Religious Moderation in the Practice of Interfaith Marriage: A Case Study of Silvia Tan and Ko Muadz

Husna Fathiyah[1], Bustomi Arisandi[2], Mudarris[3]
[1]Universitas Islam Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia,[2,3]Darul Hikmah Islamic College, Bangkalan, Indonesia

Email: husnafathiyaa@gmail.com[1] , abidnri9@gmail.com[2], darrisnice@gmail.com[3]

Abstract*: This study explores religious moderation in the context of interfaith marriage in Indonesia through the case of Shilvia Tan (Muslim) and Ko Muadz (Confucian), who have lived harmoniously for 17 years without religious conversion. The purpose is to analyze how religious moderation is practiced in interfaith households and how this case reflects tensions between state law, religious doctrine, and individual rights. The originality of this research lies in its interdisciplinary perspective that combines legal, religious, and sociological analysis with the lived experience of an interfaith couple, filling a gap in previous studies that largely focused on normative or legal aspects.Using a qualitative approach, the study employs literature review and media analysis of academic works, legal documents, news reports, and social media discussions from 2007 to 2024. Data were thematically analyzed to identify issues such as legal challenges, public perceptions, and representations of religious moderation.Findings show that interfaith marriage reveals structural obstacles in legal recognition and highlights the gap between the state's discourse of moderation and the lived realities of citizens. The case demonstrates that tolerance and family harmony can be achieved without conversion, but more inclusive legal and social policies are needed to address the needs of Indonesia's plural society.*

Keywords: *Religious Moderation, Interfaith Marriage, Interfaith Tolerance*

Introduction

Indonesia is known as a pluralistic country with a diversity of religions, ethnicities and cultures united in the spirit of Unity in Diversity. However, this plurality does not necessarily guarantee a harmonious life among religious communities, especially when these differences intersect with fundamental values in the social and spiritual life of society. One of the most complex and controversial issues in the context of religious diversity in Indonesia is interfaith marriage (Muhtarom et al., 2020).

Interfaith marriage is a meeting point between private and public values, between personal beliefs and social regulations. Law No. 1/1974 on Marriage states that a marriage is valid if performed according to the laws of each religion and belief. This provision implicitly closes the legal space for interfaith marriage because the laws of the majority religion do not allow it. As a result, couples who wish to enter into an interfaith marriage are faced with various administrative, social and theological obstacles. It is not uncommon for them to be forced to marry abroad or make formal

religious conversions in order to fulfill legal requirements, even though their inner beliefs have not changed (Amal, 2024).

This situation reflects the gap between the principle of pluralism upheld in the constitution and the socio-legal reality faced by society. It is in this context that the concept of religious moderation becomes very important. Religious moderation is a religious approach that emphasizes balance, tolerance, non-violence, and respect for differences. This idea has become a strategic policy of the government, especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in maintaining harmony and preventing radicalism. However, the application of this concept still faces serious challenges when faced with concrete cases such as interfaith marriages (Karman et al., 2022).

The case of the marriage between Shilvia Tan and Ko Muadz came into the public and social media spotlight in 2007 as it illustrated a real dynamic in the practice of religious diversity and tolerance in Indonesia. Shilvia Tan, a Muslim woman, and Ko Muadz, a Confucian man, lived a 17-year marriage without forcing a religious conversion on each other. They continue to adhere to their respective faiths, build their family, and raise their children in an atmosphere of open interfaith dialog. This marriage is not only a personal event involving two individuals, but also reflects a broader social struggle regarding how Indonesian society deals with differences in faith in the most intimate space: the household. Their courage to live with differences emerges into the public sphere as a reflection of the complexity of marriage law, the limits of state authority in private matters, and how society views interfaith relations beyond the level of discourse. Through the experiences of Silvia and Ko Muadz, we can see that the practice of moderation is not only measured by the formal narratives of the state or religious institutions, but also by the social realities that citizens live directly. Their story reveals that tolerance and respect for differences can be practiced without having to sacrifice the religious identity of each party. But on the other hand, it also highlights the structural challenges that interfaith couples face in gaining equal legal and social recognition. Various reactions have emerged, both from religious leaders, religious organizations, academics, and ordinary people. Some see it as a form of respect for individual freedom and love across faith boundaries, but not a few criticize it on the grounds that it violates religious norms.

The state, in this case the marriage registrar, does not provide legal recognition, so the couple must seek other legal loopholes to obtain legal recognition. This phenomenon shows the tension between normative ideals of moderation and rigid institutional realities. Society remains divided on this issue, suggesting that moderation is not yet a grounded practice in the face of complex differences. When interfaith marriages do not find a humane and just solution, the ideal of harmony will only remain a slogan. This study is relevant because it is able to present a critical analysis of how the concept of religious moderation is translated into social practice, especially in a very personal issue such as interfaith marriage. In addition, this study also seeks to reveal how society, the state, and the media interpret and respond to the practice of interfaith marriage in the context of increasingly dynamic diversity in Indonesia.

Although studies on interfaith marriage have been widely conducted, most of the previous research has focused primarily on normative-theological aspects or formal legal perspectives (Amri, 2020; Hermawan, 2018). Research that highlights the lived experiences of interfaith couples within the framework of religious moderation remains limited, particularly in Indonesia, where legal regulations and social diversity present complex challenges. This gap is what the present study seeks to address.

This research offers two main contributions. First, it does not only examine legal frameworks and religious norms but also explores the concrete practice of religious moderation in the daily life of an interfaith household, through the case study of Silvia Tan and Ko Muadz. Second, it demonstrates how public narratives, media discourses, and state institutions interact in responding to interfaith marriage, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the tension between normative state discourses and the lived social realities of citizens. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the literature on religious moderation by presenting an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates theological, legal, and social dimensions in a more holistic manner

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach through literature review and media analysis. The literature review includes scholarly works, legal documents, and government policies on religious moderation and interfaith marriage, selected based on their relevance and credibility. This method allows the researcher to identify gaps in existing scholarship and to situate the study within broader theoretical and legal debates. Media analysis focuses on news articles, online reports, and social media discussions from 2007 to 2024 that documented and debated the case of Silvia Tan and Ko Muadz. Through this approach, the study captures how interfaith marriage is framed in public discourse, thereby providing direct insight into societal perceptions and responses.

Data were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring issues such as legal barriers, public perceptions, and representations of religious moderation. This process allowed the researcher to map how different actors—including the state, society, and the media—construct and respond to interfaith marriage. By combining the critical insights from literature with empirical social narratives from media sources, this methodology ensures that the research objectives—analyzing the practice of religious moderation and its social-legal challenges—are addressed in a comprehensive manner.

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Result and Discussion

Conceptual Foundations of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation in Indonesia emphasizes balance, tolerance, and respect for diversity (Arikarani et al., 2024; Irama & Zamzami, 2021). The Ministry of Religious Affairs frames moderation as a national policy to counter intolerance, while Islamic organizations contextualize it in theological principles. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) emphasizes tawasuth (middle way), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice), while Muhammadiyah promotes wasatiyyah Islam as the foundation for dialogue and coexistence.

Table 1. Comparative perspectives on religious moderation

Actor	Core Principles
Ministry of Religious Affairs	Balance, tolerance, harmony, prevention of radicalism
Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)	*Tawasuth, Tasamuh, Tawazun, I'tidal*
Muhammadiyah	*Wasatiyyah Islam*, inclusive da'wah, building multicultural society

This conceptual foundation illustrates that moderation is not a uniform idea but shaped by diverse religious and institutional interpretations.

In the perspective of religious organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), religious moderation has long been embedded in the principles of tawasuth (middle way), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice). NU encourages Muslims to be inclusive, open interfaith dialog, and reject violence in the name of religion. The same is held by Muhammadiyah, which emphasizes wasatiyyah Islam (moderate Islam) as the basis for thinking in the relationship between religion, science, and humanity. Muhammadiyah also prioritizes enlightening da'wah and building multicultural societies through peaceful, not confrontational, approaches (Mahatma, 2017).

The views of interfaith religious figures also underscore the importance of moderation in religious life. Gus Dur (KH. Abdurrahman Wahid), for example, taught that religion should be a source of compassion, not a means of justifying violence. He stated, "God does not need to be defended," as a form of criticism of violent and exclusive religious attitudes. Christian figures such as Franz Magnis-Suseno also emphasize that religious plurality is not a threat, but a social reality that must be managed with a spirit of mutual respect (Muis, 2024).

The Legal Foundation of Marriage in Indonesia

In Indonesia, formally, the rules regarding marriage are regulated in two main regulations, namely Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage and Presidential Instruction of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1991 concerning the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI). These two regulations regulate various aspects of marriage, including provisions regarding interfaith marriages. In Law No. 1/1974, specifically Article 2 paragraph (1), it is stated that: "A marriage is considered valid if it is conducted in accordance with the religious laws and beliefs of each party." This provision implicitly emphasizes that the validity of a marriage depends on the religious rules or beliefs adopted by the couple. Thus, marriages that are not in accordance with the provisions of their respective religions are considered legally invalid.

The legal framework for marriage in Indonesia is restrictive. Law No. 1/1974 and the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) affirm that marriages are valid only if conducted under the same religion, thereby limiting the legality of interfaith marriages (Hermawan, 2018; Amri, 2020). Catholic canon law similarly imposes restrictions, while Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions provide greater flexibility under certain conditions.

A similar view is also emphasized in several articles in the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) which is a legal product based on Presidential Instruction Number 1 of 1991. Among them are:

1. Article 4, which states that a marriage is valid if it is conducted according to the provisions of Islamic law, as stipulated in Article 2 paragraph (1) of Law Number 1 Year 1974.
2. Article 40, which sets out the conditions under which a man is prohibited from marrying a woman. These prohibitions include:
   a) A woman who is still bound in marriage to another man;
   b) Women who are in the iddah period due to divorce or death of the husband;
   c) Women who do not profess the religion of Islam (Asiyah, 2015).

In the regulation of Islamic law in Indonesia, Article 44 of the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) explicitly prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men. Meanwhile, Article 61 states that differences in social level or incompatibility (not sekufu) are not a barrier to marriage, unless the incompatibility is caused by differences in religion (ikhtilaf al-dien). Based on the contents of these two articles, it can be concluded that every marriage conducted within the jurisdiction of Indonesia must be within one religious belief system. Interfaith marriages conducted without the same religion between the two parties are considered contrary to the Indonesian constitution and positive law. From an Islamic perspective, interfaith marriages are not allowed in principle (Amri, 2020).

The Qur'an explicitly prohibits Muslims from marrying polytheists, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 221 which states that:

> "*Do not marry polytheist women until they believe. Indeed, a believing slave girl is better than a polytheist, even if she appeals to you. And do not marry polytheists (to believing women) before they believe. Indeed, a believing male slave is better than a polytheist male, even if he attracts you.*"

This prohibition applies to both Muslim men and women who wish to marry non-Muslims. Even for men from among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), there is a strict prohibition on marrying Muslim women. Surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 10 and Al-Baqarah verse 221 reinforce this provision. Imam Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi explained that Muslim women are not allowed to marry disbelieving men, whether from the People of the Book or not. This assertion refers to the word of Allah which states that a Muslim woman is not lawful for a polytheist man, unless the man has embraced Islam. This prohibition applies absolutely without exception. Surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 10 also confirms that believing women who migrate should not be returned to their disbelieving husbands, because they are not lawful for each other. This verse also implies that marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not recognized and must be broken (Hermawan, 2018).

Scholars such as Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Jazairi state that there is no evidence, either from verses or hadith, that allows disbelieving men, including those from the People of the Book, to marry Muslim women. Even the use of the term "kafir" in Islamic texts often includes all non-Muslims, whether polytheists, People of the Book, or apostates. A similar opinion is also expressed by Muhammad Ali ash-Shabuni, who explains that Allah forbids the guardians of women to marry off their dependents to polytheist men. The term "polytheists" here includes various groups, including idolaters, Mussulmans, Jews, Christians, and people who have apostatized from Islam. Imam al-Qurthubi stated that marriage between a Muslim woman and a polytheist man is invalid in terms of Shariah. The consensus of scholars (ijma') confirms that such a relationship is a form of abuse of the religion of Islam. Ibn Abdil Barr even stated that all scholars agree that it is not permissible for a Muslim woman to be the wife of a disbelieving man under any circumstances (Yaman, 2024).

Marriage in the context of Indonesian law is interpreted as a physical and mental bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife with the aim of forming a happy and lasting family, based on the principle of God Almighty. Therefore, a marriage is declared valid if it is held in accordance with the teachings of the religion and beliefs of each party, and is officially registered in accordance with the provisions of the applicable laws and regulations. However, marriage between adherents of different religions raises its own problems. It should be noted that interfaith marriages are not included in the category of mixed marriages as referred to in the

Marriage Law. In the law, mixed marriages refer to marriages between Indonesian citizens (WNI) and foreigners (WNA), not because of differences in religion between the spouses (Cahyani, 2020).

With Indonesia's pluralistic society, interfaith marriages are not impossible. For couples with sufficient economic means, they can marry abroad to be legally recognized. However, financially challenged couples face major obstacles, which in turn lead to complex legal issues. There are two common approaches to obtaining legality for interfaith marriages:

1. One party changes their religion to match the religion of their partner. However, this is often just a formality to fulfill administrative requirements. After the marriage process is complete, the couple returns to their original religion. This step is considered legal manipulation and is not recommended because it contradicts the spirit of Law No. 1/1974.
2. Based on Supreme Court Decision No. 1400 K/Pdt/1986, the KCS can record interfaith marriages.

Conversely, under the a contrario approach, the KUA can also register a marriage if the non-Muslim couple does not dispute the provisions of Islam and is willing to undergo the process according to sharia. In this case, the couple is considered to be fully subject to Islamic law regarding marriage. Interfaith marriages do not have to be performed by pretending to convert, as this is an act of legal smuggling. Through the legal approach as stated in the Supreme Court's decision, interfaith couples can still legally marry without having to abandon their respective beliefs.

Religious Views on Interfaith Marriage

Interfaith marriage is a sensitive issue in a multicultural society like Indonesia. Although Indonesian positive law, based on Law No. 1/1974 on Marriage, requires marriage to take place in accordance with each religion, the reality in society often shows different complexities. Differences in interpretation and acceptance of interfaith marriage reflect variations in theological views between religions. The following describes the views of each major religion on interfaith marriage.

1. Islamic view

    In Islam, marriage is not only a social contract, but also an order of worship that must be fulfilled in accordance with the Shariah. The majority of scholars from all four Sunni schools of thought (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali) hold the principle that (Hamzani, 2020):

    a) Muslim men are allowed to marry women from among the Ahlul Kitab (Jews and Christians), based on the Qur'an Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 5, which reads:

        "*This day you are permitted that which is good ... and (it is permissible to marry) chaste women from among those who were given the Book before you.*" (QS. Al-Ma'idah: 5)

        However, this marriage is still conditioned on the protection of the children's faith and the good of the family. Some contemporary scholars suggest that this should be avoided because of the potential for religious conflict in the household.

    b) Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men, whether they are polytheists or People of the Book. This prohibition refers to the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah verse 221:

"*And do not marry polytheists (to believing women) until they have believed.*"(QS. Al-Baqarah: 221)

This opinion is reinforced by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Fatwa No. 4/2005, which emphasizes that marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is haram and invalid, both religiously and sharia. MUI argues that interfaith marriages can disrupt the continuity of faith and religious education of children in the family. In addition, many Muslims view interfaith marriages as conflict-prone due to fundamental differences in value systems, worship rituals, and moral authority (Jalil, 2018).

2. Catholic view

    The Roman Catholic Church has a more systematic but still exclusive view of interfaith marriage. In Catholic doctrine, marriage is a holy sacrament that is spiritually binding and not just social. If a Catholic wants to marry a non-Christian, special permission from the bishop (dispensation of disparity cultus) is required for the marriage to be considered valid in the Church. Meanwhile, if the couple belong to two Christian denominations (e.g. Catholic and Protestant), the marriage is still considered valid but requires permission from the church authorities (dispensation mixta religio) (Lon, 2019). The Code of Canon Law (Codex Iuris Canonici), Canons 1124-1129, stipulates that interfaith marriages are allowed under two main conditions:

    a. The Catholic side promises to maintain the Catholic faith and endeavors to educate the children in a Catholic manner.

    b. The non-Catholic spouse knows and agrees to the vows.

    However, in pastoral practice, many priests or local churches are reluctant to grant permission when there is no firm agreement on the faith education of children. The focus of the Catholic church is the continuity of faith values within the Catholic household (Sanga, 2014).

3. Protestant view

    Unlike Catholics, Protestants have a variety of views due to the non-centralized organizational structure of their churches. Each synod or denomination has its own authority in determining marriage policy. Some Protestant churches, especially evangelical or conservative ones, still reject interfaith marriages on the grounds that differences in faith will undermine the spiritual unity of the household (referring to 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be united with those who are not of the same faith."). However, many Protestant churches are more inclusive and contextual. They allow interfaith marriages as long as both parties show mutual understanding, tolerance, and are committed to maintaining family harmony. Churches often continue to perform blessings of interfaith marriages, although legal registration is done through the Civil Registry Office (KCS), not the church institution (Nainggolan et al., 2015).

    4. Hindu and Buddhist views

        a. Hinduism (especially Balinese Hinduism)

            In Balinese Hinduism, interfaith marriages can still be performed through ritual ceremonies of belief alignment, such as the sudhi wadani procession (spiritual cleansing ritual) for non-Hindu couples. After going through the ritual, the couple is considered to have spiritually 'merged'

with the Hindu tradition and can enter into marriage. However, in practice, formal religious adjustment is often done, as in Balinese custom, it is important for couples to be integrated into the religious traditions and rites of the family, especially in major ceremonies such as ngaben and galungan (Wartayasa, 2018).

b. Buddha

Buddhism does not place strong restrictions on interfaith marriages. The main principles in Buddhism are awareness, mutual understanding, and harmony in domestic life. There is no Tripitaka text that explicitly prohibits Buddhists from marrying non-Buddhists. However, monks or monastery leaders usually recommend that couples share common moral values (sila) and commit to living in peace and mutual respect. Since Buddhism emphasizes moral and spiritual practices rather than rigid theological structures, interfaith marriages are not considered a violation of the teachings (Rukiyanto, 2021).

5. Confucian view

In Confucian tradition, family harmony and respect for ancestors are the main principles of domestic life. Therefore, interfaith marriages are not explicitly prohibited, as long as Confucian ethical and moral values are maintained. One of the important things in a Confucian family is the ceremony of honoring ancestors, such as prayers and Chinese New Year celebrations. As long as the non-Confucian couple respects these traditions, the marriage is considered valid and accepted by the community. A Confucian marriage not only unites two individuals, but also unites two extended families. Therefore, the blessings of parents and family are very important, and are often more decisive than just the theological aspects (Huriani et al., 2022).

Interfaith marriage is a complex issue influenced by the doctrines, traditions and social circumstances of each religion. In Islam and Catholicism, interfaith marriages are in principle prohibited or severely restricted, as they are considered to have an impact on the continuity of faith. Meanwhile, the Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian churches are more flexible, although they still emphasize the values of understanding, ethics and family unity. In the Indonesian context, the issue of interfaith marriage does not only concern theological aspects, but also state law, which requires the same religion in the implementation of marriage to be considered legally valid. Therefore, a thorough understanding of both religious and statutory aspects is key in addressing this issue.

Marriage law in Indonesia presents serious obstacles to interfaith couples. Law No. 1/1974 and the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) stipulate that a marriage is valid only if conducted under the same religion. For Muslims, Article 44 of KHI prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men, and MUI Fatwa No. 4/2005 reinforces this restriction. Catholic canon law also imposes strict conditions, requiring bishop dispensation, while Protestant, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions display greater flexibility in practice.

Table 2. Religious perspectives on interfaith marriage in Indonesia

Religion	Position on Interfaith Marriage
Islam	Prohibited for Muslim women; limited permission for Muslim men with *Ahlul Kitab* (MUI Fatwa 2005)
Catholicism	Requires bishop's dispensation; children must be raised Catholic
Protestantism	Varies by denomination; some reject, others allow with mutual understanding
Hinduism	Often requires ritual adjustment (e.g., *sudhi wadani* in Balinese Hindu tradition)
Buddhism	No strict prohibition; emphasis on harmony and shared values
Confucianism	Permissive if family harmony and ancestral rites are respected

This comparative overview shows that while some religions allow conditional flexibility, Indonesian state law remains rigid, creating structural obstacles for interfaith couples.

The Case of Silvia Tan and Ko Muadz as a Socio-Religious Reflection

1. Chronology

   Silvia Tan and Ko Muadz have been in the spotlight on social media for sharing their story of being married for 17 years. Silvia is Muslim, while Ko Muadz is Confucian. Both still maintain their respective beliefs, but live harmoniously as a married couple. Interfaith marriage is a very sensitive topic, especially in Indonesia where legally and socially there are still questions about its legality and its impact on families, especially children. In Indonesia, the Marriage Law No. 1/1974 implies that a valid marriage is one between couples of the same religion. Many interfaith couples end up marrying abroad in order to be legally registered when they return to Indonesia. Couples like Silvia and Ko Muadz often face social pressure and stigma, both from family and the environment. However, their story shows how tolerance and love can be the main foundation of a relationship, despite different faiths.

2. Reaksi Publik

   Silvia and Ko Muadz's wedding was a big hit on social media. Many users responded emotionally, both in favor and against. On the one hand, some people welcomed their marriage as a triumph of love over religious boundaries, considering it a representation of religious tolerance and individual rights. Many netizens congratulated them and hoped that the couple would be an inspiration for people living in diversity. However, on the other hand, there was strong opposition, especially from religious conservatives. Some Muslim leaders and activists said that the marriage was not valid according to Islamic law, because in the view of Islam (the majority of Sunni scholars), Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men, while Muslim men are only allowed to marry Ahlul Kitab women (Jews or Christians), and only under certain conditions (QS. Al-Ma'idah: 5) (Muhammad, 2021).

It also sparked a debate about the state's position in regulating and recognizing interfaith marriages. A number of figures regretted that the state, through Dukcapil, seemed to provide a legal loophole for practices that are contrary to the norms of religious law recognized in Indonesia. For example, the Director of Islamic Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Religious Affairs has said that the state only records marriages if they are religiously valid, and if there are procedural violations, they will be traced. However, at the same time, the government cannot immediately cancel the marriage certificate because it already has legal force (Syahrul Mustofa, 2019). Family law and human rights observers see this case as a clear example of the conflict between civil liberties and religious norms, which are often incompatible in the Indonesian legal system that recognizes six official religions. According to human rights experts, Indonesia should consider a pluralistic approach and the individual's constitutional right to freedom of religion and family (UUD 1945 Articles 28B and 29). (Junaidi et al., 2023).

3. Representation of the Value of Tolerance and Personal Attitude towards Different Faiths

    Silvia and Ko Muadz's marriage is also a material for socio-religious reflection on how plural societies should deal with differences, especially in the context of private relations such as marriage. This couple represents a group of individuals who try to harmonize differences in faith by prioritizing mutual respect, not forcing each other's beliefs, and choosing to maintain their respective religions in married life. In the interview, Silvia said that they never planned to convert each other, and that they had agreed to live with an interfaith commitment. This attitude reflects the core values of religious moderation, namely:
    a. Not forcing each other's beliefs, both continue to worship according to their respective beliefs, showing a high attitude of tolerance.
    b. Raising children, one of the aspects most questioned by the public is how they educate their children. In several interviews or posts, they mentioned that children are given freedom of choice, with guidance from both parents.
    c. Harmonious life, they show that differences do not have to be a barrier to building a healthy and loving household.

    Religious moderation in this case does not mean mixing teachings, but rather strengthening a mature and rational attitude in the face of differences. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, this approach is essential to prevent religion-based horizontal conflicts. However, it is also important to note that this practice of moderation is not free from criticism. For some, especially those who hold strict religious interpretations, interfaith tolerance in the realm of marriage is considered to violate the principles of sharia and cause social slander. They argue that such relationships can lead to ambiguity in children's upbringing, potential conflicts of values, and decreased loyalty to religion. In contrast, from a human rights perspective, the state should be there to guarantee the freedom to choose a life partner, without imposing specific religious norms. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, freedom of religion and freedom to form a family are fundamental rights guaranteed by international law.(Maula, 2023).

    The marriage of Silvia Tan (Muslim) and Ko Muadz (Confucian), ongoing for 17 years, exemplifies the lived practice of moderation within an interfaith household. They chose not to convert, continued their respective religious practices, and raised children in an environment of tolerance.

Public responses were sharply divided. Many saw their union as a triumph of love and an example of tolerance, while others condemned it as contrary to religious law and questioned its legal validity.

Table 3. Public Responses to Silvia & Ko Muadz's Marriage

Supportive Views	Critical Views
Love transcends religious boundaries	Violates Islamic law and religious norms
Example of tolerance in plural society	Not legally valid under Indonesian marriage law
Protection of individual rights	Risk of confusion in children's religious identity

This case reflects the tension between personal choice and public recognition, highlighting the gap between state-promoted narratives of moderation and the everyday realities of interfaith couples.

Policy and Education Recommendations to Strengthen Religious Moderation

Based on this reality, here are some recommendations to strengthen the understanding and implementation of religious moderation in society:

1. Reformulation of Religious Marriage Policy
   The state needs to develop policies that are more inclusive and have a human rights perspective, including by providing legal space for interfaith marriages. This does not mean ignoring religious teachings, but rather providing legal alternatives that can accommodate the increasingly complex social conditions of society. For example, the government could consider making implementing regulations or technical regulations, which allow the registration of interfaith marriages under certain conditions, including religious counseling and agreements on children's education (Rahmatika & Hafidzi, 2025).
2. Improving Tolerance Education at All Levels
   Formal and informal education should be equipped with a religious moderation curriculum that is not only theoretical, but also contextual. Through early education, values such as mutual respect, open-mindedness and empathy for differences can be strongly instilled. This program should involve religious leaders, teachers and higher education institutions as the main actors in disseminating moderation values (Lubis & Harahap, 2025).
3. Facilitate Interfaith and Community Dialogue
   The government and religious organizations should regularly hold interfaith dialogue forums that discuss actual issues, including interfaith marriage, in order to create a deeper understanding and avoid miscommunication. Such dialogues should uphold the spirit of inclusiveness, not to find winners, but to find common ground over differences.
4. Provide Neutral Counseling and Mediation Services
   Interfaith couples who wish to marry should receive assistance and counseling services, both from religious and state institutions. This counseling is important so that both parties understand the spiritual, social and legal consequences of their marriage. In addition, state institutions can provide neutral mediation, not to impose a decision, but to help find a fair middle ground (Zein, 2019).

Previous studies on interfaith marriage in Indonesia have largely focused on normative legal restrictions (Amri, 2020; Hermawan, 2018) or theological prohibitions. Others, such as Muhtarom et al. (2020) and Karman et al. (2022),

analyze religious moderation mainly in educational or institutional contexts. This study differs by highlighting the lived experiences of an interfaith couple and examining how their marriage is represented in public and media narratives. By doing so, it provides an interdisciplinary contribution that integrates legal, religious, and sociological perspectives. Compared to prior works, this study demonstrates that moderation is not only a matter of theological discourse or legal frameworks but also a daily practice negotiated by citizens. The Silvia–Ko Muadz case reveals how tolerance can exist in private life despite institutional resistance, while also underscoring the urgent need for more inclusive policies

Conclusion

This study reveals that interfaith marriage in Indonesia highlights not only theological and legal constraints but also the tension between the state's narrative of religious moderation and the lived realities of citizens. The case of Silvia Tan and Ko Muadz illustrates how tolerance and family harmony can be achieved without religious conversion, yet their marriage continues to face structural and social barriers.The originality of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining legal, religious, and sociological perspectives with the lived experience of an interfaith couple. In doing so, it offers a more holistic contribution to the literature on religious moderation, moving beyond normative debates to real-life practices.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made: (1) legal reform to provide fair recognition for interfaith marriages, (2) strengthening of tolerance education at all levels, (3) facilitation of interfaith dialogue on sensitive issues such as marriage, and (4) provision of neutral counseling and mediation services for interfaith couples. In conclusion, religious moderation must move beyond abstract policy to become a lived practice supported by inclusive laws, educational initiatives, and open dialogue. Such integrative efforts are essential to ensure justice, tolerance, and harmony in Indonesia's plural society..

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