

The 2024 Istiqlal Declaration as a Bridge for Religious Moderation in Indonesia: A Social Semiotic Study

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Abstract

This study examines how the Istiqlal Declaration, signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque, Nasaruddin Umar, in Jakarta on 5 September 2024, constructs meanings of religious moderation and how religious leaders in Indonesia perceive these meanings. Grounded in social semiotics, the study adopts a mixed-methods design. The declaration's text, together with its visual and spatial documentation, was analysed as a multimodal semiotic event. A 16-item questionnaire was developed from the four religious moderation indicators of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. It was given to 250 purposively selected religious figures from six faiths in Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar, and complemented by interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The findings show that the declaration combines several kinds of semiotic resources to link religious identity with citizenship, shared humanity, and ecological responsibility. These include linguistic expressions, an explicit reference to Pancasila, and spatial symbols such as the Istiqlal Mosque, its proximity to Jakarta Cathedral, and the Tunnel of Friendship. Respondents' perceptions were positive overall ($M = 4.21$). Acceptance of local traditions (4.40) and anti-violence (4.32) scored highest, followed by national commitment (4.10) and tolerance (4.03). Interviews indicate that religious leaders and institutions are viewed as the main pillars for countering fanaticism, exclusivism, and religion-based hate speech in public spaces. Although the perception data do not establish causal effects, the study offers an original integration of social semiotics with Indonesia's religious moderation framework and Pancasila. It positions the declaration as an Indonesian model that can inform global interfaith dialogue.

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Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana Deklarasi Istiqlal membangun makna moderasi beragama. Deklarasi ini ditandatangani oleh Paus Fransiskus dan Imam Besar Masjid Istiqlal, Nasaruddin Umar, di Jakarta pada 5 September 2024. Penelitian ini juga mengkaji bagaimana para tokoh agama di Indonesia memaknai deklarasi tersebut. Dengan berlandaskan semiotika sosial, penelitian ini menggunakan desain metode campuran. Teks deklarasi beserta dokumentasi visual dan spasialnya dianalisis sebagai peristiwa semiotik multimodal. Kuesioner 16 butir disusun berdasarkan empat indikator moderasi beragama Kementerian Agama RI. Kuesioner ini diberikan kepada 250 tokoh dari enam agama di Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, dan Makassar yang dipilih secara purposif, lalu dilengkapi dengan wawancara, observasi non-partisipan, dan studi dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa deklarasi ini menggabungkan beberapa jenis sumber daya semiotik untuk menautkan identitas keagamaan dengan kewargaan, kemanusiaan bersama, dan tanggung jawab ekologis. Sumber daya itu meliputi ungkapan linguistik, rujukan eksplisit pada Pancasila, serta simbol spasial seperti Masjid Istiqlal, kedekatannya dengan Gereja Katedral Jakarta, dan Terowongan Silaturahmi. Persepsi responden secara keseluruhan positif ($M = 4,21$). Skor tertinggi ada pada penerimaan tradisi lokal (4,40) dan antikekerasan (4,32), disusul komitmen kebangsaan (4,10) dan toleransi (4,03). Wawancara menunjukkan bahwa tokoh dan lembaga agama dipandang sebagai pilar utama untuk meredam fanatisme, eksklusivisme, dan ujaran kebencian berbasis agama di ruang publik. Meskipun data persepsi tidak membuktikan hubungan kausal, penelitian ini menawarkan integrasi orisinal antara semiotika sosial, kerangka moderasi beragama Indonesia, dan Pancasila. Penelitian ini menempatkan deklarasi tersebut sebagai model khas Indonesia yang dapat memperkaya dialog antaragama global.

Keywords: Istiqlal Declaration; religious moderation; social semiotics; interfaith dialogue; Pancasila; religious leaders

Introduction

Certain groups have utilised religion as an argument for promoting conflict and violence, thereby inducing societal fear and engendering feelings of insecurity, discomfort, and instability. Prior research on radicalism, extremism, and intolerance jeopardises global peace and undermines the social foundations of Indonesian society in its national existence (Aderus et al., 2024; Setinawati et al., 2025). This research indicates that religious moderation has become a peaceful means of fostering unity among religious communities. A different investigation was undertaken by Fuadi (2021) and

Irham et al. (2021), who claimed that Indonesia, the nation with the biggest Muslim population globally and significant religious variety, is positioned to promote diverse forms of moderation by reinforcing the principles of *Pancasila*, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and the spirit of cooperation (*Gotong Royong*) (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). However, neither study investigates the core of integrating social semiotic knowledge with the principles of *Pancasila*, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and the values of cooperation as a potential framework for managing diversity in Indonesia and fostering global harmony. The findings of this investigation can substantiate this novel proposal.

The findings in this study also affirm that one important moment showcasing Indonesia's contribution to global religious moderation is the Istiqlal Declaration, which was delivered at the historic meeting between Pope Francis and the Distinguished Islamic Leader of Istiqlal Mosque, Prof. Dr. KH. Nasaruddin Umar in 2024 (Hariyanto & Islamy, 2023; Mardhiah et al., 2025). This declaration serves as a significant societal symbol for interfaith dialogue and articulates the dedication of these two prominent personalities to peace, social justice, and the recognition of diversity. The proclamation delivered at Istiqlal Mosque, the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, highlights the strategic importance of social semiotic knowledge in signalling Indonesia's readiness for cross-faith engagement (Hadiyanto et al., 2025; Hopid et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the historical-educational significance and the visualisation of the Istiqlal Declaration have not been thoroughly examined to assess its content, context, and contribution to the framework of religious moderation, particularly concerning the distinct Indonesian experience, which encompasses the integration of social semiotic knowledge with the principles of *Pancasila*, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and the values of cooperation. The findings of this research can address this gap.

The 2024 Istiqlal Declaration provides a particularly significant case for examining this problem. Signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque, Prof. Dr. KH. Nasaruddin Umar, the declaration identifies

dehumanisation and environmental crisis as two major challenges confronting religion and humanity. It criticises the instrumentalisation of religion in violence, calls for the protection of human dignity, affirms interreligious dialogue, promotes fraternal solidarity, and frames environmental care as a shared responsibility. The declaration also explicitly refers to Pancasila as Indonesia's philosophical principle in responding to these challenges. Its significance, therefore, lies not only in the propositions contained in the text but also in the way its message is constructed through the authority of the signatories, the symbolic character of the Istiqlal Mosque, its relationship with Jakarta Cathedral, the *Tunnel of Friendship*, bodily gestures, spatial arrangements, and visual representations of the encounter. The declaration can thus be understood as a public and multimodal event in which religion, citizenship, humanity, and national identity are represented simultaneously.

To analyse this process, the study employs social semiotics as its principal theoretical framework. Following Alexander & Halliday (1977), Hodge & Kress (1988), Kress & Leeuwen (2006), social semiotics understands meaning not as an inherent property of signs but as something produced through the use of socially available semiotic resources. Language is therefore only one mode among others, including visuality, space, architecture, gesture, material objects, and actor configurations. Within this framework, the Istiqlal Declaration is treated as a multimodal semiotic event. Expressions such as "human dignity," "human family," "dialogue," "Pancasila," and "guardians of creation" are examined together with the spatial setting of Istiqlal Mosque, its symbolic proximity to Jakarta Cathedral, the Tunnel of Friendship, the presence and authority of religious leaders, gestures of encounter, and visual documentation. Social semiotics, therefore, provides a framework for explaining how meaning is produced. In contrast, the four indicators of religious moderation provide the substantive categories for examining what kinds of meaning are being produced and negotiated.

This paper examines the Istiqlal Declaration as a tangible manifestation of religious moderation and investigates how Indonesia's approach might serve

as a pedagogical example for the international community (Amin et al., 2024; Haryanto, 2025). This study's findings provide a novel perspective on religious moderation, particularly on integrating social semiotic knowledge with the values of *Pancasila*, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (united diversity), and *Gotong Royong* (collaboration and cooperation) to foster global diversity.

Building on this background, the present study addresses three interrelated research questions. First, it examines the substance and core messages of the Istiqlal Declaration, jointly signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of the Istiqlal Mosque, KH. Nasaruddin Umar, in Jakarta on 5 September 2024. Second, it analyses how the declaration reflects the principles of religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) as conceptualised and institutionalised in the Indonesian context. Third, it explores the distinctive contribution that Indonesia's approach to religious moderation, as articulated in the declaration, offers to global discourses on interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. In addressing these questions, the study treats the declaration not merely as a symbolic diplomatic moment but as a normative text that translates Indonesia's lived experience of religious diversity into a framework of wider international relevance.

Basic Concept of Religious Moderation

The Istiqlal Declaration 2024 and religious moderation stand in a close and mutually reinforcing relationship. The declaration can be read as a concrete and symbolic enactment of religious moderation across faiths and nations. It also reinforces Indonesia's standing as a model of peaceful religious pluralism in a world marked by polarisation, violence, and ecological crisis (Nolte, 2023; Suprpto et al., 2023). Substantively, its content resonates with the four indicators of religious moderation formulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). National commitment is reflected in the declaration's explicit recognition of the contribution of *Pancasila*, Indonesia's philosophical foundation, as a reference for the signatories' shared response. Tolerance is expressed through its call to promote a culture of respect, compassion, and

fraternal solidarity grounded in the dignity of every human being, irrespective of faith. Anti-violence appears in its critique of the instrumentalisation of religion to legitimise violence and in its endorsement of interreligious dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts incited by the abuse of religion. Accommodation of local culture is less explicit in the text. It is nonetheless discernible in the declaration's grounding in Pancasila as an indigenous philosophical synthesis, and in the symbolism of its signing at the Istiqlal Mosque, which is linked to the neighbouring Jakarta Cathedral by the "Tunnel of Friendship." Beyond these indicators, the declaration offers a cross-religious ethical framework for addressing two contemporary humanitarian crises, dehumanisation and climate change, with its attendant environmental degradation (Purnomo & Kurniawan, 2024; Sihombing et al., 2020).

Religious moderation is a religious attitude that emphasises balance, Tolerance, and openness in understanding and practising religious teachings without being extreme, whether in the form of radicalism or excessive liberalism (Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024; Parhan et al., 2022). Further, they affirmed that religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that emphasises the commitment to always be on the middle path, fair, and balanced in carrying out religious teachings, respecting differences, and maintaining harmony among religious communities. Moreover, (K. et al., 2023; Masykur et al., 2024) state that moderation does not mean obscuring religious values but rather avoiding extreme interpretations that can provoke violence or social division. In this view, a moderate person remains faithful to their religion yet can coexist peacefully with adherents of other religions and fellow believers with different theological perspectives (Riyawi & Febriansyah, 2023).

In addition, the theological and philosophical foundations of moderation in major religions are an important component of religious moderation. Religious moderation in Islam has a strong theological basis, namely the concept of *ummatan wasathan* (the middle Islamic community) mentioned in the Qur'an, "*Wa kadzālika ja'alnākum ummatan wasathan*" (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143), which means "and thus We have made you a moderate person"

(Jamaludin, 2022). This teaching invites Muslims to be balanced—neither extreme right nor left—in their faith, beliefs, worship, or social attitudes. Prophet Muhammad SAW also exemplified a moderate life in his preaching, including facing differences and challenges. In this context, moderation is understood as the principles of justice, Tolerance (*tasamuh*), balance (*tawazun*), and inclusion (*infitah*) in relation to diversity. Contemporary scholars like Yusuf al-Qaradawi also emphasise the importance of *wasatiyyah* as a middle path in religion that reflects *rahmatan lil alamin*—mercy for all the worlds (Ichsan et al., 2024).

In Christian and Catholic traditions, the foundation of religious moderation lies in the teachings of Jesus Christ on love and forgiveness. The Gospel of Matthew 22:37–39 records Jesus' words: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' This teaching emphasises the balance between faith in God and peaceful relations with others. In Catholic tradition, reflections by philosophers such as St. Thomas Aquinas reinforce the theological foundation of moderation through the understanding that God's law (*lex divina*) is always directed to the common good and the salvation of souls (*salus animarum*), which is the highest law in the Church (Eitel, 2023; Oelze, 2021). Thomas Aquinas highlighted the importance of moderation, which safeguards individuals from extreme dispositions (Viktorahadi, 2022).

Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism also teach the value of moderation through principles of balance and universal virtue. In Hinduism, the Dharma principle serves as a guiding principle that encompasses harmony among actions, moral obligations, and social responsibilities. The Bhagavad Gita 6:16–17 states: "*Yoga is not for one who eats too much or too little...but for one who lives in balance in eating, sleeping, working, and recreation*" (Jayanti, 2019). This notion illustrates the significance of reaching an agreement (*madhyama mārga*). In Buddhism, the principle of *Majjhima Patipada* (Middle Way) is the essence of the Buddha's teachings, which avoids the extremes of asceticism and hedonism (Lackner, 2019). In

Confucianism, the teaching of *Zhong Yong*, or "Doctrine of the Mean" from Confucius, teaches simplicity, inner balance, and wisdom in attitude, as it is said: "Harmony is the root of the entire universe" (Lackner, 2019).

Principles of Religious Moderation

The main principles of religious moderation serve as a foundation guiding the faithful to live their religious lives peacefully, in a balanced manner, and inclusively within a diverse society (Girivirya, 2023; Setinawati et al., 2025). A fundamental concept is fairness, defined as the proportionate allocation of rights to all individuals, free from discrimination based on religion or beliefs (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Moderation prevents extreme positions, including religious extremism and relativism, that dismiss the significance of faith principles. The principles of Tolerance and anti-violence are at the heart of religious moderation in maintaining social harmony (Indainanto et al., 2023; Rusmana et al., 2025). Tolerance does not mean equating all religions but rather respecting the existence and beliefs of others while remaining steadfast in one's faith. Moderation rejects all forms of violence, whether physical, verbal, or symbolic, in the name of religion, as violence contradicts the core teachings of religion that emphasise love, compassion, and peace (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Additionally, respecting local culture is important in Indonesia's multicultural context. Moderation encourages religious values to engage critically and creatively with local culture without losing identity or damaging traditional wisdom (Pangalila & Rumbay, 2024; Untung et al., 2025).

The challenges of religiousness in the modern era are becoming increasingly complex, especially amid polarisation, radicalism, and the politicisation of religion (Sazali et al., 2023). Polarisation arises when society is fragmented into mutually exclusive groups that reject one another because of divergent religious interpretations or ideological goals, thereby further restricting the scope for dialogue and Tolerance (Hati et al., 2023; Suprpto et al., 2023). Radicalism emerges from a constricted, literalist understanding of religion that is often judgmental, resulting in a dismissal of variety and

sometimes justifying violence for religious ends. The politicisation of religion—specifically, the utilisation of religious symbols and doctrines to acquire political influence—transforms religion into an instrument for mass mobilisation, confuses the public sphere, and fosters social segregation (Itmam & Aouich, 2024; Purwidiанти et al., 2021).

Pancasila as a Philosophical Pillar Across Faiths

The declaration's explicit reference to Pancasila as Indonesia's philosophical principle is highly significant. It suggests that the declaration is not solely the result of a personal encounter between two world religious leaders but is anchored in the Indonesian nation's commitment to noble values (Preston & Baimel, 2021). This declaration reaffirms Indonesia's identity as a nation that embraces diversity as a source of strength and a foundation for coexistence, as articulated in Pancasila. Pancasila's ethical foundation in developing inter-religious dialogue and harmony is underscored by its emphasis on values such as unity, humanity, and social justice. This perspective highlights Indonesia's distinct contribution to the global community by establishing a framework for peaceful coexistence (Preston & Baimel, 2021). *Pancasila* is an internal guide and a representation of Indonesia's philosophical proposal for a more equitable and compassionate global order. The declaration is incorporated into the transmission of the values of moderation that the Indonesian nation has long embodied in this context.

A similar analytical position is adopted toward Pancasila. The mere invocation of Pancasila cannot automatically be interpreted as evidence of successful pluralism or religious moderation in Indonesia. Rather, Pancasila is treated here as a normative and symbolic resource whose meaning emerges through its use in specific social contexts. Within the discourse of religious moderation, Pancasila may serve as a mediating framework among religious identity, citizenship, and common life, but this relationship requires examination rather than assumption. Recent scholarship demonstrates that national commitment, tolerance, and multiculturalism occupy central

positions within the conceptual network of Indonesian religious moderation. However, their meanings are transformed when translated into concrete practices and local contexts (Zaluchu et al., 2025). Thus, Pancasila is analytically significant not merely because it is mentioned, but because of the social and semiotic relations through which it becomes meaningful.

Social Semiotics from the Istiqlal Declaration 2024

In semiotics, a sign represents something else, consisting of two basic materials: 'expression' and 'content.' The relationship between the expression material and content operates dynamically, depending on the interpreter's perspective. Therefore, a sign is never entirely complete, as it requires the presence of an interpreting subject and context (Inwood & Zappavigna, 2023). Signs provide specificity and facilitate social interactions within a given society. A profound meaning is concealed and represented within a sign, not the sign itself. This indication is significant. Social semiotics must be presented in the public space of Indonesia and globally by this principle, as it can facilitate the interpretation of meanings from a variety of social events that are not restricted to visual appearances (such as the Istiqlal Mosque) but also the interpretation of the sign of the Istiqlal Mosque itself. A science that investigates phenomena, events, a sequence of objects, and other elements of society as a sign with a specific meaning is known as social semiotics (Barthes, 1977). Social semiotics play an important role in interpreting the meanings of various signs displayed in different social practices, and meanings are constructed through socially shaped and culturally given resources. Therefore, language (linguistics) is not the only and primary mode for constructing meaning (Kazarinova, 2024; Kravchenko et al., 2022). Semiotic resources are adaptable and recreated to the interests and requirements of the sign creator in social semiotics. Social semiotics is a perpetual process that entails selecting available signifiers, which are then reprocessed and transformed into new meanings.

Social semiotics is an approach to meaning-making that understands signs not as fixed or self-contained entities, but as socially available resources

whose meanings are produced through their use in particular cultural, institutional, and historical contexts. Building on Alexander & Halliday (1977) an understanding of language as a social semiotic, and later developments by Hodge & Kress (1988), Kress & Leeuwen (2006) this approach examines how social actors use multiple semiotic resources—including language, images, gesture, spatial arrangement, architecture, objects, and bodily presence—to construct, communicate, and legitimise particular meanings. Social semiotics, therefore, shifts the analytical question from “What does a sign inherently mean?” to “How is meaning socially produced, by whom, through which resources, in what context, and with what social effects?” In this study, social semiotics is particularly useful because religious moderation is not treated merely as an abstract value or predefined attitude, but as a socially constructed meaning that becomes visible and intelligible through specific combinations of verbal, visual, spatial, and performative resources.

This research uses a mixed quantitative-qualitative method. Quantitative data were obtained from survey questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained from interviews and non-participant observation. The research data were collected through a questionnaire about the declaration of Istiqlal and religious moderation involving 250 figures from various religions in four major cities in Indonesia: Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar. Researchers used purposive sampling to select the respondents. Table 2 illustrates the sample's demographics.

Table 2. Demographic information of research respondents

Demographic		Total	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	185	74
	Female	65	26
Age	31-40	40	16
	41-50	80	32

Demographic		Total	Percentage (%)
	51-60	100	40
	61 above	30	12
Religion backgrounds	Islam	102	40.8
	Protestant	61	24.4
	Catholic	59	23.6
	Hindu	16	6.4
	Buddha	10	4
	Confucianism	2	0.8
Education backgrounds	Diploma	51	20.4
	Bachelor	147	58,8
	Magister	50	20
	Doctor	2	0.8
Domicile	Jakarta	86	34.4
	Surabaya	62	24.8
	Medan	56	22.4
	Makassar	46	18.4

This research employs triangulation *to* gather data, *including* document study, questionnaire distribution, interviews, and non-participant observation. *This research focuses on the* Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia's work on religious moderation *and examines* documents related to the availability of written texts on religious moderation. Thus, document study is employed. The researchers developed *a questionnaire as a research instrument* after conducting *a* document study. The primary objective of the instrument is *to identify* the challenges participants *encounter* in achieving religious moderation in Indonesia and the symbolic meaning of the *Istiqlal* Declaration. The instrument employs a 1-4 *Likert scale*, with the options being strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1) (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The researchers categorised the questionnaire data into four indicators, *comprising* 16 statements. These statements were arranged *into* three themes: the analysis of the implementation of the values *of* the Istiqlal declaration symbol, the manifestation of four indicators of religious moderation, and the significance of strengthening religious institutions and cooperation among religious leaders in achieving the goal of religious moderation in Indonesia.

Respondents can select only one of the four provided answer options for each of the 16 closed-ended questions. Furthermore, a category is proposed to organise the respondents' perspectives. There are four classifications: very low, low, medium, and high. The potential range of results for each category is illustrated in Table 3.

The survey data were utilised to calculate percentages using numerical methods. The Excel chart data series software was employed to analyse the percentage, and the results were subsequently presented for qualitative analysis.

The next step is to develop the interview guidelines. The respondents are represented in the virtual interviews conducted to analyse the questionnaire data. In the meantime, non-participant observation is selected in the context of this research because the researcher observes the Declaration of Istiqlal through television media and generates data in the form of photographs of the Declaration of Istiqlal, Pope Francis, and the greatest leader of Istiqlal Mosque, Prof. Dr. KH. Nasaruddin Umar. Researchers might observe and document behaviours or phenomena without being directly and actively involved in the observed circumstance, which is consistent with the non-participant observation technique (Barrios, 2024).

Table 3. Score Category

Score	Category
1,1 – 2,1	Very low
2,2 – 3,1	Low
3,2 – 4,1	Medium
4,2 – 5,0	High

Result

The Istiqlal Declaration 2024, an authoritative cross-religious document highlighting a dedication to environmental sustainability, peace, and humanity, was signed by Pope Francis and the greatest leader of Istiqlal

Mosque, Prof. Dr. KH. Nasaruddin Umar. Table 4 is the primary message and content of the Istiqlal declaration text in English.

Table 4. Istiqlal Declaration Document

Title	Declaration of Istiqlal 2024
Theme	Fostering Religious Harmony for the Sake of Humanity
Issues	1. The global phenomenon of dehumanization is marked especially by widespread violence and conflict, frequently leading to an alarming number of victims. It is particularly worrying that religion is often instrumentalized in this regard, causing suffering to many, especially women, children, and older people. However, religion's role should include promoting and safeguarding the dignity of every human life. 2. The human exploitation of creation, our common home, has contributed to climate change, leading to various destructive consequences such as natural disasters, global warming, and unpredictable weather patterns. This ongoing environmental crisis has become an obstacle to the harmonious coexistence of peoples.
Response	In response to these two crises, guided by our respective religious teachings and recognizing the contribution of Indonesia's philosophical principle of "Pancasila", we, together with the other religious leaders present, call for the following: 1. The values shared by our religious traditions should be effectively promoted to defeat the culture of violence and indifference afflicting our world. Indeed, religious values should promote a culture of respect, dignity, compassion, reconciliation, and fraternal solidarity to overcome both dehumanization and environmental destruction. 2. Religious leaders, in particular, inspired by their respective spiritual narratives and traditions, should cooperate in responding

to the abovementioned crises, identifying their causes, and taking appropriate action.

3. Since there is a single global human family, interreligious dialogue ought to be recognized as an effective instrument for resolving local, regional, and international conflicts, especially those incited by the abuse of religion. Moreover, our religious beliefs and rituals have a particular capacity to speak to the human heart and thus foster a deeper respect for human dignity.
 4. Acknowledging that a healthy, peaceful, and harmonious living environment is vital for becoming true servants of God and custodians of creation, we sincerely call on all people of goodwill to take decisive action to maintain the integrity of the natural environment and its resources, for we have inherited them from past generations and hope to pass them on to our children and grandchildren.
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Pope Francis signed the Istiqlal Declaration 2024, and the Greatest Leader of Istiqlal Mosque, Prof. Dr. KH. Nasaruddin Umar, in the presence of a variety of interfaith leaders and personalities from various faiths in Indonesia, was also present and supported. This signing represents a collective dedication to enhancing ecumenical harmony for the benefit of humanity. The spirit of pluralism and a shared commitment to confronting global challenges, such as dehumanisation and environmental crises, through interfaith and universal human values, are reflected in the presence and participation of these leaders. The subsequent image illustrates the participants of the Istiqlal declaration



Figure 1. Two Crucial Principles of the Islamic Declaration: Resistance to Dehumanization



Figure 2. Pope Francis: Istiqlal Declaration



Figure 3. Istiqlal 2024 Collective Declaration

The perceptions of religious moderation and the symbolic meaning of the Istiqlal Declaration 2024, as completed by 250 respondents, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The Rating of Perception

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Statement	Mean
National Commitment	By prioritizing the common interests, respecting national symbols and values, and endeavoring to maintain the unity and integrity of the nation, compliance with the constitution and state law is guaranteed.	1. I believe the proper practice of religion should align with patriotism and the dedication to uphold national unity.	4,2
		2. Indonesia's diversity of races, cultures, and religions is a valuable asset that should be preserved through mutual respect and unity.	4,4
		3. I repudiate all ideologies and activities that seek to disintegrate the nation behind the pretense of religion or the interests of particular groups.	4,6
		4. The state and religion	3,2

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Statement	Mean
		should collaborate to foster justice, peace, and welfare for everyone.	
Average			4,1
Anti-Violence	By emphasizing dialogue in conflict resolution, we can prevent hate speech and provocation, thereby rejecting physical, verbal, and symbolic violence.	5. I denounce all manifestations of violence, whether physical, verbal, or symbolic, committed in the name of religion.	4,4
		6. Differences in beliefs should not be a reason to hate or attack fellow human beings.	4,4
		7. Dialogue and reconciliation are the most effective methods for resolving problems about religion and beliefs.	3,8
		8. I believe that every religion teaches love and peace. Thus, there is no justification for committing violence in the name of religion.	4,7
Average			4,32
Tolerance	Fostering positive relationships among religious communities, refraining from imposing beliefs on others, and allowing for diversity in public spaces are all ways to demonstrate respect for various beliefs and devotional customs.	9. I respect the right of every individual to embrace and practice their religious beliefs without coercion or pressure from others.	4,6
		10. Belief differences are an inherent aspect of existence that should be embraced with a welcoming and tolerant mindset.	4,3
		11. I am committed to fostering constructive and beneficial discourse with adherents of various faiths to enhance solidarity among religious	3,8

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Statement	Mean
		communities.	
		12. Tolerance is not defined as compromising personal beliefs; instead, it involves creating an environment to comprehend and honor diversity.	3,4
Average			4,025
Tradition Acceptance	Respecting culture and local wisdom involves adjusting religious teachings to the cultural context without sacrificing the essence of the teachings, refraining from automatically rejecting traditions without a thorough understanding, and endeavoring to balance religious values and local culture.	13. I contend that local traditions aligning with the principles of humanity and justice should be honored and maintained as integral components of the community's cultural identity.	3,6
		14. Religion and culture can mutually enhance one another without necessitating the complete disappearance of fundamental theological doctrines or the cultural legacies received through generations.	4,6
		15. I oppose the perspective that regards tradition as an entity to be eliminated due to its perceived opposition to religion without a profound comprehension.	4,8
		16. Indonesia's wide range of customs represents a valuable heritage that needs to be conserved as a testimony to historical reverence and indigenous knowledge.	4,6
Average			4,4

Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Statement	Mean
overall average			4,21

Source: Researchers' Data

The results reveal that the Istiqlal Declaration 2024 is not only a textual declaration but also a configuration of semiotic resources containing interconnected religious, humanitarian, national, and ecological implications. Firstly, linguistic expressions such as “human dignity” (Table 4, response column, last phrase in statement iii), “fraternal solidarity” (Table 4, response column, last phrase in statement i) and “custodians of creation” (Table 4, response column, last phrase in statement iv) frame religious responsibility as a collective ethical commitment to humanity and environmental protection. Second, the thematic connection between dehumanisation (Table 4 and Picture 1), religious conflict (Table 4), and environmental destruction (Table 4, response column, last phrase in point i) represents these challenges as interconnected concerns requiring interreligious cooperation. Third, references to religious teachings, spiritual traditions, beliefs, and rituals (Table 4) serve as culturally meaningful resources that link religious identity to compassion, reconciliation, peaceful coexistence, and environmental responsibility. Another symbol of interreligious collaboration and shared duty is the presence of Pope Francis, the Grand Imam of the Istiqlal Mosque, and other religious leaders (Pictures 1-3). The explicit use of Pancasila also links religious beliefs to Indonesia’s philosophical foundations and national identity, demonstrating plurality and unity as universal values.

These interpretations are supported contextually by our survey of 250 respondents, which yielded an overall mean of 4.21 for perceptions of religious moderation and the declaration’s symbolic significance. Tradition acceptance scored 4.40, while anti-violence scored 4.32, indicating positive perceptions of cultural preservation and nonviolence. Although these perceptions do not establish the causal effects of individual semiotic elements, they complement the textual analysis. Accordingly, the declaration’s semiotic

resources derive their significance from how linguistic choices, thematic relationships, religious symbols, and ideological references represent and connect shared values. This view moves beyond the ways in which the Istiqlal declaration constructs social meanings concerning religious harmony, national identity, human dignity, and ecological responsibility.

Discussion

The researchers undergo a series of critical phases to conduct a thorough and systematic data analysis. The first stage in the analysis of this research is for the researchers to sort or separate the interview results into pieces of essential information (quotes, opinions, and the respondents' experiences) and begin labelling/coding them with relevant terms. For instance, "*Islamic wasathiyah values*," "Interreligious tolerance," "Interfaith dialogue," and "The symbolic role of Istiqlal." This phase assists the authors in organising the raw data into more focused units of analysis, as demonstrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Data Interview Categorisation

Quotation Representation of Respondent's Statement	Indicator
"I believe that the proper practice of religion should align with nationalism and a dedication to preserving national unity."	National Commitment
"The variety of tribes, cultures, and religions in Indonesia is a valuable asset that should be maintained through mutual respect."	Interfaith tolerance
"I denounce all manifestations of violence, whether physical, verbal, or symbolic, committed in the name of religion."	Anti-religion violence
"Dialogue and reconciliation are the most effective means of resolving religious problems."	Interfaith Dialogue
"Local traditions that align with the principles of compassion and justice should be honored and	Local Traditions

maintained.”	Acceptance
“Tolerance does not include compromising personal convictions but rather creating an environment to comprehend and honor diversity.”	Religious Moderation
“I believe that all religions provide lessons of love and peace.”	Religion's Universal Values
“Religion and culture can mutually enhance one another without compromising their basic principles.”	Harmony of Religion-Culture

The next process used was contextual hermeneutic analysis. The contextual hermeneutic analysis of the interview data and the quantitative results in the table indicate that religious moderation in Indonesia is both an ideal normative concept and a tangible reality within society. The majority of participants demonstrated strong support for moderation. For instance, in the national commitment indicator, the average score of 4.1, categorised as Medium, was derived from 250 respondents who stated concurrence with the significance of associating religiousness with nationalism. The anti-violence indicators provide an average score of 4.32, categorising it as high, which suggests that a significant number of individuals strongly oppose violence justified by religion. Similarly, regarding Tolerance, the average score is 4.025, categorising it as Medium, while the acceptance of tradition averages 4.4, placing it in the high category. The majority strongly endorse the principles of mutual respect, interfaith dialogue, and the preservation of local wisdom. This indicates that moderation in Indonesia functions within the context of harmonising faith, culture, and nationalism.

Pope Francis and KH. Nasaruddin Umar reflects the model of religious moderation both symbolically and practically. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis highlights the principles of universal love, dialogue, and non-violence that dismantle the barriers of exclusivism and extremism (Fuadi, 2021; Jati et al., 2022). This idea aligns with the respondents' rejection of hate speech and endorsement of diversity in the interview findings. Simultaneously, KH.

Nasaruddin Umar creates the Istiqlal Mosque as a venue for open and friendly interfaith discussion, integrating Islamic moderation into spiritual and governmental practices. The pragmatic approaches of these two individuals demonstrate that Tolerance transcends theological discourse, serving as a tangible social practice that mitigates tensions in public spaces and interfaith relationships (Aditya et al., 2022; Mardhiah et al., 2025).

This perspective aligns with prominent figures such as Nurcholish Madjid, who asserted that religion should serve as a unifying force and an opportunity for all of humanity. In philosophy, Jürgen Habermas, via his theory of communicative action, highlights the vitality of rational discourse for establishing social consensus in a pluralistic society (Kiklewicz, 2022). Meanwhile, Paul Ricoeur, in his reflective hermeneutics, proposes understanding across traditions through inclusive and ethical interpretation (Boyko et al., 2022). Therefore, the practice of religious moderation in Indonesia, grounded in local values, bolstered by symbolic figures and global religious traditions, and underpinned by a humanist philosophical framework, might exemplify an encouraging paradigm for the globe in fostering harmony among diversity.

This study of the 2024 Istiqlal Declaration might be read through the complementary philosophical viewpoints of Habermas, Ricoeur, and Levinas. Habermas's theory of communicative action helps pluralistic communities reach a shared understanding through open, logical, and non-dominating dialogue (Habermas, 1990). This method is relevant in Indonesia's diverse society, given its many religions, ethnicities, cultures, and languages. and political viewpoints require respectful communication. The declaration encourages interreligious dialogue, religious leader teamwork, and peaceful conflict. Its emphasis on discourse to resolve local, regional, and worldwide disputes shows how communication can bridge religious divides and build solidarity. Ricoeur's reflective hermeneutics highlights the importance of interpretation, self-reflection, and openness to different meanings (Ricoeur, 1976). Interreligious dialogue allows each tradition to understand the other without losing its identity, thereby making it relevant to the 2024 Istiqlal

Declaration. Critical interpretation and self-reflection may transform faith differences into mutual learning rather than hatred. The declaration emphasises dialogue, dignity, and solidarity against dehumanisation (Masjid Istiqlal, 2024). Therefore, Ricoeur's hermeneutics can promote religious moderation through mutual understanding, respect for diversity, and a sense of humanitarian duty.

Emmanuel Levinas's ethical perspective grounds moral obligation in responsibility toward the "Other"—recognising the fragility and dignity of other humans (Levinas, 1979). This perspective is crucial to the 2024 Istiqlal Declaration, as it recognises an interfaith commitment to promoting human dignity, condemning violence, and assisting marginalised groups. The declaration can promote religious tolerance in Indonesia by promoting cross-religious solidarity (Masjid Istiqlal, 2024). Thus, harmony is an ethical commitment to life, justice, and respect, not passive tolerance. These philosophical perspectives show the declaration's importance as an ethical and communicative foundation for religious plurality, mutual understanding, and social responsibility. They provide complementary interpretations rather than empirical confirmation of the declaration's societal effects.

To enhance the validity of the findings, the author employed triangulation in the subsequent phase by comparing interview data with official documents, including declaration texts, speeches, and news articles. Furthermore, this is confirmed by scholarly sources on religious moderation in Indonesia and by the perspective of Pope Francis (Hakim, 2021; Jati et al., 2022). The analysis of the interview data is alongside the statements of Pope Francis and Professor KH. Nasaruddin Umar reveals a significant congruence between the interview findings and the Istiqlal Declaration 2024, particularly in its core principles of religious moderation, including a commitment to peace, a rejection of violence, and an appreciation for diversity. The interview data indicate that most respondents "strongly agree" that religious practice should align with patriotism.

Religious moderation refers to a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion within a shared social life that embodies the essence of religious

teachings—namely, protecting human dignity and fostering the common good—grounded in principles of justice and balance, while adhering to the constitution as a national consensus (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Religious moderation does not entail diminishing one’s faith or conflating different religious doctrines; rather, it involves avoiding extreme attitudes, excessive fanaticism, intolerance, and violence committed in the name of religion. This concept emphasises four key indicators: commitment to the nation, tolerance, non-violence, and the acceptance of local traditions, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Indicator of Religion Moderation in Indonesia

Indicator	Meaning and Application in Indonesia
Tolerance	Respecting other people's rights to hold their own beliefs, practice their religion, and express their views without discrimination.
Non-violence	Rejecting physical and verbal violence, the coercion of religious beliefs, and the use of violence to achieve religious or social goals.
Accommodation of Local Culture	Respecting local traditions and wisdom that support communal life, provided they do not conflict with the principles of the religion being practiced.
National Commitment	Accepting Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and the principles of national life as the framework for living together.

The Istiqlal Declaration promotes the 'Tunnel of Friendship' as an illustration of interfaith interactions that reconcile differences through personal connections rather than doctrinal consistency. This aligns closely with the survey results regarding the anti-violence indicator (average = 4.32) and Tolerance (average = 4,025), which indicates that respondents strongly

agree that dialogue and peaceful approaches are the best ways to resolve religious conflicts. Additionally, the acceptance of traditions (Average = 4.4) shows that respondents strongly agree that the diversity of local traditions and cultures must be respected and preserved.

From a philosophical perspective, this spirit recalls Paul Ricoeur's thoughts on the hermeneutics of faith and dialogue, as well as Emmanuel Levinas's idea of the 'Other' as the highest ethical encounter (Purnomo & Kurniawan, 2024; Syarif et al., 2024). The Istiqlal Declaration and interview results indicate that diversity is not a menace but a reservoir of spiritual and social prosperity. Religious moderation in Indonesia, as evidenced by community reactions and remarks by leaders such as Pope Francis and KH. Nasaruddin Umar reflects a worldwide paradigm of spirituality grounded in humanity, inclusivity, and ecological sustainability (Ives et al., 2024; Renger et al., 2024).

Social semiotics is the primary theoretical framework for studying how language, symbols, architectural space, and visual elements in the 2024 Istiqlal Declaration shape ideas of Indonesian religious moderation. Representation, composition, perspective, and visual relationships shape visual meaning (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Human dignity, interreligious harmony, and the rejection of dehumanisation show religion as a force for good. In partnership, Pope Francis and Nasaruddin Umar represent interfaith dialogue and peace. As the venue for this confrontation, the Istiqlal Mosque blends religious and national identities. Photos and visual documentation may support equality and brotherhood through participants' placement, gestures, architectural context, and image arrangement. Through multimodal communication, the Istiqlal Declaration bridges identity gaps by grounding them in shared humanistic principles. These interpretations must be supported by a mindful study of textual and visual data, not only symbols.

Novelty

The article offers a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between formal interfaith declarations and the practice of religious moderation in

Indonesian society through the lens of social semiotics theory. The author asserts that the article's originality derives from three primary aspects: *first*, an integrative investigation of declarative texts, social realities, and social semiotics. The paper examines the Istiqlal Declaration 2024 as a symbolic document and its correlation with field data from surveys and interviews with 250 respondents of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. *Secondly*, the use of markers of religious moderation as an evaluation framework encompasses national dedication, Tolerance, anti-violence, and acceptance of traditions as analytical tools. *Third*, the focus is on *Pancasila* as the foundation of religious moderation. This article highlights Pancasila as Indonesia's unique contribution to the world discourse on religious moderation, in contrast to prior studies that focused solely on its theological aspects.

Conclusion

This research indicates that the Istiqlal Declaration 2024 articulates a principal message: reinstating religion as a moral authority to uphold human dignity, opposing violence in the name of religion, and fostering interfaith solidarity and collective ecological responsibility. This declaration reflects the notions of religious moderation as articulated within the Indonesian context, specifically through a dedication to nationalism, Tolerance, non-violence, and respect for local traditions—values that are also reflected in the essence of the *Pancasila*. This declaration emphasises the symbolic unity of the Istiqlal Mosque and the Jakarta Cathedral, and its appeals for discussion and interfaith collaboration reflect the moderate religious disposition that defines the Indonesian nation-state. Indonesia's distinguished contribution to this proclamation is its achievement in incorporating local values, experiences of pluralism, and principles of coexistence as a pertinent practical model for the global context.

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