

Governing Religious–Political Boundaries: Religious Moderation as Civic Infrastructure for Inclusive Cultural Resilience in Indonesia

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Abstract: In democratic elections, religious identity can enrich public debate or be turned into a test of political belonging. This paper asks how religious moderation can govern the boundary between legitimate religious participation and exclusionary political membership, and whether it builds inclusive cultural resilience rather than surface calm. Treating Indonesia as a strategic Malay-Islamic case, it compares the 2019 and 2024 elections through interviews with electoral and religious-affairs authorities and analysis of official documents. The shift between the two is best read as de-escalation without demonstrated transformation: overt religious politicization became less visible while the capacity to convert religious difference into a political boundary persisted in subtler, networked forms. Moderation interrupts this process through four mechanisms, boundary detection, public-ethical translation, cross-boundary brokerage, and relational repair with institutional learning, but currently works more as episodic containment than durable change. The paper repositions moderation as an accountable practice of boundary governance and treats resilience as an outcome to be demonstrated, not inferred from harmony.

Keywords: religious moderation; religious-political boundary governance; politicization of religion; inclusive cultural resilience; electoral politics; Indonesia.

Introduction

Religion continues to shape moral meaning, social organization, and political communication across Muslim-majority democracies, and its role in elections is deeply ambivalent. Religious language can enrich public debate about justice, welfare, and accountability. It can also be turned into an instrument for deciding who counts as morally authentic and who deserves to represent the public (Assyaukanie, 2019; Ahnaf & Lussier, 2019). What matters analytically, then, is less the presence of religion in politics than the way religious symbols, authorities, and networks are converted into political boundaries, and what that conversion does to equal citizenship. This paper takes that conversion as its central object and asks how it can be governed.

Indonesia offers a strategic setting for the question. Few countries combine competitive elections, the world's largest Muslim population, mass religious organizations, and a state that has turned “religious moderation” (*moderasi beragama*) into official policy. The 2019 presidential election showed how religious identity could be mobilized to signal loyalty, moral legitimacy, and political belonging, even though its effects were never separable from incumbent performance, economic evaluation, and coalition arithmetic (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019a, 2019b; Fossati et al., 2020). Seen this way, 2019 was not simply an election with religious overtones. It was an episode in which religious difference could be recast as a hierarchy of political worth.

The 2024 election looked different. A three-candidate presidential field, looser coalitions, and changing campaign incentives seemed to lower the payoff of open sectarian confrontation, and a number of observers noted that identity polarization was less visible than in 2019 (Qodir & Hefner, 2024; Suraya & Pobedash, 2025). Lower visibility, however, is not the same as absence. Work on the pre-election period and on campaign communication suggests that religious appeals did not vanish so much as move into more performative, networked, and digital forms (Achfandhy et al., 2024; Lussier & Ahnaf, 2024; Bukhari et al., 2026). Read side by side, the two elections suggest a mixed pattern in which open antagonism recedes while religious-political boundary-making mutates or shifts arena rather than disappearing.

This puzzle exposes three gaps. The first is temporal. Existing accounts describe identity politics, candidate line-ups, and institutional prevention across the two elections, but they stop short of establishing whether the case shows decline, mutation, displacement, or some combination, and a drop in recorded incidents cannot on its own prove that boundary-making has weakened. The second gap concerns mechanism and governance together. Studies tend to jump from the claim that religion is used in politics to the conclusion that polarization follows, without saying who activates which religious resource, against whom, and in what arena. Religious moderation, in turn, is usually described as an attitude, a value, or a government program rather than as something specific actors actually do at specific moments (Ropi, 2019; Kurniawan & Afifi, 2023; Reza, 2024). The third gap is about outcomes and implementation. Cultural resilience is often reduced to harmony or the mere absence of open conflict, while calls for moderation rarely say which actor should act at which stage of an election, or how anyone would recognize success (Danisworo et al., 2024; Samosir, 2021).

The gaps matter because campaigning has migrated into networked and digital spaces where religious cues travel beyond party structures and beyond the categories that official violation reports can capture (Ridho et al., 2023; Bukhari et al., 2026). A society can drift from open antagonism to managed ambiguity without ever losing its capacity

for exclusionary mobilization. The problem is not to push religion out of democratic life but to keep religious participation from hardening into a test of unequal citizenship, and to explain why moderation sometimes buys only temporary calm and sometimes builds lasting civic capacity.

The novelty of this study lies in reframing religious moderation as a form of boundary governance rather than a personal virtue or a state campaign. The sociology of symbolic boundaries has long shown how groups draw and police the line between insiders and outsiders, yet that lens has rarely been trained on how electoral contests convert religious difference into unequal political standing. Indonesian scholarship on moderation, for its part, tends to read it either as an individual attitude or as a Ministry program, which leaves open the more practical question of who actually governs the boundary, in which arena, and to what effect (Ropi, 2019; Reza, 2024; Fitri et al., 2025). This paper moves the analysis in three directions. It relocates moderation from the level of belief to the level of practice, naming the actors and arenas involved. It separates the containment of visible tension from the harder work of restoring equal membership, so that a calm election is no longer mistaken for a resilient one. And it treats moderation as an empirically contestable practice that can protect pluralism or, if handled carelessly, harden into a state instrument for sorting acceptable from unacceptable believers (Hefner, 2023; Siswi & Farid, 2024). What follows, then, is not a defense of moderation but an account of the conditions under which it does, and does not, build civic resilience.

The study pursues three questions. How did the form of religious politicization change between the 2019 and 2024 elections? Through what process are religious resources turned into unequal political membership, and through which actors, arenas, and actions can religious moderation break that process? And under what conditions does moderation move beyond one-off conflict containment toward inclusive cultural resilience? To answer them, the paper builds the concept of religious-political boundary governance and tests it against interviews with officials from the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, read alongside official documents. Its central claim is that the move from 2019 to 2024 is better understood as de-escalation without demonstrated transformation. Parties and candidates do much of the work of turning religious resources into political boundaries, and moderation becomes civic infrastructure only when it ties together four mechanisms: boundary detection, public-ethical translation, cross-boundary brokerage, and relational repair with institutional learning. The contribution is not another argument that moderation lowers polarization, but a process model, with named actors, that shows how religious-political boundaries are built, governed, and at times merely contained.

Method

This is a qualitatively driven exploratory case study supported by descriptive electoral contextualization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than a cross-national comparison, the 2019 and 2024 elections are read as two temporal episodes within a single national case. The aim is to reconstruct plausible mechanisms rather than to test a statistical model. In practice this means asking who did what, in which arena, and with what effect, and then tracing whether the pattern held, weakened, or changed shape across the two episodes. Throughout, the study keeps a firm line between national elections (Pemilu, Pilpres, Pileg) and regional elections (Pemilihan or Pilkada), since conflating their figures would distort any comparison.

The study draws on two aligned bodies of evidence. The first is a set of interviews with senior officials of the three institutions that sit at the center of the boundary between religious expression and electoral competition: the General Elections Commission (KPU), which designs and runs the stages of the election; the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), which maps risk and handles violations; and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (hereafter the Ministry), which leads the religious moderation agenda. The interviews addressed how religious identity becomes a political boundary, how moderation is practiced by actors and institutions, and how communities recover after electoral tension. The second is a corpus of official documents, triangulated with a descriptive reading of secondary electoral data, selected because they are authoritative, cover both episodes, and speak directly to boundary risk, prevention, and moderation. Table 1 sets out the corpus.

Table 1. Document corpus

Document	Institution	Year	Use in analysis
PKPU 23/2018	KPU	2018	Campaign rules, 2019
PKPU 15/2023 and 20/2023	KPU	2023	Campaign rules, 2024
IKP 2019	Bawaslu	2019	Vulnerability baseline, 2019
IKP and thematic SARA mapping, 2024	Bawaslu	2022/2023	Vulnerability and prevention, 2024
Laporan Kinerja and Satu Data Bawaslu	Bawaslu	2019, 2024	Violation handling
Perpres 58/2023	State/Ministry	2023	Moderation policy

PMA 3/2024	Ministry	2024	basis Moderation coordination
SE Menag 9/2023	Ministry	2023	Sermon guidelines
KPU results and turnout	KPU	2019, 2024	Electoral context

The descriptive electoral data map indicators such as turnout, candidate configuration, recorded SARA-related campaign concerns, hate speech, and disinformation warnings. They set the scene and show that religion and identity remained salient in both contests, but they are not used as inferential evidence of voter motivation.

In data analysis, coding was both thematic and mechanism-oriented. A first pass identified religiosity in its several forms, as moral orientation, identity, symbol, authority, network, and public discourse. A second pass traced how those resources were turned into political polarization, moral legitimation, delegitimation of opponents, or unequal political membership. A third pass read the moderation side of the ledger through four mechanisms: boundary detection, public-ethical translation, cross-boundary brokerage, and relational repair with institutional learning. To keep the reconstruction disciplined, each candidate episode was coded along a single sequence, from electoral trigger and actor, through the religious resource activated, the boundary claim, its target and arena, the moderating intervention, and its immediate output, to the resilience outcome and any rival explanation. A mechanism was only treated as present when an identifiable actor, an observable action, a clear target, and an immediate output could be shown, supported by at least two sources or one strong primary source.

Confidence in the reading rests on triangulation across interviews, documents, and reports, on thick description, on analytic memoing, and on the deliberate search for disconfirming evidence and rival explanations. Because interview accounts were long, working summaries were prepared for coding, and any material quoted in the paper is checked against the original record rather than the summary. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, institutional affiliations are reported at the level agreed with each informant, and the analysis keeps informant claims distinct from the author's interpretation. Two limits follow from the design and are carried openly into the discussion. Secondary indicators cannot establish individual voter motivation, and the available evidence is generally stronger on prevention and early warning than on the harder-to-document work of post-election repair.

Results and Discussion

1. Electoral Pressure and Religious Boundary-Making

Placed side by side, the two elections point to a mixed pattern rather than a clean decline. The 2019 presidential race offers the clearest baseline. A two-candidate contest between Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin on one side and Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno on the other made it easy to sort the electorate into morally charged camps, and religion-related narratives, fake news, and symbolic distinctions between supporters were highly visible (Assyaukanie, 2019; Ahnaf & Lussier, 2019). The salience of identity was real, though its effect never stood apart from incumbent performance, economic evaluation, and coalition arithmetic (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019a, 2019b; Fossati et al., 2020). On the governance side, KPU ran the campaign under PKPU No. 23/2018, while Bawaslu's IKP 2019 already treated hate speech and the politicization of SARA as strategic risks (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, 2019).

The 2024 election ran on a different structure. Three presidential tickets competed, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka won by a wide margin, and several analyses found overt sectarian confrontation less dominant than in 2019 (Qodir & Hefner, 2024; Suraya & Pobedash, 2025). Yet the contest was not religion-free. Religious appeals appeared in more performative, networked, and digital forms rather than in open sectarian rhetoric (Achfandhy et al., 2024; Lussier & Ahnaf, 2024). Bawaslu widened its instruments, adding thematic mapping of SARA politicization, social-media campaigning, money politics, and civil-servant neutrality to the IKP for the 2024 concurrent elections. By 7 February 2024 it had recorded 341 suspected online-content violations, 326 of them classed as hate speech, and across the cycle it registered 1,023 findings and reports and 479 suspected violations (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, 2024). KPU, for its part, revised the rules through PKPU No. 15/2023 and No. 20/2023, both drafted from an evaluation of 2019, and hosted a peaceful-campaign declaration signed by the presidential candidates on 27 November 2023.

Across the two episodes, the change is one of configuration, not disappearance (Table 2). Bawaslu officials describe the movement from 2019 to 2024 as a hybrid mutation rather than a simple shift from offline to online: sermons, banners, and community meetings still matter, but their content is now recorded, cut, and redistributed digitally, and digital material in turn feeds local offline pressure. Some features carried over intact. Both elections saw peaceful-campaign declarations, both treated houses of worship as sensitive arenas, and hate speech was a strategic concern in both.

The comparison also guards against an easy misreading of the numbers. Because the IKP records events, better-documented regions can appear more vulnerable than quieter ones, so the index maps attention as much as prevalence, and a fall in recorded incidents cannot on its own show that boundary-making has weakened. Lower official figures may instead reflect displacement into less visible or closed channels. This is why all three institutions resist attributing the calmer surface of 2024 to moderation alone. The three-candidate field, more fluid coalitions, a shorter campaign period, the courting of younger voters, and fatigue after earlier cycles all plausibly lowered the payoff of open sectarian appeals, and studies of specific 2024 contests report much the same depolarizing effect of candidate and coalition structure (Deni et al., 2025).

These observations answer the first research question. The move from 2019 to 2024 is best described as de-escalation with mutation: the most visible forms of religious politicization receded, but the capacity to convert religious difference into a political boundary persisted, displaced into symbolic, networked, and digital arenas that formal violation categories struggle to capture (Ridho et al., 2023; Bukhari et al., 2026). A change in intensity, in short, is not the same as a change in mechanism.

Table 2. Comparative electoral context, 2019 and 2024

Dimension	2019	2024	Change
Contest type	Two-candidate race	Three tickets, wide margin	Less binary field
Religious/SARA issue	Visible identity politics and fake news	Lower overt salience, ongoing SARA concern	Partial decline with mutation
Main arena	Rallies, sermons, networks	Same, plus heavy digital circulation	Hybrid offline/digital
Main actors	Candidates, parties, supporters	Same, plus prevention and brokerage roles	Prevention more visible
Target	Opponents framed as anti-Islam or ethnic	Cues embedded in networks	Explicit to implicit
Institutional response	IKP 2019 mapping	IKP 2024, thematic mapping, monitoring	Mapping to preventive governance

The contest structure, the dominant arena, the mix of actors, and the way opponents were targeted all changed, yet the underlying resource stayed available. The 2019 pattern of a binary race, open sectarian narratives, and explicit targeting gave way in 2024 to a three-way field, quieter cues, and signals folded into networks and digital circulation. The right-hand column therefore reads less as a list of things that disappeared than as a set of mutations and displacements. What the table maps is a change in the form of religious-political boundary-making, not a measure of how strongly citizens believe or why they voted as they did. The comparison also has to be read within its limits. Recorded violations and public discourse are not equivalent measures, a less binary contest does not by itself prove lower politicization, platform activity is not a proxy for voter motivation, and the presence of preventive discourse does not show that prevention worked. For these reasons the table is best treated as context rather than proof. It establishes that religion and identity remained salient across both elections and that the visible pattern shifted, which is enough to justify the qualitative reconstruction of mechanism that follows, but not enough on its own to settle why the shift occurred.

2. Making and Governing the Religious-Political Boundary

This gap has two sides, the making of the boundary and its governance, and the section takes them in turn. It begins with how a religious difference becomes a political inequality. The mechanism has to be separated from the ordinary presence of religion in democratic life. Religious language, moral concern, and appeals to the welfare of the ummah can all be legitimate parts of persuasion. The problem begins when parties or candidates convert these resources into a hierarchy of worth, presenting one candidate or constituency as the authentic moral voice of the ummah while casting opponents as less trustworthy, less pious, or less entitled to speak for the public (Assyaukanie, 2019). The boundary, in other words, is produced through political translation, not by religious identity as such.

The three institutions agree that this work is done by organized actors rather than by voters in the abstract. Parties, candidates, campaign teams, and religious brokers activate symbols, authorities, organizational networks, and public narratives when competition raises the demand for attention and legitimacy. This reading extends earlier accounts of resentment and identity politics by locating the conversion of religious sentiment inside strategic electoral organization, rather than treating it as an automatic expression of social identity (Fossati et al., 2020; Azizah, 2023).

The decisive step is the moralization of political choice. A policy disagreement or a candidate preference is recast as a test of faith, loyalty to the ummah, or public virtue. Accusations of money politics matter here because they can be framed not only as legal violations but as proof that a rival is corrupt, untrustworthy, or morally unfit to lead. That framing only becomes boundary-making when it is tied to religious obligation, the moral integrity of the ummah, or the claim that an opponent has forfeited the right to represent, which is precisely why an anti-corruption message is not, by itself, religious politicization. KPU officials describe an operational version of this line. Their test is not the theology of a message but its electoral character: the content, the context, the actor, the target, the place, the attributes used, and whether it is linked to a specific participant. Bawaslu draws the same distinction in different words, separating legitimate *politik identitas* from *politisasi identitas*, where the problem is the capitalization of religious symbols or authority to attack an opponent, incite hostility, or deny another group's equal political standing.

The Ministry adds the ethical reading, and stresses that arena and power relation change the meaning of the same words. A message delivered from the pulpit by a recognized authority carries a social pressure that the same claim would not carry from a private citizen, which is why the politicization of houses of worship and the cutting of sermon clips for circulation are treated as particularly serious (Lussier & Ahnaf, 2024). Once a choice is moralized in this way, the boundary can reach beyond the ballot. It can narrow communication by making compromise look like betrayal, privilege actors recognized as authentic representatives, and, in its harder forms, shade into restrictions on the recognition and participation of those placed on the wrong side of the line (Hefner, 2023; Samosir, 2021).

The interpretation stays open to rival explanations. Judgments about money politics may spring from general anti-corruption norms rather than religious commitment, and some delegitimation is better explained by partisan rivalry than by faith. The point of the mechanism is not to deny these alternatives but to specify when they cross into religious-political boundary-making. This answers the mechanism side of the second research question: religious difference becomes political inequality not because religious identity is present, but because organized actors moralize political choice and use it to rank citizens by their claimed proximity to the ummah. Having shown how the boundary is built, we turn to how it is governed. The evidence supports reading religious moderation as a practice of governing religious-political boundaries rather than as a general attitude of tolerance or a slogan of electoral civility (Ropi, 2019; Reza, 2024; Fitri et al., 2025). The relevant question is not whether actors use religious language but whether they keep religious difference from turning into unequal membership. Across the three institutions, that work takes four recognizable forms, each placed at a different point in the sequence traced above (Figure 1).

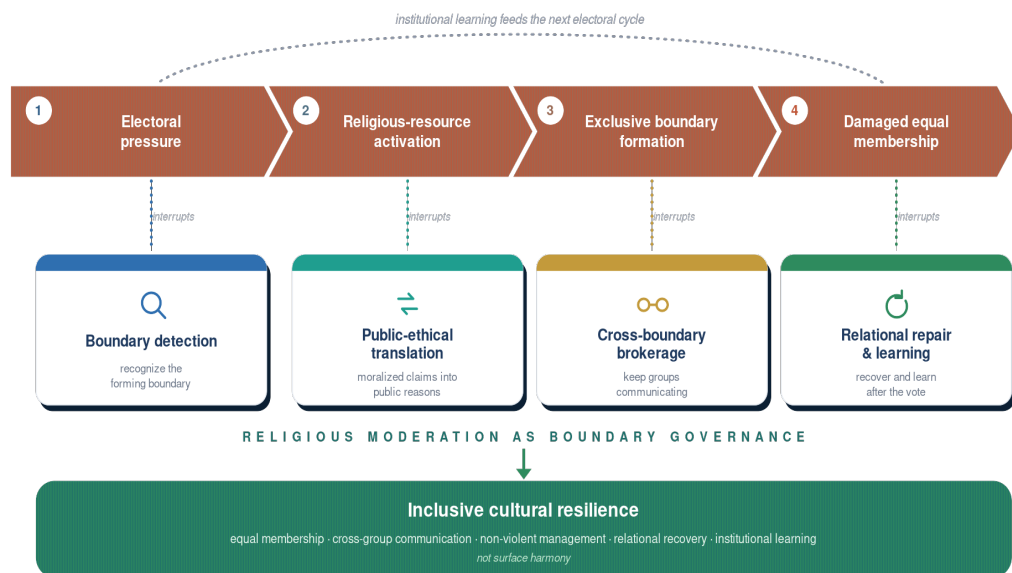


Figure 1. Religious moderation as religious-political boundary governance.

Electoral pressure activates religious resources, which can harden into an exclusive boundary and, in turn, damage equal membership. Four mechanisms interrupt the sequence at different points: boundary detection as the boundary begins to form, public-ethical translation as claims are moralized, cross-boundary brokerage as communication and equality come under strain, and relational repair with institutional learning after the contest. The outcome of interest is inclusive cultural resilience rather than surface harmony.

Boundary detection. Recognizing when religious difference is being turned into a political hierarchy is largely Bawaslu's terrain. Its vulnerability index and thematic mapping give the state an early-warning vocabulary

for SARA politicization, hate speech, disinformation, and identity politics, and its distinction between politik identitas and politisasi identitas is itself an act of detection (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, 2019, 2024; Siswi & Farid, 2024). KPU contributes by documenting campaign conduct that touches its mandate and referring the rest, while the Ministry reads the ethical signals, attending to when a pulpit or a religious authority is being used to lock a political choice. Detection, however, is not resolution. It flags the possibility of a boundary and directs attention to it, but it does not by itself show that unequal membership has been prevented.

Public-ethical translation. Turning religious commitment into publicly debatable reasons is the Ministry's core contribution. It encourages preachers and religious counselors to shift the center of a message from a candidate's identity to the quality of conduct: amanah as accountability, adil as non-discriminatory service, maslahat as protective policy, and the rejection of money politics, and it frames political choice as a social endeavor rather than a measure of faith. The Ministry's sermon guidance formalizes this stance (Surat Edaran Menteri Agama No. 9/2023). Bawaslu performs its own translation through participatory-oversight materials produced for six religions, which recast religious concern as vigilance against SARA politicization and vote-buying, and KPU shapes the arena by facilitating debates, disseminating candidate programs, and hosting peaceful-campaign declarations. The test, as the Ministry's officials put it, is whether a message can be translated into reasons that citizens of different affiliations can debate, or whether it only marks an in-group. Translation is meaningful only when it keeps that space of contestation open rather than closing it with religious authority.

Cross-boundary brokerage. Keeping divided groups in communication is shared work, but the interfaith machinery sits mostly with the Ministry and the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB). Toward 2024 this produced documented joint declarations and dialogues that brought together local government, KPU, Bawaslu, parties, candidates, and multi-faith figures, for example in Sumba Timur, Ngada, and the Riau Islands (Danisworo et al., 2024). Bawaslu adds a coordination and referral function and frames minority protection as equal-standard receipt of reports, early detection, and complainant confidentiality, though it concedes that public documents show a collaborative orientation more than a uniform, tested national protocol. KPU sets out a division of labor and calls for explicit escalation paths with response deadlines. Brokerage of this kind builds resilience only if it produces action rather than ceremony, addresses the power asymmetries between groups, and treats minorities as participants rather than as objects of a harmony managed by the majority (Hefner, 2023).

Relational repair and institutional learning. The final mechanism runs after the contest, and here the evidence is thinnest. KPU repairs trust in the process through transparent recapitulation and compliance with the Constitutional Court's dispute procedure, and it is explicit that healing social relations between supporters is not its job alone. Bawaslu evaluates through performance and violation-handling reports, compiled for 2024 in Satu Data Bawaslu, and its move from general mapping toward thematic SARA modules, internet-content monitoring, and community approaches reflects a shift from broad prevention to more specific detection. The Ministry describes post-election repair through interfaith dialogue, calls to stop stigmatization, and returning houses of worship to their service function, and gained a firmer cross-government footing through Perpres No. 58/2023 and PMA No. 3/2024. All three, however, warn against confusing procedure with repair. Institutionalization, as Bawaslu officials put it, has to be shown by written rules, allocated resources, and a repeatable, auditable practice, and administrative evaluation needs to be matched by evidence that stigma and broken communication actually healed.

The four mechanisms are unevenly evidenced. Detection and translation are comparatively well documented, brokerage is visible but concentrated in declarative events, and relational repair is the least substantiated. The temporal comparison reinforces the point: between 2019 and 2024 institutional moderation moved from vulnerability mapping toward more explicit preventive governance, but anticipation is not the same as transformation, and a calmer surface does not prove that communities recovered equal political relations. This is also where moderation must be read critically rather than celebrated. Officials in all three institutions acknowledge that the vocabulary of SARA and moderation can be applied too loosely, that criticism of a policy or a candidate must not be equated with hatred of a religious group, and that enforcement without transparent reasons, documented evidence, and consistent treatment can slide into political censorship. The Ministry names the sharpest risk directly, that moderation can harden into an identity label that sorts citizens into acceptable and unacceptable believers, and argues that the antidote is to evaluate actions and effects rather than to police persons, and to involve minorities, women, youth, and civil society in defining the terms (Reza, 2024). Moderation, on this reading, is not an assumed good but a governance practice that can protect pluralism or reproduce exclusion depending on how it is exercised. Religious moderation does operate as boundary governance through identifiable actors, arenas, and actions, but on the present evidence it works most reliably as episodic conflict containment. Whether it becomes civic infrastructure depends on the mechanism that is currently weakest, the repair and learning that would turn a contained election into a resilient one.

3. From Harmony to an Implementable Resilience

The third gap asks what would count as success, and the answer cannot be the calm surface of an orderly election. Harmony describes a temporary state in which actors avoid open confrontation; resilience describes the

capacity of a political community to keep equal membership, manage disagreement, recover relations, and learn under pressure. Read this way, inclusive cultural resilience has five observable markers: equal citizenship, in which religious identity or candidate preference does not decide whose voice counts as legitimately national; cross-group communication that survives disagreement; non-violent conflict management; relational recovery after the contest; and institutional learning that changes rules and practice for the next cycle (Hefner, 2023; Harsono & Hara, 2025). Against these markers, the Indonesian evidence is uneven. Detection and prevention are comparatively strong, while relational recovery and demonstrated learning remain the least documented, which is precisely why a quieter 2024 cannot yet be read as a more resilient one.

Because resilience is a capacity rather than a mood, it can be turned into an implementation sequence. Table 3 sets that sequence out. It is a theory of change rather than a validated prescription: it names where a boundary risk is likely to appear, which mechanism should answer it, who is responsible, and what evidence would make a response observable. The matrix deliberately places primary responsibility on parties, candidates, and electoral institutions rather than on religious leaders or minorities, since it is the former who shape the conditions under which religious resources are mobilized.

Table 3. Implementation matrix across electoral stages

Stage	Main boundary risk	Mechanism and lead actors	What to look for
Pre-campaign	Exclusive claim to represent the ummah	Detection and translation; parties, KPU, Bawaslu	No exclusionary labels; shared risk register
Campaign	SARA cues, hoaxes, hate speech	Detection and brokerage; Bawaslu, media, fact-checkers	Content answered; correction reaches its audience
Money politics	Rival framed as morally unfit	Translation and non-violent management; parties, supervisors	Complaints go to legal channels; no stigmatization
Voting and dispute	Distrust after contested results	Brokerage and non-violent management; officials, observers	Formal channels used; no retaliation
Post-election	Winner-take-all, broken relations	Relational repair; parties, religious and civic actors	Cross-group interaction resumes
Learning	Calm leaves incentives unchanged	Institutional learning; KPU, Bawaslu, organizations	Updated risk maps, training, protocols

The stages follow the same logic as Figure 1. Detection and translation matter most before and during the campaign, brokerage and non-violent management become urgent when claims circulate or results are disputed, repair belongs to the period after the vote, and learning decides whether the whole sequence is repeated from scratch next time or begins from a higher baseline. Success at each stage is not the absence of religion from politics but the presence of a traceable response with a named owner.

This makes it possible to grade implementation rather than to declare it. Level one is containment, where overt hate, intimidation, and retaliatory mobilization fall and disputes move to lawful channels. Level two is civic recovery, where communication, participation, and cooperation resume across the boundary that the campaign activated. Level three is institutional transformation, where the lessons of the contest change rules, training, monitoring, and the incentives that actors face. The Indonesian evidence supports level-one capacities more firmly than levels two and three, which keeps the paper from treating a calm election as proof of resilience and gives future fieldwork a clear yardstick.

The strength of this account depends on conditions the analysis has to keep in view. Boundary governance is more likely to hold where religious organizations carry social legitimacy, where cross-group channels already exist, where election bodies are trusted, and where media and civil society can answer an exclusionary narrative in time. It is more likely to fail where competition is framed as a threat to core identity, where elites profit from polarization, where inequality of citizenship is already entrenched, or where moderation itself is read as a coercive state agenda. These conditions also house the rival explanations carried through the paper, since the calmer surface of 2024 may owe as much to coalition structure, candidate strategy, and digital ecology as to any governance of boundaries (Deni et al., 2025). This answers the third research question. Moderation becomes civic infrastructure only when it climbs from containment toward recovery and transformation, and the implementation matrix specifies who must act, at which stage, against which risk, and on what observable indicator. It is offered as a testable theory of change, not as evidence that the framework has already worked.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explain how religious moderation can govern the boundary between legitimate religious participation and exclusionary political membership in Indonesia, and whether it builds inclusive cultural resilience. Three answers follow. The shift from 2019 to 2024 is best read as de-escalation without demonstrated transformation: overt religious polarization became less visible and less electorally rewarding, yet the capacity to convert religious difference into a political boundary persisted in subtler, networked, and digital forms. Religious difference becomes political inequality not through the presence of religious identity but through the organized moralization of political choice, and moderation interrupts that process through four practices carried by KPU, Bawaslu, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs: boundary detection, public-ethical translation, cross-boundary brokerage, and relational repair with institutional learning. Those practices currently work most reliably as episodic containment. They become civic infrastructure only when they climb toward relational recovery and institutional learning, and it is exactly there that the present evidence is thinnest.

The contribution is to reposition religious moderation from an individual attitude or a state program into an accountable practice of boundary governance, and to treat cultural resilience as an outcome that has to be shown through equal citizenship, cross-group communication, non-violent management, relational recovery, and institutional learning rather than read off a calm surface. On this account moderation is not an assumed good. Handled carelessly it can harden into a state instrument for sorting acceptable from unacceptable believers, which is why the framework ties success to observable indicators and to the protection of minorities rather than to the appearance of harmony.

Two limits bound these claims. The evidence rests on institutional interviews and official documents, which illuminate prevention and design more than the lived texture of local relations, and secondary indicators cannot establish individual voter motivation. Both point to the same next step. Future research should trace the four mechanisms through process-tracing in selected localities, test whether institutional prevention develops into civic recovery and transformation, and compare how religious resources are activated across regions and electoral cycles. The implementation matrix is offered in that spirit, as a testable theory of change for governing religious-political boundaries rather than a claim that the work is already done.

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