

# The Impact of Religious Moderation in School Uniform Policies: A Mixed-Methods Analysis on Student Well-Being in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how religious moderation is operationalized through school uniform policies and how these policies influence student well-being in Indonesian public senior high schools and vocational schools. Although previous research has explored religious moderation in madrasahs and the politics of hijab regulation, limited studies have integrated religious moderation policy, uniform regulation, and student well-being within a single analytical framework. This study addresses that gap by analysing how inclusive uniform rules shape students' daily experiences, identity expression, and sense of belonging. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining survey data from 110 students across four schools in West Sumatra and Central Java with qualitative interviews and document analysis. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while qualitative responses were coded thematically. The findings show three key results. First, uniform regulations that neither mandate nor prohibit religious attire are widely perceived as supportive, with 99.1 percent of students reporting no disruption to their school activities. Second, 98.2 percent believe that current policies reflect multicultural values, indicating alignment with national religious moderation guidelines. Third, wearing the hijab has become a personal habit for most Muslim female students, suggesting that policy neutrality does not diminish religious identity. These findings demonstrate that inclusive uniform policies strengthen students' psychological comfort, social cohesion, and cultural respect. The study concludes that schools should maintain flexible uniform regulations and integrate religious moderation principles to promote equitable and harmonious learning environments.

## ABSTRAK

*Studi ini membahas bagaimana moderasi beragama diimplementasikan melalui aturan seragam sekolah dan bagaimana aturan ini terkait dengan kesejahteraan siswa di sekolah menengah negeri di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan analisis metode campuran, data diperoleh dari 110 siswa di tiga sekolah kejuruan dan sekolah menengah atas di Jawa Tengah dan Sumatera Barat. Wawancara, analisis dokumen, survei, dan tinjauan pustaka dilakukan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan persepsi siswa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa moderasi beragama terungkap dalam peraturan seragam saat ini, yang tidak melarang atau mewajibkan siswa untuk mengenakan pakaian keagamaan seperti jilbab. Siswa sebagian besar menemukan kebijakan ini mendukung dan inklusif terhadap keberagaman, dengan 99,1% mengakui bahwa peraturan seragam tidak membebani kegiatan sehari-hari mereka dan 98,2% mengakui bahwa kebijakan saat ini mencerminkan nilai-nilai multikultural. Analisis ini*

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## KATA KUNCI

Moderasi beragama, analisis kebijakan, kesejahteraan siswa, pendidikan, multikultural, toleransi beragama

*menunjukkan bahwa peraturan seragam yang inklusif dapat melahirkan rasa memiliki, identitas, dan kenyamanan psikologis yang positif, memperkuat lingkungan pendidikan multikultural demi kesejahteraan siswa. Studi ini mengungkap kontribusi baru dengan memadukan regulasi yang seragam, kebijakan moderasi beragama, dan kesejahteraan ke dalam kerangka analitis, yang menawarkan rekomendasi yang berarti bagi para pendidik, pemimpin sekolah, dan pembuat kebijakan untuk menyediakan lingkungan belajar yang harmonis dan inklusif.*

## Introduction

Moderation is widely understood as a balanced position that avoids extreme tendencies and promotes justice, fairness, and harmony across social and institutional interactions (Badruzzaman, 2022; Hadiyanto et al., 2025; Hanapi, 2014; Helmawati et al., 2024). In many scholarly discussions, moderation is not merely a descriptive label but a normative orientation that guides individuals and institutions toward equilibrium when navigating competing values. Within Islamic scholarship, the concept of *wasathiyah* has long been recognized as a paradigm that encourages Muslims to embody tolerance, generosity, fairness, and peaceful coexistence with people of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Jati & Bachtiar, 2024). The term *wasathiyah*, often translated as “middle,” “fair,” or “balanced,” reflects a long-standing intellectual tradition that positions moderation as the ideal expression of Islamic ethics. Religious moderation therefore serves as a guiding principle for maintaining balance in social, national, and state life, ensuring that no religious community is constrained by extreme beliefs or discriminatory practices (Kafid, 2022). This principle is particularly relevant in plural societies where differences must be managed constructively to prevent polarization. At the policy level, schools function as institutional spaces where regulations shape behavior, identity, and social cohesion, and where policies can either reduce or reinforce inequality depending on how they are designed and implemented (Bandur et al., 2022; Trisnawan, 2017; Zajda, 2022). School policies thus become instruments that reflect broader societal values, including how a nation interprets and operationalizes moderation.

In Indonesia, the intersection between religious moderation and school policy has gained national attention, particularly through the Ministerial Decree on school uniform regulations (Nasution & Rojiati, 2021). Uniforms serve not only disciplinary and organizational purposes but also reflect broader cultural and religious dynamics (Roza et al., 2021; Harber, 2021). They function as visible markers of identity, belonging, and conformity, and therefore often become sites of negotiation between personal expression and institutional expectations. Historically, the use of the hijab in public schools has shifted significantly, from periods of restriction during the New Order to its widespread acceptance today (Hasni, 2021; Indriani, 2023; Nuraeni et al., 2021). These shifts illustrate how political climates and state ideologies influence school practices.

Recent controversies, such as the case at SMKN 2 Padang involving non-Muslim students being asked to wear the hijab, highlight the tension between local cultural norms, national regulation, and human rights considerations (Fajar, 2021; Roza et al., 2021). The incident also demonstrates how school-level decisions can escalate into national debates when they intersect with sensitive issues of religion and identity. Although the government responded through the SKB 3 Menteri, the subsequent cancellation of this decree illustrates the complexity of aligning uniform policies with religious values and legal frameworks (Fajar, 2021; Jarudin et al., 2023). The rapid policy reversal also reflects how public pressure, media narratives, and legal constraints interact in shaping educational governance. These debates are closely tied to student well-being, which is

influenced by religious identity, school climate, and the degree to which students feel respected and included (Hossain et al., 2023; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021; Jankowski et al., 2022; Aziz et al., 2024). When uniform policies intersect with religious expression, they can affect students' psychological comfort, sense of belonging, and daily experiences in school.

Despite extensive scholarship on religious moderation in educational settings, most studies focus on madrasahs rather than state senior high schools or vocational schools (Kafid, 2022; Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2023). This creates an imbalance in the literature, as public schools represent a broader demographic and a more diverse religious environment. Research on uniform regulations has largely centered on political or legal controversies, such as the hijab case in Padang, without examining implications for student well-being (Berlian, 2021; Jarudin et al., 2023). These studies tend to emphasize regulatory conflict, local cultural norms, or media narratives, leaving the lived experiences of students underexplored. Meanwhile, studies on student well-being rarely connect it to religious diversity or uniform policies shaped by moderation principles (Aziz et al., 2024; Muqowim et al., 2022). This separation between policy analysis, religious studies, and well-being research has resulted in fragmented understandings of how uniform regulations operate in practice. No existing research has integrated religious moderation policy, school uniform regulation, and student well-being into a single analytical framework, leaving a significant gap in understanding how these elements interact in everyday school life. This gap is particularly important because uniform policies are experienced daily by students and therefore have direct implications for their identity formation, comfort, and social interactions.

This present study aims to analyse how religious moderation influences school uniform regulations in state high schools and vocational schools, and how these regulations affect students' religious expression and well-being. It also seeks to interpret how uniform policies can accommodate religious diversity while maintaining inclusion and unity. Using human development theory and a pluralism framework, the study examines the social implications of moderation-based uniform policies for students' identity formation and school experiences. Three research questions of this study include: (1) How does religious moderation policy impact the school uniform regulation in state high schools and state vocational schools?; (2) How do students' religious beliefs and their well-being at school become affected by the uniform policies?; (3) What are the perceptions of students as the enforcers of the regulation regarding the implementation of religious moderation within school uniform policies? By focusing on both policy documents and student perceptions, the study provides a comprehensive view of how moderation principles are translated into practice.

This research offers theoretical and practical contributions by integrating three domains that have previously been studied separately: religious moderation, uniform policy, and student well-being. The study provides a novel analytical lens for understanding how policy neutrality toward religious attire can strengthen social cohesion and psychological comfort. It also contributes to discussions on how schools can serve as environments that nurture tolerance and respect for diversity. Practically, the findings offer evidence-based insights for policymakers and school leaders seeking to design inclusive uniform regulations that support both diversity and national commitments to moderation. The study therefore advances both conceptual understanding and practical strategies for fostering harmonious, equitable, and culturally responsive educational environments.

## **Method**

This study employed a mixed-methods design, which was selected as the most appropriate approach to address the research questions concerning the relationship between religious moderation, school uniform regulations, and student well-being. The mixed-methods design allows the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence, enabling the researchers to capture both measurable patterns and the depth of students' lived experiences. As described in the attachment, mixed-methods research combines interviews, observations, document analysis, and surveys to generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. This design is particularly suitable because the topic involves policy interpretation, personal perceptions, and contextual variations across schools, all of which require both numerical trends and narrative insights to be fully understood. The use of mixed-methods therefore strengthens the validity of the findings by allowing the convergence of multiple data sources.

The data for this study were drawn from a population of senior high school students enrolled in state high schools and state vocational schools in two Indonesian regions. A total of one hundred and ten students participated, with the majority coming from SMKN 2 Padang in West Sumatra, a school that gained national attention in 2021 due to the reported coercion of non-Muslim students to wear the hijab. Additional participants were drawn from SMAN 1 Banyudono Boyolali, SMKN 1 Sawit Boyolali, and SMKN Batik 1 Surakarta in Solo Raya, Central Java. These two regions were intentionally selected because Padang is known for its strong religious character and public debates about tolerance, while Solo Raya represents a highly pluralistic environment with diverse ethnic and religious communities. The inclusion criteria focused on students currently enrolled in these schools, as they are the direct subjects of uniform regulations and experience the policies daily. Parents and teachers were excluded from the study because the research specifically aimed to capture students' perspectives as the primary actors who apply and experience the uniform rules. Data collection involved administering a questionnaire to all participants, followed by interviews with selected respondents to obtain deeper explanations of their survey responses.

The analysis process followed a sequential and systematic procedure. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were first organized and examined descriptively to identify general patterns related to students' perceptions of uniform regulations, religious expression, and well-being. These descriptive findings provided an overview of the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with key statements about uniform policies and multicultural values. Qualitative data from interviews were then analysed through narrative interpretation, in which students' explanations, experiences, and reflections were coded thematically. This step allowed the researchers to contextualize the quantitative trends and explore nuances that numerical data alone could not capture. Document analysis of relevant policies and school regulations was used to triangulate the findings and ensure alignment between policy intentions and student experiences. By combining these analytical steps, the study produced a coherent and comprehensive understanding of how religious moderation is practiced within school uniform policies and how these policies influence student well-being across different sociocultural settings.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

#### **The Implementation of Religious Moderation and Students' Perception**

The implementation of religious moderation is clearly reflected in Indonesia's current school uniform regulations, which intentionally adopt a neutral stance toward religious attire. These regulations neither require students to wear religious symbols nor restrict them from doing so, thereby allowing students to express their religious identity

voluntarily. This approach demonstrates an effort to balance institutional order with respect for individual autonomy. Section 2 (Pasal 2) outlines the foundational aims of the uniform policy, which include cultivating nationalism, fostering togetherness, strengthening solidarity among students, promoting equality regardless of socio-economic background, and encouraging discipline and responsibility. These objectives illustrate that the uniform policy is not merely a matter of appearance but a strategic tool for shaping school culture and reinforcing shared civic values.



Figure 1. Official uniforms for SMAN and SMKN students according to the latest regulations (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022).

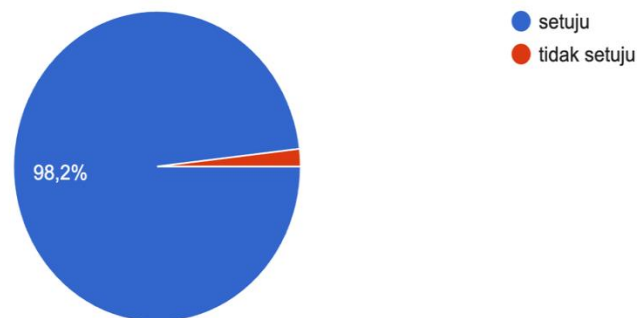
This regulatory framework aligns closely with Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on the Strengthening of Religious Moderation. Chapter II of the regulation articulates seven core principles: safeguarding human life, upholding noble civilization, respecting human dignity, reinforcing moderation, promoting peace, honoring pluralism through the protection of freedom of thought, expression, and religion, and maintaining national commitments. The uniform policy reflects these principles by ensuring that students from diverse religious backgrounds can participate in school life without feeling pressured to conform to a particular religious expression. In this sense, the uniform regulations serve as a practical embodiment of the state's broader commitment to moderation, tolerance, and social harmony.

Survey data collected from more than one hundred students across SMAN and SMKN institutions provide further insight into how these policies are experienced in practice. The majority of respondents were from SMKN 2 Padang, with additional participants from schools in Boyolali and Surakarta.



Menurut saya, peraturan penggunaan seragam sekolah saat ini sudah menaungi dan merepresentasikan siswa-siswi yang multikultural

110 jawaban



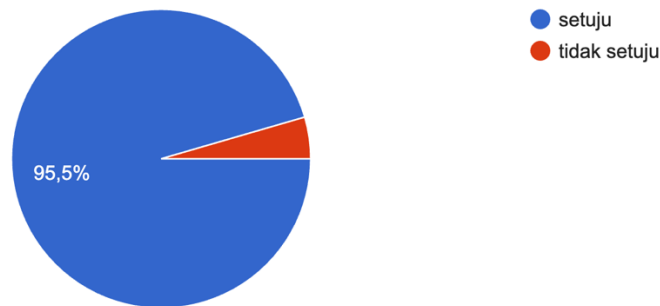
**Figure 4.** Students' Perception On The Inclusivity Of The Uniform Policy

Qualitative responses enrich these quantitative findings. Adzkia, a student from SMKN 2 Padang, explained that non-Muslim students do not face issues with not wearing the hijab, as it is not part of their religious practice. However, she suggested that wearing the hijab should be mandatory for Muslim female students because it represents their religious identity. Her view reflects a belief that religious expression should be encouraged within one's own faith community, even if not imposed universally. Henel, another student from the same school, added that while current regulations already reflect diversity, incorporating kebaya as a formal daily uniform could further strengthen cultural appreciation. She argued that wearing traditional attire more frequently would help students develop pride in their cultural heritage and enrich the symbolic meaning of school uniforms.

Regarding hijab practices, 95.5 percent of female students reported that wearing the hijab at school has become a personal habit that extends into their daily lives outside school. This suggests that the uniform policy does not merely regulate appearance but interacts with students' broader identity formation. Only 4.5 percent indicated that they do not wear the hijab outside school. According to Khumaira from SMAN 1 Banyudono, the extent to which students wear the hijab outside school depends largely on their social environment. Students in metropolitan areas tend to wear the hijab only at school to comply with regulations, whereas those in more religious communities, such as areas with many pesantrens, typically wear it as part of their daily routine. This variation underscores the contextual nature of religious expression and highlights how school policies intersect with local cultural norms.

siswi yang menggunakan hijab di sekolah, menjadi kebiasaan sehingga memakai hijab juga di kesehariannya di luar sekolah

111 jawaban



**Figure 5.** Students' Responses On The Habit Of Wearing Hijab Outside School

Overall, school uniform regulations in Indonesia continue to evolve in response to the country's multicultural and religious landscape. Although regional variations exist, public high schools and vocational schools generally design uniforms that are modest and respectful of religious customs, particularly in Muslim-majority areas. The influence of religious moderation is evident in the formulation of uniform rules, such as the guidelines for Muslim female students to wear long-sleeved shirts, ankle-length skirts, and headscarves. These rules do not apply to non-Muslim students, reflecting an effort to encourage modesty without imposing religious obligations. This approach demonstrates a nuanced understanding of diversity, allowing schools to uphold shared standards while respecting individual differences.

The survey findings indicate that most students do not feel coerced by the uniform regulations, and only a small proportion report that uniforms hinder their activities. This suggests that the policy successfully balances the goals of discipline, unity, and respect for religious diversity. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data reveals that students generally perceive the uniform policy as fair, inclusive, and aligned with their cultural and religious identities. As such, the uniform regulations serve not only as administrative guidelines but also as instruments for promoting social cohesion, cultural appreciation, and the values of religious moderation within the school environment.

From survey data collected and explained above, it was found that most of SMAN and SMKN students did not feel forced to wear school uniforms that complied with regulations, only a small portion of them felt that school uniforms could hinder their activities at school.

## Discussion

### Uniform Policies, Adolescent Identity Formation and Student Well-Being in Pluralistic Contexts

The findings of this study align closely with major theoretical perspectives on adolescent development, particularly Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which positions schools as a central microsystem shaping students' socio-emotional experiences (Khairul Amali et al., 2023). When uniform policies accommodate religious and cultural diversity, they reinforce students' sense of stability, predictability, and psychological security, strengthening the developmental function of the school environment. This interpretation is consistent with earlier scholarship on religious moderation, which emphasizes balance, fairness, and the rejection of extreme tendencies (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Jati & Bachtiar,

2024). Comparative studies in the United Kingdom and Malaysia similarly show that religious attire functions not only as personal expression but also as a cultural symbol embedded in broader social structures (Tan et al., 2024). The Indonesian context adds further nuance by demonstrating that moderation-based policies can maintain institutional neutrality without suppressing religious expression, complementing global debates that often frame uniform regulations as either restrictive or permissive (Harber, 2021). These theoretical parallels highlight how uniform policies grounded in moderation can support students' socio-emotional development within diverse school environments, particularly in contexts where religious identity is deeply intertwined with cultural belonging.

The study also reveals that uniform regulations grounded in religious moderation function as mechanisms for balancing inclusivity with respect for religious beliefs. This supports the broader policy intention of maintaining diversity within the educational system while avoiding coercion, a principle emphasized in national discussions of religious moderation (Marjani, 2023). The variation in how these policies are interpreted across regions such as in Bali, Papua, or North Sumatra, illustrates that local cultural and religious compositions shape the practical outcomes of uniform regulations. This observation resonates with Martin et al. (2014), who argue that students' sense of belonging and academic engagement increases when institutional policies acknowledge and respect their religious identity. The findings also complement historical analyses of Indonesia's shifting uniform practices, including the New Order's restrictions on hijab use (Hasni, 2021; Indriani, 2023; Nuraeni et al., 2021), by showing that contemporary policies have moved toward greater flexibility and recognition of diversity. These insights demonstrate how uniform regulations can serve as tangible expressions of institutional respect, reinforcing students' well-being through recognition rather than uniformity, and illustrating how moderation principles are translated into everyday school governance. From a developmental psychology perspective, the findings correspond with Erikson's theory of identity formation, which identifies adolescence as a critical period for negotiating personal and social identity (Erikson, 1994). Uniform policies that promote unity while allowing space for religious expression appear to support adolescents' efforts to establish a coherent sense of self. This interpretation aligns with Lerner's (2018) argument that learning environments should nurture cognitive, emotional, and cultural development simultaneously. The findings also echo Stewart et al. (2018), who emphasize that adolescents often struggle to balance cultural customs or religious convictions with institutional expectations. In Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape, this negotiation process becomes even more complex, making inclusive uniform policies particularly important. The study's findings suggest that uniforms can reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen group belonging, thereby facilitating identity consolidation during a critical developmental stage. This developmental support is especially significant in contexts where religious identity is not merely personal but embedded in broader community expectations, making the school's role in shaping identity even more consequential.

The pluralistic nature of Indonesia's educational landscape further reinforces the relevance of pluralism theory, which emphasizes the need for mutual respect among diverse groups to maintain social harmony (Hefner, 2019). The flexibility of uniform policies in accommodating different religious practices reflects a shift away from earlier approaches that privileged dominant religious norms, such as the historical expectation for Muslim female students to wear the hijab (Reidy, 2021). This shift aligns with broader societal movements toward recognizing Indonesia's multicultural identity, as highlighted by Nurman et al. (2022), who note that educational practices have increasingly incorporated multicultural values since the late 1990s. The findings also resonate with the perspective of Abdurrahman Wahid, who advocated for personal autonomy in

religious expression and opposed coercive practices (Hendrik, 2022). The students' interpretations in this study reinforce this view, demonstrating that autonomy and respect are central to the successful implementation of moderation-based policies. These insights collectively illustrate how pluralism and moderation intersect within the everyday practices of school uniform regulation, shaping how students understand their place within a diverse national community.

The findings also highlight the importance of student perceptions in ensuring the effectiveness of uniform regulations. As Raby (2012) notes, educational policies cannot function as intended if students do not internalize or accept them. The present study shows that students generally perceive uniform regulations as fair and inclusive, suggesting that the policies are aligned with their expectations and lived experiences. However, the identity negotiation challenges described by some students reflect the broader developmental tensions outlined in human development theory, which emphasizes the influence of cultural and religious environments on adolescents' perspectives (Newman & Newman, 2022). Schools, as microcosms of society, must therefore design uniform policies that respect diversity while fostering unity, ensuring that students' religious identities are neither marginalized nor imposed. These findings also align with earlier research on the role of moderation in shaping educational environments, which emphasizes the importance of balancing national commitments with respect for individual religious expression (Kafid, 2022; Kementerian Sekretariat Negara, 2023). The study thus contributes to a deeper understanding of how uniform policies can serve as instruments for cultivating inclusive school cultures that support both identity development and social cohesion.

Finally, the findings underscore the need for continued research across diverse regions and educational levels. Indonesia's multicultural context means that student experiences vary significantly depending on local norms and environments. While SMAN and SMKN students demonstrate maturity in interpreting uniform regulations within the framework of religious moderation, perspectives may differ among university students, who navigate religious identity within more complex social and institutional settings (Wu et al., 2023). These variations highlight the importance of contextualized policy analysis and the need for adaptive approaches that reflect Indonesia's pluralistic reality. Taken together, the findings argue that uniform policies informed by religious moderation are most effective when they remain context-sensitive, student-centered, and grounded in pluralistic values, enabling schools to cultivate environments that support both identity development and social cohesion.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious moderation significantly shapes school uniform regulations in Indonesian state high schools and vocational schools. Uniform policies that neither mandate nor prohibit religious attire successfully uphold the principles of neutrality, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. Students perceive these regulations as supportive of their well-being, with most reporting that uniforms do not hinder their activities and that the policies accommodate multicultural identities. The study also shows that religious expression, such as wearing the hijab, remains a personal and contextual practice rather than a product of institutional coercion. Together, these findings answer the research questions by confirming that moderation-based uniform policies foster a balanced environment where religious identity, student comfort, and institutional cohesion can coexist.

This study, however, is limited by its sample distribution, which focuses primarily on students from specific regions, West Sumatra and Central Java, whose cultural and

religious contexts may not represent the diversity of Indonesia as a whole. The reliance on self-reported survey data and selective interviews also restricts the depth of interpretation regarding students' lived experiences. Future research should expand to include broader geographic areas, incorporate longitudinal designs to observe changes over time, and involve additional stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and policymakers to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how uniform regulations interact with religious moderation in varied educational settings.

Future studies could also explore comparative analyses between regions with different religious demographics, examine how uniform policies influence identity formation across educational levels, or investigate how digital and media narratives shape public perceptions of religious moderation in schools. Practically, this study highlights the need for policymakers to design uniform regulations that remain flexible, context-sensitive, and grounded in pluralistic values. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing literature on religious moderation by demonstrating how policy frameworks translate into everyday school practices, reinforcing the role of education as a key arena for cultivating tolerance, social cohesion, and student well-being.

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