



Nahdlatul Ulama and Digital Polarization of Sunni Opinion on the Iran–Israel Conflict

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Article Information	Abstract
<p>Submitted: 22 March 2026 Revision: 22 May 2026 Accepted: 29 June 2026 Published: 31 June 2026</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Digital Polarization, Nahdlatul Ulama, Islam Nusantara, Iran–Israel Conflict, Religious Moderation.</i></p>	<p><i>This study examines the digital polarization of Sunni Muslim opinion regarding the Iran–Israel conflict and the moderating role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesia. The research focuses on how social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and X (Twitter) contribute to the spread of sectarian narratives and ideological contestation within Indonesian Muslim digital discourse. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and digital discourse analysis, this study analyzes online narratives, institutional statements, and digital content produced by NU-affiliated media platforms. The findings show that digital polarization is intensified by algorithm-driven communication systems that amplify emotional and identity-based content related to Iran, Palestine, and Shia identity. In response, Nahdlatul Ulama promotes moderate digital narratives through the framework of Islam Nusantara, emphasizing humanitarian values, peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and diplomatic approaches. This study concludes that NU plays a significant role in reducing sectarian polarization and strengthening religious moderation within Indonesian digital society.</i></p> <p>Penelitian ini mengkaji polarisasi digital opini Muslim Sunni terhadap konflik Iran–Israel serta peran moderasi Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) di Indonesia. Penelitian berfokus pada bagaimana media sosial seperti YouTube, TikTok, dan X (Twitter) berkontribusi terhadap penyebaran narasi sektarian dan kontestasi ideologi dalam ruang digital Muslim Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis wacana digital terhadap narasi media sosial, pernyataan institusional, dan konten digital yang diproduksi media afiliasi NU. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa polarisasi digital diperkuat oleh sistem algoritma media sosial yang mendorong penyebaran konten emosional dan berbasis identitas terkait Iran, Palestina, dan identitas Syiah. Sebagai respons, Nahdlatul Ulama membangun narasi digital moderat melalui konsep Islam Nusantara yang menekankan nilai kemanusiaan, toleransi, koeksistensi damai, dan pendekatan diplomatik.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The escalation of the Iran–Israel conflict has transformed from a regional geopolitical confrontation into a global issue shaping public opinion within Muslim societies, including Indonesia. The conflict is no longer interpreted solely through political and military perspectives, but also through religious and ideological narratives influencing Muslim responses toward international affairs. In Indonesia, the conflict has generated diverse reactions among Sunni Muslims, particularly regarding Iran’s position within broader narratives of Islamic solidarity, resistance against Western dominance, and sectarian identity.¹ This phenomenon demonstrates that global conflicts are frequently localized through religious interpretations and sociopolitical experiences within Muslim communities.

The rapid expansion of digital media has intensified this dynamic. Information concerning the Iran–Israel conflict circulates rapidly through online news portals, YouTube discussions, X (Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and other digital platforms. Nevertheless, the circulation of information is rarely neutral because digital narratives are often framed according to ideological and political interests. Several online discussions portray Iran as a symbol of resistance against Israel and Western hegemony, whereas other narratives emphasize Iran’s Shia identity and historical tensions with Sunni Islam.² Consequently, public opinion among Indonesian Sunni Muslims becomes increasingly polarized, particularly within digital spaces where emotional and identity-based narratives spread rapidly.

This polarization reflects the continuing influence of sectarian identity in shaping Muslim public opinion in Indonesia. Support for Iran is commonly associated with solidarity toward Palestine and opposition to Western political dominance in the Middle East. Conversely, rejection toward Iran is frequently influenced by perceptions of Shia theology as incompatible with Sunni traditions.³ The conflict therefore evolves beyond a geopolitical issue into a symbolic arena where religious identity, political narratives, and digital discourse intersect. In many cases, social media discussions simplify complex

¹ Mahmoodreza Esfandiar, “Islam Nusantara and the Challenges of Political Islam in the Contemporary World: Emphasizing the Views of Abdurrahman Wahid,” *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2022): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i1.147>.

² Fira Pujia Nuraini et al., “Framing Analysis of Iran-Israel’s 2024 Conflict in Kompas.id,” *Kajian Jurnalisme* 8, no. 1 (2024): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v8i1.55562>.

³ James B. Hoesterey, “Globalization and Islamic Indigenization in Southeast Asian Muslim Communities,” *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2022): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i2.370>.

geopolitical realities into binary oppositions that deepen ideological fragmentation within Muslim society.

Several previous studies have discussed the role of Islamic organizations in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia. Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang argue that Islamic organizations play a significant role in maintaining moderation and preventing religious extremism in Indonesian society.⁴ Mahmoodreza Esfandiar further emphasizes that Islam Nusantara represents an inclusive Islamic perspective capable of responding to contemporary political challenges through moderation and contextual interpretation.⁵ Other studies have also examined how media framing shapes Muslim perceptions regarding international conflicts and identity politics within digital spaces.⁶ Nevertheless, existing studies generally focus either on Islamic moderation or media framing separately, without specifically examining the interaction between digital polarization, Sunni public opinion, and the moderating role of Nahdlatul Ulama in the context of the Iran–Israel conflict.

This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how digital media shapes Sunni Muslim polarization in Indonesia regarding the Iran–Israel conflict and how Nahdlatul Ulama functions as a moderating force amid sectarian tensions. Unlike previous studies, this research integrates three analytical dimensions simultaneously: digital media narratives, sectarian identity, and Islamic moderation within the framework of Islam Nusantara. This study argues that the polarization of Sunni Muslim opinion toward Iran cannot be understood solely through theological differences, but must also be analyzed through the interaction between geopolitical narratives, digital information flows, and religious identity construction.

In this context, Nahdlatul Ulama occupies a strategic position as the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia with a long-standing tradition of moderation, tolerance, and contextual Islamic interpretation. Through the concept of Islam Nusantara, Nahdlatul Ulama promotes an inclusive approach emphasizing humanitarian values, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence

⁴ Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, "The Challenges of Islamic Organisations in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2021): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.12948>.

⁵ Mahmoodreza Esfandiar, "Islam Nusantara and the Challenges of Political Islam in the Contemporary World: Emphasizing the Views of Abdurrahman Wahid," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2022): 24, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i1.147>.

⁶ Fira Pujia Nuraini et al., "Framing Analysis of Iran-Israel's 2024 Conflict in Kompas.id," *Kajian Jurnalisme* 8, no. 1 (2024): 56, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v8i1.55562>.

rather than sectarian confrontation.⁷ Official statements from NU regarding tensions in the Middle East consistently encourage Muslims not to be provoked by divisive narratives and to prioritize humanitarian concerns, especially regarding the Palestinian issue.⁸ Therefore, this study aims to analyze the digital polarization of Sunni Muslim opinion in Indonesia toward the Iran–Israel conflict and to examine the moderating role of Nahdlatul Ulama in maintaining religious moderation and social cohesion in Indonesian Muslim society.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature-based research design to analyze the digital polarization of Sunni Muslim public opinion in Indonesia regarding the Iran–Israel conflict and the moderating role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The study is grounded in the perspectives of Islamic political sociology and the concept of Islam Nusantara to understand the relationship between sectarian identity, geopolitical narratives, digital discourse, and Islamic moderation within contemporary Muslim society. The qualitative approach was selected because this research emphasizes interpretative analysis toward religious narratives, ideological representations, and online public discourse circulating within digital spaces. In addition, qualitative methods allow the researcher to explore the complexity of ideological contestation and the dynamics of religious interpretation that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone.

This research positions digital polarization as a sociopolitical phenomenon shaped by the interaction between media narratives, religious identity, and geopolitical perceptions. Through the perspective of Islamic political sociology, this study examines how sectarian identity influences Sunni Muslim responses toward Iran and the Iran–Israel conflict. Meanwhile, the concept of Islam Nusantara is used to analyze the moderating role of Nahdlatul Ulama in promoting humanitarian values, social cohesion, tolerance, and contextual Islamic interpretation amid increasing sectarian tensions in digital spaces. The study also highlights how social media platforms have become arenas for ideological contestation, where religious narratives are reproduced, contested, and disseminated rapidly among Muslim communities in Indonesia.

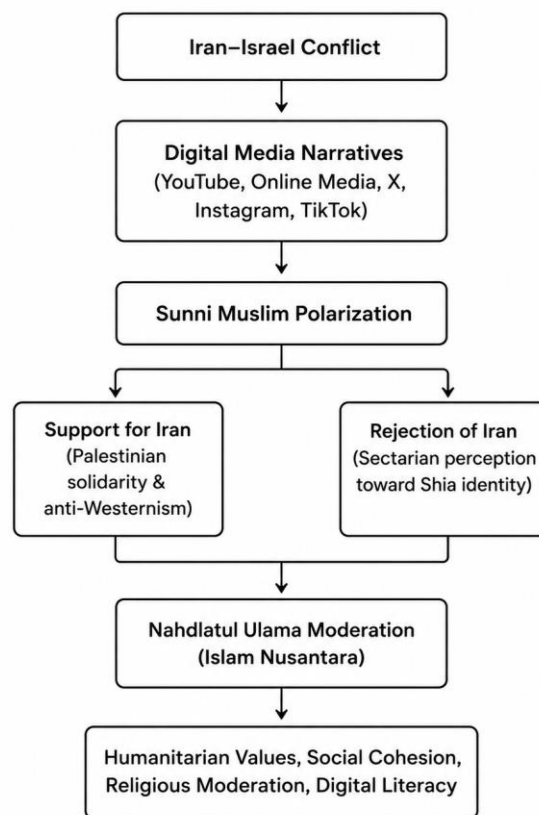
The data used in this study were collected from various secondary sources, including academic journals, books, online news articles, institutional

⁷ Ahmad Fathoni, "Islam Nusantara Menurut Gus Dur: Kajian Pribumisasi Islam," *Mozaic: Islam Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (2018): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mozaic.v4i1.120>.

⁸ Haekal Attar, "PBNU dan Kemenko Polkam Imbau Masyarakat Tak Terprovokasi Isu Eskalasi Timur Tengah," NU Online, 2025, <https://www.nu.or.id>.

publications, digital media content, and previous studies related to sectarianism, Islamic movements, digital communication, and Middle Eastern geopolitics. The data were analyzed using descriptive-interpretative techniques to identify patterns of discourse, forms of polarization, and narratives of moderation emerging within digital public spaces. Through this approach, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Nahdlatul Ulama functions as a moderating Islamic force capable of reducing sectarian polarization while strengthening inclusive Islamic values in Indonesia's contemporary digital society.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



The data used in this study were obtained from academic journal articles, institutional publications, official statements issued by Nahdlatul Ulama, online news portals, and digital media content published between 2020 and 2025. Digital sources include discussions and publications from YouTube, NU Online, Kompas.id, Tirto.id, and other online platforms discussing the Iran-Israel conflict, Sunni-Shia relations, and Islamic moderation in Indonesia. These sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research topic,

credibility, and contribution to public discourse regarding sectarian polarization and digital narratives.

Data collection was conducted through documentation and literature review techniques. The researcher collected academic publications, digital news coverage, institutional statements, and online discussion materials related to the Iran–Israel conflict and Sunni Muslim responses in Indonesia. Particular attention was given to digital narratives circulating through social media and online media platforms that potentially intensified sectarian polarization within Muslim communities.

This study applies thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, narratives, and ideological tendencies within the collected data. The analytical process involved data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and contextual analysis of digital discourse concerning the Iran–Israel conflict. The study specifically examines narratives supporting Iran through anti-Western and Palestinian solidarity frameworks, as well as narratives rejecting Iran based on sectarian perceptions toward Shia identity. Through thematic interpretation, this research analyzes how digital polarization is constructed and reproduced within Indonesian Muslim society.

To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing academic literature, institutional documents, digital media publications, and official statements from Nahdlatul Ulama. The triangulation process was conducted to strengthen analytical consistency and reduce interpretative bias in examining digital narratives and sectarian discourse related to the Iran–Israel conflict.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Narratives of the Iran–Israel Conflict in Indonesian Media

The Iran–Israel conflict has become one of the most intensively discussed geopolitical issues within Indonesian digital media spaces. The rapid development of online communication platforms has enabled the circulation of political, religious, and ideological narratives concerning the conflict among Indonesian Muslim communities. Digital media platforms such as YouTube, X (Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and online news portals function not only as channels of information dissemination but also as arenas for constructing public opinion and ideological contestation regarding the Middle East conflict.⁹

Digital narratives concerning the Iran–Israel conflict in Indonesia generally emerge through two dominant tendencies. The first narrative portrays Iran as a

⁹ Fira Pujia Nuraini et al., "Framing Analysis of Iran-Israel's 2024 Conflict in Kompas.id," *Kajian Jurnalisme* 8, no. 1 (2024): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v8i1.55562>

symbol of resistance against Israel and Western political domination, particularly due to Iran's support for Palestine. Within this perspective, Iran is frequently framed as part of the broader struggle for Muslim solidarity and anti-colonial resistance. The second narrative emphasizes sectarian perspectives by portraying Iran primarily through its Shia identity, which subsequently generates suspicion and rejection among certain Sunni Muslim groups in Indonesia.¹⁰ These competing narratives contribute significantly to the polarization of public opinion within digital spaces.

The role of digital media in intensifying polarization can be observed through various online discussions and media publications related to the Iran–Israel conflict. YouTube discussions broadcast by TVNU, for example, consistently frame the conflict within humanitarian, diplomatic, and geopolitical perspectives rather than sectarian confrontation. In several broadcasts discussing Middle Eastern tensions, speakers emphasized the importance of avoiding religious provocation and prioritizing humanitarian solidarity toward victims of war.¹¹ This demonstrates that digital religious media also function as instruments of moderation within Indonesian Muslim society.

Figure 2. TVNU Discussion on the Iran–Israel Conflict and Global Geopolitics



Source: TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, "Discussion on Middle East Conflict," YouTube, 2024.

In contrast, social media platforms such as X (Twitter) and TikTok often display more confrontational narratives concerning Sunni–Shia relations. Emotional and identity-based content tends to simplify the geopolitical complexity of the Iran–Israel conflict into binary religious opposition. In several online discussions, support toward Iran is associated with solidarity for Palestine

¹⁰ James B. Hoesterey, "Globalization and Islamic Indigenization in Southeast Asian Muslim Communities," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2022): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i2.370>

¹¹ TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, "Discussion on Middle East Conflict," YouTube video, 2024, https://youtu.be/69MVK_oqk1k

and anti-Western political resistance, whereas rejection toward Iran is frequently linked to sectarian perceptions regarding Shia theology.¹² As a consequence, digital platforms contribute to the reproduction of ideological fragmentation and sectarian polarization among Muslim users.

The framing of digital narratives is also visible in online news coverage. NU Online and several Islamic media platforms generally emphasize diplomatic solutions, peace-building efforts, and humanitarian responses to the conflict. PBNU officially urged the international community to prioritize diplomacy and ceasefire efforts while warning Indonesian Muslims not to be provoked by divisive sectarian narratives.¹³ This position reflects Nahdlatul Ulama’s commitment to maintaining social cohesion and religious moderation amid increasing polarization within digital public discourse.

Figure 3. Official Statement of PBNU Encouraging Diplomacy and Humanitarian Resolution in the Iran–Israel Conflict



Source: Haekal Attar, “PBNU dan Kemenko Polkam Imbau Masyarakat Tak Terprovokasi Isu Eskalasi Timur Tengah,” NU Online, 2025.

The phenomenon demonstrates that digital media does not merely distribute information but actively shapes ideological orientation and collective identity within Muslim society. The interaction between geopolitical conflict, sectarian discourse, and digital communication has transformed the Iran–Israel conflict into a symbolic issue influencing religious perceptions and political attitudes among Indonesian Sunni Muslims. Therefore, digital polarization

¹² Nuraini et al., “Framing Analysis of Iran-Israel’s 2024 Conflict,” 58.

¹³ Haekal Attar, “PBNU dan Kemenko Polkam Imbau Masyarakat Tak Terprovokasi Isu Eskalasi Timur Tengah,” *NU Online*, 2025, <https://www.nu.or.id>

surrounding the Iran–Israel conflict must be understood not only as a communication phenomenon but also as a sociopolitical and religious process constructed through continuous media interaction.¹⁴

Table 1. Digital Narratives and Sunni Polarization toward the Iran–Israel Conflict in Indonesian Media

No	Digital Platform	Dominant Narrative Polarization Pattern	Polarization Pattern
1	YouTube (TVNU)	Humanitarian diplomacy	Moderate Islamic discourse
2	X (Twitter)	Anti-Western solidarity	Pro-Iran polarization
3	TikTok	Sectarian narratives	Sunni–Shia tension
4	Online News Portals	Geopolitical framing	Public opinion fragmentation

Source: Processed from TVNU discussions, NU Online publications, and Nuraini et al. (2024).

The findings presented in Table 1 indicate that digital platforms significantly influence the construction of Sunni Muslim polarization regarding the Iran–Israel conflict in Indonesia. Each platform produces different narrative tendencies depending on audience characteristics, communication patterns, and ideological orientation. YouTube discussions affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama tend to promote humanitarian and moderate Islamic discourse, whereas platforms such as X (Twitter) and TikTok more frequently amplify emotional, confrontational, and sectarian narratives. This condition demonstrates that digital media not only functions as a medium of information exchange but also as an arena for ideological contestation shaping religious perceptions and political attitudes within Indonesian Muslim society. Consequently, the challenge of maintaining religious moderation increasingly depends on the ability of Islamic organizations, particularly Nahdlatul Ulama, to strengthen inclusive digital narratives capable of countering sectarian polarization and identity-based fragmentation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Mahmoodreza Esfandiar, “Islam Nusantara and the Challenges of Political Islam in the Contemporary World: Emphasizing the Views of Abdurrahman Wahid,” *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2022): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i1.147>

¹⁵ Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, “The Challenges of Islamic Organisations in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia,” *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2021): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.12948>

Sunni Polarization toward Iran in Indonesian Digital Space

The polarization of Sunni Muslim public opinion toward Iran has become increasingly visible within Indonesian digital spaces following the escalation of the Iran–Israel conflict. The rapid development of digital communication technology has enabled the circulation of ideological narratives, religious sentiments, and geopolitical interpretations influencing Muslim responses toward international conflicts. Social media platforms such as YouTube, X (Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, and online Islamic forums function not only as channels of information dissemination but also as arenas for ideological contestation and identity formation among Muslim communities.¹⁶

Support toward Iran among certain Sunni Muslim groups in Indonesia is generally associated with narratives of Palestinian solidarity and resistance against Western political domination in the Middle East. Within many digital discussions, Iran is portrayed as one of the few Muslim-majority countries consistently supporting Palestinian independence and openly opposing Israeli military actions in Gaza. Consequently, pro-Iran narratives frequently emphasize themes of anti-imperialism, Muslim solidarity, resistance against Zionism, and humanitarian concern for Palestinian civilians affected by war.¹⁷ This phenomenon demonstrates that support for Iran is not always rooted in theological alignment with Shia Islam, but rather emerges from shared political and humanitarian sentiments circulating through digital media narratives.

Several online discussions broadcast through YouTube channels such as TVNU and other Islamic digital media platforms also reveal how geopolitical discourse is interpreted through religious and humanitarian perspectives. Discussions concerning the Iran–Israel conflict frequently emphasize humanitarian suffering in Gaza, criticism toward Israeli military operations, and the failure of Western countries to stop civilian casualties.¹⁸ In these discussions, support toward Palestine often becomes intertwined with positive perceptions of Iran because Iran is consistently portrayed as actively supporting Palestinian resistance movements. The findings reveal that digital media narratives contribute significantly to shaping emotional solidarity and political sympathy among Muslim audiences in Indonesia.

¹⁶ Fira Pujia Nuraini et al., "Framing Analysis of Iran-Israel's 2024 Conflict in Kompas.id," *Kajian Jurnalisme* 8, no. 1 (2024): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v8i1.55562>

¹⁷ TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, "Iran and Global Political Analysis," YouTube video, 2024, <https://youtu.be/s9aX-OLPTWw>

¹⁸ TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, "Live Discussion on Geopolitics," YouTube video, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/live/iV1bMBx62Qs>

However, rejection toward Iran simultaneously emerges through sectarian narratives emphasizing theological differences between Sunni and Shia Islam. In various online discussions circulating through TikTok, X (Twitter), and Islamic digital forums, Iran is frequently associated with Shia political expansion and ideological deviation from Sunni orthodoxy.¹⁹ Sectarian narratives often portray the Iran–Israel conflict not only as a geopolitical confrontation but also as part of a broader Sunni–Shia rivalry shaping contemporary Muslim politics. As a result, discussions concerning Palestine and Middle Eastern geopolitics frequently shift into theological debates concerning sectarian legitimacy and religious identity.

The findings of this study indicate that Sunni polarization within Indonesian digital spaces cannot be understood merely as theological disagreement between Sunni and Shia communities. Instead, polarization is strongly shaped by the interaction between geopolitical narratives, digital communication structures, and identity-based discourse reproduced continuously through online media platforms. This finding represents an important contribution of the study because previous discussions regarding the Iran–Israel conflict in Indonesia generally focus only on political solidarity or media framing separately, without specifically examining how sectarian identity and digital algorithms simultaneously influence Sunni Muslim opinion formation.

The study further demonstrates that social media algorithms contribute significantly to intensifying sectarian polarization within Indonesian digital spaces. Platforms such as TikTok and X (Twitter) tend to prioritize emotionally charged and provocative content because such narratives generate higher engagement among users. As a result, confrontational discourse related to Sunni–Shia tensions spreads more rapidly compared to moderate or diplomatic narratives. This explains why sectarian narratives surrounding the Iran–Israel conflict frequently dominate online discussions despite Indonesia’s long tradition of moderate Islam.

Moreover, this study finds that digital polarization among Indonesian Sunni Muslims is characterized by three dominant patterns. First, pro-Iran narratives based on anti-Western solidarity and support for Palestine. Second, anti-Iran narratives rooted in sectarian perceptions toward Shia Islam. Third, moderate narratives emphasizing humanitarian concerns, diplomatic solutions, and social cohesion promoted by organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama. The presence of these three patterns indicates that Indonesian Muslim digital discourse is not

¹⁹ James B. Hoesterey, “Globalization and Islamic Indigenization in Southeast Asian Muslim Communities,” *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2022): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i2.370>

entirely polarized into binary opposition, but also contains moderating voices attempting to reduce sectarian confrontation within online public spaces.

Table 2. Patterns of Sunni Polarization toward Iran in Indonesian Digital Space

No	Polarization Orientation	Dominant Narrative	Main Digital Platforms
1	Support for Iran	Palestinian solidarity and anti-Western resistance	YouTube, X (Twitter)
2	Rejection toward Iran	Sectarian perception toward Shia identity	TikTok, Islamic forums
3	Moderate position	Humanitarian concern and diplomatic solution	NU Online, TVNU

Source: Processed from TVNU discussions, NU Online publications, digital discourse analysis, and Nuraini et al. (2024).

The findings presented in Table 2 confirm that digital media has transformed the Iran–Israel conflict into a symbolic arena for negotiating religious identity, political ideology, and Islamic solidarity within Indonesian Muslim society. Unlike previous studies that primarily discuss media framing or Islamic moderation separately, this study demonstrates that digital polarization is produced through the interaction between geopolitical narratives, sectarian identity, and algorithmic communication structures within social media environments. This finding constitutes an important contribution of the study because it explains how global geopolitical conflicts are localized within Indonesian Muslim discourse through digital religious communication.

Furthermore, the study highlights the strategic role of Nahdlatul Ulama in countering sectarian polarization through moderate digital narratives grounded in Islam Nusantara. NU-affiliated media platforms consistently frame the Iran–Israel conflict within humanitarian and diplomatic perspectives rather than sectarian confrontation. This approach contributes to reducing ideological fragmentation by emphasizing peace-building, religious moderation, and humanitarian solidarity instead of identity-based hostility. Therefore, the study argues that strengthening moderate Islamic digital discourse is essential for maintaining social cohesion and preventing the expansion of sectarian polarization within Indonesian Muslim cyberspace.²⁰

²⁰ Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, “The Challenges of Islamic Organisations in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia,” *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2021): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.12948>

The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Constructing Moderate Digital Narratives

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) plays a significant role in constructing moderate digital narratives amid the increasing polarization of Sunni Muslim opinion regarding the Iran–Israel conflict within Indonesian digital spaces. As the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, NU has consistently promoted Islamic moderation through the framework of Islam Nusantara, which emphasizes tolerance, humanitarian values, peaceful coexistence, and contextual religious interpretation. In the context of digital communication, NU does not merely function as a religious institution but also as an important actor shaping public discourse and countering sectarian polarization circulating through social media platforms.²¹

The development of digital media has transformed the pattern of religious communication within contemporary Muslim society. Social media platforms such as YouTube, X (Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and online Islamic news portals have become major arenas where religious identity, geopolitical narratives, and ideological contestation are continuously reproduced. Within these digital environments, emotionally charged and provocative narratives frequently dominate public attention because algorithmic systems tend to amplify content generating high engagement among users. Consequently, sectarian discourse related to Sunni–Shia tensions often spreads rapidly and contributes to ideological fragmentation within Muslim communities.²²

In responding to this condition, Nahdlatul Ulama actively constructs moderate digital narratives emphasizing humanitarian solidarity and diplomatic approaches rather than sectarian confrontation. Through official media platforms such as TVNU and NU Online, NU consistently frames the Iran–Israel conflict within broader humanitarian and geopolitical perspectives instead of reducing the issue into theological hostility between Sunni and Shia groups. Several discussions broadcast through TVNU emphasize the importance of protecting civilian victims of war, encouraging peaceful conflict resolution, and avoiding divisive religious provocation within Indonesian society.²³ This approach demonstrates NU's effort to prevent global geopolitical tensions from intensifying sectarian conflict at the domestic level.

²¹ Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, "The Challenges of Islamic Organisations in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2021): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.12948>

²² James B. Hoesterey, "Globalization and Islamic Indigenization in Southeast Asian Muslim Communities," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2022): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i2.370>

²³ TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama, "Discussion on Middle East Conflict," YouTube video, 2024, https://youtu.be/69MVK_oqk1k

The concept of Islam Nusantara becomes an important foundation in NU's digital moderation strategy. According to Ahmad Fathoni, Islam Nusantara represents an inclusive Islamic perspective integrating Islamic teachings with local wisdom, cultural accommodation, and social pluralism.²⁴ Through this framework, NU promotes the understanding that Islamic solidarity toward Palestine should not automatically produce hatred toward particular sectarian groups. Instead, NU encourages Muslims to prioritize humanitarian concern, peaceful coexistence, and social harmony within public discourse concerning international conflicts.

NU's moderating role is also visible through its institutional statements regarding tensions in the Middle East. PBNU repeatedly urged Indonesian Muslims not to be provoked by divisive sectarian narratives circulating through digital platforms. NU emphasized that the Iran–Israel conflict should be understood through humanitarian and diplomatic perspectives rather than through sectarian hostility.²⁵ This position reflects NU's long-standing tradition of moderation rooted in the historical development of Indonesian Islam. A. Jauhar Fuad explains that moderation within Nahdlatul Ulama historically developed through accommodation, social harmony, and contextual Islamic interpretation capable of responding to sociopolitical challenges without encouraging ideological extremism.²⁶

Furthermore, this study finds that NU's digital moderation strategy operates through several interconnected dimensions. First, NU promotes humanitarian narratives focusing on solidarity toward civilian victims affected by war regardless of religious or sectarian identity. Second, NU strengthens diplomatic discourse encouraging peaceful conflict resolution and international cooperation instead of military escalation. Third, NU develops moderate Islamic communication through digital platforms to counter misinformation, sectarian provocation, and ideological extremism circulating within social media environments.

The findings also indicate that NU's moderate digital narratives function as an important counterbalance against algorithm-driven polarization within social media. Platforms such as TikTok and X (Twitter) frequently prioritize provocative identity-based content because emotionally confrontational

²⁴ Ahmad Fathoni, "Islam Nusantara Menurut Gus Dur: Kajian Pribumisasi Islam," *Mozaic: Islam Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (2018): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mozaic.v4i1.120>

²⁵ Haekal Attar, "PBNU dan Kemenko Polkam Imbau Masyarakat Tak Terprovokasi Isu Eskalasi Timur Tengah," *NU Online*, 2025, <https://www.nu.or.id>

²⁶ A. Jauhar Fuad, "Akar Sejarah Moderasi Islam Pada Nahdlatul Ulama," *Tribakti Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 31, no. 1 (2020): 153–68, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v31i1.991>

narratives attract stronger public engagement. In this situation, moderate discourse often becomes less visible compared to sensational sectarian narratives. Therefore, NU's active involvement within digital communication spaces represents an important effort to maintain social cohesion and reduce ideological fragmentation among Indonesian Muslims.²⁷

This study demonstrates that Nahdlatul Ulama's role in constructing moderate digital narratives extends beyond religious authority into the broader sphere of digital public communication. NU utilizes digital platforms not only for religious dissemination but also for promoting moderation, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence within contemporary Muslim society. Consequently, NU's moderation strategy contributes significantly to preventing the expansion of sectarian polarization and strengthening inclusive Islamic discourse within Indonesian digital spaces.

Implications of Digital Polarization for Religious Moderation in Indonesia

The increasing polarization of Sunni Muslim opinion regarding the Iran–Israel conflict within Indonesian digital spaces has broader implications for religious moderation and social cohesion in Indonesia. The rapid circulation of ideological narratives through social media platforms demonstrates that digital communication technologies not only facilitate information exchange but also shape religious perception, political identity, and collective emotional responses among Muslim communities.²⁸

Digital polarization surrounding the Iran–Israel conflict illustrates how global geopolitical issues are localized within Indonesian Muslim discourse through religious interpretation and identity politics. In many online discussions, support for Palestine becomes intertwined with sectarian perceptions toward Iran and Shia Islam. Consequently, international political conflict is transformed into symbolic religious contestation capable of influencing intergroup relations among Indonesian Muslims.²⁹

One important implication of this phenomenon is the increasing vulnerability of digital spaces to identity-based fragmentation. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize provocative and emotionally charged content

²⁷ Mahmoodreza Esfandiar, "Islam Nusantara and the Challenges of Political Islam in the Contemporary World: Emphasizing the Views of Abdurrahman Wahid," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2022): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i1.147>

²⁸ Fira Pujia Nuraini et al., "Framing Analysis of Iran-Israel's 2024 Conflict in Kompas.id," *Kajian Jurnalisme* 8, no. 1 (2024): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkj.v8i1.55562>

²⁹ James B. Hoesterey, "Globalization and Islamic Indigenization in Southeast Asian Muslim Communities," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2022): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i2.370>

because such narratives attract stronger public interaction. As a result, moderate discourse emphasizing diplomacy, humanitarian values, and peaceful coexistence often becomes less dominant compared to confrontational sectarian narratives. This condition potentially weakens the tradition of religious moderation that has historically characterized Indonesian Islam.³⁰

The findings of this study also indicate that sectarian polarization within digital spaces may influence broader sociopolitical stability within Indonesian society. Although Sunni–Shia tensions in Indonesia remain relatively limited compared to several Middle Eastern countries, digital narratives continuously reproducing sectarian hostility can gradually strengthen intolerance and ideological exclusivism among online Muslim communities.³¹ In this context, digital communication functions not merely as a technological medium but also as an arena for constructing collective identity and ideological legitimacy.

Nahdlatul Ulama's role in promoting moderate digital narratives therefore becomes increasingly significant within contemporary Indonesian society. Through the framework of Islam Nusantara, NU consistently promotes inclusive Islamic values emphasizing tolerance, cultural accommodation, humanitarian solidarity, and peaceful social relations. This approach demonstrates that Islamic moderation remains relevant in responding to contemporary digital challenges, particularly those related to sectarian polarization and ideological fragmentation.³²

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that strengthening digital religious moderation requires active engagement within online communication spaces. Moderate Islamic organizations can no longer rely solely on conventional religious authority because contemporary public discourse is increasingly shaped by algorithmic communication structures and digital interaction patterns. Consequently, organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama must continuously expand their presence within digital platforms to disseminate moderate

³⁰ Mahmoodreza Esfandiari, "Islam Nusantara and the Challenges of Political Islam in the Contemporary World: Emphasizing the Views of Abdurrahman Wahid," *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 3, no. 1 (2022): 21–37, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v3i1.147>

³¹ Hasse Jubba, Jaffary Awang, and Siti Aisyah Sungkilang, "The Challenges of Islamic Organisations in Promoting Moderation in Indonesia," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2021): 43–54, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.12948>

³² Ahmad Fathoni, "Islam Nusantara Menurut Gus Dur: Kajian Pribumisasi Islam," *Mozaic: Islam Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (2018): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.47776/mozaic.v4i1.120>

narratives capable of countering misinformation, hate speech, and sectarian provocation.³³

This study also contributes theoretically by integrating digital media analysis, sectarian identity, and Islamic moderation within a single analytical framework. Previous studies generally discuss media framing, Islamic moderation, or sectarian identity separately. However, this research demonstrates that digital polarization within Indonesian Muslim society emerges through the interaction between geopolitical narratives, religious identity construction, and social media communication systems simultaneously.³⁴

Therefore, the challenge of maintaining religious moderation in Indonesia increasingly depends on the ability of Islamic organizations, digital communities, and state institutions to strengthen inclusive digital discourse capable of reducing ideological polarization. Moderate Islamic narratives emphasizing humanitarian solidarity, peaceful coexistence, and social harmony remain essential for preserving Indonesia's pluralistic religious landscape amid the rapid expansion of digital political communication.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Iran–Israel conflict has intensified polarization among Sunni Muslim communities in Indonesian digital spaces. Social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and X (Twitter) contribute significantly to the spread of sectarian narratives and ideological contestation regarding Iran, Palestine, and Shia identity. The findings indicate that Nahdlatul Ulama plays an important role in constructing moderate digital narratives through the framework of Islam Nusantara. NU consistently promotes humanitarian values, peaceful coexistence, and diplomatic approaches rather than sectarian confrontation. Through platforms such as NU Online and TVNU, NU attempts to reduce polarization and strengthen religious moderation within Indonesian Muslim digital discourse. This research also demonstrates that digital polarization is influenced by algorithm-driven communication systems that amplify emotional and identity-based content. Therefore, strengthening moderate Islamic discourse in digital media becomes increasingly important for maintaining social cohesion in Indonesia.

³³ Haekal Attar, "PBNU dan Kemenko Polkam Imbau Masyarakat Tak Terprovokasi Isu Eskalasi Timur Tengah," *NU Online*, 2025, <https://www.nu.or.id>

³⁴ A. Jauhar Fuad, "Akar Sejarah Moderasi Islam Pada Nahdlatul Ulama," *Tribakti Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 31, no. 1 (2020): 153–68, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v31i1.991>

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Ethical Clearance

This study used publicly available digital content and secondary data sources. Therefore, formal ethical clearance was not required.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study are available from publicly accessible digital platforms, including YouTube, NU Online, and related online publications cited in this article.

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