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# Rewriting Westphalia and Reviving Bandung: The Historical Trajectory of Nahdlatul Ulama's Global Islamic Vision

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## Abstract

This paper explores how the Muslim world today faces a fragmentation that echoes Europe's bloody religious wars prior to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the colonial subjugation that triggered the Bandung Conference (1955). At a time when sectarianism, radicalism, and external securitization threaten the coherence of Islamic civilization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, emerges as a unique actor striving for renewal. This article examines NU's global initiatives through the dual historical lenses of Westphalia and Bandung, proposing that NU seeks not only to establish a "Muslim Westphalia"—an order based on peaceful coexistence among Islamic traditions—but also to reignite the "Spirit of Bandung"—a decolonial movement for Islamic dignity, independence, and pluralism. Through initiatives like Humanitarian Islam and the R20 Forum, NU offers a model of civil Islam that challenges both internal extremism and external domination. Furthermore, the article situates NU's actions within the broader theoretical frameworks of international relations, highlighting the organization's attempt to create an "Islamic internatio-

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nal society" based on pluralism, sovereignty, and mutual respect, echoing the foundations of the Westphalian system but adapted to the Muslim world's realities. At a time when global governance struggles to reconcile power with ethics, NU's experiment offers a vital blueprint for a future shaped by moral leadership rather than coercive dominance. Ultimately, NU's efforts represent a critical, if precarious, experiment in building a new Islamic global order rooted not in hegemony or militarism but in ethical leadership, pluralism, and the global public good, offering an alternative vision for the future of international Islamic engagement.

**Keyword:** Bandung Conference, Decolonial Islamic Order, Muslim Westphalia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Religious Moderation.

### Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana dunia Muslim saat ini menghadapi fragmentasi yang menggemakan perang agama berdarah di Eropa sebelum Perjanjian Westphalia (1648) dan penaklukan kolonial yang memicu Konferensi Asia-Afrika di Bandung (1955). Di tengah ancaman sektarianisme, radikalisme, dan sekuritisasi eksternal terhadap koherensi peradaban Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—organisasi Muslim terbesar di Indonesia—muncul sebagai aktor unik yang berupaya melakukan pembaruan. Artikel ini mengkaji inisiatif global NU melalui dua lensa historis, Westphalia dan Bandung, dengan mengusulkan bahwa NU tidak hanya berupaya membangun “Muslim Westphalia”—sebuah tatanan berbasis koeksistensi damai antartradisi Islam—tetapi juga menghidupkan kembali “Semangat Bandung” sebagai gerakan dekolonial untuk martabat, kemerdekaan, dan pluralisme Islam. Melalui program seperti Islam Kemanusiaan dan Forum R20, NU menawarkan model Islam sipil yang menantang ekstremisme internal maupun dominasi eksternal. Selain itu, artikel ini menempatkan aksi-aksi NU dalam kerangka teori hubungan internasional, menyoroti upaya organisasi ini untuk menciptakan "masyarakat internasional Islam" berbasis pluralisme, kedaulatan, dan saling menghormati, sejalan dengan fondasi sistem Westphalia tetapi disesuaikan dengan realitas dunia Muslim kontemporer. Di saat tata kelola global berjuang untuk mendamaikan kekuasaan dengan etika, eksperimen NU menawarkan cetak biru penting bagi masa depan yang dipandu oleh kepemimpinan moral, bukan dominasi koersif. Pada akhirnya, upaya NU merupakan eksperimen penting—meski penuh tantangan—dalam membangun tatanan global Islam baru yang berakar pada kepemimpinan etis, pluralisme, dan kebaikan publik global, serta menawarkan visi alternatif bagi masa depan keterlibatan internasional dunia Islam.

**Kata kunci:** Konferensi Bandung, Moderasi Beragama, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Tatanan Islam Dekolonial, Westphalia Muslim.

## الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الكيفية التي يواجه بها العالم الإسلامي المعاصر حالة التفتت التي تعيد إلى الأذهان الحروب الدينية الدموية التي شهدتها أوروبا قبل معاهدة وستفاليا (1648)، والاستعمار الذي أفضى إلى انعقاد مؤتمر باندونغ الآسيوي- الإفريقي عام 1955. وفي ظلّ التهديدات المتزايدة من الطائفية والتطرف والتمثيلات الأمنية الخارجية التي تقوّض تماسك الحضارة الإسلامية، تبرز "نهضة العلماء"—أكبر منظمة إسلامية في إندونيسيا—كفاعل فريد يسعى إلى تجديد الخطاب الإسلامي وأدواره العالمية. تستند هذه المقالة إلى إطارين تاريخيين هما وستفاليا وباندونغ، لقراءة المبادرات العالمية ل نهضة العلماء، وتقدّم أن المنظمة لا تسعى فقط إلى بناء "وستفاليا إسلامية"—نظام يقوم على التعايش السلمي بين التقاليد الإسلامية المختلفة—بل تسعى أيضاً إلى إحياء "روح باندونغ" بوصفها حركة تحرّرية من الاستعمار، تدافع عن الكرامة والحرية والتعددية ضمن السياق الإسلامي. ومن خلال برامج مثل "الإسلام الإنساني" و"منتدى الدين R20"، تعرض نهضة العلماء نموذجاً للإسلام المدني يتحدى التطرف من الداخل وهيمنة القوى الخارجية من الخارج. وتضع المقالة هذه الجهود ضمن إطار نظريات العلاقات الدولية، مبينة كيف تسعى المنظمة إلى تشكيل "مجتمع دولي إسلامي" يقوم على التعددية والسيادة والاحترام المتبادل، على غرار مبادئ نظام وستفاليا، ولكن بصيغة تتلاءم مع واقع العالم الإسلامي المعاصر. وفي وقت يعاني فيه النظام العالمي من صعوبات في التوفيق بين السلطة والأخلاق، يقمّ مشروع نهضة العلماء تصوراً بديلاً لمستقبل يقوده الضمير الأخلاقي بدلاً من الهيمنة القسرية. وفي النهاية، تُعدّ جهود نهضة العلماء تجربة رائدة—رغم ما يحيط بها من تحديات—في بلورة نظام إسلامي عالمي جديد، يركز إلى القيادة الأخلاقية والتعددية والخير العام العالمي، ويقمّ رؤية بديلة لمستقبل الانخراط الدولي للعالم الإسلامي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية/الرئيسية:** الاعتدال الديني، لإنهاء الاستعمار، مسلم ويستفاليا، نهضة العلماء (NU)، النظام الإسلامي.

## 1. Introduction

The origins of the modern international system are typically attributed to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which promoted the idea of sovereign states and non-intervention in the affairs of others. This Westphalian order fundamentally reordered world politics: by a great leap, it let religion take a backseat, relegating it first and foremost to a domestic sphere. In this worldview, the state became the essential building block of global order and transnational religious authority, like the pan-Islamic cleric caliphate, was put in the backseat. However, the orthodox story historians tell about Westphalia as the isolated source of sovereignty is a little fairy-tale, cooked up after the fact to justify a state-centric ideology.<sup>1</sup> Although the historical accuracy of Westphalianism is highly contested, the "Westphalian template" is still a strong heuristic for examining the complex interplay between religion and politics in the international system.

The Muslim world has been in a state of tension between the Westphalian order and the ideal of an international *Ummah* since the Peace of Westphalia. The abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Atatürk in 1924, along with the emergence of post-imperial nation-states, further consolidated the Westphalian framework—originally a system that permitted trans-state

<sup>1</sup> Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization*, 55, no. 2 (2001): 251–87.

Christian unity—yet it did not extinguish the aspiration for a unified, transnational Islamic community.<sup>2</sup> Movements such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) attempted to coordinate political action grounded in religious solidarity. However, they largely adhered to a state-centric orthodoxy and were often hindered by the politics of geo-sectarian rivalry.

The emergence of transnational extremist actors in the early 21st century, with extremists like ISIS found to have drawn adherents from across the world, underscored the continued attractiveness of Islamic polity beyond the nation-state, if mainly through violent and exclusivist means. These radical utopias, dismissed by most Muslim publics as apocalyptic, highlighted the fragility of unset contradictions between religious universalism and state power.<sup>3</sup>

In this historical flow, the conference at Bandung in 1955 represents a historical landmark addressing post-colonial negotiations with the world order. Bandung stood for anti-colonialism, sovereign equality and cooperation among the newly independent Asian and African states.<sup>4</sup> The conference combined Westphalian with Third World solidarity, recognizing state sovereignty while supporting collective resistance to imperialism. However, the secularist orientation of Bandung prevented the predominance of an Islamic identity instead of greater anti-colonial and development aspirations.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Muslim world was politically fragmented, and sect invasion by other regions further heightened it.<sup>5</sup> Global terrorism war and a surge in the availability of digital media exacerbated ideological divisions that allowed extremist narratives to flourish in conjunction with the discourse of moderate reform. This background made expressing a coherent international Muslim presence even more difficult.

Within this context, Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama (The Awakening of Ulama, or NU) takes on particular relevance as an influential component of civil society, gravitating towards an alternative model of Islamic engagement in global governance. Established in 1926, NU is the largest independent Muslim organization in the world, historically committed to promoting moderate, inclusive Islam compatible with the nation-state model.<sup>6</sup> Over the past decade, NU has become more focused on the world, arguing that Islamic civil society can provide moral and intellectual leadership in combating extremism, conflict, and injustice.

Several of the NU's programs and projects, such as the Declaration on Humanitarian Islam

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Lasse Laustsen and Michael Bang Petersen, "Winning Faces Vary by Ideology: How Nonverbal Source Cues Influence Election and Communication Success in Politics," *Political Communication* 33, no. 2 (2015): 188–211.

<sup>4</sup> Amitav Acharya, "Studying the Bandung Conference from a Global IR Perspective," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (2016): 342–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2016.1168359>.

<sup>5</sup> W. Lance Bennett, "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644, no. 1 (2012): 20–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716212451428>.

<sup>6</sup> Greg Fealy, "Bigger Than Nahdlatul Ulama: Understanding the NU's Engagement in Global Islam," *Indonesia* 101 (2016): 45–66.

and the Fiqh al-Hadārah (Fiqh of Civilization) project, indicate a deliberate effort to rethink Islamic discourse in relation to contemporary challenges. Instead of bringing down the Westphalian structure, NU hopes to inject Western-style norms with Islamic values—'justice (*'adl*), mercy or compassion (*rahmah*), and human dignity (*karamah al-insaniyyah*)'—and to narrow the distance between secular international rules and spiritual principles.<sup>7</sup>

That vision has since evolved into NU's Humanitarian Islam, a movement to modernize Islamic law and establish a global order of mutual respect and common values. Through programs like Bayt ar-Rahmah and involvement in the G20 Religion Forum (R20), NU interacts with global partners cross-religion and cross-sector, representing itself as a voice for ethical global engagement.<sup>8</sup>

Still, the NU project confronts enormous challenges. Maintaining unity in its larger membership continues to be interecine. Moreover, externally, skepticism among both Western and the Muslim masses, desire of hardline ideologies, and great-power politics continue to remain daunting.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, within global governance, power tends to trump ethics, the condition in which NU's moral leadership inevitably negotiates its position.

This article locates NU's international activism as part of a historical continuum "from Westphalia to Bandung," from founded in the state-centric world order to the post-colonial struggle for fair global engagement. It analyses NU's ideological initiatives and foreign affairs to determine whether they represent a departure from the prevailing international order in favour of an Islamic alternative or an effort at reforming it by being included in it.

**Research Questions** The following research questions guide this inquiry: firstly, how does NU think about a "new Islamic global order" compared to earlier models represented by Westphalia and Bandung? Secondly, how has NU translated into on-the-ground actions outside the West, and how do such actions counter the disunity in the Muslim world? Lastly, how far can NU's initiatives be interpreted as symptomatic of the emergence of non-state religious actors affecting global norms, and how far are they bound by the currently dominant, state-centric international order?

Through a critical analysis of NU's interaction with global structures, this study aims to make a contribution to broader debates in developing the place of Islamic civil society in the crafting of alternative directions for international relations and to provide some new perspectives on how ethical pluralism might feed into the governance of the world in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>7</sup> Rahyudi Dwiputra, Thoriq Abdul Aziz, and Muhammad Nur, "Strengthening Digital Citizens Political Communication Ethics (Digital Citizenship) in Social Media," *International Journal Pedagogy of Social Studies* 7, no. 2 (December 30, 2022): 51–56, <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijposs.v7i2.52400>.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Lengauer, "A Genealogy of Komunitas: Varieties of Social Formation and Their Signification in Bandung, Indonesia," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 32, no. 3 (2021): 309–29.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Swerts and Walter Nicholls, "Undocumented Immigrant Activism and the Political: Disrupting the Order or Reproducing the Status Quo?," *Antipode* 53, no. 2 (March 14, 2021): 319–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12678>.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### *Westphalia, Bandung, and the Search for an Islamic Global Order: A Conceptual Foundation*

The narrative on the history of IR theory depicts a relationship with the 'Westphalian' framework imbued with the centrality of state sovereignty and non-state actors/transnational movements, which it engenders and contends against. A cornerstone of the modern state system that focuses on principles like state sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Treaty of Westphalia, ratified in 1648, is frequently lauded.<sup>10</sup> Yet historians today challenge the simplistic "Westphalian narrative," the idea that sovereignty is a simple, one-time deal, an antecedent to which we have forgotten but carry with us as the original sin of the modern state.<sup>11</sup> This comprehension becomes so important here, for it allows for the integration of so much more in terms of government and identity outside of the traditional concept of what it means to be a sovereign state. It also challenges the hegemony of Eurocentric readings of international order. It opens the way for alternative models, including those that are based on religious and cultural traditions in other – non-European – societies.<sup>11</sup>

Schematically, the idea of sovereignty as we understand it from the Peace of Westphalia is also complicated by this post-colonial stance, and it goes back to Bandung in 1955. Participants from recently decolonised countries in Asia and Africa wanted to re-fashion the rules of international affairs to accord with principles of sovereign equality, non-intervention, and collective empowerment.<sup>12</sup> By converging around the principle of racial equality and economic justice, Bandung participants promoted a "Bandung internationalism" as an alternative narrative to those of the Western hegemonic powers. Researchers argue that this was an important tipping point of how a peripheral state can use soft power to change the world's rules and contest imperial legacies.<sup>14</sup> <sup>13</sup> Bandung was also the starting point of a new international sensibility that turned the tide toward solidarity among people formerly colonised, indicating the possibilities of non- Western actors in exercising global governance.<sup>14</sup>

This starkly contrasts Westphalian sovereignty as it raises the historically entrenched aim of Islamic political thought of a Caliphate to the global stage beyond any modern borders. The disintegration of the Ottoman Caliphate bequeathed a complicated environment of nationalism

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<sup>10</sup> Mohamed A Brahim and Thomas Brisson, "Strategies of a Transnational Intellectual: Tariq Ramadan and the Project of a European Islam," *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1015–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026119900105>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Phillips, "Beyond Bandung: The 1955 Asian-African Conference and Its Legacies for International Order," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (2016): 329–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2016.1153600>.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Rizky Mardhatillah Umar, "Rethinking the Legacies of Bandung Conference: Global Decolonization and the Making of Modern International Order," *Asian Politics & Policy* 11, no. 3 (July 21, 2019): 461–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12473>.

<sup>13</sup> Acharya, "Studying the Bandung Conference From a Global IR Perspective."

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Gray and Barry K. Gills, "South–South Cooperation and the Rise of the Global South," *Third World Quarterly*, 37, no. 4 (April 2, 2016): 557–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1128817>.

and Islamist movements that have tended to function, if not in the contemporary nation-state, in the form of "quasi-states," such as Hezbollah and Hamas.<sup>15</sup> The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) stands as a model of such endeavours to square Islamic solidarity with the demands of a Westphalian order. Still, its efficiency in doing so is seriously circumscribed.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Islamic political groups have confronted their dilemmas reconciling transnational ideals of religious solidarity with realities of governing through modern state institutions, resulting in intra-Islamic disputes and strategies across the Islamic world.<sup>17</sup>

The recent phenomenon of extreme groups like ISIS sheds remarkable insight on the deviation from Westphalian ideas in this movement, calling for a follow-through of state borders in exchange for a return to traditional Islamic rule.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that significant voices within contemporary Islamic thought and activism are attempting to negotiate these tensions between religious ideals and the operational imperatives of international relations, aspiring to resolve them through a synthesis that accommodates the legitimacy of the nation-state at the same time promoting a vision of Islamic ethical life.<sup>19</sup> Franchised organisations that advance discourse about both Islamic human rights and ethical finance and reasonable humanitarian participation are attempts to square the Islamic circle in relation to global practice without submitting to the Islamist view that associates secularism with the other extreme, the rejectionist radical approach.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, within the periphery of international relations theory, understanding of non-state actors' roles has evolved considerably. In the beginning, IR was defined by a world-centric focus that wasn't seen due to a focus on the state of the world and the influence of doctrine, norms, and networks. Constructivist and critical theories have developed to contest the idea that power in global politics is best understood as determined by the state level, but recognise that "global power is best understood as a composite of arrangements between state and non-state action", with civil society organisations and religious movements comprising non-state potential influences capable of norm diffusion, advocacy, monitoring, and shaming.<sup>21</sup> Religious actors, most notably, have recently emerged as "moral entrepreneurs", challenging

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<sup>15</sup> Ali A Yildiz and Maykel Verkuyten, "Inclusive Victimhood: Social Identity and the Politicization of Collective Trauma Among Turkey's Alevis in Western Europe.," *Peace and Conflict Journal of Peace Psychology* 17, no. 3 (2011): 243–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10781919.2011.587175>.

<sup>16</sup> Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*.

<sup>17</sup> Daromir Rudnyckyj, "From Wall Street To*Halal*Street: Malaysia and the Globalization of Islamic Finance," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 4 (2013): 831–48, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911813001630>.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," in *Social Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511616839.002>.

<sup>19</sup> Ari Sulistyanto, Rina Sovianti, and Syaifuddin Syaifuddin, "The Agenda Formation of the Fantasy of Identity Politics in the Digital Media and Its Effect Towards Cohesiveness of 212 Alumni Brotherhood," 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icas-19.2019.21>.

<sup>20</sup> Patricia Ehrkamp and Helga Leitner, "Rethinking Immigration and Citizenship: New Spaces of Migrant Transnationalism and Belonging," *Environment and Planning a Economy and Space* 38, no. 9 (2006): 1591–97, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a38349>.

<sup>21</sup> Swerts and Nicholls, "Undocumented Immigrant Activism and the Political: Disrupting the Order or Reproducing the Status Quo?"



established international standards and promoting alternative articulations of world order.<sup>22</sup> Civil society activism, transnational advocacy networks, and religious diplomacy have all become influential players that challenge states' exclusive privileges in international affairs.

A case in point is the activism of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has no aspirations to the state's power but functions as a major civil society actor committed to defining global conversations on Islam, democracy, and human rights.<sup>23</sup> NU's strategic interaction with international actors, its role in brokering programs such as Humanitarian Islam and its convening of interfaith dialogues indicate how non-state Muslim actors can meaningfully contribute to the recasting of global norms.<sup>24</sup> NU's model differs from state-centred Islamic diplomacy and militant transnationalism, instead basing itself on a vision of pluralism, tolerance, and constructive engagement with international governance.

In that sense, a theoretical framework of the thesis combined critical historiographies of Westphalian sovereignty, Bandung-inspired post-colonial internationalism, and constructivist anarchies about non-state actors in international relations. By highlighting NU's international actions, this inquiry locates their actions as religious outreach and a sideline form of Islamic internationalism. Not only does this approach hope to heal past schisms, it also hopes to play a constructive role in establishing new global norms. NU's praxis provides a way for Islamic actors to transform spiritual values into a *modus opera apertus* dealing with modern political realities while contending with questions of sovereignty, unity, and global ethics.

In short, the complex interplay between state-centred and transnational lenses in studying international relations provides a valuable expansion of the literature in this area. The triangulation of sovereignty, collective identity, and agency illustrate the importance of developing broad-based theoretical frameworks that integrate the particular, multiple idioms with which global stories and definitions of state power and religious authority are currently negotiated. Additional examination of civil society-driven Islamic diplomacy, especially models of NU's variety, might sharpen well discussions regarding pluralism, governance, and the forward direction of global order.

### 3. Method

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach, combining critical discourse analysis with historical-institutional contextualisation to examine the global engagement of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in international Islamic discourse. The methodology is designed to uncover how NU's initiatives articulate a vision of global order that responds to the crises of Muslim disunity, radicalism, and external securitization, while navigating the frameworks of Westphalian sovereignty and Bandung-inspired postcolonial internationalism.

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<sup>22</sup> Jeremy Menchik, "The Constructivist Approach to Religion and World Politics," *Comparative Politics* 49, no. 4 (2017): 561–81, <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041517821273035>.

<sup>23</sup> Dwiputra, Aziz, and Nur, "Strengthening Digital Citizens Political Communication Ethics (Digital Citizenship) in Social Media".

<sup>24</sup> Fealy, "Bigger Than Nahdlatul Ulama: Understanding the NU's Engagement in Global Islam".



To achieve this, the research draws on two main sources of data: (1) Primary organizational materials produced by NU and its affiliated institutions, such as the *Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*, the *Fiqh al-Hadārah* (Jurisprudence of Civilization) project, statements from Bayt ar-Rahmah, and speeches delivered at the G20 Religion Forum (R20); and (2) Secondary scholarly literature in Islamic studies, international relations, and postcolonial theory, especially those addressing non-state actors, global Islamic movements, and the legacies of Westphalia and Bandung.

Through critical textual analysis, the study decodes how NU's normative claims—such as *ʿadl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *karāmah al-insāniyyah* (human dignity)—are framed as global moral values within the grammar of Islamic ethical discourse and simultaneously embedded in the secular vocabulary of global governance. Particular attention is paid to how NU positions itself not only as a theological body but as a norm entrepreneur in international politics.

Furthermore, this inquiry employs a comparative-historical logic, juxtaposing NU's present activism with two historical moments: the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia and the 1955 Bandung Conference. These moments are not treated merely as historical background but as heuristic frameworks through which NU constructs its ideological identity and foreign policy imaginaries. The Westphalia–Bandung binary is used not as a rigid typology but as a narrative arc that situates NU's vision of an ethical Islamic global order.

Lastly, this study adopts a constructivist lens in international relations theory, focusing on the role of ideas, identity, and discourse in shaping global order. By examining how NU's religious diplomacy contests prevailing paradigms of power and sovereignty, this article contributes to ongoing debates on how civil society actors—particularly religious organizations—can influence and reform international norms from the periphery of the Muslim world.

## **4. Result dan Discussion**

### **1. Westphalia and the Question of Muslim Sovereignty**

The signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 is generally considered the beginning of the modern terms on which the modern discipline of international relations is founded, including the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states.<sup>25</sup> Although these principles have played a significant role in the rise of the modern state system when invoked in Muslim contexts, quite different and complex relationships to Islamic political history are often displayed. The canonical Theology of Islam is based on the idea of Ummah, which knows no geographical map and fosters allegiance to one political authority, the Caliphate.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, there is an emphasis in Westphalia on nation-states having recognizable borders and secular (following the abolition of the Ottoman

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<sup>25</sup> Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth".

<sup>26</sup> Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*.

Caliphate in 1924) governance systems.

Secular rule and nationalist concepts accompanying the division of the Islamic lands in the colonial era have created this break.<sup>27</sup> Academics argue that arbitrary colonization of state borders has usurped customary Islamic governance, in the process inducing traumatic identity dilemmas among Muslim nations.<sup>28</sup> Even since state sovereignty and territoriality have been further complicated by classifying territories as *Dar al-Islam* (House of Islam) and *Dar al-Harb* (House of War). The Westphalian system is widely seen as a colonial imposition that rejects the indigenous moral matrix for authentic politics in such societies.<sup>29</sup>

This gradual destruction of the Ummah's core ideological values has led inter alia to sectarianism, nationalism and territorial contention along identity lines. As a result, we have movements that generate themselves as 'an answer to the current problems, which often tend to be politically enfingering rather than unifying.<sup>30</sup> The decline of conventional religious solidarities has generated deep quandaries of political legitimacy, collective identity, and governance within the modern Muslim world. Its absence has frequently been replaced by ideologies that alternately slide between secular-nationalism and extremist-transnationalism, and manage, in the end, only partially to meet the deeper longings for unity and justice among Muslim peoples.<sup>31</sup>

Dissident and radical movements, such as ISIS, have taken advantage of these grievances by rejecting completely the modern nation-state and calling instead for a renewal of transnational Islamic political order.<sup>32</sup> Their brutal tactics and medievalist visions have been almost entirely repudiated by mainstream Islamic scholars and societies.<sup>33</sup> Such a wholesale rejection is symptomatic of a general desire in much of the Muslim world to interact with modernity without selling out its Islamic moral underpinning. It highlights the necessity for a process of thought in politics capable of bringing Islamic values into alignment with modern forms of governance, as a third way between the extremism of a utopianist-style and

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<sup>27</sup> Brahimi and Brisson, "Strategies of a Transnational Intellectual: Tariq Ramadan and the Project of a European Islam".

<sup>28</sup> Abdalhadi Alijla and Gahad Hamed, "Addressing the Islamic Notion of Sovereign State," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.15640/jisc.v3n2a13>.

<sup>29</sup> Firmanda Taufiq and Ahalla Tsauro, "Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Fiqh of Civilization (Fikih Peradaban): Strategies, Contributions, and Challenges in Overcoming the Humanitarian Crisis," *International Journal Ihya Ulum Al-Din* 26, no. 1 (2024): 173–83, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.26.1.20255>.

<sup>30</sup> Salawati M Basir, Saidatul N A Aziz, and Mohd H M Kamal, "China's South China Sea Claims, the Historic Rights Debate and the Middle Approach of Islamic International Law," *Journal International Studies* 19 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.32890/jis2023.19.1.10>.

<sup>31</sup> Hamoon Khelghat-Doost, "Foreign Policy of Post-Revolutionary Iran: Expediency at the Crossroad of Supra-Nationalism and Sovereignty," *Austral Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations* 11, no. 22 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-6912.116576>.

<sup>32</sup> Yildiz and Verkuyten, "Inclusive Victimhood: Social Identity and the Politicization of Collective Trauma Among Turkey's Alevis in Western Europe".

<sup>33</sup> Khamami Zada, "Sharia and Islamic State in Indonesia Constitutional Democracy: An Aceh Experience," *Ijtihad Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 23, no. 1 (2023): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v23i1.1-18>.

<sup>35</sup> Taufiq and Tsauro, "Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Fiqh of Civilization (Fikih Peradaban): Strategies, Contributions, and Challenges in Overcoming the Humanitarian Crisis".

uncritically accepted secular Westphalian norms.

Faced with these challenges, hopeful movements like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) point a way forward. NU was instrumental in the formulation of an Islamic political model that attempts to reconcile tradition with demands of the modern-nation state.<sup>34</sup> In programs such as *Fiqh al-Hadārah* (Fiqh of Civilization) and Humanitarian Islam, NU outlines a vision of sovereignty underpinned by moral maxims that are universal, values shared by all, such as justice (*ʿadl*), compassion (*rahmah*), as well as human dignity.<sup>35</sup> Far from rejecting the Westphalian paradigm altogether, NU is seeking to re-read it and to humanize it, so that religious values can play a central part in political debate and in international governance.

In addition, NU promotes inter-religious discourse, religious tolerance, and inclusive pluralism, providing a counter to today's escalating global populism, nationalism, and sectarianism.<sup>37</sup> Unlike radical exclusivist movements, NU shows that religious identity can act as a platform for understanding and peace, and not a cause for friction. It is particularly important at a time when religious myths are so often politicized.

In addition, the Westphalian concept of non-interference has been selectively applied, especially in cases of military invasions under the pretext of being humanitarian interventions, which have intensified the disillusionment of Muslims with the international world system.<sup>36</sup> Situations like Iraq, Libya and Syria illustrate that interventions typically do more to destabilize conflict than to uphold sovereign equality and justice. Such tendencies have perpetuated images of marginalization and victimhood and, in that sense, alienated Muslim communities from the existing global framework.

Understanding these realities, NU's model works to advance a new vision of the world order that will balance sovereignty with moral accountability. It stands as an example that religious actors can and must have a voice in shaping international norms and develop ethical approaches that promote peace, social justice, and human dignity beyond national or sectarian loyalties.<sup>37</sup> NU's programs to promote dialogue among civilizations help to promote a more pluralist, and therefore more robust, model of global governance, in line with both Islamic tradition and contemporary practice.

In short, the shadow of the Treaty of Westphalia has severe implications for the political spectrum of the Muslim world, but also opportunities for opening themselves adopted the

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<sup>34</sup> Basma Tania et al., "How Humanitarian Islam Fosters Peace: The Perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama," *El Harakah Jurnal Budaya Islam* 26, no. 1 (2024): 171–203, <https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v26i1.26592>.

<sup>35</sup> Umi Musyarrofah and Zulhannan Zulhannan, "Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0," *Keuangan Islam Dan Peran Kesejahteraan*, 2023, 409–34, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss2.art5>.

<sup>36</sup> Nevy R Dewi et al., "Politik Kebangsaan Dalam Membendung Gerakan Radikalisme Oleh Nahdlatul Ulama Kabupaten Pati (National Politics in Repressing the Radicalism Movement by Nahdlatul Ulama of Pati Regency)," *Potret Pemikiran* 25, no. 1 (2021): 60, <https://doi.org/10.30984/pp.v25i1.1429>.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Engel, "South–South Cooperation in Southeast Asia: From Bandung and Solidarity to Norms and Rivalry," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 38, no. 2 (2019): 218–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103419840456>.

dimension and interpretation. Movements like Nahdlatul Ulama, would show that it's possible to find a compromise between Islamic moral traditions and modern forms of sovereignty.<sup>38</sup> In focusing political legitimacy on moral goods rather than territorial fixity, NU presents an alternative perspective on Islamic politics — one that aims to mend historical fractures, redress contemporary wrongs and, most crucially, navigate a path to a more just and inclusive global order.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Bandung, Postcolonialism, and Muslim Solidarity

Bandung 1955 is a turning point in the shared movement in search of identity and a national independence from the colonial past of the newly independent Asian and African countries.<sup>41</sup> Meeting as a body largely composed of newly independent states, they presented a set of principles opposed directly to Eurocentric thinking that had shaped world politics since the Peace of Westphalia. The delegates at Bandung emphasized mutual respect, equality among nations, and shared histories of colonization and oppression, thus rewriting the rules that had previously consigned the countries and cultures of Asia and Africa to the margins.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the emphasis on solidarity and anti-imperialism at the conference corroborated the idea of a cooperative international system that recognized the importance of sovereign equality and non-intervention.<sup>41</sup>

For Muslim-majority countries, the Bandung Conference went beyond just politics and was also about claiming cultural and civilizational dignity on the global stage. The message of the conference was piercingly Islamic in tone; it was about justice (*ʿadl*) and the struggle, in the modern world, for a reconstituted sense of communal solidarity (*Ummah*) in the face of neocolonial pressures.<sup>42</sup> The moral substance of Bandung helped withstand the Cold War double pressure of alliances and secular nationalism and brought out into the open the proximity to Islamic teachings that emphasize human dignity (*karamah al-insaniyyah*).<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Bandung not only developed a political vision but also articulated Islamic political ideals, constructing a conception of international relations that respects moral values alongside state sovereignty.

It was a kind of Bandung internationalism that gained ground among Muslim intellectuals and leaders who envisioned re-establishing agency in a nascent world system inspired by morality rather than raw power, as in the Westphalian order.<sup>44</sup> The foundation for

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<sup>38</sup> Umar, "Rethinking the Legacies of Bandung Conference: Global Decolonization and the Making of Modern International Order".

<sup>39</sup> Acharya, "Studying the Bandung Conference From a Global IR Perspective."

<sup>40</sup> Heloise Weber and Poppy S Winanti, "The 'Bandung Spirit' and Solidarist Internationalism," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (2016): 391–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2016.1167834>.

<sup>41</sup> N'Dri T Assié-Lumumba, "Behind and Beyond Bandung: Historical and Forward-Looking Reflections on South-South Cooperation," *Bandung* 2, no. 1 (2015): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40728-014-0011-5>.

<sup>42</sup> Umar, "Rethinking the Legacies of Bandung Conference: Global Decolonization and the Making of Modern International Order".

<sup>43</sup> Engel, "South-South Cooperation in Southeast Asia: From Bandung and Solidarity to Norms and Rivalry".

<sup>44</sup> Gray and Gills, "South-South Cooperation and the Rise of the Global South."

various solidarities was established at the Bandung Conference, and its relevance has assumed many different shapes since then, notably with the Non-Aligned Movement, which sought to articulate the aspirations of the Global South against dominant Western geopolitical narratives.<sup>45</sup> However, the ideals expressed at Bandung faced complexities in post-colonial life, such as continued authoritarianism and sectarian divides.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the spirit of the Bandung Conference still resonates in discussions about Muslim solidarity, particularly in the revival and evolution of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).<sup>47</sup> The manifestations at Bandung paved the way for subsequent efforts to energize South-South cooperation, urging Muslim countries to engage constructively with the complexities of identity and sovereignty.<sup>48</sup>

In this light, the NU program can be seen as a contemporary attempt to revive the Bandung spirit through initiatives like "Humanitarian Islam"—an interface between Islamic teachings and global human rights discourse.<sup>49</sup> NU's engagement in global initiatives, such as the G20 Religion Forum (R20), reflects a commitment to applying the Bandung ethos of justice and solidarity in interfaith contexts, demonstrating that Islamic values can actively contribute to the betterment of the global order.<sup>50</sup>

Through these channels, Bandung endures as a legacy, spotlighting the importance of ethical engagement in an increasingly complex world. The relationships forged and the principles set forth at the conference continue to offer a framework for building a just international order rooted in self-determination, dignity, and solidarity among diverse cultures.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the Bandung Conference and its ongoing influence provide a robust foundation for imagining transnational governance frameworks that integrate ethical and pluralistic principles.

### **3. Nahdlatul Ulama and the Making of a Post-Westphalian Islamic Internationalism**

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, is currently engaged in building a post-Westphalian Islamic internationalism that integrates ethical imperatives within contemporary global governance.<sup>52</sup> Based on historical-specific contexts of the Treaty of

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<sup>45</sup> Acharya, "Studying the Bandung Conference From a Global IR Perspective".

<sup>46</sup> Umar, "Rethinking the Legacies of Bandung Conference: Global Decolonization and the Making of Modern International Order."

<sup>47</sup> Weber and Winanti, "The 'Bandung Spirit' and Solidarist Internationalism".

<sup>48</sup> Engel, "South-South Cooperation in Southeast Asia: From Bandung and Solidarity to Norms and Rivalry".

<sup>49</sup> Shailaja Fennell, "Building on Bandung: What Does Cooperation Do for Regional Engagement?," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 10, no. 1 (2022): 87–105, <https://doi.org/10.18588/202205.00a268>.

<sup>50</sup> Engel, "South-South Cooperation in Southeast Asia: From Bandung and Solidarity to Norms and Rivalry."

<sup>51</sup> Wildan S Utama, "From Brussels to Bogor: Contacts, Networks and the History of the Bandung Conference 1955," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2018): 11–24, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jissh.v6i1.56>.

<sup>52</sup> Taufiq and Tsauo, "Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Fiqh of Civilization (Fikih Peradaban): Strategies, Contributions, and Challenges in Overcoming the Humanitarian Crisis."

Westphalia and the Bandung Conference, NU argues for a relationship of 'contemporary Islam' with the notion of 'Islamic state' beyond the distortion of an idealized caliphate and beyond a secular teleology of the modern state.<sup>53</sup> This perspective articulates the commitment of the organization to developing an alternative form of Islamic internationalism based on ethical and moral universalism, grounded in justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and human dignity (*karamah al-insaniyyah*).<sup>54</sup>

At the heart of NU's academic approach lies the notion of "Fiqh al-Hadārah" (The Fiqh of Civilization), aimed at placing Islamic legal principles in their proper time and place, thereby taking into account contemporary conditions.<sup>55</sup> This re-interpretation places sovereignty alongside ethical responsibility and thus refuses the idea of unlimited state authority separated from ethical obligation. Fiqh al-Hadārah hopes to confront radical Islamist ideologies with a discourse based on peace, coexistence, and respect between communities.<sup>56</sup>

A significant initiative arising out of this framework is "Humanitarian Islam," which seeks to reconcile teachings of the faith of Islam with international human rights norms, whilst maintaining Islamic religious tenets.<sup>57</sup> This project confronts interpretive practices that exclude and marginalize in the name of violence and intolerance. Instead, it encourages a narrative of mercy and social concord, embodying the ethical solidarity enshrined in the Bandung Conference.<sup>58</sup> NU's dialogues and collaborations with different stakeholders are emblematic of its function as a "norm entrepreneur" in global governance and the promotion of global ethical norms.<sup>59</sup>

Institutions such as Bayt ar-Rahmah and engagements like the G20 Religion Forum (R20) are testament to how NU is a stakeholder in international forums and how it advances a pluralistic solution to global challenges.<sup>60</sup> The interaction of NU's actions demonstrates an ability for incremental change through dialogue and consensus-building as opposed to sudden revolutions, thereby underlining the significance of strategic collaboration for sustainable and ethical results.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tania et al., "How Humanitarian Islam Fosters Peace: The Perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama."

<sup>54</sup> Reza F Nazar and Abdul Hamid, "Tracking the Genealogical Reasoning Reconstruction of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Fiqh: From 'Social Fiqh' to 'Civilization Fiqh,'" *Tashwirul Affiar* 41, no. 2 (2022): 137–62, <https://doi.org/10.51716/ta.v41i2.74>.

<sup>55</sup> Nazar and Hamid.

<sup>56</sup> Musyarrofah and Zulhannan, "Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0."

<sup>57</sup> Alexander R Arifianto, "Nahdlatul Ulama and Its Commitment Towards Moderate Political Norms: A Comparison Between the Abdurrahman Wahid and Jokowi Era," *Journal of Global Strategic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2021): 77–114, <https://doi.org/10.36859/jgss.v1i1.573>.

<sup>58</sup> Menchik, "The Constructivist Approach to Religion and World Politics."

<sup>59</sup> Arifianto, "Nahdlatul Ulama and Its Commitment Towards Moderate Political Norms: A Comparison Between the Abdurrahman Wahid and Jokowi Era."

<sup>60</sup> Dewi et al., "Politik Kebangsaan Dalam Membendung Gerakan Radikalisme Oleh Nahdlatul Ulama Kabupaten Pati (National Politics in Repressing the Radicalism Movement by Nahdlatul Ulama of Pati Regency)."

<sup>61</sup> Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 42, no. 1 (2020): 58–84, <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs42-1c>.



Such gradualism is a necessity to meet present-day global issues within the Islamic tradition. NU's model ensures that it engages global governance structures while preserving Islamic values.<sup>62</sup> NU's own body of ideas also includes "Fiqh al-Muwathanah" or jurisprudence of citizenship, which holds that Muslims can fully participate in pluralist democracies while retaining their identities.<sup>63</sup> This doctrine opposes exclusive definitions that ignore national membership and promotes conversations that value both religious and national belonging. NU's position provides a blueprint for how Islam should engage in democratic processes with principles of respect, integration without assimilation, and ethical pluralism.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, NU is engaged in confronting and revising radical ideas within the Muslim community by favoring religious dialogue that promotes values of tolerance, social justice, and human dignity. Its mission is to further promote the awareness of Islamic fundamental principles and to reconcile Islamic ideology through grassroots efforts, teaching, and worldwide forums—realizing that ideological shifts must come from within, using reformative methodology to bring peace and grace to the plethora of Islamic audiences.<sup>65</sup>

In sum, NU's project to build an Islamic internationalism after Westphalia represents a forward-leaning and ethical foreign worldview.<sup>66</sup> By integrating historical ethical frameworks with contemporary challenges, NU is a model of how an Islamic organization can navigate the dilemmas of modernity while working towards a more fair and inclusive world order. This dynamic model of interfaith cooperation and ethical advocacy proposes a viable way forward for reimagining global governance as both pluralist and responsive to Islamic values.<sup>67</sup>

#### **4. Challenges and Prospects for NU's Global Role**

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is a major actor in the formulation of post-Westphalian Islamic internationalism, but its path is fraught with obstacles both internal and external. One of the biggest internal challenges is the disunity of the Muslim world, where sectarian identities have overshadowed religious unity, and foreign interests often prevail over collective Muslim interests.<sup>68</sup> These obstacles frequently impede a unified Muslim response to global issues, complicating NU's advocacy for a universalist interpretation of Islam. The struggle to foster

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<sup>62</sup> Musyarofah and Zulhannan, "Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0."

<sup>63</sup> Mietzner and Muhtadi, "The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia."

<sup>64</sup> Riaz Hassan, "Expressions of Religiosity and Blasphemy in Modern Societies," 2006, <https://doi.org/10.22459/ns.06.2006.11>.

<sup>65</sup> Siswoyo A Munandar and Ummu A Kubro, "Tawassut Attitude Relevance Nahdlatul Ulama in Preventing Extremism," *Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Masyarakat* 17, no. 1 (2021): 45–59, <https://doi.org/10.23971/jsam.v17i1.2421>.

<sup>66</sup> Taufiq and Tsauo, "Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Fiqh of Civilization (Fikih Peradaban): Strategies, Contributions, and Challenges in Overcoming the Humanitarian Crisis."

<sup>67</sup> Arifianto, "Nahdlatul Ulama and Its Commitment Towards Moderate Political Norms: A Comparison Between the Abdurrahman Wahid and Jokowi Era."

<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion in Foreign Policy," 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.380>.

<sup>71</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion in Foreign Policy".



pluralism and moderation within the Ummah is complex—NU must contend with hardened factions entrenched in sectarianism and nationalism if it is to overcome historical grievances and political rivalries.<sup>69</sup>

NU also grapples with skepticism from Western publics and segments within the Muslim community.<sup>72</sup> In Western contexts, religious organizations from Muslim-majority countries are often viewed with suspicion, and NU's identity may be misconstrued as incompatible with secular liberal norms, despite its commitment to interfaith dialogue and human rights.<sup>73</sup> Simultaneously, in some Muslim regions, NU's moderation is criticized for straying too far from traditionalist interpretations, thereby raising issues of authenticity and credibility.<sup>70</sup>

Maintaining coherence across NU's decentralized and diverse structures presents another challenge. With members spread across Indonesia and other countries, ensuring that the vision of Humanitarian Islam is uniformly articulated and implemented is difficult.<sup>71</sup> This decentralization, while empowering grassroots initiatives, risks diluting the global message NU seeks to convey, necessitating consistent cadre training and institutional strengthening to uphold credibility on the international stage.<sup>72</sup>

Externally, NU's ambitions are complicated by geopolitical shifts, including the resurgence of great power rivalries and the rise of right-wing populism.<sup>73</sup> These dynamics undermine efforts to promote a pluralist international order, while Islamophobic narratives deepen political divisions. Furthermore, international governance structures often marginalize the contributions of non-state actors, restricting NU's influence on global policy debates.<sup>74</sup>

Despite these challenges, NU's prospects remain strong. There is a growing recognition of the role civil society and religious actors can play in addressing global challenges, particularly as secular paradigms prove insufficient to solve crises such as climate change and inequality.<sup>75</sup> The ethical framework that organizations like NU offer becomes increasingly relevant in shaping the global agenda.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Hermawan, Ahmad, "Islam and Christian Perspective Toward Global Religious Education in Indonesia." *Al-Hayat Journal of Islamic Education* 6, no. 2 (2022): 89..

<sup>70</sup> Delf Rothe, "Governing the End Times? Planet Politics and the Secular Eschatology of the Anthropocene," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 48, no. 2 (2019): 143–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829819889138>.

<sup>71</sup> Novebri Novebri and Resdilla Pratiwi, "Peran Tokoh Agama Dalam Pencegahan Konflik Di Tengah Masyarakat Multikultural Pada Era Digital," *Khalifa Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 2 (2021): 198, <https://doi.org/10.24036/kjie.v5i2.185>.

<sup>72</sup> Novebri Novebri and Resdilla Pratiwi, "Peran Tokoh Agama Dalam Pencegahan Konflik Di Tengah Masyarakat Multikultural Pada Era Digital".

<sup>73</sup> Merijn Oudenampsen, "Neoliberal Populism: The Case of Pim Fortuyn," *Political Studies* 72, no. 4 (2023): 1373–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217231185211>.

<sup>74</sup> Muhammad S Itmam and Abdelmalek Aouich, "Legal Politics of Religious Moderation and State Defense Policy at Public Universities," *Justicia Islamica* 21, no. 1 (2024): 87–110, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v21i1.9242>.

<sup>75</sup> Johanna Kantola and Emanuela Lombardo, "Populism and Feminist Politics: The Cases of Finland and Spain," *European Journal of Political Research* 58, no. 4 (2019): 1108–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12333>.

<sup>76</sup> Yaron Katz, "Navigating the Complexities of Identity: Is There an Accelerated Israelization of Religion?,"

NU's collaborative model—engaging with diverse international stakeholders and interfaith networks—amplifies its voice and credibility.<sup>77</sup> Participation in forums and partnerships with other faith communities fosters peaceful coexistence and human rights advocacy, helping to bridge cultural and political divides necessary for global dialogue.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, NU's emphasis on gradualism and consensus-building, rather than rigid ideological positions, enhances its adaptability across different cultural and political contexts.<sup>83</sup> Through education, interfaith efforts, and humanitarian programs, NU promotes sustainable change rooted in Islamic tradition and ethical pluralism.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, NU's historical and theological legitimacy within the Sunni tradition grants it considerable soft power.<sup>16</sup> By advocating progressive Islamic interpretations while maintaining traditional grounding, NU can shape the broader Muslim discourse on critical ethical and political issues, contributing meaningfully to the global debate on governance and justice.<sup>80</sup>

In sum, while NU faces formidable internal and external challenges in its pursuit of post-Westphalian Islamic internationalism, its ethical foundations, capacity for strategic adaptation, and expanding international engagement offer a hopeful blueprint for a more pluralistic and inclusive world order.<sup>81</sup> With a firm commitment to justice, compassion, and human dignity, NU stands at the forefront of the ongoing global governance debate.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has examined Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)'s changing contribution to building a post-Westphalian Islamic internationalism that traverses historical legacies, ethical traditions and global realities. Within the context of the Treaty of Westphalia and the Bandung Conference, navigating history as NU articulates itself as the vanguard in propagating a world-engagement praxis based on Islamic ethical principles of justice, compassion, and human dignity.

Through programs such as *Humanitarian Islam* and *Fiqh al-Hadārah*, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) elaborates a “Muslim imaginary” that responds to global challenges—one that neither degenerates into a secluded and gratuitous traditionalism, nor uncritically surrenders to secular state paradigms. Its approach to engagement—promoting pluralism, peaceful coexistence, and normative reform—reflects a nuanced understanding of 21st-century global politics. NU's

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*International Journal of Social Science and Human Research* 7, no. 06 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v7-i06-27>.

<sup>77</sup> Yunus Rahawarin et al., “Seven Motivations of Students Selecting Department of Islamic Teaching Education in Public University,” *Asian Social Science and Humanities Research Journal (Ashrej)* 2, no. 1 (2020): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.37698/ashrej.v2i1.25>.

<sup>78</sup> Katz, “Navigating the Complexities of Identity: Is There an Accelerated Israelization of Religion?”

<sup>83</sup> Sherrie M Steiner, “Faith-Based Accountability Mechanism Typology,” *Sage Open* 2, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012450705>.

<sup>79</sup> Sherrie M Steiner, “Faith-Based Accountability Mechanism Typology”.

<sup>80</sup> Katz, “Navigating the Complexities of Identity: Is There an Accelerated Israelization of Religion?”

<sup>81</sup> Itmam and Aouich, “Legal Politics of Religious Moderation and State Defense Policy at Public Universities.”

activism demonstrates that faith-based organizations can serve as norm entrepreneurs, contributing to constructive global governance by advancing more inclusive, ethical, and environmentally conscious frameworks.

However, the road is still difficult. Muslim disunity, skepticism among various constituencies, internal fragmentation, resistance within, and the structural impediments in the international system all create formidable obstacles. But the flexibility of NU, its grounding in Islamic scholarship and its willingness to carry out reform in an incremental and consensus-based manner are strengths that work to its advantage in addressing these dynamics.

The odds for NU impact have increased due to greater world awareness of the ability of civil society and religious actors to mediate in crises that secular models have not been able to resolve. NU's international collaborations and its commitment to education, interfaith dialogue, and humanitarian outreach, create a platform where the university is uniquely poised to be or to become a pivotal actor in influencing emerging norms of international engagement.

In the end, Nahdlatul Ulama's vision provides a powerful alternative to reimagining the international order—a world in which religious morality complements state sovereignty, pluralism flourishes, and justice is not overshadowed by power politics. At a time when the world faces increasing polarization, civilizational stress and geopolitical volatility, NU's offerings stand out as a possible path toward a fairer, peaceful, and ethically grounded global community. Oxford/New York: O. The originality of NU, combining tradition with modernity, provides much to consider for the re-design of global order beyond Western-centered paradigms.

Further studies would need to trace how NU's initiatives develop, how its ideas resonate in different global settings, and how its model might encourage larger efforts to reconcile religious values with the evolving horizons of international relations. To take the measure of NU's post- Westphalian Islamic internationalism, comparative analysis with other global Islamic movements, and longitudinal analysis of its influence on global institutions, will be crucial. In the process, they have much to teach students, scholars, and policymakers about how to construct a more inclusive, peaceful, and humane global order rooted in ethical pluralism, rather than in coercive dominance.

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