

Between Ideological Polarization and Progressive Islam: Muhammadiyah's Responses to the Religious Right, the Political Left, and Post-Truth

Darin Dianah Pertiwi

Itenas, Indonesia.
darindianah@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines how Muhammadiyah responded to three distinct but intersecting ideological currents: the religious right, the political left, and post-truth politics. It uses qualitative historical-intellectual document analysis rather than a systematic literature review and includes only sources published by 2022. Official Muhammadiyah texts, organizational decisions, and scholarship on Indonesian Islam, populism, socialism, and digital disinformation are interpreted through a framework of selective ideological translation. The findings show an asymmetrical response. Muhammadiyah rejected communist atheism and class reductionism while retaining egalitarian, anti-exploitative, and welfare-oriented concerns through al-Ma'un praxis. It resisted Islamist absolutism, vigilantism, and majoritarian state projects while preserving purification, public morality, and Muslim solidarity within constitutional citizenship. Against post-truth, it developed an epistemic ethic centered on tabayyun, verification, expertise, and accountability, especially through Fikih Informasi. However, official moderation does not automatically govern decentralized members, schools, mosques, or digital networks. Muhammadiyah's resilience therefore depends less on occupying a fixed ideological center than on converting theological principles into credible institutions, public knowledge, and self-correcting organizational practices.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah; ideological polarization; Islamic modernism; post-truth; progressive Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah has never developed in an ideologically empty environment. Since its establishment in 1912, the organization has operated amid colonial liberalism, Javanese religious traditions, Islamic reformism, nationalism, socialism, communism, developmental authoritarianism, political Islam, global Salafism, neoliberal economic reform, and the digital circulation of disinformation. Each current offered a diagnosis of social disorder and a program for collective life. Muhammadiyah's history can therefore be read not only as the institutional expansion of schools, hospitals, and religious councils, but also as a continuing process of ideological selection, translation, and boundary making.

The proposed categories of right-wing, left-wing, and post-truth require conceptual discipline. The religious right and political left refer to broad families of political ideas, movements, and social coalitions. Post-truth, by contrast, is not a coherent ideology with a stable social program. It describes an epistemic condition in which identity, emotion, repetition, and partisan loyalty can outweigh verifiable evidence in public judgment (McIntyre, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Post-truth practices may be used by actors

on the right, left, or center. Treating the three categories as equivalent would therefore produce a false symmetry. This article examines them together because they constitute different pressures on Muhammadiyah's theological authority, organizational cohesion, and public credibility.

The term religious right is used here for currents that combine moral conservatism with hierarchy, majoritarian identity, exclusivist nationalism, or projects to subordinate citizenship to a singular religious-political order. In Indonesia, this field includes but is not limited to Islamist populism, anti-pluralist mobilization, vigilantism, and transnational projects such as the caliphate. It does not include every form of personal piety, scripturalism, or conservative theology. Muhammadiyah itself has a strong purification tradition, and conservative positions exist within the organization. The analytical question is how purification is separated from coercive majoritarianism and how Muslim solidarity is reconciled with constitutional equality.

The political left is equally heterogeneous. It includes Marxism, communism, socialism, social democracy, anti-capitalism, labor politics, and broader egalitarian critiques of exploitation. Indonesian public memory often collapses this spectrum into the prohibited Communist Party of Indonesia and the violence surrounding 1965-1966. That collapse obscures the fact that social justice, cooperative economics, anti-colonialism, and protection of marginalized groups also circulated through Islamic, nationalist, and socialist vocabularies. Muhammadiyah opposed atheistic communism and the PKI, but its theology of al-Ma'un, welfare institutions, and constitutional defense of public resources expressed concerns that cannot be described adequately as politically right-wing.

Existing accounts frequently assign Muhammadiyah a fixed location: modernist, moderate, conservative, liberal, puritan, nationalist, or civil-Islamic. These labels illuminate particular dimensions but become misleading when they are treated as permanent essences. Burhani (2005, 2013, 2018) demonstrated that liberal, conservative, pluralist, and Islamist orientations have competed within Muhammadiyah. Brown (2019) and Menchik (2016, 2019) likewise warned against equating mainstream Muslim organization with consistent liberalism. Organizational decisions emerge from leadership structures, congresses, councils, educational networks, local cultures, and changing political incentives. An official position can be normatively clear while remaining unevenly internalized.

Muhammadiyah's response to ideological currents is best understood as selective translation. The organization rarely accepts or rejects an external ideology as a total package. It disaggregates problems, values, and instruments. It can accept the right's concern with moral formation while rejecting religious coercion; accept the left's concern with structural inequality while rejecting materialist determinism; and use digital technology while rejecting the collapse of truth into virality. Theologically, selection is mediated by tawhid, the Qur'an and Sunnah, ijtihad, maslahah, and tajdid. Institutionally, it is mediated by Majelis Tarjih, congress decisions, cadre education, social services, universities, and public advocacy.

This article asks three questions. First, how did Muhammadiyah historically frame and

respond to ideological currents associated with the right and left? Second, how did the organization construct an Islamic response to post-truth and digital disinformation by 2022? Third, what organizational conditions explain the gap between official doctrine and the behavior of members or affiliated institutions? The article argues that Muhammadiyah's ideological position is not a geometrical midpoint. It is a normatively structured but internally contested form of progressive Islam that seeks to convert revelation into social reform, constitutional citizenship, and credible knowledge practices.

The contribution is both historical and conceptual. Historically, the article connects colonial social reform, post-independence ideological conflict, Reformasi-era polarization, and digital disinformation in a single account. Conceptually, it separates doctrinal rejection from functional appropriation and distinguishes ideological moderation from epistemic reliability. A movement may reject extremism in official documents yet remain vulnerable to polarizing networks. Conversely, it may hold conservative theological positions while contributing to public welfare and constitutional democracy. The decisive issue is how principles are institutionalized, monitored, and revised.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative historical-intellectual document analysis. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive retrieval, protocol registration, database saturation, or statistical aggregation. The purpose is interpretive: to reconstruct changing patterns in Muhammadiyah's ideological response and to develop a framework that explains continuities, asymmetries, and contradictions across periods. The evidentiary corpus was bounded by a publication cutoff of 31 December 2022.

Primary materials include Muhammadiyah's official ideological and ethical texts: the Khittah of national and state life, the Second-Century Statement, Negara Pancasila sebagai Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah, Fikih Informasi, Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah, and Risalah Islam Berkemajuan (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2000, 2002, 2010, 2015, 2022; Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2019). These documents were selected because they formalize the organization's position on political participation, citizenship, knowledge, communication, social justice, and religious reform. Historical speeches and organizational interpretations were used cautiously where they clarified rather than replaced formal decisions.

Secondary materials include historical studies of Muhammadiyah, research on internal liberal-conservative contestation, analyses of civil Islam and religious moderation, and scholarship on Indonesian populism, communism, social welfare, and digital polarization. Classic studies by Peacock (1978), Alfian (1989), Nakamura (2012), and Hefner (2000) provide institutional and political context. Later work by van Bruinessen (2013), Burhani (2013, 2018), Hadiz (2016), Menchik (2016), Lim (2017), Brown (2019), Mietzner (2020), and others contextualizes the conservative turn, Islamic populism, organizational compromise, and digitally mediated polarization.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, statements were coded according to the problem they identified: theological deviation, political domination, economic injustice, national disintegration, or informational disorder. Second, responses were classified as rejection, appropriation, translation, accommodation, or organizational regulation. Third, the institutional carrier of each response was identified, including doctrinal councils, congress decisions, cadre systems, social services, universities, media, and coalitions. Fourth, contradictions were examined between official norms and observed organizational diversity. This procedure produces an analytical history rather than a chronology of every political event.

Three safeguards were applied. The analysis does not treat right and left as morally or empirically equivalent; it distinguishes communist organizations from broader egalitarian thought; and it avoids inferring Muhammadiyah's official position from individual members. It also treats post-truth as a cross-ideological epistemic condition rather than a third point on a left-right spectrum. Finally, institutional size is not used as proof of ideological success. Schools and hospitals may embody social ethics, but their existence does not demonstrate that all members resist intolerance, economic hierarchy, or disinformation.

The study has limitations. Public documents privilege central leadership and may underrepresent local contestation. Historical evidence on Muhammadiyah members during the anti-communist violence is fragmented and morally sensitive; the article therefore avoids unsupported claims of organizational uniformity or direct command. Digital behavior is also difficult to attribute because affiliation is often informal and algorithmic networks cross organizational boundaries. The results identify institutional tendencies and unresolved risks, not a comprehensive measurement of member attitudes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identifies four recurring mechanisms in Muhammadiyah's response to global ideological currents. The first is theological boundary making: defining positions incompatible with tawhid, revelation, or human dignity. The second is normative translation: reformulating concerns such as justice, order, solidarity, or truth into an Islamic vocabulary. The third is institutional substitution: answering ideological promises through schools, hospitals, philanthropy, disaster response, and civic participation rather than revolutionary seizure or theocratic control. The fourth is organizational containment: using councils, cadre education, congresses, and official guidance to manage internal diversity. These mechanisms are visible across the historical periods summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Historical configuration of ideological pressures and organizational responses

Period	Dominant ideological pressure	Muhammadiyah response	Institutional expression
1912-1945	Colonial modernity, religious traditionalism, nationalism, early socialism	Selective adoption of modern organization; scriptural reform; social translation of al-Ma'un	Schools, women's organization, welfare, health assistance, associational discipline

Period	Dominant ideological pressure	Muhammadiyah response	Institutional expression
1945-1965	Nationalism, Islamic party politics, socialism, PKI communism	Participation in Muslim politics; rejection of atheistic communism; defense of religious public life	Masyumi-linked networks, education, preaching, expanding social institutions
1966-1998	State anti-communism and authoritarian developmentalism	Institutional expansion and political restraint; accommodation mixed with moral criticism	Khittah traditions, schools, universities, hospitals, professionalization
1998-2010	Democratic opening, liberal-conservative contestation, transnational Islamism	Organizational independence from parties; internal debate; renewed civic engagement	2002 Khittah, Majelis Tarjih, civil-society networks, public advocacy
2010-2016	Islamist mobilization, identity politics, inequality, democratic contestation	Progressive Islam and constitutional nationalism	Second-Century Statement; Dar al-'Ahd al-Shahadah; constitutional advocacy
2017-2022	Islamic populism, algorithmic polarization, hoaxes, pandemic disinformation	Information ethics, professional expertise, civic moderation, service-based legitimacy	Fikih Informasi, digital communication, universities, hospitals, crisis institutions, Risalah Islam Berkemajuan

1. Colonial Reform and the Refusal of Ideological Totality

Muhammadiyah emerged when colonial capitalism, bureaucratic modernization, Christian mission, Javanese court culture, Islamic traditionalism, and anti-colonial politics were simultaneously reshaping social life. Ahmad Dahlan's response was neither restorationist isolation nor secular assimilation. He accepted modern schools, schedules, accounting, associations, and empirical knowledge while grounding reform in Qur'anic interpretation. Peacock (1978) described this as purification, but purification was joined to social organization. Repeated teaching of Surat al-Ma'un connected worship to care for orphans, the poor, and the vulnerable, turning doctrine into an institutional program.

This early configuration already resisted ideological totality. Western organizational techniques were not accepted as a complete liberal worldview. Islamic tradition was not rejected as a historical residue, but subjected to scriptural and practical evaluation. Nationalist and socialist concerns with emancipation were not adopted through class revolution, but translated into education, health, women's organization, and disciplined philanthropy. Nakamura (2012) showed how this reform became embedded in local social relations rather than remaining an imported doctrine. Muhammadiyah's modernism was therefore selective from its beginning.

The organization's social program also complicated a simple right-left classification. Purification and scriptural authority could appear culturally conservative, yet education for girls, public health, associational equality, and assistance to the poor disrupted inherited hierarchy. Mulkhan's discussion of Marhaenis Muhammadiyah captured the existence of constituencies whose reformist Islam intersected with popular and egalitarian social identities (Mulkhan, 2010). The relevant distinction was not between

religion and social justice, but between an Islamic account of justice and materialist or authoritarian accounts that claimed exclusive explanatory power.

The formation of 'Aisyiyah further demonstrates why ideological labels must be disaggregated. Muhammadiyah did not derive women's public participation from a secular left program, yet it created schools, associations, welfare activities, and religious authority through which Muslim women entered public life. This reform could coexist with gendered interpretations of family and leadership that later feminists would criticize. The pattern is characteristic: an inherited norm was neither simply abolished nor preserved, but reorganized through education and association. The result was socially transformative without being identical to liberal or socialist feminism.

2. Encountering the Political Left: Rejection, Trauma, and Social Appropriation

Muhammadiyah's relation to the political left was shaped by theological disagreement, partisan competition, and national trauma. Marxist materialism and communist atheism contradicted Muhammadiyah's theocentric account of human agency. The PKI's political conflict with Islamic organizations, landowners, military actors, and competing parties deepened antagonism. Muhammadiyah figures were linked to Masyumi and other anti-communist networks, and the organization operated within a broader Muslim public that viewed communism as a threat to religion and social order (Alfian, 1989; Fealy & White, 2008).

Yet anti-communism should not be narrated as an uncomplicated moral achievement. The mass killings and detentions of 1965-1966 constituted grave human suffering, and later state narratives converted anti-communism into a durable instrument of political discipline. Scholarship on the period demonstrates the participation of multiple state and non-state actors and the difficulty of assigning collective responsibility to entire organizations (Cribb, 1990; Roosa, 2006; Robinson, 2018). A historically responsible account must distinguish doctrinal opposition to communism, political conflict with the PKI, individual participation, institutional decisions, and retrospective mythmaking.

The New Order institutionalized anti-communism while restricting autonomous political Islam. Muhammadiyah gained space to expand education, health, and social welfare but operated under authoritarian developmentalism. This arrangement reinforced an organizational preference for social service and nonparty engagement. It also created a potential blind spot: rejection of communist authoritarianism could coexist with accommodation to state authoritarianism. The ideological lesson was asymmetrical. Muhammadiyah preserved a strong memory of left-wing danger, while criticism of state capitalism, military violence, or technocratic domination was often more institutionally constrained.

Muhammadiyah nevertheless appropriated several problems emphasized by the left. Al-Ma'un theology framed poverty as a religious failure, not merely an individual misfortune. Schools and hospitals redistributed capabilities through organized services. Zakat, waqf, and philanthropy mobilized resources for public welfare. In the Reformasi period, constitutional litigation over water, oil, gas, and other strategic resources invoked Article 33 of the Constitution and criticized privatization of public goods. These initiatives did

not constitute Marxism, but they challenged exploitation, market absolutism, and elite capture through an Islamic-constitutional vocabulary.

The organization's response can therefore be described as anti-materialist but not anti-egalitarian. It rejected the reduction of religion to ideology, class to the sole engine of history, and revolutionary coercion to a legitimate political method. At the same time, it retained commitments to economic justice, cooperative action, welfare, and defense of marginalized groups. *Risalah Islam Berkemajuan* later articulated liberation, empowerment, justice, and public benefit as dimensions of progressive Islam (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2022). The social question was not surrendered to the secular left; it was reconstructed as an obligation of faith.

This synthesis remains incomplete. Muhammadiyah's charitable enterprises can alleviate deprivation without transforming structures that reproduce it. Professional institutions may charge fees beyond the reach of poorer groups, and philanthropic language may individualize problems rooted in labor relations, land distribution, or political economy. Moreover, anticommunist memory can be activated in contemporary politics to discredit reformers, minorities, or opponents with little connection to historical communism. An Islamic rejection of Marxist atheism does not justify conspiracy, historical denial, or the suppression of legitimate socioeconomic critique.

The expansion of market-oriented education and health care makes this limitation more urgent. Muhammadiyah institutions operate within regulatory and financial systems that reward scale, accreditation, fees, and competition. These mechanisms can strengthen professional quality, but they can also normalize inequality as an administrative necessity. A serious engagement with the political left therefore cannot stop at rejecting communism. It must examine wages, employment security, access, debt, land, environmental extraction, and the distribution of institutional benefits. *Islam Berkemajuan* loses critical force when progress is measured only through buildings, enrollment, or organizational assets.

3. Encountering the Religious Right: Shared Vocabulary, Contested Political Ends

Muhammadiyah's relation to the religious right is more porous than its relation to the communist left because both may use the language of purification, scriptural authority, Muslim solidarity, and moral reform. This proximity produces recurrent confusion between Muhammadiyah modernism and Salafi or Islamist projects. The overlap is real at the level of some religious practices and social concerns, but the organizational trajectories differ. Muhammadiyah institutionalized modern education, women's activism, professional medicine, collective *ijtihad*, and civic nationalism, whereas transnational Salafism and Islamist movements often organize authority, culture, and politics through different genealogies.

Internal contestation became especially visible in the Reformasi era. The collapse of authoritarian controls allowed liberal, conservative, Salafi-influenced, and Islamist currents to compete more openly inside the Muslim public. Burhani's study of the 45th Muhammadiyah Congress and later analysis of liberal and conservative discourses demonstrated that the organization's public face was disputed rather than predetermined (Burhani, 2005, 2013). Debates over pluralism, interfaith relations, gender, minority

rights, and political Islam revealed both the reach of conservative networks and the continuing presence of moderate-progressive intellectual traditions.

Right-wing populism introduced an additional challenge. Populist actors divide society into a virtuous people and a corrupt or threatening elite, then fuse religious identity with political grievance. In Indonesia, Islamist populism has mobilized narratives of Muslim victimhood, elite betrayal, foreign domination, and moral emergency (Hadiz, 2016; Mietzner, 2018; Mietzner et al., 2020). Such narratives can resonate with Muhammadiyah members without being official organizational doctrine. Dense mosque networks, alumni groups, digital channels, and partisan affiliations create multiple pathways through which majoritarian messages circulate.

Muhammadiyah's formal answer has been constitutional rather than theocratic. Negara Pancasila sebagai Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah defines Indonesia as a state of national covenant and a field for ethical witness (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2015). The formula closes the organizational question of replacing Pancasila with an Islamic state while refusing secular privatization of religion. Muslims are called to demonstrate Islamic values through justice, service, knowledge, and national advancement, not through monopolizing citizenship. The 2002 Khittah similarly protects organizational independence from political parties while affirming responsible participation.

This position rejects two forms of absolutism. It rejects secular exclusion that treats religion as illegitimate in public reasoning, and it rejects Islamist claims that a single movement possesses exclusive authority to define the state. The organization can defend Muslim interests, criticize policy, and articulate moral norms without turning non-Muslims into conditional citizens. Its institutional practice in education, health, disaster relief, and interreligious communities often supplies a practical basis for such civic inclusion, although practice remains uneven across locations (Hefner, 2000; Burhani, 2018; Brown, 2019).

The response to the religious right is nevertheless more ambivalent than formal documents suggest. Some members share anti-minority narratives, support majoritarian mobilizations, or interpret purification through rigid cultural opposition. Burhani (2018) found significant pluralism, liberalism, and Islamism within Muhammadiyah's religious outlook. The organization's decentralized structure protects local initiative but also limits central control. Official moderation may coexist with sermons, school cultures, or online communities that frame politics through suspicion and exclusion.

A further difficulty is that moderation can become merely positional. Describing Muhammadiyah as neither radical nor liberal does not explain the substantive rights, institutions, and evidence needed to govern disagreement. A credible response to the religious right requires more than loyalty to Pancasila. It requires protection of equal citizenship, rejection of political violence, procedural fairness, theological literacy about difference, and internal sanctions against hate speech. Without these mechanisms, moderation risks becoming a reputational label rather than an accountable practice.

Gender and minority questions reveal whether constitutional language has practical depth. Conservative mobilization frequently constructs women, religious minorities, sexual minorities, and heterodox Muslim groups as symbols of moral crisis.

Muhammadiyah's official ethics of dignity and social service can restrain such politics, but institutional responses have varied. The critical test is not whether leaders use the word moderation; it is whether schools prevent humiliation, hospitals serve without discrimination, preachers reject collective blame, and organizational forums permit reasoned disagreement. Civic nationalism becomes credible through these ordinary practices.

4. Post-Truth as an Epistemic Crisis

Post-truth presents a different kind of threat. It does not necessarily demand formal membership or doctrinal conversion. It reorganizes how people decide what is credible. Digital platforms reward speed, outrage, identity confirmation, and repetition, while weakening the gatekeeping authority of professional media and institutions. In Indonesia, algorithmic enclaves have enabled users to inhabit polarized publics in which political identity and religious belonging reinforce selective exposure (Lim, 2017). Tapsell (2017) further showed how concentrated media power and digital participation interact rather than simply replacing one another.

For Muhammadiyah, this condition is especially consequential because the organization has historically justified reform through literacy, reason, scientific knowledge, and collective deliberation. A rumor ecosystem that treats emotional congruence as evidence attacks the epistemic basis of *tajdid*. It can transform religious authority into viral performance, turn historical trauma into conspiracy, and undermine health guidance during crises. Post-truth therefore threatens not only public civility but also the institutional division of labor through which Majelis Tarjih, universities, hospitals, and professional associations produce authoritative judgments.

Fikih Informasi represents Muhammadiyah's most systematic response by 2022. Developed through collective *ijtihad* and published in 2019, it broadens *fiqh* beyond discrete legal rulings into a hierarchy of values, principles, and practical norms for information and social media (Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2019; Fauzi & Ayub, 2019). Its central commitments include truthfulness, trust, verification, avoidance of harm, protection of dignity, responsibility for transmission, and the obligation to examine sources before sharing claims.

The concept of *tabayyun* is crucial but insufficient if reduced to personal caution. Verification requires institutions: access to evidence, competent experts, transparent correction, accountable media, and procedures for disputes. Fikih Informasi is strongest when read as an institutional ethic rather than a list of etiquette rules. Muhammadiyah's universities, schools, media outlets, hospitals, and councils can create verification networks, teach source evaluation, publish corrections, and explain uncertainty. The organization possesses an infrastructure that many anti-hoax campaigns lack.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested this capacity. Medical misinformation, conspiracy theories, and vaccine hesitancy circulated through the same networks that distributed religious teaching and political messages. Muhammadiyah's health institutions and crisis structures generally supported scientific public-health measures, demonstrating the value of professional expertise within a faith-based organization. Yet the presence of organizational guidance could not eliminate skepticism among all members. The crisis

showed that trust depends on consistent communication, credible messengers, and the ability to acknowledge uncertainty without surrendering to false equivalence.

Post-truth also exposes a tension within religious communication. Moral certainty can motivate action, but it can be misused to close empirical inquiry. Religious actors may label disagreement as disloyalty, treat charismatic confidence as expertise, or circulate claims because they support a righteous cause. Muhammadiyah's own modernist heritage provides resources against this tendency: *ijtihad* acknowledges fallibility, *tarjih* compares evidence, and *burhani* reasoning recognizes empirical knowledge. However, these methods must be translated into accessible digital pedagogy rather than confined to scholarly councils.

The organizational risk is not simply that outsiders spread falsehoods about Muhammadiyah. Members and affiliated media can also reproduce unverified information when partisan identity becomes stronger than institutional discipline. Decentralization, informal WhatsApp groups, and the blurred boundary between personal and organizational speech make correction difficult. A post-truth response therefore requires internal accountability, not only external denunciation. The organization must clarify who speaks authoritatively, how errors are corrected, and how repeated disinformation affects leadership or institutional responsibility.

Digital communication also redistributes religious authority. A short video by a charismatic speaker may reach more members than a carefully reasoned *Tarjih* document. Platform metrics reward certainty, conflict, and personalization, whereas collective *ijtihad* is slow and qualified. Muhammadiyah's response must therefore consider format as well as content. Scholarly conclusions need accessible explanation, searchable archives, visual evidence, and rapid clarification during controversy. Otherwise, the most methodologically responsible voice may remain institutionally authoritative but publicly marginal.

5. A Framework of Selective Ideological Translation

Table 2 synthesizes Muhammadiyah's response as a process of selective ideological translation. The framework separates the legitimate problem identified by an ideological current from the absolutist answer that Muhammadiyah rejects. It then identifies the Islamic-organizational translation and its unresolved risk. This structure prevents two errors: assuming that every concern associated with an opponent is invalid, and assuming that borrowing a concern requires accepting the opponent's worldview.

The mechanism is visible in all three fields. From the left, Muhammadiyah can recognize exploitation and inequality without accepting atheistic materialism or revolutionary vanguardism. From the right, it can affirm religious morality and communal solidarity without accepting theocratic monopoly or majoritarian coercion. In the post-truth environment, it can value participatory communication and decentralized media without accepting the equivalence of evidence and rumor. Selective translation is therefore neither ideological eclecticism nor opportunistic centrism. It is a method of normative discrimination.

Institutional credibility determines whether translation succeeds. Al-Ma'un becomes more than rhetoric when services are accessible and socially accountable. Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah becomes more than nationalism when minorities receive equal civic protection. Fikih Informasi becomes more than digital etiquette when institutions correct their own errors and publish evidence. The recurring weakness is implementation. Muhammadiyah's central texts can formulate principled responses, but decentralized units vary in resources, leadership, and ideological orientation.

Selective translation also requires historical literacy. Ideological labels such as communist, liberal, radical, secular, and anti-Islam are frequently used as weapons rather than descriptions. Cadres who do not understand the histories and internal diversity of these traditions are vulnerable to manipulation. Ideological education should therefore compare primary texts, political practices, and social consequences. The goal is not to normalize every doctrine, but to make rejection intellectually accountable and to prevent opponents from being invented through rumor.

Table 2. Selective ideological translation in Muhammadiyah

Current	Legitimate concern recognized	Absolutism rejected	Muhammadiyah translation	Unresolved risk
Political left	Inequality, exploitation, concentration of resources, exclusion	Atheistic materialism, class reductionism, revolutionary coercion	Al-Ma'un, welfare institutions, philanthropy, cooperative action, constitutional defense of public goods	Charity without structural reform; anticommunist labeling used against legitimate criticism
Religious right	Moral formation, religious integrity, Muslim solidarity, resistance to domination	Theocratic monopoly, vigilantism, majoritarian citizenship, rigid anti-cultural politics	Tajdid, civic nationalism, Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah, collective ijtihad, service to the nation	Porous member networks; moderation reduced to branding; weak sanctions for exclusionary conduct
Post-truth	Participatory communication, distrust of unaccountable elites, need for accessible knowledge	Identity as evidence, viral repetition, conspiracy, equivalence of expertise and rumor	Tabayyun, Fikih Informasi, scientific expertise, source verification, correction and harm prevention	Decentralized digital speech; unclear authority; reluctance to correct internal misinformation

Discussion

The findings support five broader interpretations. First, Muhammadiyah's ideological identity is relational rather than fixed. It becomes visible through the boundaries it draws and the concerns it translates. Second, its responses are historically asymmetrical. Anticommunism became deeply institutionalized through national trauma and state ideology, while resistance to religious majoritarianism remained complicated by shared language and overlapping constituencies. Third, post-truth challenges the epistemic mechanisms of reform more directly than conventional ideological competition. Fourth, organizational service is a form of ideological argument, but only when its outcomes correspond to stated values. Fifth, internal heterogeneity is not an accidental deviation; it is a structural consequence of scale, decentralization, and long historical duration.

1. Beyond the Myth of a Fixed Center

Muhammadiyah is often praised as a middle force between secularism and Islamism, capitalism and socialism, or liberalism and conservatism. The metaphor is useful politically but weak analytically. A midpoint can shift whenever the extremes shift, and it provides no independent criterion of justice or truth. Muhammadiyah's strongest positions do not arise from averaging opponents. They arise from substantive commitments: tawhid, human dignity, knowledge, public benefit, constitutional covenant, social service, and reform.

This distinction matters because moderation can otherwise legitimize the status quo. A movement located between an exploitative market and revolutionary socialism may still fail the poor. A movement located between religious intolerance and secular exclusion may still tolerate discrimination. A movement located between conspiracy and official propaganda may still avoid evidence. Progressive Islam must therefore be evaluated by institutional consequences: who receives protection, how authority is checked, how claims are verified, and whether injustice is reduced.

2. The Asymmetry of Left and Right

Muhammadiyah's response to the left is marked by greater doctrinal distance and stronger historical stigma. This clarity protected the organization from materialist reductionism but also risked narrowing the field of legitimate socioeconomic criticism. The vocabulary of communism has often been used in Indonesia as a political accusation detached from actual Marxist organization. Muhammadiyah's commitment to truth and justice requires resistance to such inflation. Historical anti-communism should not license false allegations, collective punishment, or the erasure of victims.

The relation to the right is structurally closer and therefore harder to regulate. Purification, Islamic solidarity, and public morality can serve either civic reform or exclusivist mobilization. The difference lies in political theology, institutional methods, and treatment of others. Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah is significant because it converts Muslim commitment into constitutional performance rather than sovereign replacement. Yet the formula must be taught through cadre education and enacted through equal treatment. Otherwise, right-wing populism can appropriate Muhammadiyah symbols while bypassing organizational doctrine.

3. Post-Truth and the Limits of Doctrinal Guidance

Post-truth cannot be defeated by a fatwa alone. Individual ethics are necessary, but platform architecture, media incentives, political financing, and social distrust shape information behavior. Muhammadiyah's response must therefore operate at multiple levels. Schools should teach evidence evaluation; universities should communicate research publicly; hospitals should address health misinformation; mosques should distinguish preaching from factual expertise; media units should publish corrections; and leaders should avoid sharing claims whose emotional usefulness exceeds their evidentiary basis.

Organizational correction is especially important. Many institutions demand verification from citizens but do not disclose their own decision processes. An epistemically credible Muhammadiyah would treat correction as a sign of amanah rather than institutional weakness. It would record changes in guidance, identify uncertainty, disclose conflicts of interest, and separate official decisions from personal commentary. These practices would operationalize Fikih Informasi and align digital ethics with the methodological humility of ijtihad.

4. From Ideological Moderation to Institutional Resilience

The analysis suggests that ideological resilience depends on five capacities. The first is doctrinal clarity: official positions must define what is rejected and why. The second is interpretive depth: cadres must understand rival ideas rather than rely on labels. The third is distributive credibility: welfare institutions must serve marginalized groups and not merely reproduce prestige. The fourth is epistemic governance: expertise, evidence, and correction must be institutionally protected. The fifth is democratic accountability: decentralized units need standards, complaint channels, and transparent leadership.

These capacities can be integrated into cadre formation. Baitul Arqam and Darul Arqam should not teach ideology as memorized organizational loyalty alone. They should include political economy, histories of violence, constitutional rights, comparative ideology, digital verification, and case-based ethical reasoning. Such content would reduce vulnerability to both ideological simplification and post-truth manipulation. It would also allow cadres to distinguish criticism of capitalism from communism, concern with morality from authoritarianism, and religious conviction from unsupported factual claims.

Institutional resilience also requires dialogue with external knowledge. Muhammadiyah's collective ijtihad has historically incorporated medicine, astronomy, social science, and law. The same model can examine platform governance, political psychology, algorithmic amplification, and economic inequality. Openness to expertise does not secularize the organization; it enables religious norms to address the actual mechanisms of contemporary harm. The alternative is moral language detached from causal understanding.

A resilient organization must also preserve principled internal dissent. Consensus is valuable for coordinated action, but excessive pressure for harmony can conceal ideological capture or policy failure. Muhammadiyah's collegial tradition should allow

minority opinions, documented objections, and periodic review of decisions. This is particularly important when leaders have partisan affiliations or when an issue divides generations and professional groups. Internal pluralism is not evidence that the organization lacks ideology; governed properly, it is a mechanism through which ideology remains responsive rather than dogmatic.

5. Implications and Research Agenda

Future research should move beyond central documents and map ideological variation across provinces, schools, universities, mosques, hospitals, and autonomous organizations. Survey research can examine whether members recognize official positions on Pancasila, minority citizenship, economic justice, and information ethics. Digital network analysis can identify how Muhammadiyah-affiliated accounts interact with Islamist, nationalist, progressive, or conspiratorial ecosystems. Ethnography can reveal how cadres negotiate contradictory authorities in daily practice.

Research must also evaluate outcomes. Claims that Muhammadiyah represents progressive Islam should be tested against access to education and health, treatment of minorities, gender equality, labor practices, environmental responsibility, and correction of misinformation. The organization has sufficient institutional scale to generate comparative data. Such evaluation would not diminish its historical achievements; it would make ideological claims accountable to the social transformations they promise.

Finally, scholarship should resist importing European left-right categories without translation. Indonesian ideological formations combine religion, nationalism, class, ethnicity, colonial memory, and state violence in distinctive ways. The categories remain useful when defined as analytical families rather than rigid party positions. Muhammadiyah itself demonstrates why: it can be theologically conservative, organizationally modern, socially reformist, economically mixed, constitutionally nationalist, and internally plural at the same time.

Comparative work could examine how these combinations differ across Muslim organizations in Southeast Asia. The relevant comparison is not which movement is most moderate, but how organizations govern ideological diversity, finance social institutions, authorize expertise, and respond to misinformation. Muhammadiyah offers an unusually rich case because its century-long institutional history links theology to everyday administration. Its success or failure can therefore be observed not only in public declarations but also in classrooms, payrolls, clinics, relief operations, and digital communication

CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah's response to global ideological currents cannot be reduced to a stable centrist identity. Across its history, the organization has practiced selective ideological translation. It rejected communist atheism, class reductionism, and revolutionary absolutism while retaining egalitarian and anti-exploitative concerns through *al-Ma'un*, welfare institutions, philanthropy, and constitutional advocacy. It resisted Islamist monopoly, vigilantism, and majoritarian state projects while maintaining scriptural

reform, Muslim solidarity, and public morality within the constitutional framework of Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah. Against post-truth, it articulated an ethic of tabayyun, evidence, expertise, responsibility, and harm prevention through Fikih Informasi.

These responses are not equally consolidated. Anticommunism is deeply embedded in national and organizational memory, sometimes beyond careful historical judgment. The boundary with the religious right is more porous because of shared vocabularies and overlapping constituencies. Post-truth is the most diffuse challenge because it operates through everyday communication rather than formal ideological membership. Central guidance cannot automatically govern decentralized digital publics.

Muhammadiyah's future credibility therefore depends on institutionalizing its principles. Progressive Islam requires accessible social services, protection of equal citizenship, serious analysis of structural inequality, transparent use of expertise, and willingness to correct error. The organization is most resilient not when it claims to stand between ideological extremes, but when it demonstrates that revelation, reason, justice, and truthful communication can produce self-correcting institutions.

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