

## Nahdlatul Ulama's Cultural Strategy Against Wahhabism and Radicalism and Its Impact on Islamic Education

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study explores the strategic role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in suppressing Wahhabism and radicalism in Sumenep Regency through cultural and religious moderation initiatives. As Indonesia's largest Islamic organisation, NU serves as a vital civil society actor in preserving the country's pluralistic religious landscape, particularly in rural and archipelagic areas. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis involving NU leaders, educators, and government officials. The primary data consisted of field findings from participants, while secondary data included institutional documents, reports, and literature relevant to NU programs. Data were analysed using thematic analysis through interactive cycles of reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that NU Sumenep exercises agency by mapping radical-affiliated institutions, labelling mosques, launching ideological training for cadres (PKPNU), and promoting religious moderation through media and higher education networks. These initiatives represent a contextualised model of grassroots resistance to exclusivist ideologies. NU's agency, grounded in the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah tradition and aligned with national policy frameworks, contributes to ideological resilience and reinforces a moderate Islam that is inclusive, tolerant, and nationally committed. Furthermore, these efforts significantly influence Islamic education in Sumenep by strengthening curricula of religious moderation, shaping institutional identity in Islamic schools and pesantren, and providing preventive frameworks that reduce the penetration of Wahhabi-oriented teachings within educational environments.*

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran strategis Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dalam menekan paham Wahabisme dan radikalisme di Kabupaten Sumenep melalui berbagai inisiatif moderasi beragama berbasis budaya dan tradisi. Sebagai

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organisasi Islam terbesar di Indonesia, NU berperan sebagai aktor masyarakat sipil yang penting dalam menjaga keragaman dan pluralitas lanskap keagamaan nasional, khususnya di wilayah pedesaan dan kepulauan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, diskusi kelompok terarah, observasi, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan para tokoh NU, pendidik, dan pejabat pemerintah. Data primer berupa temuan lapangan dari para partisipan, sedangkan data sekunder meliputi dokumen kelembagaan, laporan, serta literatur yang relevan dengan program-program NU. Analisis data dilakukan dengan menggunakan analisis tematik melalui tahapan interaktif berupa reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa NU Sumenep menjalankan agensinya dengan memetakan lembaga-lembaga yang berafiliasi dengan paham radikal, melakukan labelisasi masjid, meluncurkan pelatihan ideologis bagi kader Pelatihan Kader Penggerak NU (PKPNU), serta mempromosikan moderasi beragama melalui media dan jejaring perguruan tinggi. Berbagai inisiatif ini merepresentasikan model kontekstual dari resistensi akar rumput terhadap ideologi eksklusivis. Agensi NU, yang berakar pada tradisi *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* dan selaras dengan kerangka kebijakan nasional, berkontribusi pada ketahanan ideologis dan memperkuat Islam moderat yang inklusif, toleran, dan berkomitmen kebangsaan. Selain itu, berbagai upaya tersebut berdampak signifikan pada pendidikan Islam di Sumenep dengan memperkuat kurikulum moderasi beragama, membentuk identitas kelembagaan di sekolah dan pesantren, serta menyediakan kerangka pencegahan yang mampu mengurangi penetrasi ajaran bercorak Wahabi dalam lingkungan pendidikan.

**Keywords:** *Nahdlatul Ulama, Religious Moderation, Wahhabi Ideology, Religious Radicalism.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In an ideal context, the Indonesian state envisions a harmonious religious life where Islamic values are practised in a moderate, tolerant, and inclusive manner. This vision is reflected in the national policy of religious moderation, supported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through various initiatives across regions (Mukhibat et al., 2023). As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia promotes Islamic teachings based on *Rahmatan lil Alamin* and *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, particularly through the role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in shaping religious discourse rooted in local culture, tradition, and nationalism (Ismail et al., 2025; Rahman & Kizi, 2023).

In this research, Wahhabism refers to a puritanical, scripturalist Islamic movement originating from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings, characterised by a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, rejection of local religious traditions, and opposition to practices considered *bid'ah* (Iliev et al., 2022). In the context of Sumenep, the term refers explicitly to local institutions, study groups, or educational actors that promote anti-traditionalist views and contest NU's *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* framework, particularly those identified by NU and community stakeholders as promoting exclusivist or intolerant doctrines.

Radicalism in this study Fealy (2004) is defined as religious interpretations or movements that reject pluralism, national ideology (Pancasila) (Sudjito et al., 2018; Sukarna & Wiyono, 2023), and moderate Islamic principles (Ab Rashid et al., 2020; Zikwan, 2023). These include teachings that encourage social segregation, hostility toward other religious or intra-religious groups, delegitimisation of local traditions, and resistance to state-endorsed moderation programs. The term refers to actors or institutions that propagate intolerant discourse in schools, *pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School), community prayer centres, and early childhood education (Kusumawardana et al., 2025).

However, this ideal faces challenges due to the growing influence of radical ideologies, including Wahhabism and transnational movements such as Hizbut-Tahrir and other exclusivist groups. These groups often infiltrate religious education institutions, community prayer centres, and even early childhood education, promoting intolerant views and rejecting the pluralistic and nationalistic values upheld by NU. This phenomenon threatens not only theological moderation but also national unity (Hasanah et al., 2024; Rahman & Kizi, 2023). In several areas, including Sumenep, religious fragmentation becomes visible as certain institutions begin to deviate from the *Aswaja* tradition (Hasanah et al., n.d.).

Despite the existence of national policies and the strong religious tradition of NU in the region (Chalik, 2010), there is a gap between the goals of religious moderation and the practical implementation in local communities. This gap can be seen in several concrete issues, such as the curriculum not being effectively implemented, certain institutions refusing to carry out moderation-based activities, and the minimal dialogue and collaboration between community organisations (Muhaemin et al., 2023). These conditions show that the state's formal structures cannot work alone in countering radicalism; civil society organisations, particularly NU, must act as agents of ideological and cultural resistance (McGregor, 2009). However, academic studies have not sufficiently examined how NU operates at the grassroots level—through its educational networks, social influence, and religious authority to respond effectively to the rise of non-moderate teachings. This gap in understanding limits the capacity of stakeholders to replicate NU's successful strategies in other regions (Zaluchu et al., 2025).

The urgency of this study lies in the need to document and analyse the proactive role of NU as an agent of moderation (Jaki et al., 2025; Muslih, 2019; Salendra, 2024), especially in rural and archipelagic areas like Sumenep. Strengthening community resilience against radicalism cannot rely solely on punitive approaches. However, it must also include education, ideological framing, and cultural interventions (Hefni & Muna, 2022). By investigating NU's agency, this study can contribute to a broader understanding of civil society's role in supporting state efforts, while offering contextualised models for peaceful coexistence and inter-religious harmony (Malik & Busrah, 2021).

Actually, Rasuki (2025) has researched the role of NU's agency in Sumenep in countering Wahhabism. However, the study does not provide a detailed explanation of the specific patterns and strategies employed in addressing this issue. Therefore, this research can be positioned as an effort to deepen the analysis of NU Sumenep's agency and its influence on Islamic educational institutions.

Empirical evidence from Sumenep illustrates how NU has engaged in various strategic actions to suppress radical influences. These include identifying and mapping radical-

affiliated schools and *pesantren*, collaborating with government bodies, initiating the labelling of mosques and *musholla*, and establishing religious moderation madrasah in partnership with higher education institutions and media like RRI (Nurullah et al., 2022). Furthermore, NU has launched the Training of Mobilizing Cadres (*Pelatihan Kader Penggerak NU/PKPNU*) to strengthen its grassroots leadership ideologically (Dorsey, 2024). According to local data, at least seven *pesantren* and five kindergartens in Sumenep are suspected of being influenced by Wahhabi ideology. These facts highlight the need for continuous efforts in ideological safeguarding and community-based moderation (Tran et al., 2024).

This fact indicates the growing influence of Wahhabism (Iliev et al., 2022), which is mainly due to the increasing number of educational institutions that aim to promote Wahhabi ideology. Although the level of religious conflict in this regency is relatively low, this development should not be overlooked. According to the findings of Redjosari (2021), the emergence of resistance against the establishment of Salafi-based educational institutions and *pesantren* is mainly caused by the lack of communication between the two parties. Misunderstandings and the breakdown of communication have become one of the triggers of tension between these groups.

This study will also analyse the appropriate attitudes and strategies for maintaining the NU-based understanding as the dominant religious perspective in Sumenep Regency. In Arif (2018), it is stated that strengthening the *Aswaja* doctrine within educational institutions is more effective and feasible. However, the key problem highlighted in this context is the lack of systematic and well-documented strategies showing how NU practically responds to the expansion of radical ideology at the community level. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore, document, and critically analyse the mechanisms, patterns, and strategies used by NU in countering Wahhabism and radicalism through educational (Gazali et al., 2023; Kartiko et al., 2020), cultural, and ideological approaches. The novelty of this study lies in its contribution to presenting a contextualised model of NU's grassroots agency, integrating tradition, institutional networks, and local wisdom as a replicable framework for strengthening religious moderation in rural and archipelagic settings such as Sumenep. This addition not only fills an existing research gap but also reinforces the urgency of understanding NU's role as a central actor in sustaining religious harmony and ideological resilience in Indonesia.

## II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research methodology with a case study approach focused on the NU organisation in Sumenep Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of NU's role and strategies in countering Wahhabism and radicalism through its cultural and religious moderation initiatives. The case study design allows for a contextual analysis of NU's grassroots practices and organisational responses in the unique socio-religious setting of Sumenep (Nur'aini, 2020).

Sumenep is positioned as a bounded case because its context has clear spatial, social, institutional, and cultural boundaries, allowing it to be studied in depth as a single analytical unit. These boundaries include the organisational structure of NU Sumenep, which has a specific network of *pesantren*, mosques, and educational institutions, the socio-cultural characteristics of coastal and archipelagic Madurese communities, the presence of concrete cases of Wahhabi infiltration in certain educational institutions,

and the unique interaction between NU, the local government, and the surrounding community. These contextual limitations make Sumenep a clearly defined unit of analysis (bounded system) according to Yin's criteria (Chin et al., 2025), and thus highly suitable for an in-depth case study.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observations, and document analysis (Safarudin et al., 2023). Key informants were selected using purposive sampling and included NU leaders, religious educators, community figures, local Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, and academics. The data were collected over several months through multiple visits to *pesantren*, mosques, NU-affiliated institutions, and public religious events.

The interviews focused on understanding how NU constructs its discourse on religious moderation, implements religious guidance programs, and interacts with other societal institutions. FGDs were used to validate and triangulate interview data (Natow, 2020), especially concerning the labelling of mosques, ideologisation strategies, and cooperation with government and media. A total of three FGD sessions were conducted, each consisting of 6–10 participants representing NU educators, local religious leaders, and youth organisations. The discussions were facilitated using structured guiding questions (Hedge & Dayanidhi, 2025), turn-taking protocols, and moderator intervention when debates became sensitive (Nguyen et al., 2022), ensuring balanced participation and reflective dialogue throughout the sessions. Observations and document analyses further enriched the understanding of NU's role in the field (Chand, 2025).

Data were analysed using a thematic coding technique (Mortelmans, 2025). The coding process identified patterns, themes, and discursive strategies employed by NU actors. The validity of the findings was ensured through data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking with key informants (Pahwa et al., 2023). The methodology emphasises the interpretive paradigm (Zoelner, 2025), recognising that cultural symbols, local norms, and theological narratives shape social reality in religious communities. As such, the study not only examines NU's formal policies but also highlights the symbolic and affective dimensions of its resistance to radical ideologies.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Amid the growing discussions surrounding Islamic educational institutions and *pesantren* in Madura with various emerging issues, including the current discourse on child-friendly *pesantren* the topic of Islamic educational institutions (Sayyi et al., 2025), and Wahhabism and radicalism has also gained increasing attention in recent times (Faidkholidi & Fajri, 2025; Saputra & Mubin, 2021).

Data from interviews with LPTNU Sumenep indicate that NU actively collaborates with universities and media outlets to disseminate moderation values. The LPTNU Chairman explained that the organisation initiated an association of university leaders to mainstream religious moderation through higher education. Planned initiatives include the establishment of *Aswaja* Centres across campuses and the development of *Aswaja*-based reference books or modules used in university-level teaching. Reflects an institutional approach where universities become strategic nodes for reinforcing *Aswaja Nahdliyyah* ideology.

## Ideologization Strategies Conducted by NU Sumenep

PCNU Sumenep issued a public advisory urging parents to avoid sending their children to schools or *pesantren* whose doctrinal orientation deviates from *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*. During interviews, PCNU leaders emphasised the existence of several institutions in Sumenep that do not align with NU's theological and national commitments. These statements indicate the presence of educational institutions perceived as promoting exclusivist or non-moderate ideologies.

FGD participants comprising academics, NU leaders, and community representatives confirmed that NU collaborates with the Ministry of Religious Affairs to map institutions suspected of promoting Wahhabism. Another academic participant added that institutions conducting pro-caliphate activities had been identified, prompting further assessment by NU. PCNU's chairman later confirmed that seven *pesantren* and five kindergartens in Sumenep city were identified as adopting Wahhabi-oriented teachings.

Observational data and interviews show that NU initiated a mosque-labeling program to reaffirm NU ownership and prevent doctrinal shifts. Labels featuring the NU logo are placed on mosques and *musholla* to protect these sites from external groups attempting to influence worship patterns or management. This labelling strategy is implemented not only at the district level but also extends to sub-branches and village units, including island areas.

PCNU further strengthened moderation discourse through public lectures at NU gatherings, conveying information on moderation, *Aswaja* values, and perceived ideological threats. These activities align with local government policies that encourage community leaders and religious institutions to actively counter radical influences, especially those affecting residents returning from outside regions.

NU Sumenep collaborates with the East Java FKPT in workshops involving interfaith groups and youth organisations. NU contributes by mapping ideological tendencies and alerting communities to the presence of schools or *pesantren* affiliated with specific transnational or puritanical movements. This reflects multi-stakeholder cooperation in preventing intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism.

The PKPNU emerges as a central strategy for ideological strengthening. Interviews with PCNU leaders and local cadres show that PKPNU includes structured ideological, emotional, and physical training sessions aimed at reinforcing *Aswaja Nahdliyyah* values. The training is described as producing committed NU cadres capable of promoting religious moderation across village-level communities. PCNU leadership encourages all NU members and leaders to join PKPNU, describing it as a key mechanism for identifying ideological challenges and strengthening NU's grassroots capacity.

**Table 1. Summary of ideologization strategies conducted by NU Sumenep**

Strategy	Key Findings
Collaboration with Universities and Media	NU, through LPTNU, collaborates with higher education institutions and media outlets to disseminate moderation values. Initiatives include establishing an association of university leaders, creating <i>Aswaja</i> Centres on campuses, and developing <i>Aswaja</i> -based teaching modules for university instruction.

Public Advisory on Non-Aswaja Institutions	PCNU issued warnings urging parents to avoid schools or <i>pesantren</i> whose doctrinal orientation deviates from <i>Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah</i> . NU leaders highlighted the presence of educational institutions in Sumenep that do not align with NU's theological and national commitments.
Mapping of Wahhabi/HTI/Hidayatullah-linked Institutions	NU, in collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, mapped institutions suspected of promoting Wahhabi, HTI, or Hidayatullah teachings. Several pro-caliphate institutions were identified. PCNU confirmed that seven <i>pesantren</i> and five kindergartens in Sumenep city adopted Wahhabi-oriented doctrines.
Mosque Labelling Program	NU launched a labelling initiative by placing NU logos on mosques and prayer rooms to reaffirm ownership and prevent doctrinal shifts. The program is implemented across districts, sub-branches, villages, and island regions.
Moderation Dissemination through Public Lectures	PCNU strengthened religious moderation by delivering lectures in NU gatherings, emphasising <i>Aswaja</i> values and perceived ideological threats. These efforts align with local government initiatives to counter radical influences.
Collaboration with East Java FKPT	NU engages in workshops involving interfaith groups and youth organisations, contributing to mapping ideological tendencies and alerting communities to schools or <i>pesantren</i> linked to puritanical or transnational movements.
PKPNU Cadre Training Program	PKPNU provides structured ideological, emotional, and physical training aimed at strengthening <i>Aswaja Nahdliyyah</i> values. NU cadres trained through PKPNU are expected to promote moderation at the village level. PCNU considers PKPNU a key mechanism for detecting ideological challenges and reinforcing grassroots capacity.

The table summarises seven key strategies employed by NU Sumenep to strengthen religious moderation and counter Wahhabi and other non-*Aswaja* influences. These strategies span institutional, community, and grassroots levels. NU collaborates with universities, media, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to institutionalise moderation and map institutions suspected of promoting exclusivist ideologies. Public advisories and the mosque-labeling program function as direct interventions to prevent doctrinal shifts within communities.

NU also disseminates moderation values through public lectures and engages in multi-stakeholder cooperation with the East Java FKPT, involving interfaith and youth groups. The most central strategy is PKPNU, a structured cadre-training program designed to reinforce *Aswaja* identity and build grassroots capacity. Overall, the strategies demonstrate a systematic, multi-layered approach to ideological safeguarding across educational, social, and religious spheres.

The findings illustrate that NU Sumenep employs a multi-layered institutional strategy to reinforce religious moderation within Islamic educational settings (Muslih, 2019). Collaboration with universities and media through LPTNU reflects an effort to embed

*Aswaja* values at the intellectual and discursive levels (Muhaemin et al., 2023). By establishing *Aswaja* Centres and developing teaching modules, NU transforms higher education institutions into ideological hubs that normalise moderate interpretations of Islam. Indicates a proactive and future-oriented approach, targeting young intellectuals who will shape religious discourse in the region. According to Ikhsan et al. (2024), the development of *Aswaja an-Nahdliyah* is strengthened through curriculum integration, interactive teaching methods, and learning materials that connect traditional values with contemporary issues. This effort aligns with NU's broader strategy of establishing *Aswaja* Centres and developing teaching modules that transform.

At the community level, PCNU's public advisory plays a regulatory role by guiding parents' educational choices and discouraging enrollment in institutions deemed non-*Aswaja*. Such advisories serve as mechanisms of social control that aim to protect communities from doctrinal orientations perceived as exclusivist or radical. The identification of local institutions not aligned with NU demonstrates that ideological contestation is not an abstract concern but manifests concretely within Sumenep's educational landscape. The highlights NU's attempt to maintain theological hegemony in an environment marked by growing ideological diversity (Firmansyah, 2025).

The collaboration between NU and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in mapping Wahhabi, HTI-, and Hidayatullah-affiliated institutions further illustrates a coordinated effort to monitor and regulate religious teachings. According to (Aryani et al., 2025), collaboration is needed in promoting religious moderation. The discovery of *pesantren* and kindergartens with Wahhabi tendencies reveals the extent of competing religious narratives in the region. This state-civil society partnership strengthens NU's legitimacy as both a religious authority and a social actor contributing to national security, particularly in preventing radicalisation.

The mosque-labeling program demonstrates NU's strategy at the grassroots level, where control over religious spaces becomes essential for guarding *Aswaja* identity (Nurjamilah & Nurrahmi, 2021). Labelling mosques with NU symbols is not merely symbolic; it functions as a territorial and ideological marker to deter external groups from influencing local worship practices. Combined with public lectures and moderation campaigns, reinforces NU's authority in shaping community-level religious expression and maintaining doctrinal continuity across villages and even island areas (Jailani, 2025).

Finally, PKPNU emerges as the core mechanism for sustaining NU's ideological resilience (Vu, 2022). By providing structured ideological, emotional, and physical training PKPNU equips cadres with the competence and commitment needed to defend *Aswaja* teachings (Ubaidillah, 2025). This initiative not only forms a network of trained activists capable of responding to ideological threats but also strengthens NU's grassroots capacity. Collectively, these strategies reveal NU's comprehensive approach: leveraging institutions, shaping public perceptions, regulating religious spaces (Ives et al., 2024), fostering multi-sector collaboration, and building a strong cadre base. This integrated model illustrates a coherent system of ideological safeguarding tailored to contemporary challenges in Madura.

### **NU's Agency in Suppressing Wahhabism and Radicalism**

PCNU Sumenep has sought to suppress Wahhabism and radicalism in Sumenep by supporting the work of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in strengthening religious moderation among the local community. One of these initiatives is carried out through

NU's higher education institution, LPTNU, which implements religious moderation training programs. These training programs are conducted in collaboration with various higher education institutions in Sumenep and RRI Sumenep, which broadcasts the moderation school programs. There are also agreements to establish *Aswaja* Centres at all campuses in Sumenep to strengthen *Nahdliyyah*-based religious understanding. *Aswaja* books and modules are being prepared as references for all universities in Sumenep.

In the writer's view, the dissemination of religious moderation is a form of religious moderation campaign that must be carried out to strengthen the understanding of moderation among the broader public because, according to many experts, campaigning is an essential part of promoting and reinforcing religious moderation (Hefni & Muna, 2022; Rahman & Kizi, 2023).

What NU does structurally in Sumenep is constitutional, as religious moderation efforts are grounded in the Indonesian Constitution of 1945, which mandates the state to guarantee freedom of religion and belief. Protection of religious freedom is also stipulated in Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights. The responsibility to ensure such protection falls under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as stated in Presidential Regulation No. 83 of 2015 on the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Rofiqi et al., 2024).

Based on these legal foundations, NU, as a community organisation, participates in protecting the state from ideological threats to national integrity. Mukhibat et al. (2023) argue that Indonesia's diversity in ethnicity, culture, and religion can potentially lead to conflicts, making religious moderation essential to maintain peace and harmony. The goal of religious moderation education is to reduce intolerance, religious fanaticism, and extremism, which can threaten social stability and national security (Irama & Zamzami, 2021). In today's globalised and technologically advanced world, such education helps learners understand the role of religion in modern life and fosters positive values.

NU's anticipatory steps include instilling *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah an-Nahdliyah* doctrine through universities and media such as RRI to address Wahhabism and radicalism. The author views these efforts as inclusive religious moderation, which embraces diversity, avoids religious discrimination, and incorporates interfaith perspectives. Collaborating with the radio means NU is engaging in open dialogue and publicly broadcasting religious moderation messages.

The ideological content in Sumenep's religious moderation programs includes values such as: *tawassuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (equality), *syura* (consultation), *islah* (reformation), *tathawwur wa ibtikar* (innovation), and *tahadhdhur* (civility) (Nabhani et al., 2023).

PCNU's coordination with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious leaders, and civil society is seen as external collaboration, while partnerships with higher education institutions are internal coordination. These efforts are vital for policy implementation. As Harmi (2022) shows, many schools and madrasahs are still unprepared to implement religious moderation programs effectively, making NU's support essential.

One of the most striking moves by PCNU Sumenep is its public guidance urging parents not to send their children to schools and *pesantren* that are not clearly aligned with NU. Highlights that not all schools and *pesantren* in Sumenep are safe from non-NU influences. PCNU has mapped educational institutions suspected of radical tendencies,

including those affiliated with Wahhabism, HTI, and Hidayatullah, both on the mainland and islands.

It was reported that seven *pesantren* and five kindergartens in the urban area adhere to Wahhabi ideology. Some baby daycare centres are also suspected of functioning as covert spaces for *anti-Aswaja* indoctrination. This statement was first delivered by Panji Taufiq (2019) in his capacity as Chairman of PCNU Sumenep and has been reported by several media outlets, including Media Jatim (2019). In the author's view, the mapping and identification efforts conducted by PCNU represent strategic measures that are followed by community training and mosque labelling campaigns to reclaim NU religious spaces that other groups may have co-opted.

This mosque labelling initiative aligns with government instructions to keep mosques and prayer spaces free from *anti-Aswaja* doctrines, reminiscent of the culturally strategic da'wah of Walisongo. The Sumenep local government urges *pesantren* and mosque leaders to counter radical ideas, particularly because some residents have been exposed to them while outside the region.

In this context, patience is essential for realising religious moderation goals. Harmi (2022) concludes that madrasahs have been relatively successful in cultivating moderate Islam. However, PCNU, as the most prominent Islamic community organisation, plays a crucial role in combating Wahhabism and radicalism in a locally contextualised manner. NU's initiatives—especially mosque labelling even in rural and island areas—should be appreciated and supported by the government.

### **NU and the Campaign for Religious Moderation**

One significant aspect of promoting religious moderation is public campaigning. According to the National Medium-Term Development Plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional/RPJMN*) 2020–2024, religious broadcasting and campaigning are key strategies. In addition to educational institutions and houses of worship, NU Sumenep promotes religious moderation through its collaboration with RRI (Permen PPN No.14, 2020).

Besides radio, NU campaigns through demonstrations and public speaking at *Nahdliyyin* community gatherings—whether at the branch or sub-branch level. PCNU uses these forums to campaign for religious moderation and raise awareness about threats to NU principles. From the author's perspective, PCNU's collaboration with the East Java Forum for the Prevention of Terrorism (FKPT) enhances its efforts to curb intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism (Rofiqi et al., 2024).

These continuous and adaptive campaigns—ideological and practical—are part of NU's agency in suppressing radicalism in Sumenep. According to Rahman & Kizi (2023), this agency plays a key role in religious moderation mainstreaming through constant, innovative strategies. PCNU's collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs is complemented by the NU Activist Training Program (PKPNU), which strengthens *Aswaja Nahdliyyah* values across the region.

### **Relation To Islamic Education**

The role of Nahdlatul Ulama at the local level—particularly in regions such as Sumenep—serves as a concrete model for strengthening Islamic Education that is moderate, culturally rooted, and resilient to radical influences. NU has demonstrated its capacity to respond to ideological threats not merely through formal religious

instruction but through a comprehensive grassroots approach that incorporates local traditions, social structures, and deeply embedded religious networks extending from villages to *pesantren*.

By integrating the values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, the principle of *rahmatan lil alamin*, and a strong sense of national identity into its educational practices, NU promotes an understanding of Islam that is inclusive, compassionate, and open to cultural and religious diversity (Suhendi et al., 2025). This model of religious education contrasts sharply with the rigid, literalist ideologies propagated by transnational movements such as Wahhabism and Hizbut-Tahrir, which often exploit the institutional gaps within formal education systems to spread exclusivist and intolerant views.

To be more effective, Islamic Religious Education in both formal schools and madrasahs must adopt a more inclusive approach that draws on the civil and cultural strategies employed by NU. This includes the implementation of contextual and reflective teaching methods, the engagement of local religious leaders in educational processes, and collaboration between schools (Albana, 2023), *pesantren*, and civil society organisations in shaping curricula and religious activities grounded in moderation (Harmi, 2022). Moreover, Islamic Education should incorporate NU's ideological strategies—such as the NU Activist Cadre Training (PKPNU), mosque labelling programs, and the establishment of religious moderation madrasah—as systemic efforts to build ideological resilience from an early age.

In this way, NU's grassroots experience can serve as a best-practice model, not only for Sumenep but also for wider national implementation. It offers a transformative framework for reforming religious education in Indonesia, enabling it to respond effectively to contemporary ideological challenges while remaining grounded in tradition and the peaceful, tolerant values of Islam (Rosyid, 2022).

**Table 2. Analysis of findings in relation to Islamic Education**

Aspect	National Policy	NU in Sumenep	Implications for Islamic Education
Religious Vision	Moderate, tolerant, inclusive Islam	<i>Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah, rahmatan lil alamin</i>	Revision of Islamic Education vision aligned with the <i>Wasathiyah</i> principles
Problem	Radicalism, intolerance	Wahhabi infiltration into <i>pesantren</i> and early childhood education (PAUD)	Islamic Education must serve as an instrument for detecting and preventing radical ideology
Strategy	Religious moderation promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs	Mosque labelling, NU Cadre Training (PKPNU), religious moderation madrasahs	Innovation in teaching methods and curriculum development in Islamic Education
Implementing Actor	State (Ministry of Religious Affairs, BNPT, FKPT)	NU (local branches, <i>pesantren</i> , partnerships with RRI and universities)	Islamic Education teachers need collaboration with religious organisations
Educational Model	Formal education (madrasahs, schools), curriculum policy	A combination of formal education and cultural-traditional approaches	Islamic Education as value-based education rooted in the <i>Aswaja</i> culture
Challenge	Disparity in local	Institutional	Need to strengthen

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implementation	fragmentation and ideological infiltration	teacher competence and renew Islamic Education content
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### Developing Islamic Education

Sumenep Regency, known for its rich Islamic traditions and strong Nahdlatul Ulama influence, is currently facing a significant ideological challenge. Despite being a bastion of traditionalist Islam, interview narratives, NU institutional reports, and media coverage suggest the perceived infiltration of Wahhabi doctrines and exclusivist religious ideologies into educational institutions, including *pesantren* and early childhood education (Rahman & Kizi, 2023; Ridho et al., 2022). In this context, Islamic Education institutions must be strengthened—not merely as centres of doctrinal teaching, but as ideological fortresses and transmitters of inclusive, tolerant, and contextualised Islamic values.

*First* and foremost, Islamic Education institutions in Sumenep must revitalise their curriculum to emphasise *Aswaja* values and local wisdom. Religious and cultural traditions such as *tahlilan*, *manaqiban*, and *ziyarah kubur* are integral to the religious identity of the Sumenep community and must be integrated into the curriculum (Albana, 2023). This approach would ensure that religious education remains relevant and grounded in the social and cultural realities of the students. Additionally, content on religious moderation, interfaith tolerance, and the historical development of Islam in the Nusantara should be prioritised in classroom instruction.

*Second*, the competence of Islamic Education teachers must be enhanced, particularly in terms of ideological literacy (Abidin & Drajat, 2022). Teachers are not just knowledge transmitters but ideological actors who shape students' perceptions of Islam. In the context of Sumenep, Islamic Education teachers should be equipped with both theological understanding and the critical ability to identify and counteract radical narratives. Programs like PKPNU offer valuable frameworks for developing ideologically sound and pedagogically capable educators.

*Third*, teaching methods within Islamic Education must adapt to local realities and ideological challenges. Relying solely on rote learning and lecturing is insufficient. Instead, participatory, reflective, and contextual approaches should be adopted (Marwan, 2023). Activities such as inviting local religious leaders, organising field trips to traditional *pesantren*, and utilising digital media for religious content are crucial to making Islamic Education more engaging and effective. Moreover, Islamic Education should foster critical thinking among students to help them navigate and respond to religious content on social media, where radical ideologies often spread.

*Fourth*, collaboration with religious organisations—particularly NU—should be institutionalised. NU's initiatives in Sumenep, such as mosque labelling, ideological mapping of religious institutions, and the establishment of madrasah moderasi, should serve as strategic partners for Islamic Education institutions. Through such collaborations, religious education can extend beyond the classroom and become part of a larger cultural and ideological movement that protects the community from extremism (Bakri & Werdiningsih, 2011).

*Fifth*, Islamic Education institutions must embrace their social function as producers of public religious discourse (Harmi, 2022). Through seminars, *Aswaja*-based discussions, religious festivals, and digital content creation, Islamic Education can reach a broader audience and shape public consciousness. By occupying both educational and social

spaces, Islamic Education reinforces its role in building a peaceful, tolerant, and nationally rooted religious identity.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

NU's role in countering Wahhabism and radicalism is executed through strategic alliances with government institutions, pesantren, and general educational institutions. Includes collaborative efforts with NU's grassroots branches (*ranting*) to conduct ideological training and religious moderation. In addition to the ideological dissemination of Aswaja Nahdliyah teachings, NU Sumenep also conducts weekly radio campaigns on religious moderation through Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) in Sumenep. Another key component of NU's religious moderation agency is the ideological and leadership strengthening of NU cadres. Based on the findings of this study, the development of Islamic Education in Sumenep is shaped not only by curriculum content but also by pedagogical practices, ideological orientations of educators, cultural engagement, and institutional collaboration. The data suggest that in responding to the rise of exclusivist and radical religious discourses, Islamic Education operates not merely as a subject of knowledge transmission but also as an arena of ideological negotiation and identity formation. The role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Sumenep, particularly through educational, cultural, and institutional strategies, illustrates a contextual approach to strengthening religious moderation within local Islamic education ecosystems. These findings indicate that NU's model contributes to the construction of a form of Islamic education that seeks to maintain traditional Sunni–Aswaja values while addressing contemporary ideological challenges, including the spread of Wahhabi-oriented teachings. Thus, the experience of NU in Sumenep may serve as an empirical reference for understanding how Islamic education institutions navigate doctrinal contestation, cultural continuity, and moderation agendas within regional contexts.

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