding social capital, facilitated by continuous boundary work (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that makes group boundaries permeable rather than exclusive. It affirms that cohesion is built not on eliminating differences but on their productive management through recognition and dialogue (Moustakas, 2023), grounded in local wisdom (Thohir, 2022).

Practically, the research highlights that while informal mechanisms and personal ties are foundational, long-term resilience requires their institutionalization into formal forums and the cultivation of communal vigilance through media literacy and civic education to counter external divisive narratives. A primary limitation is the study's specific locus, which may limit direct generalization. Future research should conduct comparative studies in different socio-cultural contexts and employ longitudinal designs to examine the long-term efficacy of institutionalization efforts and the impact of generational change on this model of coexistence.

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