

Religious Moderation Preaching as a Model of Islamic Guidance and Counseling in the 2024 Political Year: A Case Study of Al-Washliyah, Medan City

Abdul Hafiz Harahap¹, Zainal Arifin², Efi Brata Madya³

Doctoral Study Program (S3) Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Faculty of
Da'wah and Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia¹

Doctoral Study Program (S3) Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Faculty of
Da'wah and Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia²

Doctoral Study Program (S3) Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Faculty of
Da'wah and Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia³

E-mail: hafizharahap@gmail.com¹, zainalarifin@uinsu.ac.id²
efibratamadya@uinsu.ac.id³

Correspondent Author: Abdul Hafiz Harahap, hafizharahap@gmail.com

Doi: 10.31316/g-couns.v10i02.8654

Abstract

This research aims to analyse Al-Washliyah's da'wah in promoting religious moderation in Kota Medan during the politically charged year of 2024. The study addresses the rise in religious politicisation and extremist narratives that threaten social cohesion. Using a qualitative case study design, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, and were analysed thematically to identify strategies, challenges, and impacts. The findings reveal that Al-Washliyah fosters religious moderation through sermons, digital media, interfaith collaboration, and community education, highlighting tolerance, inclusivity, and unity. Organisational strength and leadership commitment support these efforts, whereas misinformation and political polarisation remain major obstacles. In practice, this study provides policymakers and religious institutions with insights into developing effective communication models to sustain harmony during electoral dynamics. It contributes to understanding the roles of local religious organisations in maintaining peace amid political tension.

Keywords: religious moderation, al-washliyah, islamic guidance, political year, social harmony

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dakwah Al-Washliyah dalam mempromosikan moderasi beragama di Kota Medan selama tahun 2024 yang sarat muatan politik. Studi ini membahas meningkatnya politisasi agama dan narasi ekstremis yang mengancam kohesi sosial. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, dan dianalisis melalui interpretasi tematik untuk mengidentifikasi strategi, tantangan, dan dampak. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa Al-Washliyah mendorong moderasi beragama melalui khotbah, media digital, kolaborasi antaragama, dan pendidikan masyarakat, yang menyoroti toleransi, inklusivitas, dan persatuan. Kekuatan organisasi dan komitmen kepemimpinan mendukung upaya ini, sementara misinformasi dan polarisasi politik tetap menjadi hambatan utama. Secara praktis, studi ini memberikan wawasan bagi para pembuat kebijakan dan lembaga keagamaan tentang pengembangan model komunikasi yang efektif untuk menjaga kerukunan selama dinamika elektoral. Studi ini berkontribusi untuk memahami peran organisasi keagamaan lokal dalam menjaga perdamaian di tengah ketegangan politik.

Kata kunci: moderasi beragama, al-washliyah, bimbingan islam, tahun politik, harmoni sosial.

Article info

Received October 2025, Revised November 2025, Accepted November 2025, Published January 2026



INTRODUCTION

Looking back, the General Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) released the 2020 Election Vulnerability Index (IKP), which revealed that Medan City had a high IKP score of 53.20, level 4 (Bawaslu, 2020). Examining the election results in Medan City clearly demonstrates the sharp religious and ethnic divisions in the 2019 election (Agasi et al., 2021; Aminah et al., 2023; Tiola & Primarizki, 2020). It is crucial to build a sustainable democracy in Medan City by prioritizing interfaith harmony as a core principle.

Following the Regional Head Election (Pemilu) in Medan City, Indonesia, the politicization of religion has become an increasingly prominent issue in the political and social spheres (Pradana et al., 2022). Elections are a crucial moment in local political life, but religious issues are often used as a tool to achieve specific political goals. The politicization of religion following the Medan City Election has had a significant impact on relations between the region's heterogeneous communities (Perkasa, 2023).

Political debates based on religious identity often lead to polarization and tension within society (Warner et al., 2021). This threatens the harmony between ethnic and religious groups that have long coexisted in Medan. Furthermore, the politicization of religion has influenced the dynamics of policy and governance at the local level, potentially impacting people's rights and freedoms. In this context, it is crucial to understand the impacts of post-election religious politicization in Medan and to seek solutions that promote peace, tolerance, and cooperation among ethnic and religious groups (Zulham, 2023). The above conditions certainly have the potential to trigger social division and segregation in Medan.

The 2024 Medan Election promises to be a highly engaging political event, but it also carries the potential for polarization and interfaith division. In the context of Medan's religious diversity, which underpins its community life, elections often become a platform for religious issues to be wielded as political weapons. This potential for polarization may be related to efforts by certain parties to exploit religious issues to gain political support Mendoza et al (2019), thereby creating tensions between religious groups. Amplified religious sentiment during election periods can create divisions and heighten societal disharmony.

Elections are crucial moments in the life of the nation and the state, during which every citizen has the right to participate in determining the direction and leadership of the country. In the pluralistic context of Medan, preaching religious moderation becomes increasingly important to build harmony and tolerance within a diverse society. Al-Washliyah, as a religious organization in Medan, plays a strategic role in spreading the message of moderation, emphasizing the values of tolerance, harmony, and inclusivity. Taking this perspective, this study aims to explore Al-Washliyah's contribution to formulating a narrative of religious moderation preaching that can enrich the discourse of the 2024 political contestation and potentially generate a positive impact in building participatory awareness and unity among the community.

Al-Washliyah's preaching faces significant challenges with the rapid development of technology. The digital era brings significant changes in the methods of delivering preaching, and conventional preaching through Friday sermons must adapt to new trends. Although many digital platforms offer new ways to disseminate religious messages, preaching through Friday sermons remains effective in influencing audiences and congregations. Friday sermons have a unique appeal because they can reach thousands of people directly in mosques or through live broadcasts. The physical presence of the



congregation offers a significant advantage over sermons or preaching delivered via digital platforms. The voice of the sermon, the sincerity of the speaker, and the energy of the mosque environment can all have a profound impact on listeners. Although technology offers new alternatives, da'wah (preaching) through Friday sermons remains a relevant and impactful means of spreading religious values (Khumaini & Abdurrazaq, 2022). In the political process, the message of moderation in Friday sermons plays a strategic role in guiding Muslims away from extremism and intolerance (Maksum, 2020).

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to recognize the close relationship between religion and politics, particularly amidst a dynamic political year. Medan, as a representative of Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity, is a crucial platform for Al-Washliyah's messages of moderation. The primary challenge facing the community is the potential for conflict and tension in the political dynamics leading up to the 2024 elections. In this context, religious moderation preaching can be positioned as a model of Islamic guidance and counseling that is not merely reactive but also preventive and transformative.

By framing Friday sermons and other religious activities as platforms for structured guidance, Al-Washliyah can systematically instill values of tolerance, pluralism, and civic responsibility. This approach allows the community to receive consistent moral guidance aligned with Islamic ethics while addressing socio-political challenges that may arise during the election period. By integrating the principles of guidance and counseling, religious leaders can identify potential sources of tension within the congregation, provide empathetic responses, and promote dialogue that fosters social cohesion. Ultimately, positioning religious moderation preaching as a model of Islamic guidance and counseling in the political year 2024 is a strategic effort to minimize polarization and encourage constructive participation in democracy.

This model enables Al-Washliyah to transform religious preaching into a practical tool for community empowerment, equipping citizens with the moral clarity and social awareness needed to engage in political processes responsibly. However, existing studies on religious moderation largely focus on national narratives and policy-level discourses, leaving local dynamics underexplored. There is a lack of empirical research examining how religious moderation operates within the socio-political realities of regional elections, particularly in heterogeneous cities such as Medan. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by providing a contextual analysis of religious moderation in a local setting during a political year. If implemented effectively, this initiative could serve as a replicable framework for other religious organizations in Indonesia, contributing to the creation of a more tolerant, just, and harmonious society where religion becomes a unifying rather than divisive force.

This study contributes to the development of Islamic guidance and counseling science by integrating the principles of da'wah moderation with practical counseling approaches to address socio-political challenges. The findings offer a framework for religious leaders and educators to apply therapeutic communication and preventive counseling within religious preaching to strengthen community resilience. Moreover, the research provides policymakers with valuable insights for formulating social policies that promote interfaith harmony and prevent polarization during political transitions. Despite extensive studies on the politicization of religion in Indonesia, few have examined how local Islamic organizations such as Al-Washliyah operationalize da'wah to promote religious moderation during periods of political contestation. Existing literature has largely focused on national-level movements or macro-political narratives, leaving a gap



in understanding how local religious actors function as agents of peace in diverse urban contexts such as Medan. Therefore, there is a need for empirical research that explores Al-Washliyah's religious moderation preaching model as an instrument of socio-political resilience and democratic harmony in the 2024 election year.

METHOD

The type of research used in this dissertation is qualitative research. Qualitative research is a study aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people, individually and in groups. This is not much different from Meleong's (2018) view, which holds that a qualitative approach is based on the idea of describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, and the attitudes of individuals and groups. The paradigm of this research is constructivist, which emphasizes that knowledge is an active construction influenced by individuals' experiences, values, and social context (Lincoln & Guba, 2016).

This research specifically uses the case study method. Robert K. Yin is widely recognized as one of the most influential scholars in the development of case study methodology, particularly within the fields of social sciences, management, and education. Yin (2018) defines a case study as an empirical research strategy that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. According to Yin (2018), the case study approach is most appropriate when the research aims to answer "how" and "why" questions, when the researcher has little or no control over behavioral events, and when the focus is on present-day, real-world situations embedded in complex social, organizational, or cultural systems.

In this view, reality is interpreted subjectively, and each individual constructs meaning based on their personal experiences. Constructivism also recognizes the important role of social interaction in the formation of knowledge, holding that meaning is not only formed individually but also through dialogue and interaction with others (Green & Piel, 2015). This paradigm plays a key role foster across various fields, embracing a more contextual and in-depth understanding of how individuals shape their worldviews (Olsen & Pilson, 2022; Pilarska, 2021).

This research was conducted at five mosques located in five electoral districts (Dapil) in Medan City, which do not have direct ties to government or private institutions and are not located in residential areas. The mosques were selected based on the intensity of their da'wah activities and their connection to the Al-Washliyah organizational network. The five mosques are Nurul Huda Mosque, Al-Amin Mosque, Al-Jihad Mosque, Istiqomah Mosque, and Salam Mosque (see attached mosque data). These mosques served as the primary venues for observing Friday sermons and other da'wah activities during the 2024 election campaign, allowing researchers to directly examine the forms, strategies, and narratives of religious moderation conveyed to congregations in a heated socio-political context.

Data collection employs multi-source triangulation, including in-depth interviews with preachers, mosque administrators, and congregants; direct observation of sermon delivery and audience engagement; and analysis of documentation of dakwah materials and institutional guidelines. Such triangulation not only enhances construct validity but also allows the research to capture the nuanced interplay between religious discourse, political awareness, and community receptivity. The data were analyzed through thematic coding and pattern matching to identify recurring strategies, narrative frameworks, and



behavioral orientations that characterize religious moderation in political communication. The interpretative process is deliberately theory-driven, aiming to contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic counseling and civic-religious engagement, especially regarding how religious organizations can act as stabilizing agents against polarizing political sentiments. Consequently, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization, but they achieve theoretical transferability, offering applicable insight for similar pluralistic urban Muslim societies in Indonesia and beyond.

Identifying research informants is a crucial step in establishing the research and the results. This study employed a purposive sampling technique to ensure that each informant possessed relevant knowledge and experience related to the problem. The criteria were as follows:

1. Must be a religious teacher (Ustaz) who is also an administrator or member of the Al-Washliyah organization.
2. Active as a preacher.

This study involved five key informants, identified by the initials Dai A to Dai E. These five informants were preachers or preachers who actively delivered da'wah (Islamic preaching) at five large mosques in each electoral district in Medan City during the research period.

The primary data sources in this study were the informants and several related articles used for the literature review. Secondary data included books, recordings of Friday sermons, reports, and scholarly articles related to the research.

In analyzing the research data on "Al-Washliyah's Religious Moderation Preaching in the 2024 Political Year in Medan City," the Miles and Huberman data analysis approach was used, focusing on in-depth understanding and mapping relationships among variables. This data analysis utilized three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (B. Miles et al., 2014).

First, in the data reduction stage, qualitative data from interviews, observations, and document analysis were condensed to identify key patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 2016). In this context, initial findings included Al-Washliyah's emphasis on inclusive language and calls for respect for differences, reflecting their active efforts to promote religious moderation.

Second, in the data presentation stage, the results of the data reduction were compiled and placed within an analytical framework to illustrate the relationships between variables (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For example, positive interactions between preachers and audiences during da'wah activities provide concrete evidence of the effectiveness of the message of moderation in inspiring a positive response from the community.

The third stage involved drawing conclusions from the emerging patterns and relationships. In this regard, the conclusion is that Al-Washliyah plays an important role in mitigating potential religious conflict during the 2024 political year. However, existential challenges are also evident, where resistance to messages of moderation suggests that attitudinal change requires a more holistic approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The views of these preachers highlight several crucial opportunities for Al-Washliyah's religious moderation da'wah. These opportunities include internal assets such as the moderate stance of the majority of preachers, as well as external assets such



as community diversity, public awareness, and potential for collaboration. This indicates that Al-Washliyah has a solid foundation for implementing moderation da'wah in the future. The opportunities for Al-Washliyah's moderation da'wah in Medan during the 2024 political year are summarized in Table 1.

Tabel 1.
 Opportunities for Al-Washliyah's Moderation Da'wah in the 2024 Political Year
 (Medan)

No	Focus of Finding	Brief Description	Data Source
1.	Pool of moderate preachers	Most Al-Washliyah preachers already promote unity-oriented and non-extreme messages, so moderation can be delivered consistently.	Interviews with preachers A–E
2.	Urban and diverse audience	Medan's heterogenous setting makes themes of tolerance, coexistence, and social cohesion relevant and acceptable.	Mosque observations & Medan context
3.	Friday sermon as main channel	The Friday pulpit is used to cool down political tension and insert moderation messages during heated moments.	Friday sermon observations
4.	Room for inter-organization collaboration	There is space to work with other religious/community actors to amplify moderation narratives.	Documents & interviews
5.	Use of digital/media platforms	Moderation da'wah can be extended online to counter politicized religious narratives.	Documents & interviews

The availability of moderate and strategic preachers to deliver messages is a valuable internal asset. This ensures the consistency of the organization's message of moderation. Coupled with the ability to build empathy and raise public awareness, Al-Washliyah's da'wah has the potential to resonate deeply within society.

Furthermore, the focus on celebrating diversity and strengthening tolerance demonstrates that Al-Washliyah's da'wah is not merely reactive to threats but also proactive in building a harmonious society. The ability to collaborate and build solidarity is key to maximizing da'wah's impact, reaching wider segments of society, and forming a united front against extremism.

Thus, these opportunities indicate that Al-Washliyah's preaching of religious moderation in the 2024 election year is not only a moral obligation but also has great potential to create a more peaceful, tolerant, and united society. Optimally utilizing these opportunities will strengthen Al-Washliyah's position as one of the vanguards in maintaining national unity.

An analysis of Al-Washliyah preachers' perceptions of the challenges and threats to preaching religious moderation in Medan City, particularly in the context of the 2024 election year, highlights various complex obstacles that require serious attention. Identifying these challenges is essential for formulating effective mitigation strategies and ensuring the sustainability of the moderate message amidst socio-political turmoil. A thorough understanding of these threats allows the organization to be more proactive in protecting the preaching of moderation from negative influences. In addition to these



opportunities, the preachers also identified several factors that hinder the delivery of moderation messages; these challenges are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2.
 Challenges and Threats to Al-Washliyah's Moderation Da'wah

No.	Type of Challenge / Threat	Impact on Da'wah	Response / Strategy Mentioned
1.	Pre-existing bias and audience resistance	Moderation messages are not immediately accepted; audiences suspect political motives.	Use more contextual, empathetic framing.
2.	Sensitivity religion-politics issues	Inaccurate wording can trigger polarization inside the mosque.	Training on crisis communication and message discipline.
3.	Inconsistency across preachers	Different preachers deliver different emphases, creating audience confusion.	Strengthening organizational guidelines/content.
4.	Misinformation and online polarization	Moderation messages lose speed to provocative content.	Build presence on digital platforms and issue clarifications.
5.	Uneven public/elite support	Moderation da'wah may look isolated and less legitimate.	Advocacy and engagement with local political/religious actors.

Overall, these challenges create a complex landscape for Al-Washliyah's religious moderation da'wah. They face deep-rooted resistance (old prejudices), vulnerability to sensitive issues that require careful communication (word choice), and difficulties in ensuring messages are widely and consistently accepted by the community (public attunement, consistency).

The fact that challenges such as consistency, public attunement, and word choice repeatedly emerged across several da'wah (Da'i A, B, C, D) indicates that these are systemic and fundamental issues that need to be addressed. This underscores the importance of more comprehensive da'wah training in crisis communication and narrative management (Indainanto et al., 2023; Dalimunthe et al., 2023)

Furthermore, the challenge of gaining support (Da'i E) highlights the need for stronger communication and public relations strategies to build legitimacy and acceptance of moderation da'wah across various levels of society, including among political stakeholders. Without adequate support, da'wah efforts can become isolated and less effective.

Thus, identifying these challenges serves as a roadmap for Al-Washliyah to strengthen its strategy. This demands a more integrated approach, better training for preachers, and ongoing efforts to address prejudice and ensure message consistency. Only by understanding and addressing these threats can Al-Washliyah's religious moderation preaching remain relevant and effective in maintaining social harmony in the election year and beyond.

Identifying threats to Al-Washliyah's religious moderation preaching in Medan City, particularly leading up to and during the 2024 election year, is a crucial step in



understanding the complexity of the preaching landscape. Data from Al-Washliyah preachers reveals various frictions. While there are many opportunities to capitalize on through Friday sermons in efforts to build tolerance and harmony, there are also significant challenges that must be overcome. The approach these preachers take must be strategic, empathetic, and keenly aware of the social context in which they preach. Their success in this endeavor will impact not only their congregations' perceptions but also broader social harmony. There is also resistance that could potentially hinder efforts to spread the message of moderate Islam. These challenges are both internal and external, reflecting the dynamic interaction between religious narratives and volatile socio-political realities. Digging deeper into these threats is essential for designing strategic and adaptive mitigation.

In the context of Al-Washliyah's da'wah (Islamic outreach), the opportunity to foster tolerance and harmony through innovative, inclusive approaches is significant. The theme "Celebrating Diversity" represents one important opportunity in da'wah. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and promoting diversity as a societal asset, not a barrier. By celebrating diversity, da'wah can increase acceptance of differences, thereby strengthening the foundation of tolerance and harmony among the congregation.

Another opportunity lies in the "effectiveness" of da'wah in changing attitudes and increasing tolerance. The ability to measure the impact of da'wah allows da'wah practitioners to refine their methods and message content. This effectiveness is crucial in ensuring that da'wah efforts directly impact the congregation's attitudes and behavior, supporting broader social transformation toward tolerance and acceptance (Putri Arini & Hasanah Sudradjat, 2023).

Developing "empathy" through da'wah is also vital. By instilling the values of empathy, da'wah not only teaches but also encourages congregants to practice them in their daily interactions. Empathy fosters greater understanding and coexistence among individuals from diverse backgrounds, directly helping to reduce social tension and conflict.

Moderate preachers act as bridges of understanding between groups with differing views by emphasizing the values of unity, tolerance, and compassion in their religious messages. The presence of moderate preachers is crucial because they not only convey religious teachings but also construct an inclusive and peaceful communication space, making preaching an instrument for strengthening social cohesion, rather than a tool for deepening polarization.

Efforts to "Raise Awareness" about the importance of tolerance and harmony through education and effective communication are also crucial. This involves not only conveying information but also opening dialogue and discussion that allows the congregation to explore these values more deeply. This approach increases awareness and understanding, which are essential for building a more harmonious society (Rusmiati, 2023).

Religion-based political polarization is not a recent phenomenon in Indonesia; however, every electoral cycle brings with it a distinct set of dynamics and challenges. Medan, known for its complex mosaic of ethnic and religious communities, represents one of the most vulnerable regions to such tension. Hence, this study becomes essential in analyzing how Al-Washliyah actively facilitates constructive dialogue among diverse religious and political actors. The analysis also encompasses its anticipatory strategies to minimize friction while fostering mutual understanding (Kastolani, 2020). The



opportunities for Al-Washliyah’s moderation da’wah in Medan during the 2024 political year are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

Al-Washliyah’s Practical Responses to Religious Polarization in Medan (2024)

No.	Form of Response	Description	Source / Basis
1.	Emphasizing preacher neutrality	Friday sermons are kept non-partisan to avoid being used for political mobilization.	Interview with preachers A–E
2.	Prioritizing unity-oriented themes	Sermons highlight harmony, citizenship, and national integrity over identity rivalry.	Sermon observations
3.	Public education on political literacy	Congregations are encouraged to assess candidates based on competence, not narrative identity.	Organizational
4.	Dialogue with diverse actors	Engagement with community/religious figures to reduce tension.	Document analysis
5.	Digital dissemination of moderation messages	Using online channels to counter polarizing and disinformative content.	Interview & documents

In the 2024 election, political competition in Medan has been notably fierce, with several candidates employing religious narratives to mobilize support. In response, Al-Washliyah has consistently emphasized public education that prioritizes policy substance and candidate competence over identity-based loyalty. This approach is critical to preserving democratic integrity and preventing the rise of exclusive or antagonistic political alignments.

Moreover, the 2024 campaign season aligns with a global shift in which digital platforms and social media have become dominant spaces for political communication. Recognizing this transformation, Al-Washliyah has expanded its outreach beyond sermons and face-to-face discourse into digital spaces, actively promoting messages of moderation through online channels. This initiative is intended to broaden its reach and counteract the spread of misinformation and polarizing content that frequently circulates in digital ecosystems (Nasution et al., 2023).

These initiatives reflect Al-Washliyah’s firm dedication to safeguarding an inclusive and peaceful democratic process in Medan. The organization functions not merely as a religious institution but as a strategic socio-political actor shaping the city’s public sphere. Through its engagement in the 2024 political landscape, Al-Washliyah exemplifies how religious institutions can effectively mitigate polarization and reinforce democratic resilience. To show that these responses are not ad hoc but theory-based, their alignment with moderation values is presented in Table 4.



Table 4.
 Alignment of Al-Washliyah's Responses with Moderation and Islamic Guidance-Counseling Model

No. Response / Initiative	Moderation Value	Guidance–Counseling Orientation	Expected Outcome
1. Neutral Friday sermons	Wasathiyah (balance, non-extremism)	Preventive – keeping the pulpit during elections	Reduced calm mosque-level polarization
2. Protection of minorities	Inclusivity, justice	Therapeutic affirming vulnerable groups	– Higher legitimacy of da'wah
3. Participatory sermons	Friday Tolerance, dialogue	Developmental building awareness	– Stronger social civic cohesion
4. Contextual/situational rhetoric	Relevance to local socio-political issues	Adaptive counseling – message context	Better audience receptivity follows
5. Online clarification of sensitive issues	Anti-disinformation, transparency	Crisis communication da'wah	Faster in escalation of conflict narratives

From these five responses from preachers, a common thread emerges in their efforts to maintain stability and harmony in an election year, albeit with varying focuses and strategies. The preacher's neutrality, promotion of noble morals, exemplary conduct and empathy, protection of minorities, and strengthening of nationalism and democracy are all important pillars of Al-Washliyah's religious moderation preaching. This variation demonstrates the adaptability and richness of its practitioners' interpretations of the principle of moderation.

Cumulatively, the responses of these preachers indicate that Al-Washliyah, through them, seeks to present moderate preaching as a comprehensive solution to the challenges of polarization and radicalism in an election year. They focus not only on the internal dimensions of the community but also on their active role in maintaining social order, diversity, and national integrity. This confirms that moderate preaching is holistic and relevant to the contemporary context.

These findings also strengthen the argument that the effectiveness of moderate preaching depends heavily on the preacher's ability to articulate and implement inclusive religious values relevant to socio-political issues. By positioning themselves as mediators, moral promoters, role models, protectors of minorities, and strengtheners of nationalism and democracy, Al-Washliyah preachers play a crucial role in shaping a constructive religious narrative amidst political turmoil.

This analysis of the preachers' responses provides a clear picture of how the concept of "Al-Washliyah's Moderation of Religious Da'wah" is not merely a theoretical discourse but is manifest practice through the various strategies implemented by preachers in Medan during the 2024 political year. This demonstrates that Al-Washliyah



proactively contributes to maintaining national integrity and social harmony through a diverse yet integrated da'wah approach in the spirit of moderate moderation.

This analysis of the responses of preachers E and D shows that they both see the need to bring the community closer by promoting values that support patience, understanding, and active participation in the democratic system. This is not only about reducing tensions but also about building a stronger foundation for a more inclusive and just society. In line with the interview above, Khairul Mufti Rambe stated that:

“When Al-Washliyah preachers attempt to mitigate religious polarization in the political arena, they are actually translating the principle of wasathiyah into contextual preaching practices. This is not merely about neutrality, but about the courage to maintain a peaceful, civilized, and inclusive public space. Their preaching represents an Islam that embraces, not attacks; that soothes, not divides.”

The statement above confirms that the steps taken by Al-Washliyah preachers in responding to religious polarization in the political arena are not merely a form of passive neutrality, but rather an embodiment of the principle of wasathiyah through active, adaptive, and contextual preaching. In his view, the preachers' efforts to maintain a peaceful and inclusive public space reflect moral courage in positioning preaching as an instrument of reconciliation, not provocation. This model of da'wah does not function as a tool for political affirmation by a particular group, but rather as a social bridge that calms differences, fosters cohesion, and prioritizes Islamic values that are rahmatan lil 'alamin (blessing for all the universe) in a pluralistic national context.

"Wasliyah da'wah must be a coolant in the heat of conflict, not a fuel. Never use the pulpit to divide the community, especially during political seasons. Instead, the da'wah practitioner must be a calming force, a connector, not a breaker."

This statement affirms the strategic role of da'wah practitioners in maintaining a stable socio-religious climate, especially during sensitive periods like elections. Dedi Iskandar Batubara emphasized that the da'wah pulpit should not be used as a tool for political mobilization, but rather as a space for calming moral and spiritual education. This statement corroborates the results of previous interviews with da'wah practitioners and emphasizes that within the Washliyah da'wah paradigm, the da'wah practitioner's role is as a washil (connector), not a qathi' (breaker). Within the framework of wasathiyah, preachers are required not only to convey messages but also to read the context and respond wisely to social dynamics. Therefore, this triangulation strengthens the position of moderation in preaching as an effort to maintain social cohesion and avoid the exploitation of religion for sectoral interests.

The interviews with preachers A, B, C, D, and E reveal a complex canvas of da'wah approaches to addressing religious polarization. Each preacher, with their own specialization and focus, offers unique approaches to addressing the problems of religious polarization that may arise in Medan City's political context. Thus, these interviews serve not only as reflections of individual perspectives but also as a broader matrix of community strategies for addressing contemporary socio-political challenges.

In the face of religious polarization that often surfaces in society, the role of preachers as mediators is crucial. Those who act as mediators strive not only to resolve conflicts but also to build bridges of understanding between various groups. This is



crucial because a deeper understanding and effective communication between different groups can prevent prolonged and deepening conflict.

Discussion

Maintaining neutrality in political issues and conflicts is essential for preachers who want to be respected and perceived as credible by all parties. A preacher's success in maintaining neutrality not only strengthens their position as mediators but also as leaders who can be trusted by all elements of society, which often have diverse views and interests. The role of a role model is another important function of a preacher in society. Through good behavior and ethics, preachers set moral standards for their followers to emulate. This is a crucial strategy for building a strong, integrated community, where positive values are instilled through daily actions, not just words.

Education and the promotion of good moral values are a primary focus of preaching aimed at overcoming polarization. Through character and moral education, preachers strive to build a strong foundation of tolerance and understanding between groups. This is crucial for creating a harmonious society, where conflict can be minimized through awareness and acceptance of diversity (Fahrurrozi & Thohri, 2020).

The protection of minorities is often a sensitive topic in polarized societies. Preachers who champion the rights and welfare of minority groups not only advocate for justice but also emphasize the importance of diversity and pluralism as a strength of society. Through their activities and preaching, preachers demonstrate that social justice is an integral component of the religious teachings they convey.

Returning to the spirit of nationalism in an inclusive context is another approach to overcoming polarization. Preachers who advocate for healthy nationalism seek to strengthen a national identity that is nurturing and non-exclusive. This involves cultivating a love for one's country that is not based on ethnic origin or a particular religion, but on universal values such as equality and brotherhood.

Increasing personal piety is also a focus in several da'wah approaches. By emphasizing spirituality and deeper religious practice, preachers seek to guide communities toward solutions to divisions in a more peaceful, introspective manner. This is expected to reduce tensions caused by differing political or religious views.

Empathy for others is crucial in reducing social tensions. By demonstrating empathy, preachers create space for a deeper understanding of others' difficulties and struggles. This approach is highly effective in overcoming prejudice and stereotypes that often fuel polarization.

The move towards a more mature and inclusive democracy is equally important. Preachers who support this transition view democracy as a crucial tool for managing differences and conflict through dialogue and community participation. By encouraging active participation in the democratic process, preachers help establish a political system that is more open and responsive to the needs of all groups in society.

Through the themes revealed in the coding of these interviews, it is clear that da'i's responses to religious polarization encompass multiple, complex, and interrelated dimensions. Those involved in da'wah face the daunting task of not only conveying religious teachings but also engaging actively in social and political issues to create a more just and peaceful society. This demonstrates that the role of da'i in modern society extends beyond mosques and places of worship; they are crucial actors in shaping a healthy social fabric in an era often fraught with challenges and change. (Risidiana et al., 2020).



Within the context of participatory communication, Al-Washliyah organizes Friday sermons as a forum for congregants to provide input and exchange ideas on local, national, and international issues. This initiative fosters more inclusive and democratic discussions, where voices from diverse backgrounds are heard and considered in formulating religious responses to current events.

The situational rhetoric employed in Medan often involves presenting current events, both local and global. This makes the sermons more relevant and pressing, reinforcing the urgency of the message. This strategy also helps congregants understand practical ways to apply moderation in their daily lives, particularly when dealing with conflict or differences of opinion (Dwipayana et al., 2023).

The implementation of this theory in Medan also demonstrates Al-Washliyah's commitment to community education and empowerment. Through informative and interactive sermons, they strive to improve congregants' religious and social literacy, which, in turn, helps them become more critical and reflective of the information they receive.

The combination of Islamic da'wah theory and participatory communication produces richer and deeper dialogue among the congregation, who not only listen but also participate in shaping religious discourse. This allows Al-Washliyah to not only disseminate messages but also listen and respond directly to the congregation's needs and concerns (Handayani, 2021).

Situational rhetoric also demands discernment and precision from preachers in selecting sermon themes and materials. In the context of a political year, where sensitive issues and societal polarization can be heightened, the ability to convey a calming yet critical message is key to maintaining social stability (Kriswantoro et al., 2022).

Active engagement of the congregation through participatory communication methods also fosters a more collaborative form of leadership within the community. This aligns with the fundamental tenet of Islam, which teaches that every Muslim is part of the ummah and has a role in maintaining social balance and justice.

Applying situational rhetoric theory enables Al-Washliyah in Medan City to respond effectively to changing political and social situations. This is especially important in an election year, when emotions can influence judgment and social interactions.

Furthermore, the approach employed by Al-Washliyah demonstrates a deep appreciation for the Islamic intellectual tradition, which consistently emphasizes the importance of adapting religious messages to temporal and local contexts. This helps ensure that the message of moderation is not only spoken but also practiced (Hermawan, 2023).

In this way, the preaching sessions become not only educational sessions but also forums for the spiritual and moral growth of the congregation, who are inspired to apply the values of moderation in their daily lives.

The overall approach adopted by Al-Washliyah in Medan demonstrates how Islamic preaching theory, participatory communication, and situational rhetoric can converge to create a preaching practice that is dynamic, responsive, and especially relevant in a changing socio-political context. This reaffirms the vital role of preaching in shaping not only Muslims' religious views but also their social and political attitudes in Medan.



CONCLUSION

Al-Washliyah takes a proactive approach to addressing potential religious polarization by emphasizing the importance of preacher neutrality in Friday sermons. Preachers are encouraged to maintain political impartiality while conveying unifying messages, aiming to reduce tension and polarization. This strategy aims to ensure that the message of da'wah reaches all members of society without causing conflict or increasing existing polarization. Al-Washliyah views moderate da'wah as an effective means of building tolerance and harmony among religious communities, particularly through the Friday sermon. They use this opportunity to educate congregants about the importance of moderation, justice, and equality in religion. Challenges include ensuring the message of moderation is well received by congregants who may hold diverse views and carefully managing sensitive topics to avoid escalating tensions. When addressing political issues, Al-Washliyah uses the Friday sermon as a medium to convey messages relevant to the current political context. This strategy focuses on Islamic values related to social justice and communal harmony. Al-Washliyah seeks to position da'wah as an activity that strengthens unity and political awareness, without engaging in practical politics, and emphasizes the importance of informed and ethical political participation.

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