

RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND GEN Z NATIONALISM: THE NEXUS OF MODERN ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND NATIONAL INSIGHT AT NURUL JANNAH ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL IN NATUNA

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ABSTRACT

Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia's frontier regions face the dual challenge of nurturing devout religiosity while sustaining national commitment among Gen Z *santri*, a synergy that existing literature suggests is difficult to achieve given persistent gaps between moderation curricula and observable practice. This study examines how *Pesantren* Nurul Jannah in Natuna designs and implements modern Islamic education that integrates religious moderation and national insight, and identifies the institutional conditions enabling this integration in a geopolitically sensitive maritime border region. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving 12 informants (*kyai*, *ustadz*, and *santri*) over three months of fieldwork, using participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis of curriculum and institutional records, analyzed through data reduction and presentation, and conclusions were drawn using source and method triangulation. Findings indicate that religious moderation and national insight are positioned as an interrelated pedagogical construct across curriculum, ceremonial practice, dialogical classroom relations, and extracurricular activities, rather than treated as separate programs. This integration appears to be supported by consistent leadership modeling and a geopolitically reinforced sense of civic mission distinctive to the border context. The study offers empirical insight into how frontier *pesantren* may operationalize moderation and nationalism jointly, with potential relevance to SDG 16 and SDG 4 insofar as it illustrates efforts toward fostering tolerant and socially cohesive younger generations, a link the analysis substantiates rather than merely asserts.

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INTRODUCTION

Natuna, as Indonesia's northernmost frontier region bordering the South China Sea, presents a distinctive socio-religious landscape where national identity and religious life intersect closely with geopolitical sensitivity. Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) in this border area do not merely serve as centers of religious learning but also function as informal guardians of national consciousness among younger generations. *Pesantren* Nurul Jannah, situated in this strategic maritime frontier, has increasingly become a reference point for how religious education can be organized to accommodate both spiritual formation and civic awareness among Generation Z *santri*.

Field observations indicate that *Pesantren* Nurul Jannah has developed a distinctive educational approach that integrates classical Islamic curriculum with structured programs on national insight (*wawasan kebangsaan*), including flag ceremonies, discussions on Pancasila, and commemorations of national historical events. This integration appears to run relatively smoothly within the daily rhythm of the *pesantren*, with *santri* participating in both religious rituals and nationalistic activities without readily apparent tension between the two value systems. The *pesantren* leadership has positioned religious moderation not as an abstract slogan but as a pedagogical practice reflected in classroom interactions, extracurricular activities, and the general ethos of tolerance cultivated among students.

These field-level observations raise questions about the conditions that may enable *santri* at this institution to articulate moderate religious views while expressing attachment to the Indonesian state, a combination often assumed to be difficult to achieve given the competing pulls of globalized religious discourse and localized nationalism. This apparent pattern at the field level raises important questions about the mechanisms and conditions that make such an integrated outcome possible in a single institutional setting.

From a theoretical standpoint, the literature suggests that achieving genuine synergy between religious moderation and nationalism among Gen Z is inherently difficult and rarely optimal. Studies indicate that religious moderation education is frequently implemented superficially within Islamic educational management, producing compliance in form rather than genuine internalization of moderate values (Chotimah et al., 2024). Similarly, evidence shows that *pesantren* environments continue to navigate unresolved tensions between radicalism, moderation, and liberalism in their religious thought, indicating that moderate outcomes are neither automatic nor guaranteed (Khoiriyah et al., 2024). Other scholars argue that Generation Z's nationalism in the digital era is shaped by complex and often contradictory pressures from globalization, economic uncertainty, and social media, making consistent national attachment difficult to sustain (Kurniawaty & Widayatmo, 2024). Research on religious moderation curricula in higher education further reveals persistent gaps between curriculum design and actual student attitudinal change (Mukhibat et al., 2024). Additionally, comparative findings on *pesantren* architecture and institutional culture suggest that translating moderation values into a coherent, lived institutional identity requires deliberate structural reimagining, something many *pesantren* have yet to achieve (Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025). Ideally, therefore, the process of merging religious moderation with nationalism should encounter significant friction and yield only partial success a contrast worth examining against the integration process observed in the field.

The contrast between the *das sein* and *das sollen* conditions above reveals a notable gap. While theoretical and empirical literature predicts persistent tension and only partial success in integrating religious moderation with nationalism among Gen Z, the field observations at *Pesantren* Nurul Jannah appear, at least preliminarily, to diverge from this expectation. This discrepancy is worth examining further, as it may suggest that theoretical models remain incomplete in accounting for specific institutional or geographic contexts, or that Nurul Jannah has developed particular strategies not yet captured in existing scholarly discussions, a possibility this study is positioned to investigate rather than assume.

This gap gives rise to the central research problem of this study: understanding how a border-area *pesantren* such as Nurul Jannah manages the process of integrating religious moderation and national insight, a process theory suggests should be difficult to attain. This leads to the research question of how modern Islamic education practices at Nurul Jannah are designed and implemented in relation to religious moderation and nationalism among Gen Z *santri*, and what factors may contribute to the effectiveness of this integration in a geopolitically sensitive frontier region.

Previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between religious moderation and educational institutions, as well as the challenges of instilling nationalism among younger generations. Several works highlight how

religious moderation of Islamic university students is shaped largely by individual reception of religious texts rather than by structured institutional pedagogy, leaving open the question of how formal curricula might more deliberately cultivate moderation (Afwadzi et al., 2024; Muhajir & Nurcholis, 2024; K. Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Other studies emphasize the digital dimension of contemporary religiosity, showing that Gen Z's religious practice is increasingly mediated through social platforms and digital da'wah, a trend that complicates conventional institutional approaches to moderation education (Arief & Hidayatullah, 2023; Benny & Yi, 2024; Rohmawati et al., 2024). Research on *pesantren* culture further reveals both the internal diversity of religious thought within *pesantren*, ranging from radical to liberal tendencies, and the emergence of Sufi-based pedagogical models specifically designed to foster moderate attitudes (Moch. S. Hasan et al., 2024; Khoiriyah et al., 2024; Waston et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, studies specifically addressing Gen Z's national identity tend to focus on digital-era challenges and opportunities without substantially connecting these dynamics to religious educational institutions, leaving the intersection between nationalism and religious moderation underexplored (Saputri & Najicha, 2023; Kurniawaty & Widayatmo, 2024; Komara et al., 2024). Additional research on religious moderation curriculum development and institutional architecture in higher education and *pesantren* settings points to persistent gaps between policy design and lived implementation, as well as the risk of superficial or ceremonial moderation practices that fail to produce durable value internalization (Wardi et al., 2023; Faslah, 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025; Untung et al., 2025). Based on this body of literature, a clear gap emerges: limited prior research has specifically examined how modern Islamic education in a maritime border *pesantren* operationalizes the concurrent cultivation of religious moderation and national insight as an integrated pedagogical strategy for Gen Z, positioning this study as a distinct contribution rather than a repetition of prior work.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the intersection of religious moderation and nationalism as an interrelated educational construct, rather than as two separate variables, within the specific context of a Gen Z cohort in a geopolitically strategic border *pesantren*. By situating this inquiry at *Pesantren Nurul Jannah* in Natuna, this research offers empirical insight into how modern Islamic education may be designed to serve dual functions of religious formation and national identity building, an angle that remains underrepresented in existing scholarship. This contribution relates to the broader agenda of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), insofar as the analysis substantiates how educational institutions may foster social cohesion, tolerance, and civic responsibility among the younger generation in vulnerable frontier regions.

The urgency of this study stems from Natuna's strategic position as a national frontier facing external geopolitical pressures, where the resilience of Gen Z's national identity is relevant to sustaining state sovereignty and social stability. Without a clearer understanding of models for integrating religious moderation and nationalism, border communities risk vulnerability to both religious extremism and identity erosion, with potential implications for long-term national resilience. This study's relevance is further reinforced by its connection to SDG 16, in that it may generate knowledge to inform policies strengthening peaceful, inclusive, and institutionally grounded educational practices in Indonesia's most vulnerable regions. This study seeks to explain how *Pesantren Nurul Jannah* in Natuna designs and implements modern Islamic education strategies in relation to religious moderation and national insight among Gen Z *santri*, in light of theoretical expectations suggesting such integration is difficult to achieve in practice.

This study also seeks to identify the contributing factors and institutional conditions associated with the convergence of religious moderation and nationalism within the *pesantren's* educational environment, particularly given its location in a geopolitically sensitive maritime border region.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach and a case study method, selected for their suitability in examining context-specific phenomena within a particular institutional setting. The research was conducted at the Nurul Jannah Islamic boarding school in Natuna. It involved 12 informants: *kiai* (mentors), *ustaz* (teachers), and *santri* (students), were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in religious and patriotic education; fieldwork spanned three months. Data were collected through participant observation of daily life at the boarding school, in-depth interviews, and an

analysis of teaching materials, class schedules, and internal documentation regarding religious and patriotic education. Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the research objectives and provided their consent; to ensure confidentiality (particularly regarding students), informants' personal data were anonymized. This combination of methods enabled the researcher to document both the formal pedagogical structures and the daily practices that contribute to the internalization of concepts regarding moderation and patriotism.

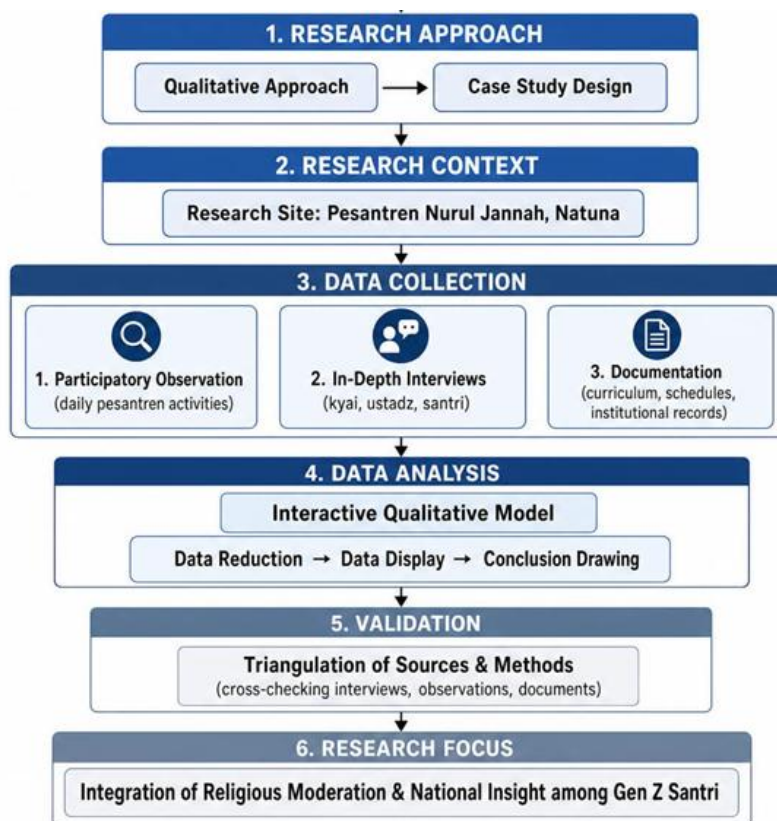


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework

Source: AI Visualization (2026)

Data analysis follows an interactive qualitative model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, conducted continuously throughout the fieldwork process through an inductive coding procedure in which interview transcripts and field notes are read repeatedly to generate initial codes, which are then grouped into categories and refined into overarching themes. Triangulation of sources and methods is applied by cross-checking interview findings against observational data and institutional documents, examining points of convergence and divergence across data sources to ensure credibility and consistency of the results. This analytical process is directed at identifying the specific strategies, institutional conditions, and pedagogical mechanisms that enable Nurul Jannah to integrate religious moderation and national insight, thereby directly addressing the two research questions formulated in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Design and Implementation of Modern Islamic Education Integrating Religious Moderation and National Insight

The research findings show that *Pesantren* Nurul Jannah does not treat religious moderation and national insight as two separate programs, but designs both as a single pedagogical construct woven throughout the curriculum structure, daily activity schedule, and overall institutional culture. The classical Islamic curriculum remains the primary foundation for *santri*'s religious character formation, yet materials strengthening national consciousness, studies of Pancasila, the history of national struggle, and Indonesia's position as a sovereign archipelagic state, are structurally embedded within it. This embedding is achieved through deliberate curriculum planning that positions national values as an integral part of religious learning itself, so that *santri* experience no cognitive separation between their Islamic identity and their Indonesian national identity.

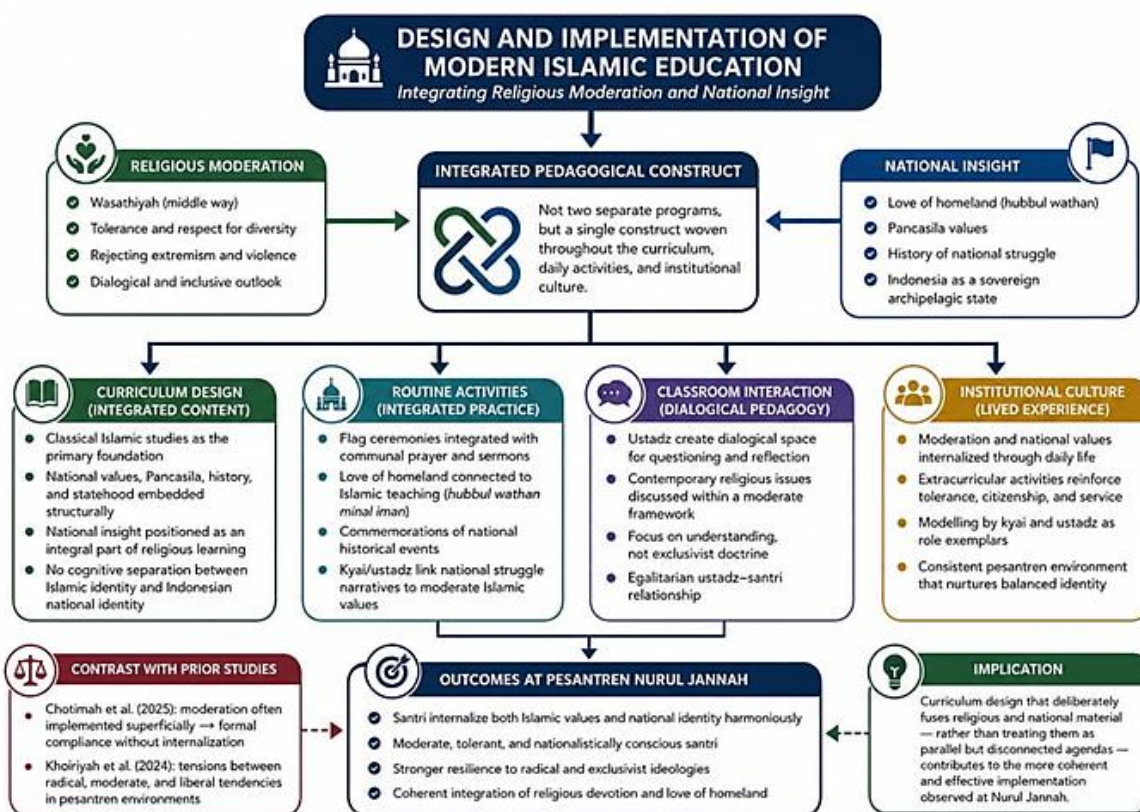


Figure 2. Design and Implementation of Modern Islamic Education Integrating Religious Moderation and National Insight
Source: AI Visualization (2026)

This practice is clearly visible in the *pesantren*'s routine activities, which combine religious ritual with symbols of statehood. Flag ceremonies are not positioned as secular formalities detached from *santri*'s religious life, but are integrated with communal prayer and sermons that connect love of homeland with the Islamic teaching of *hubbul wathan minal iman*. Commemorations of national historical events follow the same pattern, with *kyai* and *ustadz* consistently linking narratives of national struggle to moderate Islamic values. Classroom interaction reflects the same pedagogical orientation: *ustadz* cultivate dialogical space where *santri* question and reflect on contemporary religious issues within a moderate framework, rather than receiving doctrine in an exclusivist manner.

These findings are worth discussing against the theoretical framework raised in the introduction. Chotimah et al. (2025) note that religious moderation education within Islamic educational management is frequently implemented superficially, producing formal compliance without genuine value internalization. Conditions at Nurul Jannah appear to depart from this pattern, since moderation is not merely delivered as material to be memorized but is directly practiced through open, egalitarian *ustadz-santri* relations and through extracurricular activities that provide lived experience rather than cognitive knowledge alone. Similarly, Khoiriyah et al. (2024) describe unresolved tensions between radical, moderate, and liberal tendencies within *pesantren* environments; this tension is not strongly reflected at Nurul Jannah, which instead shows a relatively consistent pattern of integration. This contrast suggests that curriculum design deliberately fusing religious and national material, rather than treating them as parallel but disconnected agendas, may account for the smoother outcome observed here compared to the more fragmented implementation reported in prior studies.

Contributing Factors and Institutional Conditions Enabling Effective Convergence

The findings point to several interlocking factors explaining this convergence. Leadership ethos functions as a decisive enabling condition: kyai and senior *ustadz* do not position themselves solely as religious authorities but consistently model moderate attitudes alongside firm national commitment in everyday conduct and decision-making. This modeling operates as a tacit curriculum running parallel to the formal one, sustaining consistency between what is taught and what is practiced.

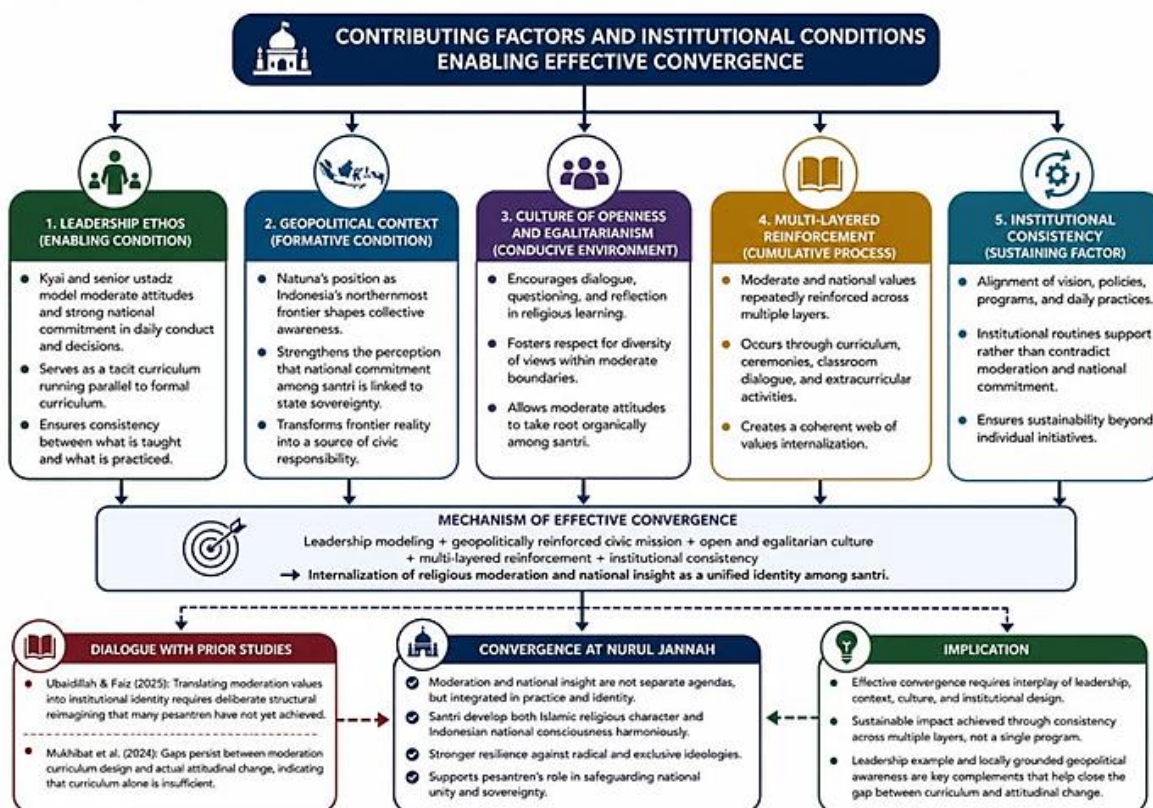


Figure 3. Contributing Factors and Institutional Conditions Enabling Effective Convergence

Source: AI Visualization (2026)

Natuna's geopolitical position as Indonesia's northernmost frontier also functions as a formative rather than obstructive condition, sharpening the *pesantren* community's sense that cultivating national commitment among *santri* is directly tied to state sovereignty rather than a peripheral concern. The internal culture of openness and egalitarian relations further creates a conducive environment for moderate attitudes to take root organically, while the repeated reinforcement of shared values across curriculum, ceremony, classroom dialogue, and extracurricular activity operates cumulatively across institutional layers.

These factors can be read in dialogue with Ubaidillah and Faiz (2025), who argue that translating moderation values into a coherent institutional identity requires deliberate structural reimagining that many *pesantren* have yet to achieve. The conditions found at Nurul Jannah suggest one plausible form this reimagining can take: leadership modeling combined with a geopolitically reinforced sense of civic mission, operating consistently across multiple institutional layers rather than resting on a single program. This also speaks to Mukhibat et al. (2024), whose findings on persistent gaps between moderation curriculum design and actual attitudinal change imply that curriculum alone is insufficient; the Nurul Jannah case indicates that sustained leadership example and locally grounded geopolitical awareness may be necessary complements that help close this gap in practice.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that *Pesantren* Nurul Jannah in Natuna has designed and implemented modern Islamic education that positions religious moderation and national insight as an interrelated pedagogical construct, rather than as two separate agendas. Through curriculum embedding, ritual practices linked with civic symbolism, dialogical classroom relations, and consistent leadership modeling, the *pesantren* appears to support the development of *santri* who exhibit both religious devotion and national commitment, offering a case that diverges from theoretical expectations of persistent friction between these two value systems in Islamic educational settings. These findings, however, are drawn from a single institutional setting and should be interpreted within that boundary; they are not intended to be generalized to *pesantren* in other border regions without further comparative research.

The integration observed at Nurul Jannah carries potential relevance for sustainable development in Indonesia's frontier regions. By nurturing tolerance, dialogical engagement, and civic responsibility among younger generations in a geopolitically sensitive border area, this educational model offers a possible contribution to SDG 16 through the strengthening of peaceful and inclusive communities, while its integrated curricular approach illustrates one way SDG 4's vision of quality education might extend beyond academic and religious competence to encompass social cohesion and national resilience. Future research involving multiple *pesantren* across different border contexts, as well as longitudinal designs capable of tracking attitudinal change over time, would help clarify the extent to which these findings hold more broadly.

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