

# Inclusivity of Lecturers with Nahdlatul Ulama Background in Political and Religious Views in Indonesia

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This paper sought to elaborate the role of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization in shaping the community's inclusive mindset and religious ideology, especially in university lecturers in Indonesia. Lecturers' religious thoughts were mapped to be inclusive, exclusive, and radical. The paper used a quantitative approach with questionnaires when collecting the data. Several questions on self-identity, the community organizations followed, the concept of truth, tolerance and inclusive within religions, were asked in the questionnaire. Respondents were forty lecturers in four major cities in Indonesia: Bandung, Yogyakarta, Semarang, and Malang. The results showed that lecturers who have backgrounds from Nahdlatul Ulama had an inclusive religious ideology. The data shows that 52% of lecturers in Indonesia were categorized as inclusive, 42% of lecturers as exclusive and 5% percent of lecturers were categorized as radical. The data also showed that 80% of the lecturers who have an inclusive ideology are from the Nahdlatul Ulama background.

**Key words:** *Religious Thought, Inclusive, Exclusive, Radical and Nahdlatul Ulama.*



## Introduction

Nahdlatul Ulama (abbreviated as NU) is a moderate traditional organization in Indonesia, following the Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, and Ahmad school of jurisprudence. Established on 31 January 1926 in Surabaya, East Java, by some prominent kyais like K.H. Abdul Wahab Hasbullah and K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, the NU was born as a response to the rise of the Wahabism movement in Saudi Arabia and the Islamic modernism movement in Indonesia (Faisal, 2011). The NU is the largest independent Islamic organization in the world, with membership estimates of 90 million (2019) (Patrick, 2019).

NU follows the ideology and principle of wasathiyat al-Islam, taking the middle path between extreme aqli (rationalist) and extreme naqli (scripturalist) tendencies. The organization identifies the Quran, the Sunnah, and the ability of the mind, coupled with empirical reality as the sources of its thought. It attributes this approach to earlier thinkers, such as Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi in the field of theology. In the field of jurisprudence, NU recognizes the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools of law, but relies in practice on Shafi'i teachings. In matters of Sufism, NU follows the path of Al-Ghazali and Junaid al-Baghdadi. It has been described by western media as a progressive, liberal and pluralistic Islamic movement (Robin, 2009).

NU, from the beginning until now, consistently promotes moderation, compassion, anti-radicalism, inclusiveness and tolerance. Some leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama are passionate advocates of Islam Nusantara, a distinctive brand of Islam that has undergone interaction, contextualization, indigenization, and interpretation, according to socio-cultural conditions in Indonesia (Alexander, 2017; Raquel, et.al 2018).

One of the fundamental principles developed by NU is inclusive thinking. Issues of inclusivism and radicalism play a very important role in the social, cultural and political aspects in the level of both the state and community. Countries whose society is inclusive tend to be safer and more peaceful when compared to a society that is exclusive, and especially radical. This is because the nature of inclusiveness recognizes the truth of other teachings for the benefit of the people (David, 2000; Neil, 2007; Alwi, 2018).

Inclusive is an English word which means 'containing as a part of a whole or including'. This term is used to indicate the situations or attitudes that views other groups as part of being included in a situation. In addition, this term is also used to state that something owned by someone may also be present in other people, or the truth owned by a religion may also exist in other religions (John and Hasan, 2015; Neil, 2007).



The essence of inclusivity is therefore the desire to know each other, understand each other, and give to each other irrespective of religious groups. Inclusivity does not allow them to be dominated or enslaved by one understanding, teaching, belief or religion. For them, claims of truth and claims of salvation is not a monopoly of a particular group or religion, but also exists in other groups or religions. Smith argued, that the two claims are actually the same as saying that God is only found in this room and not in the next room, or he is just in this cloth, and not in any other cloth (Julian, 2010).

Indonesia as a nation consisting of various different tribes, races, languages and cultures and must be built with an inclusive spirit, namely the spirit of mutual appreciation, protection, and respect for the ethnicity, religion, culture, race, and language of others in the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Inclusiveness in the life of the nation and state is a necessity for the realization of a just, safe and prosperous society (Arie, 2014).

This paper intends to examine the influence of Nahdlatul Ulama's moderate principles on the religious reasonings of lecturers in Indonesia. Is there a correlation between lecturers with NU backgrounds and the moderate principles taught by NU? Whether the moderate principles theoretically taught by NU can be implemented in the moderate behaviour of lecturers with an NU Background?

With those questions, this study attempts to map the religious reasoning of lecturers in Indonesia, which is divided into three categories, ie, inclusive, exclusive, and radical. In addition, it also aims to analyse the background of the lecturers' religious organization that falls into these three categories, especially the inclusive category.

## **Materials and Methods**

The main objective of the research is to prove the assumption that Nahdlatul Ulama ideology and principle make its followers inclusive and tolerant. For the study, the researchers decided to apply a primary data search by distributing a set of questionnaires to selected respondents. Several questions on self-identity, the community organizations followed, the concept of truth, tolerance, and inclusivity within religions were all asked in the questionnaire. Each response to the question shows the level of religious views of the respondent, which is inclusive and exclusive. In four major cities, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Semarang, and Malang, university lecturers took the questionnaires. Two universities, namely universities under the Ministry of Research and Technology and universities under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, were taken from each city. The choice of these two types of universities was to make the conclusions more objective. Furthermore, from each university, five lecturers were chosen at random to be respondents. Therefore, the total number of lecturer respondents who filled out questionnaires were 40 lecturers. The details of the respondents can be seen in the

following table.

**Table 1:** Demographic data of research subjects

Demographic data		Number
Age	$\geq 40$	25
	$< 40$	15
Sex	Male	20
	Female	10
Type of university	Under the Ministry of Religious Affairs	20
	Under the Ministry of Research and Technology	20

## Result and Discussion

### *Mapping the Lecturers' Religious Thought in Indonesia*

The mapping of the religious reasoning of these lecturers was limited to three models, ie, inclusive, exclusive and radical. For the radical category, it was again divided into three models, ie, radical in mind, radical in attitude and radical in action.<sup>10</sup>

These three categories needed exploring further, so that the meaning of each terminology could be clear. *Firstly*, inclusivity is an attitude that is open to the differences of opinion and the person can accept differences of opinion as natural or *sunnatullah*, which has the same value of truth. The inclusive nature acknowledges that there is truth out there besides the truth owned.

Furthermore, inclusive attitudes are of the view that, outside of their religion, there is also truth, even though it is not complete or as perfect as one else's religion. In inclusive attitudes, there is still theological and faith tolerance. According to Nurcholish Madjid, an inclusive attitude is to view other religions as an implicit form of our religion.<sup>11</sup>

*Secondly*, exclusivity is the understanding that there is only one correct form of an opinion and truth, their truth and their group's truth, but they do not impose their opinion which is considered true onto others, because they still think that the difference is *sunnatullah*.

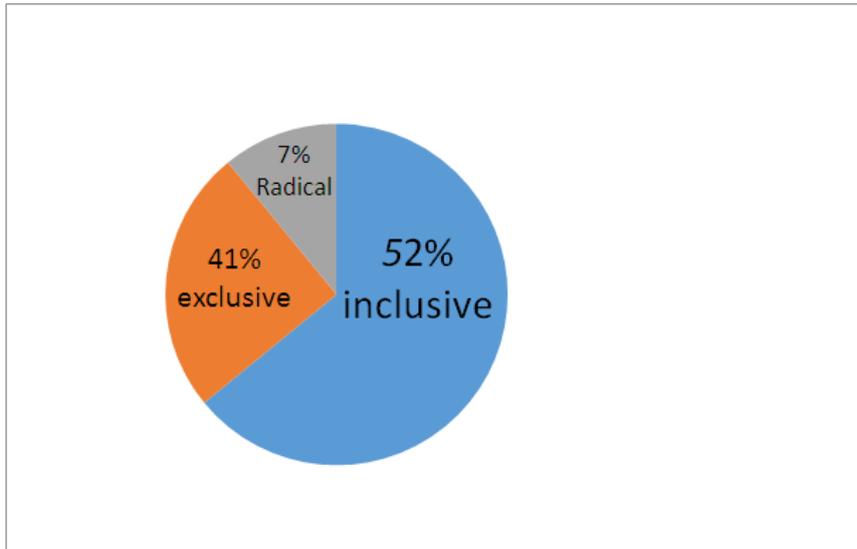
The exclusive terminology used in this study had little difference with the exclusive meaning according to Komaruddin Hidayat and Nurcholish Madjid. The difference was in the desire to force others to follow the truth which they believed. The exclusive terminology in this study still respected the differences and did not impose the beliefs of their own, even though the others considered it to be wrong. For the exclusiveness by Komaruddin Hidayat and Nurcholish Madjid, it means that others are wrong and must be justified in accordance with their opinions and religion.<sup>12</sup>

*Thirdly*, the radical category is the assumption that the most correct opinion is their own opinion, while the opinion of others is wrong and must be fixed to fit their opinion. This radical category is divided into three, ie, radical in mind, radical in attitude, and radical in action. Radical in mind is the lowest level of radicalisation. Being radical in mind means that the individual considers their opinions as the most correct and the opinions of others are wrong and their views must be justified so that others will follow their opinions. The model of radical in mind is usually insistent in arguing, blaming others, infusing others, and labelling *bid'ah* to others. However, this is only limited to war of thought without action (Maeghin, 2016).

The level of radical in attitude is even higher because this has arrived at behaviour and movement. Groups who fall into this category behave exclusively among their groups; they do not associate with other groups who are considered as wrong. This group has also begun to realize the ideas of the *Khilafah* and the application of Islamic law with its massive program and movement. However, this radical level has not committed violence in realizing their ideals. The radical in action attitude however is radicalisation at the highest level, which an individual uses force to get others to follow their opinion, typically by resulting to violence. At this level, they attempt to realize *Khilafah* by violence such as in Syria and Iraq (Schmid, 2013).

Furthermore, based on the data, this study obtained 60 lecturers who filled out the questionnaire; there were 52% of lecturers in inclusive categories, 41% of lecturers in exclusive categories and 7% in radical categories. The Radical understanding in question means that the lecturers only considered the truth of their own and their group, while others were wrong and had to be corrected. Of the seven percent, 6% were at the level of radical in mind and 1% was at the level of radical in attitude (Muhammad, 2017).

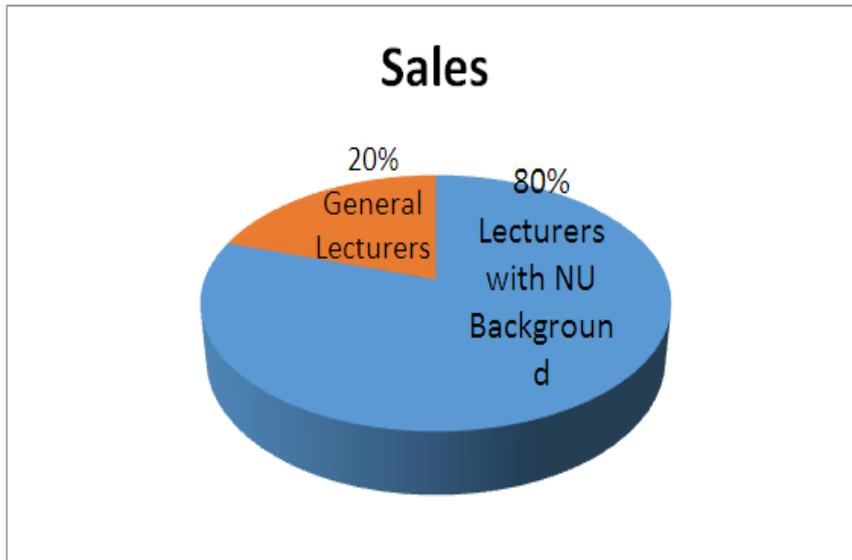
This table illustrates the percentage more clearly:



### ***Inclusiveness of Lecturers with NU Background***

Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) or The Revival of the Religious Scholars was established by various religious scholars (ulama) on January 31, 1926. After its formation, it shifted its focus from the anti-traditionalist environment of Saudi Arabia to their home country of Indonesia where the modernist Muhammadiyah movement was threatening the very foundation of their traditions. NU's call to preserve the traditional Islamic scholarly traditions that were nurtured in pesantren, they found wide spread support among the people of rural Java and its membership also grew rapidly (Kalyan, 2015).

The preliminary data of this study showed that there were about 52 percent of lecturers included in the inclusive category. The data was further developed that the majority of these lecturers had a background in the *Nadhlatul Ulama* (NU) organization. Of the 52 percent (31 people), 80 percent (24 people) claimed to have a relationship with the this organization. More details can be seen in the following graph:



The inclusiveness with the NU background is interesting to be studied more deeply, particularly with the reasons why those lecturers can have openly and inclusive religious understandings that accept the differences of people and upholds respect for others (Robin, 2009).

This happens because the NU has principles that are open, *tawasuth*, moderate, tolerant and balanced. Some of these principles are as follows: *first*, the principle of *al-tawassuth*, ie., the middle way which is not right-wing or left-wing extremist. In the understanding of *Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah* held by NU, in the field of law (sharia), of faith, and of morality, the principle of middle way (*tawasuth*) is always put forward (Adistya et al., 2013).

NU's moderation attitude is reflected in the law-taking method (*istinbath*) which not only uses texts, but also pays attention to the position of reason. Likewise in discourse, NU always bridges between revelation and ratio (*al-ra'iy*). This method (*manhaj*) is implemented by the *Imam* (leader) of the four schools and the next generation in giving birth to the fiqh (Harun, 2018).

The second principle is *tawazun*, which is maintaining the balance and harmony, so that the interests of the world and the afterlife, between personal and community, and between the present and future are maintained to be balanced. This pattern is built more for issues that have a socio-political dimension. In other words, through this pattern Aswaja wants to create social integrity and solidarity for the people (Greg, 1996).

The third principle is *tasamuh*, which is to be tolerant to differing views, especially in matters of a *furu'iyah* nature. The implication of this tolerant attitude is to create a brotherhood

(*ukhuwah Islamiyah*) because various thoughts that grow in the Muslim society get appreciative recognition. Such wide openness to accept various opinions make NU have the ability to reduce various internal conflicts among its people (Bustanul, 2016).<sup>1</sup>

The fourth principle is *ta'adul* (balance), which means perpendicular, not leaning right or left. *Ta'adul* is taken from the word of *adlu* which means justice as stated in in Sura Al Maidah verse 8. The conclusion is that the NU citizens behave in a non-compromising manner by not mixing the right and wrong. NU is not also affected by momentary interests, at the expense of NU and its people (Greg, 1998).

The fifth principle is *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (calling for goodness and preventing evil). With this principle, there will be a good social sensitivity and differences in shared life.

The five principles of NU are always internalized to its members, administrators and the wider community, so it is not surprising that many NU followers have an inclusive and tolerant nature.

## Conclusion

Nahdlatul Ulama is an organization with its principle that plays a significant role in shaping religious mindset, understanding, and the attitude of its followers, including lecturers in Indonesia. The result shows that 52% of lecturers are categorized in the inclusive category, 41% are in the exclusive category and 7% are in the radical category. Based on the grouping in the inclusive category (52% or 31 people), 80 percent (24 people) claim to have a background of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization. The inclusiveness of the lecturers with this background occurs because NU as a social organization has principles that support inclusiveness. Some of these principles are *tawazun*, *tasamuh*, *tawasuth*, *ta'adul*, and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*.

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<sup>1</sup> In the socio-cultural discourse, NU has tolerated many traditions that have developed in the community, without involving itself in the substance, even trying to direct it. Formalism in the cultural aspects of Aswaja does not have strong significance. Therefore, it is not surprising in the Sunni tradition that the face of Shiite culture or even Hinduism is impressed. Such a tolerant attitude of NU has given special meaning in relation to the broader dimension of humanity. This also makes it attractive to many Muslims in various regions of the world. The pluralism of the thoughts and attitudes of people's lives is a necessity and this will lead to the vision of the life of a world of mercy under the principle of divinity.



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