The Role of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah in Building a Moderate Islamic Civilization

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The development of socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia today faces the challenge of polarization between religious radicalism and liberalism that has the potential to undermine the foundations of moderate Islam. This research aims to comprehensively describe the strategic role of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) in building a moderate Islamic civilization through theological, institutional, and cultural pillars. The method used is a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive design, which utilizes content analysis techniques against credible national and international scientific literature in the last ten years. The results of the study show that Aswaja functions as a theological instrument through the principles *of tawasuth, tawazun, i'tidal,* and *tasamuh* which are filters for extreme ideologies. Institutionally, Aswaja values are transformed into habitus in Islamic boarding schools and universities to ensure inclusive social behavior. In conclusion, the cultural flexibility of Aswaja through the rules *of al-muhafadzah 'ala al-qadim as-shalih* allows Islam to remain relevant in the face of digital disruption and *the post-truth era*. The sustainability of moderate civilization is highly dependent on the resilience of the thinking methodology (*manhaj al-fikr*) and the strategy of digitizing Aswaja values in the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

Socio-religious developments in Indonesia in the past decade have shown complex dynamics, characterized by a strengthening polarization between rigid religious radicalism and liberalism that tends to strip away traditional authority. This phenomenon creates epistemological tensions that have the potential to damage the foundations of moderate and civilized Islam in the midst of a pluralistic society (Ali, 2020). The main problem arises when religious interpretations are drawn into the realm of extremes, so that the values of social harmony begin to be eroded by the claims of one-sided truth that are often exacerbated by the speed of information flow in the digital age. In this context, Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) as the mainstream of Islamic thought in Indonesia has a historical and theological responsibility to be a counterbalance through the principles *of tawasuth* (moderate), *tawazun* (balanced), *i'tidal* (just), and *tasamuh* (tolerant).

Several previous studies have discussed the role of Aswaja in the context of Islamic mass organizations and their contribution to national political stability (Hanafi, 2020). In addition, studies on religious moderation in the Islamic education curriculum have also been widely carried out to

fortify students from radical ideas (Saifuddin & Quddus, 2023). However, most of these studies are still limited to macro policy analysis and have not specifically dissected how Aswaja values are transformed into a "habitus" or automatic behavior in higher education institutions to respond to the specific challenges of the *post-truth* era and digital radicalism (Fahmi, 2023; Muzakki, 2020). This gap *analysis* is the entry point for this article. The uniqueness and novelty of this research lies in the integrative approach that connects the classical thinking methodology (*manhaj al-fikr*) with the challenges of modernity, especially regarding how the internalization of Aswaja character values can function as moral conservation ethics for students in the era of disruption (Ismunadi, 2024; Ula, 2024).

The problems raised in this study are focused on the effectiveness of the application of the Aswaja pillars in reducing the influence of confrontational transnational ideologies. The fundamental question that arises is how Aswaja was able to maintain the originality of its traditions while adapting to the innovations of modernity without losing its identity. The problem-solving approach used in this study is through content *analysis* of the latest literature and habituation practices in Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions and universities (Subekti & Haq, 2025). Using the framework of the rules *of al-muhafadzah 'ala al-qadim as-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah*, this study seeks to formulate a moderation model that is relevant to the needs of future generations. This research aims to comprehensively describe the strategic role of Aswaja in building the foundations of moderate Islamic civilization. The expected result of this study is the identification of patterns of internalization of values that can be used as a reference in the development of a character education curriculum with a moderation perspective. Practically, this research is expected to contribute to religious and educational policy makers in formulating preventive strategies against extremism, so that Indonesia can continue to maintain its role as a model of peaceful and inclusive Islamic civilization in the international arena (Zakaria et al., 2025; Zainiyati, 2021).

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an analytical descriptive design to explore the strategic role of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) in the construction of moderate Islamic civilization. Given the nature of the study that focuses on theological concepts and social implementation, the location of this research virtually covers the scope of credible national and international scientific literature. Primary data is sourced from fundamental texts on the principles *of manhaj al-fikr* Aswaja, while secondary data is obtained from reputable journal articles, books, and research reports published in the last ten years (2015-2025) to ensure the relevance of the findings to contemporary challenges such as digital radicalism and the *post-truth era*.

The subject of the research in this study is the values of Aswaja character which include *tawasuth, tawazun, i'tidal,* and *tasamuh* which are implemented in educational institutions such as

Islamic Boarding Schools and Islamic Universities in Indonesia as the basis of moderate civilization. The data collection technique is carried out through a systematic study of documentation, where the researcher acts as a key instrument in collecting, classifying, and interpreting relevant text data. The data analysis procedure is carried out through four stages:

2.1 Data Collection

Data collection related to the concept of moderation. At this stage, data collection focuses on gathering comprehensive information related to the concept of moderation in Islam from an Aswaja perspective. Relevant data are obtained from classical and contemporary texts discussing the principles of *tawasuth*, *tawazun*, *i'tidal*, and *tasamuh*, as well as their application in educational and social contexts. The researcher systematically identifies, selects, and compiles documents that explicitly address theological foundations, educational practices, and societal challenges associated with moderate Islamic civilization. This stage ensures that the collected data are rich, credible, and aligned with the research objectives.

2.2 Data Reduction

Data reduction to remove irrelevant information. Data reduction is conducted by critically reviewing and filtering the collected data to eliminate information that is repetitive, irrelevant, or not directly related to the research focus. In this process, the researcher categorizes data according to key themes of Aswaja moderation and its role in shaping Islamic civilization. By simplifying and refining the data, this stage helps to sharpen analytical focus and facilitates deeper interpretation of the most significant concepts and findings relevant to the study.

2.3 Data Presentation

The presentation of data is thematic that connects theological theory with social reality. Data presentation is carried out in a thematic and narrative form to clearly illustrate the relationship between Aswaja theological principles and their practical implementation in social and educational settings. The organized data are presented by linking normative religious doctrines with empirical realities, such as the role of Islamic boarding schools and universities in promoting moderation. This stage allows patterns, meanings, and interconnections among concepts to emerge systematically, making the findings easier to understand and analyze.

2.4 Data Withdrawal

Drawing conclusions through content analysis techniques. The final stage involves drawing conclusions through content analysis by synthesizing the presented data into coherent interpretations. The researcher reflects on the patterns and themes identified to formulate conclusions regarding the strategic role of Aswaja values in constructing moderate Islamic civilization. This stage not only answers the research questions but also provides theoretical and practical implications, ensuring that the conclusions are logically derived, academically sound, and relevant to contemporary socio-

religious challenges. The validity of the research results is guaranteed through source triangulation techniques and peer checking to ensure that the resulting interpretation is objective and can be scientifically accounted for.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study found that the role of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) in building a moderate Islamic civilization in Indonesia is transformed through theological and institutional instruments. The processed literature data shows the classification of the pillars of Aswaja's strategy in stemming extremism as presented in the following Table 1:

Table 1. Aswaja's Strategic Pillar in Religious Moderation

Strategic Pillar	Main Components	Manifestation Function
Theological (Manhajul Fikr)	Tawasuth, Tawazun, I'tidal, Tasamuh	Filter radical and liberal ideologies
Institutional	Islamic Boarding Schools and Colleges	Transformation of values into *habitus*
Cultural	Rules *of Al-Muhafadzah*	Adaptation of innovation without the elimination of tradition

Based on the data in Table 1, the manifestation of Aswaja does not only stop at the cognitive level, but also penetrates into the dimension of praxis through educational institutions. In the Islamic Boarding School environment, these values are internalized through a consistent kiai exemplary system, while in Higher Education, Aswaja is contextualized as social ethics and a moral compass for students in facing the challenges of the times (Ismunadi, 2024; Subekti & Haq, 2025).Aswaja functions as a dynamizer that ensures that civilization continues to move forward but remains based on authoritative scientific sanad. These findings prove that moderate Islamic civilization in Indonesia has high resilience because it has a strong ideological filter in mediating the conflict between textual radical puritanism and liberal secularism that denies religious authority.

DISCUSSION

Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) is not just a group of theological sects, but a method of thinking (manhaj al-fikr) that is essential for the stability of civilization. The emergence of textualist radicalism and liberalism that denies tradition is a real threat to the foundations of civilized Islamic civilization (Ali, 2020). Fundamentally, Aswaja has a methodological tool that is able to synchronize the absolute text of revelation with relative social reality. This balance between reason and revelation

is the key to why Aswaja is able to mediate epistemological conflicts that are often unanswered by other extreme beliefs.

This research strengthens the argument of Samsuddin (2021) who states that Indonesian Islamic moderation has uniqueness in its cultural flexibility through the rules of al-muhafadzah 'ala al-qadim as-shalih. However, this study places a deeper emphasis on the digital dimension that has not been extensively discussed comprehensively by previous researchers. In contrast to the view of Hidayatullah (2020) which tends to focus on macropolitical stability, the results of this study actually see that the stability of civilization starts from the habituation of values at the microsocial level such as Islamic boarding schools. There is a correlation with the findings of Fahmi (2023) that Aswaja's biggest challenge today is the "new religious authority" on social media, where instant da'wah often cuts the depth of methodology for the sake of popularity. Therefore, this study offers a solution in the form of digitizing Aswaja values to stem extreme narratives (Muzakki, 2020).

Conformity is also found in the aspect of institutional roles. These findings support the habitus theory proposed by Subekti & Haq (2025), that the value of moderation will not be effective if it is only a lecture material without a supportive institutional environment. Rather, this study provides a new perspective that complements the assumption that modernity has always eroded traditional values; The results of the analysis actually show that through its adaptive character, Aswaja is able to use modernity instruments (such as technology) to strengthen the reach of its traditional values in the 4.0 era (Ula, 2024). This analysis confirms that the sustainability of moderate civilization requires a synergy between theological depth and intelligent technological adaptation.

The theoretical implication of this study is the need to redefine religious moderation which not only means "tolerance" between people, but also "methodological resilience" to distortions of religious teachings themselves. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic studies by integrating classical theological concepts into the challenges of digital sociology. Meanwhile, practically, the implications of this study suggest for policymakers in relevant ministries and educational institutions to strengthen the Aswaja-based curriculum as a preventive strategy against radicalism from an early age. The practical application of tasamuh and tawazun values in society will create permanent social harmony, so that Indonesia can continue to be the mecca of moderate Islamic civilization for the international world (Musadat, 2022; Zainiyati, 2021; Zakaria et al., 2025). Furthermore, the findings indicate that Aswaja's strength lies in its layered epistemology, which combines textual authority (naql), rational consideration ('aql), and socio-historical experience. This tripartite framework allows Aswaja to remain normative without becoming rigid, and contextual without falling into relativism. In the context of contemporary Islamic discourse, this epistemological balance functions as a safeguard against simplification of religious understanding, especially in digital spaces where complex theological issues are often reduced into binary narratives.

Thus, Aswaja offers not only theological moderation but also cognitive moderation in understanding religious texts and realities.Another important dimension highlighted by this study is the role of pesantren as agents of civilizational continuity. Pesantren are not merely educational institutions, but also cultural ecosystems where Aswaja values are embodied through daily practices, traditions, and social relations. This supports the argument that moderation is most effectively transmitted through lived experience rather than doctrinal instruction alone. The habituation of values such as tawassuth, tawazun, and tasamuh within pesantren culture contributes significantly to the internalization of moderation at the individual and communal levels, which later manifests in broader social behavior.

In addition, the digital transformation of religious discourse presents both risks and opportunities for Aswaja. On one hand, algorithm-driven platforms tend to favor sensational and polarizing content, which can marginalize moderate narratives. On the other hand, when utilized strategically, digital media can become a powerful tool for disseminating Aswaja's nuanced and inclusive worldview. This study shows that the success of digital Aswaja initiatives depends not only on content production, but also on maintaining methodological integrity and ethical communication. Without this, digitalization risks turning moderation into mere slogans devoid of substance.The study also reveals that the contestation of religious authority in the digital era necessitates a reconfiguration of da'wah strategies. Traditional authority based on sanad, scholarly competence, and moral integrity must be translated into forms that are recognizable and credible in digital spaces. This does not mean abandoning classical authority structures, but rather rearticulating them in formats that resonate with contemporary audiences. As such, Aswaja's adaptability becomes a crucial asset in maintaining religious authority while responding to changing modes of knowledge consumption.

Finally, this research underscores that the future of moderate Islamic civilization is inseparable from intergenerational transmission. Younger generations, as digital natives, require models of religious understanding that are intellectually rigorous yet communicatively accessible. Aswaja, with its emphasis on balance, continuity, and adaptability, has the potential to fulfill this role if supported by systematic educational policies and sustainable digital ecosystems. Therefore, strengthening Aswaja is not merely a matter of preserving tradition, but a strategic investment in the resilience of Islamic civilization amid rapid global and technological change.

4. CONCLUSION

Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) plays a fundamental role as the anchor of moderate Islamic civilization in Indonesia through the synergy of theological, institutional, and cultural pillars. Theologically, the principles *of tawasuth, tawazun, i'tidal,* and *tasamuh* have proven to be effective as ideological filters in dampening the currents of radical extremism and religious liberalism. Institutionally, the transformation of Aswaja values into *habitus* in Islamic boarding schools and universities ensures that the values of moderation do not only stop at the cognitive level, but manifest

in inclusive social behavior. In addition, the cultural flexibility of Aswaja through the rules *of al-muhafadzah 'ala al-qadim as-shalih* allows moderate Islam to remain relevant in facing the challenges of digital disruption and *the post-truth era*. The implications of this study confirm that the sustainability of moderate civilization is highly dependent on the resilience of the thinking methodology (*manhaj al-fikr*) and the strengthening of educational institutions as a fortress of ideological defense. The strategy of digitizing Aswaja values is a crucial recommendation for policy makers to ensure that the narrative of moderation continues to dominate the public space in the future.

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