

The *Betimbang* Tradition and the Construction of Religious Moderation in South Sumatra, Indonesia

Abdul Azis*, Muslimin Muslimin, Gesit Yudha

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia

*Correspondence: [✉ abdulazis@radenintan.ac.id](mailto:abdulazis@radenintan.ac.id)

Abstract

This study examines the *Betimbang* tradition in South Indralaya District, Ogan Ilir Regency, South Sumatra Province, and its role in constructing religious moderation. The *Betimbang* is a communal tradition of mutual assistance during wedding receptions that has sparked debate between those who consider it excessive and contrary to Islamic teachings and others who maintain it as valuable local wisdom. This ethnographic study employed participant observation, in-depth interviews with community members and local religious leaders, and literature review to analyze the tradition's implementation and its relationship to religious moderation. The findings reveal that the *Betimbang* tradition functions as a mechanism for applying Islamic values of mutual assistance (*ta'awun*) and social solidarity within extended family networks. Religious moderation is constructed through the integration of local cultural practices with Islamic teachings, facilitated by local religious leaders who provide contextual religious guidance during *Betimbang* ceremonies. This study contributes to the understanding of how local traditions can serve as vehicles for religious moderation by demonstrating the dynamic negotiation between cultural authenticity and religious orthodoxy in contemporary Indonesian Muslim communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's religious landscape demonstrates remarkable diversity in how Muslims understand, practice, and preserve Islamic teachings. This diversity manifests in various local traditions that reflect the dynamic interaction between Islamic values and indigenous cultural practices. In South Sumatra, particularly in Ogan Ilir Regency, the *Betimbang* tradition during wedding ceremonies exemplifies this cultural-religious synthesis, yet raises questions about how local practices contribute to religious moderation in contemporary Indonesia (Setinawati et al., 2025).

The relationship between religion and local traditions has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry. Religion, as Geertz argues, functions as a symbol system that creates enduring motivations by establishing conceptions of general order and attaching them to factual experiences (Geert, 1973). This process becomes particularly significant when religious teachings encounter local cultural contexts, creating what Peter Berger identifies as a dialectical process of externalization, objectification, and internalization within society (Kahmad, 2011). Through this dialectic, religious values become embedded in local traditions while simultaneously being shaped by cultural practices.

The challenge of religious moderation becomes acute when local traditions appear to contradict orthodox religious interpretations. The *Betimbang* tradition a communal practice of mutual financial assistance during wedding receptions illustrates this tension. While some community members view it as embodying Islamic principles of mutual aid (*ta'awun*), others consider it excessive and potentially contrary to religious teachings (Pawlewicz & Senetra, 2024). This debate reflects broader questions about how religious moderation is constructed through the negotiation between cultural authenticity and religious orthodoxy. Religious moderation, defined by

Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs as "a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that embodies the essence of religious teachings while protecting human dignity and building public welfare" (Saifudin, 2022) has become a key policy framework since 2017. However, empirical studies examining how this moderation is constructed at the grassroots level, particularly through local traditions, remain limited.

Research by Moh. Ashif Fuadi, et al. entitled, "Religious Moderation in the Context of Integration Between Religion and Local Culture in Indonesia" focuses on religious moderation as a government policy implemented by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia to maintain interfaith harmony with a moderate approach to religion. In this study, religious moderation plays an important role in forging social harmony within the religious diversity that exists in Indonesia. This study shows how religious moderation integrates the principles of moderate Islam, respects tolerance between religious communities, and maintains local wisdom. Based on the historical flow and the context of religious values mingled with local culture, the concept of Islamic Indigenization that was previously introduced changed to the concept of Islam Nusantara. Currently, Islam Nusantara is one indicator of religious moderation that can create dialogue between religion and culture (Qorib & Umiarso, 2025). This study reveals the close relationship between the historical streams of Islamic Indigenization, Islam Nusantara, and Religious Moderation, as well as the importance of creating a bridge between religion and culture that is a distinctive character of Indonesia (Shah, 2025).

Research Khairul Fuad et al, "West Kalimantan's Manuscripts Circulation as a Religious Comprehensive Tool Against Violence in the Name of Religion," on manuscript circulation in West Kalimantan, demonstrates the importance of manuscripts as resources that can mitigate violence in the name of religion. The main focus of this research is on important figures such as Muhammad Khatib al-Sambasi, Muhammad Basuni Imran, and Ismail Mundu, each of whom contributed to understanding Islam from various dimensions, such as fiqh, Sufism, and doctrine. Through a scientific approach that collects and analyzes manuscript data, this research aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of religion.

Siti Mahmudah's research, "Resistance to Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Lower to Middle-Class Communities," analyzes resistance to religious moderation among Indonesia's lower and middle classes. Using a qualitative approach and data from online media platforms, the study identifies factors influencing resistance to religious moderation policies, such as miscommunication, distrust of government initiatives, and limited understanding of history and theology. The study emphasizes the importance of inclusive education and policymaking that bridges the gap between state narratives and the religious experiences of the community. These findings provide important insights for policymakers and educators in designing culturally sensitive strategies to promote religious moderation.

This study offers significant novelty by introducing the *Betimbang* tradition as a concrete example of religious moderation that thrives within the local cultural context of South Sumatra. This tradition, which remains intact to this day, provides new insights into how local Islamization, carried out harmoniously, can become an instrument of religious moderation, making it more relevant to people's daily practices. The role of local culture in moderating religion is underexplored in previous research, particularly in the context of South Sumatra. By examining how the values of religious moderation are integrated into the *Betimbang* tradition, this study adds a new dimension to the interaction between religion and local culture and introduces a new method for building peace through respect for local culture and the preservation of moderate Islamic values (Pohan et al., 2025).

This study addresses a critical gap by examining how the *Betimbang* tradition functions as a site for constructing religious moderation in South Sumatra. Unlike previous studies that focus on the historical development of Islamic traditions in Ogan Ilir (Nurhasan, 2023), this research investigates the specific mechanisms through which local traditions contribute to moderate religious attitudes. The study's novelty lies in demonstrating how community-level negotiations between

tradition and religion create practical frameworks for religious moderation, providing empirical insights that can inform national religious policy.

This investigation seeks to answer two interconnected questions: How does the *Betimbang* tradition reflect and construct religious moderation in the Muslim communities of South Indralaya District, Ogan Ilir Regency? and what mechanisms enable local traditions to serve as vehicles for moderate religious practice while maintaining cultural authenticity?. These questions are addressed through ethnographic analysis that examines both the practice of the tradition and the discourses surrounding it.

METHODS

The research utilized three ethnographic techniques: participant observation (attending 12 *Betimbang* ceremonies over 8 months), in-depth interviews (24 informants using semi-structured format), and document analysis (village records, wedding invitations, contribution lists, and photographs from the past two decades).

Ideational ethnography focuses on understanding the meanings and interpretations that actors give to their practices, recognizing that cultural actions are meaningful to participants and that these meanings constitute the data necessary for understanding social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture how community members interpret the religious significance of *Betimbang* tradition.

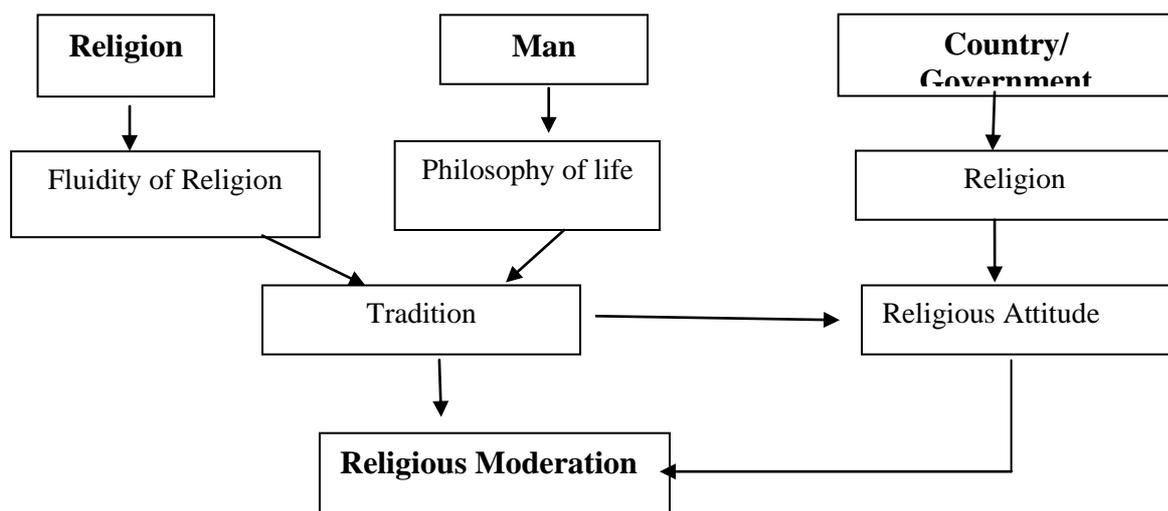


Figure 1. The Way of Interpreting Religion and Culture

The study involved 24 informants selected through purposive sampling: village officials (3), traditional leaders (4), religious leaders (5), community elders (6), and younger community members (6). This diversity ensured representation of different perspectives on the tradition's compatibility with Islamic teachings. The analytical framework conceptualizes religious moderation as emerging from the intersection of state policies, religious teachings, local traditions, and community attitudes. This framework guided data collection by focusing on how these elements interact to produce moderate religious attitudes within the *Betimbang* tradition context. Data validation in this study was achieved through source and method triangulation, involving diverse informants and combining interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns in how the *Betimbang* tradition interacts with Islamic teachings, using content analysis to examine alignment with religious moderation principles. The theory of religious moderation, focusing on tolerance, moderation (*wasathiyah*), and justice/equality, was applied to evaluate how the community balances traditional customs and Islamic values, ensuring respect, inclusivity, and social fairness in their practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marriage and *Betimbang* Tradition in Ogan Ilir

The majority of the population of Ogan Ilir embraces Islam and Islamic values are deeply rooted in all aspects of people's lives including basic things such as marriage issues. In addition to the pillars and valid requirements, the wedding procession is always decorated with cultures that are very thick with Islamic values, so that since long ago this marriage custom has been included in the Simbur Cahaya Law which takes up a separate chapter entitled the chapter on Customs of Bachelors, Girls and Marriage, this law regulates it quite clearly, and for Ogan Ilir there are slight differences and additions with other inland areas in general (Muslimin, 2021, pp. 37–38)

The implementation of the wedding tradition begins with the existence of *rasan mudo*, the bachelor and the girl agree to build a household. *Rasan Mudo* is accompanied by the *Rasan Tuo* tradition. In this case, the parents of both parties give their approval and blessing for the matchmaking of the bachelor and the girl with the hope that their household life will be safe and long-lasting (Harry Yuniardi et al., 2025). The approval and blessing of both parties are determined by a series of Ogan Ilir traditional wedding ceremonies.

The *Betimbang* tradition, also known locally as *baretong*, represents a distinctive form of communal mutual assistance (*gotong royong*) specifically practiced during wedding receptions in South Sumatra. Field observations reveal that this tradition originated among a small community group and subsequently spread throughout nearly every village in the Indralaya Selatan sub-district. According to community members interviewed during fieldwork, "*Betimbang has become an inseparable part of our wedding celebrations. When someone holds a wedding reception, the entire community knows that there will be Betimbang this is our way of helping each other.*" The evolution of *Betimbang* from a localized practice to a widespread communal tradition reflects its deep social significance. One elderly informant explained, "*In the past, only certain families practiced Betimbang, but now it has become almost mandatory in every wedding. This shows how our community values mutual support we don't let a family bear the burden of wedding costs alone.*" This expansion demonstrates the tradition's effectiveness as a social security mechanism within the community, addressing the practical challenge of wedding expenses through collective contribution (Inayatillah et al., 2022).

The implementation of *Betimbang* follows a systematically organized procedure that ensures transparency and accountability. During wedding receptions, all envelopes brought by invited guests are collected in a designated location. A committee, previously appointed by the host family, undertakes the responsibility of opening these envelopes and publicly announcing the contents (Anggraini et al., 2025). The process involves reading aloud each contributor's name, address, and the amount of their donation. After all individual contributions have been announced, the committee declares the total sum of collective contributions received. The organizational structure of *Betimbang* typically involves a committee of five or more members, with two to three individuals specifically assigned to read out the names and amounts. This structured approach was explained by a committee member, "*We are usually chosen because we can read clearly and loudly, and we are trusted by the community. Our role is not just to read names, but to ensure that every contribution is properly acknowledged and recorded.*" The public announcement serves multiple functions: it creates transparency, acknowledges each contributor's generosity, establishes a social record for future reciprocity, and reinforces community bonds through visible demonstration of collective support.

Field observations documented that the *Betimbang* ceremony typically occurs at a specific time during the wedding reception, often after the main meal but before guests begin to depart. The atmosphere during this announcement is notably attentive, with guests listening carefully as names are called. One informant noted, "*When your name is called and your contribution is announced, it's a moment of social recognition. But more importantly, it's a public commitment to the value of helping others everyone witnesses your participation in this communal responsibility.*"

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and local Palembang dialect, with each session lasting 60-90 minutes. Participant observation involved attending twelve *Betimbang* ceremonies across three villages (Meranjat 3, Sribandung, and Tanjung Senai) during the eight-month fieldwork period. Mr. Herwanto as the Head of Meranjat 3 Village, South Indralaya District described that the series of customs before the marriage contract is carried out and the peak of the wedding reception. The sequence is as follows: First, *Mutus Rasan*, which determines the approval or rejection of the wishes of the groom's family, and determines various customary marriage requirements, including the amount of honest money (requested by the bride's parents); Second, *Beterangan*, which explains the day of the marriage contract to the bride's family, traditional leaders and the local government and submits honest money; Third, *Mintak Wali*, which is: asking and clarifying who will be the marriage guardian for the woman who will be married. After the stages, the marriage contract is held in the form of *ijāb qabul* as Islamic law, the marriage contract is carried out in front of officials from the Religious Affairs Office who are invited to come to the bride's house to carry out the marriage contract.

As for when the marriage process that was initially a bachelor and a girl who wanted to get married had not received approval and was not known to the parents of both parties, or indeed not approved by their parents but the bachelor and girl still wanted to get married, the steps they took were to ask for protection from the village head or sub-district head, through which the village head or sub-district head informed the parents of both parties, then the family began to hold a consensus meeting whether the intention of this marriage would continue or cancel it. If an agreement was reached to carry out the marriage, it was carried out according to the bright custom, but if there was no agreement between the two parties, the party who canceled the intention of the marriage was subject to a fine according to customary rules as a form of shame.

However, if the bachelor and girl still want to marry without a guardian from the *nasabiah* (family), then the village head/sub-district head or traditional leader processes the marriage of the bachelor and girl to the local District Religious Affairs Office (KUA), in accordance with Article 6 paragraph (1) and paragraph (6) of Law No. 1 of 1974. This type of marriage is termed elopement. This type of marriage only applies in the interior of Palembang. In the city of Palembang, the custom of *belarian* or *benaik-an* as the initial process towards elopement is not known. This is actually a custom that should not be carried out by members of the community because it is considered a lack of mutual respect, but due to the situation and conditions, sometimes this custom still applies in the Ogan Ilir community for the following reasons: First, there are obstacles to approval from the family, or the bachelor does not dare to propose to the girl's parents. Second, it is a shortcut to avoid the stages of a clear customary marriage which is considered complicated and expensive.

In Islamic teachings, announcing a marriage to the public is an order from the Prophet Muhammad. The practice or event of announcing a marriage in each region is different. This kind of marriage custom is called an honest marriage or bright custom, because all series of marriage customs are carried out with a plan that has been known and approved by the parents of both parties and the local government (Ichrom et al., 2024).

The Ogan Ilir community today no longer prioritizes the amount of honest money in choosing a partner and to avoid immoral acts and violating Islamic teachings, marriage customs that are considered to be burdensome to the community can be tolerated in their implementation, the legacy of customs with very high honest money has been opposed by scholars since the mid-19th century and supported by the Dutch colonialists. So even though this custom is still used by the Ogan Ilir community, it is not a disgrace if you do not follow it.

In this event, the role of religious figures is very important from the beginning of the planning, such as the proposal process, a family meeting is held with mutual friendship which is termed "*Mutus Rasan*" in this procession the intent and purpose of the proposal is conveyed and an agreement is made between the man and the woman, in the meeting, discussions are held regarding the dowry, smoke money (participation of the prospective in-laws in financing the funds for the

alms reception), and determining the date of the marriage contract and gifts or step money are given if it turns out that the prospective bride precedes/steps over her older sister to get married.

Next, when the wedding schedule is approaching, a "*kelompok malam*" (gathering night) will be held to form a wedding committee. In the *kelompok malam*, two committees are formed, namely the committee of adults and the committee of the youth group. The meeting was started by the parents' group where the meeting began with the reading of the Qur'an, Yasin letter together and *Tahlil* and a prayer of congratulations, then the meeting was continued with the formation of the committee from the youth group.

In terms of presenting or bringing the girls in the village to the evening event "*lump*", then the young men or bachelors will go to each house of residents who have teenage or adult daughters and ask permission from the parents of the girl or woman to borrow their daughters to attend the *kelompok malam* event. Then when the event is over, the young men will return the girls to their respective homes as a form of responsibility and gratitude for the willingness of the girl's parents to lend and allow their daughters to attend the *kelompok malam*.

Before the day of the wedding almsgiving/feast, there is an interesting tradition in the Ogan Ilir community as briefly discussed above related to the principle of reciprocity, the invited neighbors will come to "*bebawean*" materials and other goods, the belongings brought by the invited guests will be greeted by the bride and groom and recorded neatly in a special book written in it the type, amount and who it comes from and other information. This can certainly help the smooth running of the almsgiving event and lighten the burden of the host who will hold the celebration.

Based on an interview on August 12, 2023 with Mr. Utsman Abu Bakar as a community leader in Tanjung Lubuk village: As for the peak of the wedding event, in the procession, representatives from the groom's side bring a *Nyirih* equipment box as an expression of *sekapur sirih* which will be received by local traditional figures and checked for completeness, when it is considered complete and enjoying Sirih together, the marriage contract procession may be carried out according to the guidance of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the event in the form of a wedding reception with details of the wedding activities begins with dances and reading of holy verses of the Qur'an and continues with speeches and is filled with the tradition of *Betimbang* and followed by a religious lecture containing advice about married life and household.

A local Islamic teacher (*ustāz*) interviewed during the research articulated this connection explicitly, "*Betimbang is essentially ta'āwun in action. When we contribute to a wedding through Betimbang, we are fulfilling our Islamic obligation to help our brothers and sisters in need. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught us that a believer to another believer is like a building each part strengthens the other. Betimbang is exactly this principle made real in our daily lives. This religious legitimation transforms what might appear as merely a cultural practice into a religiously sanctioned form of worship (ibādah)*" (Shera et al., 2025).

Furthermore, religious leaders emphasize that *Betimbang* prevents the prohibited practice of extravagance (*isrāf*) by distributing wedding costs across the community rather than burdening a single family. As one imam explained during a wedding ceremony, "*Islam teaches moderation in all things, including celebrations. Betimbang allows families to hold proper wedding celebrations without falling into debt or selling their assets this is practical wisdom that aligns perfectly with Islamic teachings on avoiding financial hardship.*" This interpretation reframes *Betimbang* not as excessive spending, but as a mechanism for enabling appropriate celebration while maintaining financial responsibility. The tradition also reinforces the Islamic concept of social solidarity (*ukhuwwah*) by creating ongoing networks of reciprocal obligation. Participants understand that their contribution today will be reciprocated when their own family holds a wedding. A community member explained: "*In Islam, we are taught that the ummah is one body when one part suffers, the whole body feels it. Betimbang makes this teaching concrete. We know that when we help others today, the community will help us tomorrow. This is not just culture; this is Islam practiced in our daily lives.*"

From the series of customs above, one of the traditional wedding processions that is the focus of the study in this article is still the *Betimbang* Tradition. This tradition is still found in the Indralaya Selatan District, especially in Tebing Gerinting Selatan Village and Tanjung Lubuk Village. The technical implementation is as follows: The almsgiving committee will distribute envelopes one by one to the invited guests to be filled with donations. While waiting for the process of distributing and filling the envelopes by the invited guests, the event is filled with religious lectures containing advice about marriage issues or children's education delivered by preachers who are brought in from outside the area. While listening to the religious lecture delivered by the preacher, the committee then collects the envelopes again and collects them on stage, then the money in the envelopes is taken out and counted. Next, the envelopes that have been written by the invited guests are read one by one, then the nominal amount of money donated and the total amount obtained during the *Betimbang* process is read and at the peak the money from the *Betimbang* will be given to the host by the Village Head accompanied by religious figures.

That evening, the host re-registers the names of the invited guests who filled the envelopes and notes them down neatly. Then, when the person who filled the envelopes holds the same event, the recipient of the first envelope will pay the bill in return with the same nominal or amount of money. This tradition is intended to ease the burden of the host who has spent a lot of money to hold a circumcision reception or wedding reception which is sometimes filled with musical entertainment by a dangdut music group or a single organ and filled with religious lectures. The amount or nominal amount obtained in the *Betimbang* procession will indicate the social status of the organizer or host of the alms and his extended family. so that when getting a large nominal amount it will be depicted that the family has a high social status and is from a prominent class. In addition, the large *Betimbang* results are social evidence that the host of the alms is fierce and greedy (likes to fulfill and attend other people's event invitations) so that he gets a reward in accordance with what he does.

In this *Betimbang* tradition, there is a principle of reciprocity. This value has become a culture and is manifested in several activities, especially to meet daily needs as a manifestation of mutual assistance and caring. For example, in the form of exchanging land and labor where someone who does not have land can work on someone else's land for a certain time with the application of profit sharing. Exchange of labor for labor known as the *istila ambik arian* (Daily) someone who is paid daily by the landowner. Exchange of goods for goods, as found in *nulung pesedekahan* (Helping for circumcision and wedding ceremonies) and *Betimbang*. In the *Pesedakan* tradition, the assistance received by the host from the invited guests who come is neatly recorded in a special book regarding the type of assistance received such as chicken, rice, chicken, duck, vermicelli and others), the amount and of course the name of the person giving the assistance from whom and other information. Furthermore, when the person giving the assistance holds a *Pesedekahan* event, the recipient of the assistance has an obligation to help the giver's alms with the same goods or objects or even more than what was received.

***Betimbang* Tradition and Religious Fluidity.**

Sociologically, religion is a manifestation of human needs for problems that cannot be solved empirically and technologically. Religion then gives new beliefs in the form of spirituality to humans and underlies new behavior and actions in changing the natural and social environment. Geographical, economic, social, and political differences classify society into different social communities (Sultan, 2022). These differences also become the starting point for a community's view of everything, including religion (Muttaqin, 2024). Several factors cause religion to be constructed dynamically when in the midst of society. First, religion emerges and becomes a human need whose symptoms are dynamic and constantly changing. The more dynamic and developing a society is, the higher the need for something transcendental in order to manage non-empirical matters and each society has different formulations and constructions of religious beliefs. Among

the causes are the process of inheriting beliefs from generation to generation and the social views of a community on the natural and social environment that surrounds it (Muttaqin, 2024).

Second, Religion is present in a dynamic and flexible social space or fluidity when interacting with various other elements as one form of the ongoing social process and also when interacting with other cultures will have a new meaning that is different from the previous meaning. This new meaning becomes a new consensus and reference for its community and forms behaviors that are different from the mainstream of religion. The dynamic and changing reality that occurs in religion provides a picture of how a society constructs the function of religion in their lives and religion experiences a phase of fluidity as occurs in culture (Muslimin, 2021). Dadang Kahmad in his book *Sociology of Religion* defines fluidity as the flexibility of a cultural entity when it enters another cultural area. This flexibility causes the initial cultural symbol to metamorphose into a new meaning while creating a new symbol. This is because humans are not mechanical creatures who can practice what is accepted as it is and humans will redesign what they receive consciously or unconsciously (Kahmad, 2011).

The reality of fluidity in religion presents a diversity of religious practices, according to Dody this is a common symptom that occurs in almost all religions, so by looking at it through a sociological and phenomenological perspective, it is revealed that the space for tolerance and opportunities for acculturation are offered more by local culture than by Islam itself and it can be understood that anywhere in the world there is no local religion or culture that is able to maintain its original characteristics unless it is influenced by other cultures or teachings that penetrate it (Truna, 2018, p. 37).

Third, the existence of the natural and social environment has a big influence on the construction of community thinking about something. A harsh natural and social environment, for example, will influence the way of thinking of a person or community in the area which is more resistant or protective. Meanwhile, other communities whose natural and social conditions are more modern will give a soft and adaptive influence. This influence has an impact on the construction of religion as a belief that emerges and becomes a necessity for social groups that interact dynamically (Muttaqin, 2024).

Fourth, stratified, the views on religion between social classes differ in line with the social interests of each social class. The relatively middle to upper social class will have the view that religion as an entity owned by each social group is an economic asset that can be utilized in order to gain profit. On the other hand, for the middle to lower social class, religion is considered a representation of strength that can accommodate its weaknesses. Through religion, this social group covers up these weaknesses through acts of worship and other religious rituals (Muttaqin, 2024). In the context of Indonesia, social stratification is formed using four basic things, namely economy, knowledge, power, and honor. Generally, a person has more than one element of the basic stratification formation. For example, rich people generally also have high knowledge. The higher a person's ownership of one or several elements forming stratification, the higher their social class in society. Conversely, the lower the ownership of the elements forming stratification, the lower their social position in society (Muttaqin, 2024).

In the above tradition of weighing the universal values of Islamic teachings are implemented dynamically and uniquely, differing from one region to another because the tradition itself was born in the midst of society, born in two ways, first through a spontaneous and unexpected emergence mechanism and involving the people. For some reason, individuals find interesting historical heritage. Second, it appears from above through coercion, something considered a tradition is chosen and made a public concern or forced by influential or powerful individuals (Mahmudah, 2019).

The *Betimbang* tradition is agreed upon by the community as a tradition and is considered not to be in conflict with the universal values of Islamic teachings to help each other and care for the needs of fellow Muslims, although it is often considered to contain acts of showing off. However, the *Betimbang* tradition has become a value agreed upon by the community as local wisdom that

can be absorbed and experienced and practiced repeatedly at every party or wedding reception so that the tradition is not lost from generation to generation. What has been agreed upon by the community above is in line with Van Peursen's statement as a process of inheritance or continuation of norms, customs, rules and traditions can be changed, raised, rejected and combined with various human actions and traditions as a pattern of behavior or beliefs that have become part of a culture that has long been known so that it becomes customs and beliefs passed down from generation to generation (CA & Puersen, 1998).

The persistence of *Betimbang* reflects a community-wide consensus that the tradition aligns with Islamic universal values of mutual assistance (*ta'āwun*) and concern for fellow Muslims' welfare. This consensus, however, emerges not from passive acceptance but through active negotiation of competing interpretations. While critics frame *Betimbang* as potentially encouraging ostentation (*riya'*) a serious concern in Islamic ethics where public displays of generosity may corrupt sincere intention the community majority reinterprets this risk within their specific social context (Mawardi et al., 2024). Field data reveals three mechanisms through which the community manages this tension. First, religious leaders consistently emphasize intention over amount, teaching that small contributions given sincerely hold greater spiritual value than large sums given for recognition. Second, informal norms discourage competitive giving, with excessive contributions sometimes viewed negatively as "*tidak sesuai kemampuan*" (beyond one's means). Third, the tradition's structure emphasizes collective achievement rather than individual display the ceremonial climax focuses on the total sum representing community solidarity, not individual wealth.

The community's agreement on *Betimbang* as local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*) represents not naive acceptance, but sophisticated negotiation that acknowledges risks while affirming social benefits. This reflects Van Peursen's (1998) insight that tradition is not static inheritance but active selection and adaptation communities continuously evaluate and reinterpret cultural practices in light of contemporary values. However, Van Peursen's framework requires extension: *Betimbang*'s transmission involves not merely continuation or rejection, but active *Islamic reasoning* that transforms cultural practice into religious expression. The community does not simply preserve *Betimbang* as cultural heritage; they reconstitute it as Islamic practice by embedding it within theological frameworks of *ta'āwun*, *ṣadaqah*, and *ukhuwwah* (Khalid & Ritonga, 2022). This process creates what might be termed "naturalized orthodoxy" practices that feel culturally authentic while being experienced as religiously correct. The tradition's power lies in this dual character: it is "ours" (culturally distinctive) and simultaneously "right" (religiously legitimate).

The question of whether *Betimbang* "conflicts" with Islamic teaching thus reveals itself as inadequately framed. The tradition does not exist in opposition to or independent from Islam; it exists *as* a form of Islam specifically, as Ogan Ilir Muslims' contextual implementation of Islamic principles. Ongoing debates about ostentation and appropriate conduct represent not conflict between culture and religion, but internal Islamic discourse about implementing shared values in specific circumstances. This discourse itself constitutes religious practice, demonstrating the community's commitment to aligning behavior with Islamic ethics. The community's consensus embodies what sociologists call "lived religion" practical ways ordinary people enact religious commitments within specific social contexts, often diverging from official orthodoxies while remaining authentically religious (Jenuri et al., 2024). *Betimbang* shows that religious authenticity emerges not from abstract conformity to textual prescriptions, but from communities' creative efforts to embody religious values within particular circumstances.

Betimbang's continuation across generations depends on its multi-dimensional functionality. The tradition persists not simply because it is old, but because it remains useful socially, economically, and religiously. It solves practical problems (distributing wedding costs), strengthens social bonds (through reciprocity networks), and provides occasions for religious teaching (through associated sermons and prayers) (Dwi Agustini & Lawahizh, 2025). This functional integration explains why reformist critiques, despite theological sophistication, have not dislodged the practice:

Betimbang addresses needs that purely doctrinal alternatives do not. The intergenerational transmission occurs through embodied knowledge younger generations learn by participating in weddings, observing parents preparing envelopes, and hearing religious leaders' contextualizing sermons. One young informant explained: "I've attended weddings with *Betimbang* since I was small. I never questioned whether it was Islamic I just knew this is how we help each other. But as I learned more about Islam, I realized *Betimbang* actually practices what Islam teaches." This experiential learning embeds both mechanics and ethical frameworks simultaneously, ensuring the tradition's vitality.

The Tradition of *Betimbang* and the Construction of Religious Moderation Values

Anthropologically, tradition is interpreted as a habit that is followed and is something that is created by humans continuously by society and it is supernatural in nature which contains cultural values, applicable norms and laws in the form of related rules and it cannot be denied that humans and culture influence each other directly or indirectly and become a product of human culture, especially Indonesian society (Galuh, n.d.). With the diversity of culture in each region with its own characteristics, be it philosophical, ideological, sociological and pragmatic, depending on the values adopted by each cultural group. Traditions and culture in each region cannot be separated from the influence of religion and the belief system adopted by its citizens. This concept reflects the integration of religion and culture, emphasizing the interaction between human culture and belief systems that form the foundation of society's values (Fitri et al., 2025).

The Islamic fluidity that occurs in Indonesia, especially in Ogan Ilir Regency, has given birth to a culture with Islamic nuances or vice versa, Islam with local cultural nuances. The wealth of local traditions and cultures above among academics continues to be observed, studied and analyzed by scientists so that academically the dynamics of people's understanding of the religious traditions they practice are discovered (Hasan et al., 2024). The social reality of the diversity of traditions and customs in Indonesia is a priceless wealth and the contact of Islamic values with traditional values that continue to be maintained by society. In this contact process, according to Dody S Truna, several possibilities arise: First, Cultural Values that are still maintained, in addition to accepting new values that come from Islam. Second, Values that are replaced (transformation). Third, Integration between values. Fourth, Traditions that are not touched by Islamic values. And Fifth, Values that remain different, not integrated and may be contradictory. The process of religious moderation is influenced by cultural heritage and its transformation over time, which aligns with the concepts discussed by Hady et al. This shows how local traditions, including the *Betimbang*, evolve within the context of Islamic teachings, forming a unique blend of cultural and religious expression.

In the *Betimbang* Tradition, compatible values and are believed by the perpetrators do not conflict with Islamic teachings such as the values of mutual cooperation, care and the spirit of sacrifice (Maria Hermina Bhebhe et al., 2025). Islamic values are accepted because the principles and values are the same as the principles and values that the local community maintains. On the other hand, when there are traditions and customs with ceremonies that are considered to be contrary to Islamic values and cannot be integrated along with the onslaught of new cultures and rational considerations, awareness or even economic factors, these traditions are getting weaker and are even no longer carried out by the community. But there are also some that are still strong and continue to be maintained by the community. These two conditions run simultaneously and are carried out by different members of society. But it could be that people who carry out local traditions that conflict are people who also carry out Islamic teachings on other events. Dody S. Truna analysis of the five possibilities arising from this contact between Islamic values and local traditions further elucidates the complex process of transformation, which is exemplified by the *Betimbang* tradition in Yanti & Mahmudah.

The tradition of weighing which continues to be maintained by local communities is the capital and basic construction for the Indonesian government to develop a Religious Moderation

program considering that there are still many local traditions that are still maintained by Indonesian society which of course do not conflict with the basic values of Islamic teachings (Rizqiyah et al., 2023).

The *Betimbang* tradition exemplifies religious moderation through its embodiment of the Islamic principle of *wasatīyah* the middle path that avoids extremes. This tradition demonstrates moderation by balancing individual religious obligations with communal cultural practices, neither rejecting local customs as un-Islamic nor abandoning religious principles for cultural accommodation. The practice reflects Qardhawi's concept of combinative cooperation between opposing elements, where Islamic teachings of mutual assistance (*ta'āwun*) merge with Palembang cultural values of social reciprocity, creating a harmonious synthesis that strengthens both religious commitment and community cohesion. In the *Betimbang* Tradition, compatible values such as mutual cooperation, care, and sacrifice are integrated with Islamic values, which reflects the Qardhawi's concept of combinative cooperation between Islamic principles and local culture, as noted by Fuadi et al. This integration helps in achieving religious moderation by aligning local customs with Islamic values, which also emphasizes the middle path, avoiding extremes as stated in Suleman et al.

Drawing on Berger's theory of social construction, the *Betimbang* tradition illustrates how religious moderation is not merely imposed but actively constructed through community dialogue and negotiation. Local religious leaders play a crucial role in this construction by providing contextual interpretations that legitimize the tradition within Islamic framework while addressing community concerns about excess or ostentation. This process of externalization, objectification, and internalization creates shared understandings about appropriate religious practice that embody moderation values, demonstrating how communities actively construct moderate religious attitudes through lived experience rather than abstract theological discourse.

However, tensions exist within the community regarding the potential for excess in the practice, as noted by Elmansyah et al, where concerns about financial burdens and social competition arise in some communities. This reflects the ongoing need for continuous negotiation between tradition and religious principles, which is a key feature of Berger's theory of social construction and is supported by the dynamic nature of moderation discussed in Jayadi. Some community members express concern about the financial burden placed on families and the potential for the practice to become a vehicle for social competition rather than genuine mutual aid. These criticisms reflect legitimate worries about the tradition veering toward excess a concern that moderates must continuously address. The ongoing debate within the community about appropriate contribution amounts and the proper spirit of giving demonstrates the dynamic nature of moderation, requiring constant negotiation between tradition and religious principle, generosity and prudence.

Lukman Hakim Saifudin, the Minister of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, states that religious moderation emphasizes tolerance, balance, and simplicity in religious practice. He outlines four key indicators that can be used to assess whether a tradition or religious practice reflects moderation values. These indicators are tolerance, balance, simplicity, and diversity. Tolerance refers to the acceptance of different religious views and practices without compromising one's personal beliefs. It includes recognizing the existence of other religions and the right to practice one's beliefs without facing intimidation. Balance involves avoiding extremism and establishing a harmony between religious teachings and social, cultural, and political life. Religious moderation encourages people to find a middle ground between accepting religious teachings and embracing local cultural practices without losing the essence of religious doctrine. Simplicity prioritizes a modest lifestyle in both religion and daily life, avoiding displays of wealth or excessive symbolism that conflict with the core values of religion. Lastly, diversity celebrates and respects differences in religion, culture, and viewpoints, fostering peaceful coexistence and enriching social interactions.

In the context of the *Betimbang* tradition, it is clear that this practice aligns with the principles of religious moderation as proposed by Lukman Hakim Saifudin. Tolerance is evident in the way

the *Betimbang* tradition is accepted and practiced by local communities, without conflicting with Islamic values. The tradition focuses on cooperation and giving, reflecting the Islamic principles of mutual assistance (*ta'awun*). Balance is also apparent as the community maintains local traditions while respecting Islamic teachings, ensuring that no aspect of the *Betimbang* practice contradicts religious principles. Simplicity is reflected in values such as sacrifice and cooperation, which prioritize social benefit over material wealth, further aligning with the principle of religious moderation. Finally, the diversity within the community, where individuals with different levels of religiosity and perspectives participate in the tradition harmoniously, demonstrates the inclusive and pluralistic nature of *Betimbang*.

To explore the integration of religious and cultural values, Mahmudah et al argue that religious moderation is most effectively achieved when local traditions and Islamic values are blended without conflict. The *Betimbang* tradition exemplifies how local cultural practices, such as mutual cooperation and social reciprocity, can be maintained while aligning with Islamic principles, like *ta'awun* (mutual assistance). This study emphasizes that religious moderation emerges from thoughtful integration rather than the abandonment of local traditions. The *Betimbang* tradition illustrates that local practices can serve as vehicles for moderate religious expression when they are guided by Islamic values of cooperation and generosity.

This study's findings contribute significantly to Indonesia's Religious Moderation program by demonstrating how grassroots traditions can serve as vehicles for moderate religious practice when properly guided by religious leadership and community dialogue. The *Betimbang* tradition offers a practical model for policymakers, showing how local customs can be preserved and even strengthened while maintaining alignment with religious teachings. For religious educators, this case provides evidence that moderation emerges not from abandoning tradition but from thoughtful integration of cultural practices with religious principles, suggesting that moderation programs should focus on supporting community-level negotiations rather than imposing top-down interpretations of appropriate religious practice.

Religious moderation has emerged as a central paradigm in contemporary Indonesian Islamic discourse, particularly through its formal adoption as state policy by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, Indonesia's former Minister of Religious Affairs, conceptualized religious moderation as emphasizing tolerance, balance, and simplicity in religious practice a framework responding to Indonesia's unique challenge of maintaining religious authenticity while accommodating extraordinary cultural diversity (Ramadhan et al., 2023). This framework operationalizes moderation through four measurable indicators: tolerance (accepting religious and cultural differences without compromising personal beliefs), balance (*tawāzun* avoiding extremism by harmonizing religious teachings with social and cultural realities), simplicity (prioritizing modest lifestyles avoiding ostentatious displays), and diversity (celebrating differences as enriching social fabric). These indicators translate abstract theological concepts into observable behavioral patterns, enabling empirical assessment of how communities negotiate between religious orthodoxy and cultural authenticity. The theoretical significance lies in departing from binary oppositions that have dominated discourse on Islam and culture in Indonesia rather than positioning religious practice and cultural tradition as inherently opposed, the moderation paradigm recognizes their potential synthesis (Netanyahu & Susanto, 2022).

Systematic application of these four indicators reveals that *Betimbang* substantially embodies religious moderation values through multiple interconnected mechanisms (Biscotti, 2017). Tolerance manifests in community members' acceptance of divergent interpretations regarding the practice's Islamic legitimacy while maintaining personal religious convictions informants ranging from traditional to reform-oriented orientations all participate meaningfully, though emphasizing different aspects. Religious leaders facilitate this theological pluralism by acknowledging that competing interpretations can simultaneously possess validity, creating space for communal deliberation rather than imposing top-down rulings (Kamali & Ramadan, 2015). Balance operates through continuous negotiation across multiple tensions: between individual religious conscience

and communal obligations, between material assistance and spiritual sincerity, between preserving tradition and adapting to contemporary circumstances. The community addresses these tensions through religious guidance emphasizing proportionate contribution according to capacity, structural mechanisms like transparent announcement that creates accountability, and ongoing modifications introduced by younger generations who add explicit Islamic framing while maintaining core functions (Auda, 2008). This adaptive approach demonstrates sophisticated legal reasoning that focuses on underlying purposes mutual assistance, social solidarity, easing wedding burdens rather than rigid adherence to forms.

The indicators of simplicity and diversity further illuminate *Betimbang's* moderate character, though not without persistent tensions requiring ongoing negotiation. Simplicity operates not as absolute minimalism but as purposeful moderation distinguishing between appropriate celebration and wasteful extravagance contributions are explicitly framed as helping rather than displaying, with informal norms about appropriate wedding expenditure that invite community criticism of excessive luxury even when *Betimbang* contributions could fund it (Couper, 2008). Religious leaders consistently teach that simplicity in Islam means purposefulness rather than austerity, emphasizing that weddings should focus on spiritual significance rather than material display, thereby enabling *Betimbang*-supported celebrations that honor the occasion without wasteful excess. Diversity manifests through inclusive participation across varied religious orientations, economic statuses, and generational perspectives theological diversity enriches the practice as different perspectives contribute to ongoing communal reflection, economic diversity is accommodated through teaching that contributions should be assessed relative to capacity rather than absolute amount, and generational diversity produces creative adaptations where younger Muslims engage in "Islamization" that preserves cultural forms while enhancing Islamic content (van Bruinessen, 2013). This diversity generates ongoing dialogue that keeps the tradition alive and adaptable, demonstrating that unity need not require uniformity and that diversity can strengthen rather than threaten social bonds.

The *Betimbang* case reveals several critical theoretical insights about religious moderation's nature and construction. First, moderation is not a static characteristic traditions either possess or lack, but a dynamic achievement requiring continuous community effort it emerges from ongoing processes of interpretation, negotiation, and adaptation rather than from fixed alignment with predetermined criteria (Berger's social constructionism). Second, moderation indicators should be understood as dimensions along which practices vary rather than binary categories, enabling more nuanced evaluation than simple moderate/extreme dichotomies allow. Third, successful moderation requires "interpretive infrastructure" institutions and practices that facilitate ongoing communal deliberation about religious meaning, including religious leaders who provide contextual guidance, community gatherings where traditions are performed and discussed, and mechanisms for gradual adaptation that preserve core values while addressing concerns (Dent, 2021). Communities lacking this infrastructure may struggle to maintain moderation as they lack forums for productive negotiation when tensions arise between tradition and orthodoxy.

This analysis demonstrates that *Betimbang* functions as a practical vehicle for religious moderation by creating social spaces where Islamic values of mutual assistance (*ta'āwun*) are implemented through culturally resonant forms that accommodate diverse interpretations and practices while maintaining communal cohesion. The tradition exemplifies what An-Na'im and Ramadan argue that Islamic universality does not require cultural uniformity, but rather universal ethics must be "clothed" in diverse cultural expressions appropriate to different contexts. Religious moderation in the Indonesian context thus represents a distinctive model emerging from centuries of experience negotiating between Islamic universalism and archipelagic diversity, cultivating what Woodward terms an "aesthetic of tolerance" not merely passive acceptance but active celebration of creative possibilities that emerge when Islam encounters diverse cultural contexts. For policymakers and religious educators, *Betimbang* offers a practical model showing how local customs can be preserved and strengthened while maintaining alignment with religious teachings,

suggesting that moderation programs should focus on supporting community-level negotiations and interpretive infrastructure rather than imposing top-down interpretations of appropriate religious practice (Zamroni et al., 2025). The findings hold significant implications for Indonesia's Religious Moderation program and broader policy considerations. The *Betimbang* tradition demonstrates that local traditions can serve as effective vehicles for moderate religious practice when supported by appropriate religious guidance and community dialogue. This suggests that moderation programs should prioritize supporting grassroots religious leadership and facilitating community-level discussions rather than imposing standardized interpretations of appropriate religious practice. For policymakers, this study indicates that religious moderation policies are most effective when they build upon existing cultural foundations rather than attempting to replace local practices with abstract principles. Educational institutions and religious organizations can utilize this model to develop curricula and programs that demonstrate how traditional practices can embody moderate religious values, thereby strengthening both cultural preservation and religious commitment in Indonesia's diverse Muslim communities.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the *Betimbang* tradition functions as a multifaceted mechanism for constructing religious moderation in South Sumatra's Muslim communities. The research identifies three key findings: first, *Betimbang* operates as a reciprocal social system that embodies Islamic principles of mutual assistance (*ta'āwun*) while maintaining cultural authenticity through local practices of communal support during wedding ceremonies. Second, the tradition demonstrates social solidarity by creating networks of obligation and support that extend beyond immediate family to encompass broader community relationships, thereby strengthening social cohesion across different economic strata. Third, the integration of religious advice during *Betimbang* ceremonies serves as a crucial site for negotiating religious moderation, where local scholars provide contextual interpretations that balance traditional practices with Islamic teachings. The study's unique contribution lies in demonstrating how religious moderation emerges through community-level negotiations rather than top-down policy implementation. The *Betimbang* tradition shows that moderation is actively constructed through the dynamic interaction between local religious leaders, community members, and cultural practices, creating practical frameworks for moderate religious attitudes that are both culturally authentic and religiously legitimate. This finding challenges assumptions about religious moderation as primarily an institutional or theological concept, revealing instead its grassroots character and community-based construction. However, this study acknowledges several limitations that affect the generalizability of findings. The research relied primarily on interviews and participant observation within a limited geographical area, focusing on three villages in South Indralaya District. The study involved 24 informants, which, while providing rich qualitative data, may not capture the full diversity of perspectives within the broader Ogan Ilir community. Additionally, the absence of extensive historical documentation limits the ability to trace long-term changes in the tradition's practice and meaning. The research also focused on the positive aspects of community integration, potentially underrepresenting voices of those who may be critical of or marginalized by the tradition. Future research should address these limitations through broader comparative studies examining similar traditions across different regions of Indonesia to understand how local contexts shape the construction of religious moderation. Research including more extensive documentary analysis, such as historical records and written accounts of the tradition's evolution, would provide deeper temporal perspective. Additionally, studies focusing specifically on younger generations' perceptions of *Betimbang* could illuminate how demographic changes affect the tradition's role in constructing religious moderation. Investigating the experiences of economically disadvantaged community members would also provide more nuanced understanding of the tradition's social dynamics.

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