



HARMONY IN DIVERSITY: THE CONGREGATION'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRESENCE OF THREE IMAMS IN BELANG-BELANG MOSQUE

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ABSTRACT

This research originates from the discourse of the sociology of religion and Islamic studies, which highlight the dynamics of religiosity in the context of fiqh diversity and worship practices in Indonesia. The phenomenon of three imams at Belang-belang Mosque is interesting to examine because it reflects tolerance and moderation in the religious life of the community. The purpose of this study is to understand the congregation's meaning of the presence of three imams and to find solutions to maintain social-religious harmony amidst differences. This study uses a phenomenological qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation techniques. Analysis is conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The research results show that the presence of three imams does not cause division, but becomes a symbol of harmony in diversity. The congregation is able to manage differences in fiqh views through the values of ukhuwah islamiyah (brotherhood) and tasamuh (tolerance). This phenomenon demonstrates the practical application of Islamic Nusantara that balances individual piety with social harmony. Theoretically, this research contributes to strengthening the concept of religious moderation in Islamic sociology. Practically, the results can serve as a model for managing congregational harmony amid differences in schools of thought and worship traditions.

Kata kunci :

Kerukunan, Jamaah, Tiga Imam, Islam Nusantara, Moderasi Beragama

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini berangkat dari diskursus sosiologi agama dan studi Islam yang menyoroti dinamika keberagaman dalam konteks keragaman fiqh dan praktik ibadah di Indonesia. Fenomena tiga imam di Masjid Belang-Belang menarik dikaji karena mencerminkan toleransi dan moderasi dalam kehidupan keagamaan masyarakat. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah memahami pemaknaan jamaah terhadap keberadaan tiga imam serta menemukan solusi untuk menjaga harmoni sosial-keagamaan di tengah perbedaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis dengan teknik wawancara mendalam,



observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberadaan tiga imam tidak menimbulkan perpecahan, tetapi menjadi simbol kerukunan dalam keberagaman. Jamaah mampu mengelola perbedaan pandangan fiqh melalui nilai *ukhuwah islamiyah* (persaudaraan) dan *tasamuh* (toleransi). Fenomena ini menunjukkan praktik nyata *Islam Nusantara* yang menyeimbangkan kesalehan individual dengan keharmonisan sosial. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap penguatan konsep moderasi beragama dalam sosiologi Islam. Secara praktis, hasilnya dapat menjadi model pengelolaan kerukunan jamaah di tengah perbedaan mazhab dan tradisi ibadah.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a nation rich in diversity. Within the Muslim community, differences in worship practices, interpretations of fiqh, and choices of religious leaders were not new phenomena; rather, they formed part of the long historical dynamics of Islam in the Nusantara, characterized by a tradition of tolerance (Azra, A. 2002). Differences in perspectives regarding the practice of worship have often generated unique social dynamics, such as the phenomenon of having three imams leading prayers at Masjid Belang-belang (Abdullah, M. A.2018). This situation is interesting to study because it demonstrates how congregants were able to maintain harmony amid differences in religious practices (Guanti, 2025). The values of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) have served as a strong foundation for communal harmony, even though differences often carried the potential for friction (Shihab, M. Q. 2011).

The concept of Islam Nusantara emphasizes that Islam in Indonesia is rooted in the values of *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *wasatiyyah* (moderation) (Jazimah & Astuti, 2017). These values have encouraged Muslims to respect differences without losing the essence of Islamic teachings (Fakhurokhman et al., 2022). As emphasized in QS. Al-Hujurat (49:13)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَمُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

The translation is:

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you



peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

QS. Al-Hujurāt [49]:13 emphasizes the equality of all human beings, who were created from a single origin, namely Adam and Eve. According to Quraish Shihab, true nobility is not determined by lineage or social status, but by taqwa manifested in moral character and social care. This verse rejects racism and teaches the values of ukhuwah (brotherhood) and tasamuh (tolerance) as the foundation for harmony in a pluralistic society such as Indonesia (Quraish Shihab 2011).

This study aimed to understand how congregants interpreted the presence of the three imams as a reflection of their acceptance of diversity within the framework of Islam as rahmatan lil-'alamin (a mercy to all worlds) (Salim & Rofik, 2019). Through a socio-religious perspective, this study was expected to reinforce the values of moderation and demonstrate that harmony can emerge from differences when they are managed wisely (Jazimah & Astuti, 2017).

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of congregants' experiences regarding the phenomenon of having three imams at Masjid Belang-belang. This approach was chosen because it is capable of exploring the subjective meanings that individuals or groups attach to the social and religious events they experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, this study aimed to interpret how congregants understood and valued harmony amid differences in religious practices and worship leadership within a shared spiritual space (Moleong, 2017).

The data sources for this study consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from the field through in-depth interviews with congregants, imams, and community leaders involved in religious activities at Masjid Belang-belang. Participatory observation was also conducted to examine the dynamics of social interactions and worship practices among congregants following different imams



(Sugiyono, 2019). Secondary data were obtained from supporting documents, such as mosque archives, records of religious activities, and relevant literature on interfaith harmony and pluralism within Islam (Bungin, 2020).

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with the flexibility to explore deeper meanings without losing focus on the research objectives (Creswell, 2018). Observations were conducted over a specific period to gain a contextual understanding of the congregants' social practices. Documentation was used to strengthen the field findings through written and visual evidence (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The primary instrument of this study was the researcher themselves (human instrument). The researcher acted as an observer, interviewer, and data analyst, directly involved in the field. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument due to their active role in interpreting social meanings (Moleong, 2017). To ensure the validity of the data, source and method triangulation techniques were employed, comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to identify consistency in the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The informants for this study comprised all congregants of Masjid Belang-belang who regularly participated in worship activities led by the three imams. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria such as active involvement in mosque activities, age, religious background, and level of participation in congregational events (Sugiyono, 2019). The number of informants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection was concluded once the information obtained began to repeat and no new findings emerged (Guest et al., 2020). Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and abstracting the raw data to align with the research focus. The reduced data were then presented in the form of thematic narratives illustrating the meanings of harmony and differences as understood by the congregants.



The final stage involved continuous conclusion drawing and verification throughout the research process. The results of the analysis were expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of communal harmony within the context of differing worship leadership at Masjid Belang-belang.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Congregants' Interpretation of the Presence of Three Imams

The study's findings indicate that the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-belang was not a sign of division, but rather an expression of religious diversity arising from differences in fiqh interpretations and congregational practices. This phenomenon provides concrete evidence of how the local Muslim community can manage differences through the principles of *ukhuwah islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and *tasamuh* (tolerance). Some congregants chose an imam based on Qur'anic recitation proficiency, others followed an imam aligned with their preferred fiqh school, while some were guided by social closeness. Nevertheless, all congregants remained committed to maintaining harmony in worship and social relations within the mosque environment (Siradj, 2015).

Based on interviews conducted with the informants, the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang initially raised questions within the community. As one informant stated: "With the presence of these three imams, there were certainly pros and cons among the community, especially since each imam had a different understanding. People wondered why there had to be three imams, but over time, the congregants became accustomed to it and practiced according to their own understanding without blaming others".¹ This situation illustrates that initially, some members of the community were not fully accepting of having three imams in the mosque; they questioned why there needed to be three, especially given the differences in understanding among them.

However, despite the initial pros and cons among the congregants, they have now begun to live harmoniously. As the Imam of Belang-Belang Village stated: "There were indeed times when the congregants were in disagreement, but now they are harmonious

¹Wandi S.Pd (30 tahun), Guru Mts Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025



and mutually understanding.”² However, this situation indicates that the congregants’ understanding of the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang shows that differences are not a reason for discord.

One of the informants stated: “Actually, I have no problem with having three imams because our purpose is to worship Allah, so we just follow the understanding or teachings that we have.”³ This indicates that some congregants had accepted the situation from the beginning without making it an issue.

Furthermore, the interview results indicated that one factor contributing to the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang was the large number of migrants coming from other regions. One informant explained: “One of the reasons there are three imams is because this village has many newcomers from other areas, who are capable of leading congregational prayers and are accustomed to leading, so they were all appointed as imams.” Besides the influx of migrants, there are other factors that also explain why there are three imams in the mosque.

As conveyed by one of our informants: “The presence of three imams is also due to differences in understanding of worship practices.”⁴ This became one of the reasons for having three imams in the mosque, caused by the existence of multiple interpretations of worship. Our informant continued: “The understandings here are not just one; there are several perspectives on worship within the community, yet despite the differences, the congregants still maintain harmony.”⁵

From these findings, it can be concluded that the community of Masjid Belang-Belang has internalized the values of Islam Nusantara in their daily lives. They view differences as opportunities to strengthen harmony rather than as sources of division. The presence of three imams has become a symbol of plurality within a unified faith and intention in worship. In a broader context, this aligns with the concept of moderate Islam, which emphasizes a balance between individual piety and social harmony. Thus, this study

²M. Yusuf (54 tahun), Imam Masjid Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025

³M. Azis (56 tahun), Jamaah Masjid Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025

⁴M. Ukkas (54 tahun), Jamaah Masjid Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025

⁵Sainal (45 tahun), Pengurus Masjid Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025



confirms that religious moderation can naturally develop through local interpretations rooted in the culture of tolerance within the Nusantara community.

2. Solutions Offered by the Presence of Three Imams in a Single Mosque

Based on the research findings, the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang should not be viewed as a source of division, but rather as a socio-religious reality that can be managed through the reinforcement of *ukhuwah islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) values. Accordingly, the solutions offered focus on strengthening social structures, enhancing religious literacy, and promoting religious moderation within the congregational life.

As the interview results indicate, the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang did not lead congregants to hostility; instead, it fostered greater harmony and mutual understanding. As one informant explained: *“It did not lead to enmity. At first, some congregants had questions, but in the end, it actually made the congregants more harmonious with one another.”*⁶ This statement indicates that differences are not a reason for discord.

Additionally, another informant stated: *“Do not let these differences be a reason for hostility; let us practice according to our own understanding and teachings without undermining one another.”*⁷ This demonstrates that the congregants’ understanding of the presence of three imams is not viewed as a significant issue.

One informant even stated, *“This can actually serve as an example for other areas, showing that something usually perceived as potentially disrupting congregational harmony can, in fact, strengthen the bonds among congregants.”*⁸ This situation provides a valuable lesson on how the community in Belang-Belang Village can maintain harmony amid differences, particularly in understanding the presence of three imams within a single mosque.

Thus, this situation demonstrates that the presence of three imams at Masjid

⁶Sainal (45 tahun), Pengurus Masjid Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025

⁷Wandi S.Pd (30 tahun), Guru Mts Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025

⁸M. Azis (56 tahun), Jamaah Masjid Belang-Belang, 18 Desember 2025



Belang-Belang can serve as a platform for social and spiritual learning about the importance of respecting diversity. This phenomenon also reinforces that religious moderation can naturally develop through the internalization of local community values rooted in traditions of tolerance and togetherness.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang does not represent division or conflict within the community; rather, it reflects an expression of religious devotion arising from diverse fiqh interpretations, traditions, and congregational practices. The community of Belang-Belang Village has been able to manage these differences wisely through the practice of *ukhuwah islamiyah* (brotherhood among Muslims) and *tasamuh* (tolerance). This is reflected in the congregants' attitudes of maintaining harmony in worship, respecting differences in understanding, and not using the presence of multiple imams as a reason for division.

Although the presence of three imams initially raised questions and differing opinions within the community, over time the congregants demonstrated the ability to adapt and accept this diversity as part of the dynamics of religious life. This situation shows a high level of religious maturity, where differences in perspective serve to strengthen the sense of brotherhood and togetherness in worship.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang can be understood as a concrete manifestation of the principles of Islam Nusantara, emphasizing the importance of harmony amid differences and balancing individual piety with social cohesion. It also reflects a practice of religious moderation that develops naturally within the local community, without coercion or external intervention. Thus, the presence of three imams at Masjid Belang-Belang not only symbolizes plurality within a single framework of faith but also serves as a tangible example of how moderate Islamic values can be implemented in the socio-religious life of Indonesian communities.



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