

EDUCATION AND POLITICAL DA'WAH IN THE THOUGHT OF KH. ABDURRAHMAN WAHID: AN ANALYSIS OF CITIZENSHIP VALUES AND PLURALISM

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Abstract (in English). This study investigates the educational and political da'wah thought of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), emphasizing the intertwined values of citizenship and pluralism within the Indonesian Islamic context. As a renowned Muslim intellectual, former President, and social reformer, Gus Dur envisioned Islam as a moral force that upholds democracy, respects human rights, and nurtures interfaith harmony. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach, this research draws upon an extensive literature review and content analysis of Gus Dur's writings, speeches, and public interventions. The study reveals that Gus Dur's da'wah was not limited to ritualistic preaching but extended into socio-political advocacy rooted in inclusive education. His concept of "civic Islam" sought to transcend ethnic, religious, and ideological boundaries, emphasizing universal values such as justice, tolerance, and human dignity. He actively challenged sectarianism and authoritarianism, positioning Islam as compatible with democratic governance and civil society. Furthermore, Gus Dur's political da'wah prioritized the protection of minority rights and the preservation of national unity, framing diversity as a divine gift rather than a threat. These insights contribute significantly to contemporary discourses on Islamic education, da'wah strategies, and the role of religion in multicultural societies. The study concludes that Gus Dur's legacy offers a transformative model for integrating religious, civic, and pluralist values in the Muslim world.

Keywords: Gus Dur, Islamic Political Education, Da'wah, Citizenship

Abstrak (in Bahasa). Penelitian ini mengkaji pemikiran dakwah pendidikan dan politik KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) dengan menitikberatkan pada nilai-nilai kewargaan dan pluralisme dalam konteks Islam di Indonesia. Sebagai seorang intelektual Muslim terkemuka, mantan Presiden, sekaligus reformis sosial, Gus Dur memandang Islam sebagai kekuatan moral yang menjunjung tinggi demokrasi, hak asasi manusia, serta keharmonisan antarumat beragama. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif, penelitian ini didasarkan pada studi literatur dan analisis isi terhadap karya tulis, pidato, serta pernyataan publik Gus Dur. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dakwah Gus Dur tidak terbatas pada aspek ritual semata, melainkan mencakup advokasi sosial-politik yang berakar pada pendidikan inklusif. Konsep "Islam kewargaan" yang ia gagas bertujuan melampaui batas-batas etnis,



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agama, dan ideologi, dengan menekankan nilai-nilai universal seperti keadilan, toleransi, dan martabat manusia. Gus Dur secara aktif menentang sektarianisme dan otoritarianisme, serta menempatkan Islam sebagai agama yang sejalan dengan pemerintahan demokratis dan masyarakat sipil. Dakwah politiknya juga menekankan perlindungan terhadap kelompok minoritas dan pentingnya menjaga persatuan nasional, dengan memandang keberagaman sebagai anugerah ilahi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemikiran Gus Dur menawarkan model transformatif dalam mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai keagamaan, kewargaan, dan pluralisme dalam wacana Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Gus Dur, Pendidikan Politik Islam, Da'wah, Kewargaan

A. INTRODUCTION

The issue of religious pluralism is not merely an intellectual or elite discourse, but a social reality that continues to challenge the life of the Indonesian nation-state. In a highly pluralistic society with more than 1,300 ethnic groups and diverse religions and beliefs, pluralism becomes a test of civilization: whether it can be harnessed as a strength or turns into a source of conflict. In this regard, pluralism must extend beyond being recognized as a sociological reality (plurality); it requires an active commitment to uphold equality, tolerance, and cooperation across diverse identities. This is precisely what KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)¹ fought for throughout his life, through education, da'wah, and political action².

Gus Dur did not perceive pluralism solely as a theological accommodation of differences, but as a social ethic that mandates the protection of minorities and the defense of the civil rights of all citizens. In the Indonesian context, pluralism becomes a prerequisite for the realization of substantive democracy. While certain groups instrumentalize religion as a tool of exclusion, Gus Dur positioned religion as a bridge to humanity³. He viewed diversity as *sunnatullah*, a divine law to be embraced with wisdom, not resisted through enforced homogeneity⁴. His writings consistently emphasized inclusivity, interfaith dialogue, and commitment to national values within a liberating and peaceful Islam⁵.

Gus Dur's vision of pluralism was embedded in his broader conception of *Islam Nusantara*, a culturally grounded, adaptive, and democracy-friendly Islam. In this framework, political da'wah and Islamic education are not instruments for the establishment of a religious state, but rather vehicles for nurturing a just and civilized civil society⁶. Gus Dur integrated civic ethics, popular theology, and

¹ Abdurrahman Wahid, "Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi," (*No Title*), 2006.

² Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President* (University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

³ Neng Nurya Safitri, "Gus Dur's Philosophical Approach to Pluralism: Insights for Social Harmony in Indonesia," *Islamic Thought Review* 2, no. 2 (2024): 129–39.

⁴ Ahmad Suaedy, *Gus Dur: Islam Nusantara & Kewarganegaraan Bineka* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2018).

⁵ Sunarto et al., *MUSIK DI INDONESIA: Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Kontemporer*, ed. Sumanto Al Qurtuby & Tedi Kholiludin, 1st ed. (Semarang: Elsa Press, 2024).

⁶ Munawar Ahmad, *Ijtihad Politik Gus Dur; Analisis Wacana Kritis* (Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2010).

political courage. The uniqueness of his approach lies in its fusion of critical thought, local wisdom, and social praxis⁷.

While various studies have addressed religious pluralism in Gus Dur's thought, many remain limited to normative dimensions or responses to intolerance. This study seeks to expand that scope by connecting Gus Dur's pluralism with the notion of citizenship, the active participation of citizens in sociopolitical life⁸. Citizenship here includes not only formal mechanisms like elections but also social movements, interfaith initiatives, and solidarity with marginalized communities⁹.

Based on this premise, the research poses the following questions: (1) What is the philosophical and sociological foundation of Gus Dur's pluralist thought? (2) How is political education and da'wah practiced to internalize pluralist values? (3) To what extent does this thought influence civic engagement in Indonesian society?

Theoretically, this study adopts a sociocultural approach, emphasizing the intersection between religion, state, and civil society. Methodologically, it employs literature analysis and hermeneutical interpretation of Gus Dur's works and the historical-social context of his activism. Data sources include books, media writings, policy documents, and scholarly journals¹⁰. In this context, the novelty of this study lies not merely in reinterpreting Gus Dur's ideas, but in synthesizing pluralism and civic engagement as dual pillars of political da'wah grounded in Islamic education¹¹. Amidst rising identity politics and declining trust in democratic institutions, Gus Dur's thought offers a timely and transformative paradigm, one that extends beyond discourse into actionable sociopolitical ethics.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using library research as the primary method. This approach is suitable for exploring the thoughts of prominent figures, particularly KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), whose ideas on political da'wah and Islamic education are deeply rooted in ethical, historical, and sociocultural dimensions. The focus of the study is to explore the concepts, meaning, and philosophical construction of Gus Dur's ideas concerning pluralism, civic values, and inclusive Islamic preaching.

Data collection was conducted through the review of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include Gus Dur's own works, such as *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita*¹², *Gus Dur di Mata Santri*¹³, and his documented speeches in *A Dialogue of Civilizations for Tolerance and Peace*, co-authored

⁷ Azyumardi Azra, *Dinamika Politik NU Era Presiden Gusdur* (Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2020).

⁸ Eva Sofia Sari and Wely Dozan, "Konsep Pluralisme Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia Dalam Perspektif Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)," *TA'LIMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2021): 21–39.

⁹ Karen Armstrong, *Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (HarperCollins, 2000).

¹⁰ K H Daisaku Ikeda, *Dialog Peradaban Untuk Toleransi Dan Perdamaian* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2013).

¹¹ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin Dan Peradaban* (Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina Jakarta, 1992).

¹² Wahid, "Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi."

¹³ Sunarto et al., *MUSIK DI INDONESIA: Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Kontemporer*.

with Daisaku Ikeda¹⁴. Meanwhile, secondary sources consist of interpretative and analytical works on Gus Dur's life and thought, including *Biografi Gus Dur: The Authorized Biography of Abdurrahman Wahid* by Greg Barton¹⁵, and *Gus Dur: Islam Nusantara dan Kewargaan dalam Keragaman* by Ahmad Suaedy¹⁶.

The data were analyzed using content analysis and textual hermeneutics. Content analysis was applied to identify key themes, core concepts, and the central messages from the texts. Hermeneutics was employed to interpret the contextual meanings of Gus Dur's ideas, taking into account the socio-political and historical settings in which they emerged.

The analysis involved the following steps:

1. Identification and classification of relevant literature;
2. Thematic categorization based on pluralism, citizenship, and Islamic da'wah;
3. Interpretation of texts through contextual and ethical lenses;
4. Synthesis of a conceptual model reflecting Gus Dur's transformative political da'wah.

To ensure data validity, the study applied source triangulation by comparing various primary and secondary references. This allowed the researcher to build a comprehensive and contextual understanding of Gus Dur's intellectual contributions.

C. RESULTS

The exploration of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid's thought on education and political da'wah reveals a multidimensional framework that is rooted in ethical pluralism, civic responsibility, and inclusive Islamic values. As previously discussed in the introduction, Gus Dur did not separate religion from the dynamics of social and political life; rather, he placed Islam as a transformative moral force within the public sphere. His intellectual legacy presents a unique integration of theology, democracy, and cultural rootedness that continues to resonate in Indonesia's plural society.

Through qualitative content analysis and hermeneutical reading of selected works, *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita*¹⁷, *Gus Dur di Mata Santri*¹⁸, and *A Dialogue of Civilizations for Tolerance and Peace*¹⁹ this study has extracted key conceptual themes that reflect the essence of Gus Dur's political da'wah. These findings are also supported and contextualized through interpretive engagement with secondary sources such as Greg Barton's biography (2002) and the civic engagement framework elaborated by Ahmad Suaedy (2011).

The findings are structured into five thematic subchapters, each representing an axis of Gus Dur's educational-political da'wah model. The first and most significant is the concept of "*Islam Kewargaan*" (*Civic Islam*), which

¹⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, *Dialog Peradaban Untuk Toleransi Dan Perdamaian*.

¹⁵ Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*.

¹⁶ Suaedy, *Gus Dur: Islam Nusantara & Kewarganegaraan Bineka*.

¹⁷ Wahid, "Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi."

¹⁸ M Syamsul Huda, "Studi Pemikiran Gus Dur Tentang Perekonomian Kelautan 1999-20009" (UNUSIA, 2018).

¹⁹ Daisaku Ikeda, *Dialog Peradaban Untuk Toleransi Dan Perdamaian*.

serves not only as the foundation of his political strategy but also as the novelty of this research. Each thematic discussion is accompanied by a diagram that visualizes the core insight and interrelation between Islamic values, political ethics, and social inclusion.

1. The Concept of Civic Islam as an Ethical Political Foundation

The concept of *Civic Islam (Islam Kewargaan)* represents one of the most significant contributions in the thought of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) in formulating the direction of political da'wah and Islamic education within a pluralistic society. Distinct from the political Islam model that emphasizes the formal application of sharia law within the state apparatus, Civic Islam does not aim to establish Islam as a state ideology. On the contrary, it positions Islam as a moral resource that animates public life with ethical, inclusive, and democratic values. For Gus Dur, religion should not be reduced to a legalistic mechanism of governance but should instead serve as a civilizational force that promotes human dignity, equality, and social justice (Wahid, 2006).

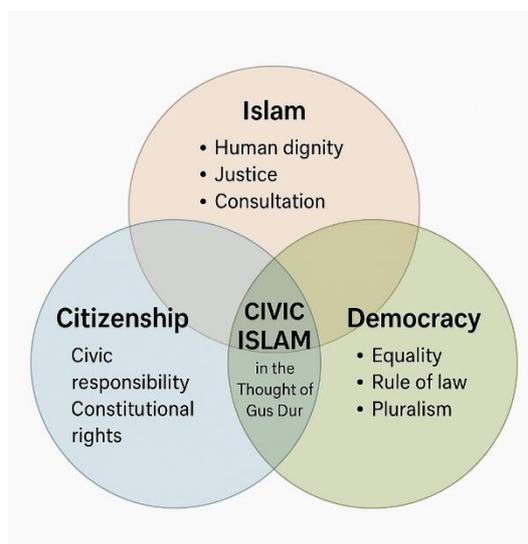


Figure 1. Venn Diagram of Civic Islam in Gus Dur's Thought

Civic Islam asserts that being a Muslim is not limited to performing religious rituals, but also entails being an active citizen in social and political spheres. In Gus Dur's perspective, citizenship is a political identity that stands equally among all members of society, not subordinate to religious affiliation. Hence, both Muslims and non-Muslims have the same right to state protection and share equal responsibilities in maintaining constitutional and social cohesion. Civic Islam, therefore, does not merely speak about rights, but also about collective responsibilities in shaping a dignified society where religion informs public ethics rather than political domination²⁰.

Normatively, Civic Islam draws upon core Islamic values such as *karamah insaniyah* (human dignity), *'adalah* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *syura*

²⁰ Ibid.

(consultation). Gus Dur believed these principles were not only compatible with modern democratic values such as human rights, pluralism, and the rule of law, but also able to provide their ethical grounding. In this sense, Islam does not contradict democracy but strengthens it, especially when interpreted through the lens of *maqashid al-shariah*, the higher objectives of Islamic law, which include the protection of religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage²¹.

Civic Islam also emerged as a response to the politicization of religion and the growing exclusivism of identity in the public sphere. Gus Dur realized that when religion is instrumentalized for power, universal values such as justice and fraternity are often sacrificed for short-term political interests. He rejected the use of Islam as a divisive identity tool and instead proposed a form of religiosity that engages in national dialogue. Through Civic Islam, Gus Dur sought to bridge the gap between Islamic identity and civic consciousness so that Muslims could become agents of peace and justice rather than sources of identity conflict²².

In practice, Gus Dur embodied Civic Islam through various roles religious leader, civil society figure, and President of the Republic of Indonesia. He advocated for the civil rights of marginalized groups such as the Chinese-Indonesian community, the Ahmadiyya sect, and indigenous peoples who were structurally excluded. He also repealed discriminatory regulations and opened broader spaces for public participation. These were not merely political gestures but practical manifestations of the values embedded in Civic Islam: justice, equality, and the celebration of diversity²³.

Moreover, the concept is an extension of the intellectual tradition of *Islam Nusantara*, a culturally grounded and contextually adaptive form of Islam that embraces local wisdom and modernity. In this framework, Gus Dur deliberately distanced himself from transnational Islamic movements that often carried puritanical and legalistic tendencies. Instead, he adopted a *wasathiyah* (*moderate*) path that emphasized cultural context and moral substance. Civic Islam thus becomes an articulation of Islam that is deeply rooted in Indonesian soil while remaining globally relevant in contemporary discussions on democracy and civil rights²⁴.

This study highlights Civic Islam as the novelty of the research, given its profound relevance in the contemporary sociopolitical context—especially in facing the crisis of public trust in democracy, the rise of identity politics, and increasing religious intolerance. Gus Dur’s thought offers an alternative approach that goes beyond theological assertion to address the sociopolitical dimensions of Islam as an engaged and participatory faith tradition. Islam is no longer confined to vertical rituals between humans and God but extends to horizontal relationships among citizens in a plural society²⁵.

Civic Islam thus provides the conceptual foundation for a political da’wah strategy that is not hegemonic, but dialogical and transformative. This strategy is

²¹ Suaedy, *Gus Dur: Islam Nusantara & Kewarganegaraan Bineka*.

²² Huda, “Studi Pemikiran Gus Dur Tentang Perekonomian Kelautan 1999-20009.”

²³ Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*.

²⁴ Syaiful Arif, *Gus Dur Dan Ilmu Sosial Transformatif* (Penerbit Koekoesan, 2009).

²⁵ Syahrul Faizin, “Menjaga Relevansi Lektur Klasik Dan Kontemporer Islam Di Tengah Kemajuan Teknologi Dan Transformasi Sosial,” *Kayumanis* 1, no. 1 (2024): 17–23.

not only relevant for Indonesia but also for the broader Muslim world seeking a balanced framework between religion and the modern state. This research positions Civic Islam as a strategic axis for building a model of da'wah based on civic ethics and pluralism one that does not dilute Islamic values, but reaffirms them in the service of social justice and inclusive citizenship.

2. Advocacy for Minorities and Resistance to Authoritarianism

One of the most prominent aspects of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur) intellectual and political engagement was his unwavering defense of minority groups and his consistent opposition to authoritarianism. In a sociopolitical context marked by structural discrimination, Gus Dur emerged as a moral leader who advocated for the rights of citizens marginalized based on ethnicity, religion, or belief. For Gus Dur, protecting minorities was not merely a matter of human rights it was a theological imperative rooted in Islamic teachings and a fundamental principle in a functioning democratic state²⁶.

As early as the 1990s, Gus Dur had actively defended the Chinese-Indonesian community, which at the time remained constrained by discriminatory policies left over from the New Order regime. He opposed the prohibition of Chinese cultural expressions, including Lunar New Year celebrations and the public use of Chinese script. For Gus Dur, culture was not a threat but a source of national richness that should be respected within the spirit of pluralism. He argued that *“protecting ethnic cultures means strengthening national civility”*²⁷. During his presidency, he revoked Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967, which had restricted Chinese cultural expression in Indonesia for decades. This marked a turning point in the relationship between the state and ethnic minorities²⁸.

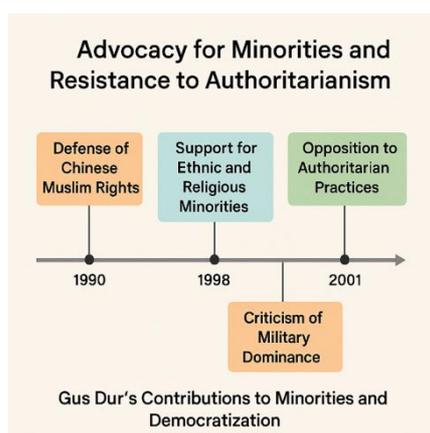


Figure 2. Timeline of Gus Dur's Advocacy for Minorities and Resistance to Authoritarianism (1990–2004).

²⁶ Wahid, "Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi."

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*.

Gus Dur's inclusive stance extended beyond ethnicity to include religious diversity. He rejected religious exclusivism and believed that the state should not align with any singular religious interpretation. In cases where local belief systems, traditional spiritual practices, or minority religious sects were pressured or delegitimized, Gus Dur defended their constitutional rights as citizens. He asserted that "*a just state does not impose a singular truth but one that guarantees the space for dialogue among diverse convictions*"²⁹.

In this regard, Gus Dur embodied a model of Islam that transcended sectarianism. He did not claim a theological monopoly but opened a dialogical space for pluralistic interpretations of religion. His approach aligned with *maqāṣid al-shar'ah*, the higher objectives of Islamic law, which emphasize the protection of life, intellect, belief, property, and dignity. His advocacy for minorities was therefore not a political compromise, but a theological expression of Islamic ethics that placed humanity at the center³⁰.

In addition to defending minorities, Gus Dur was a fierce critic of authoritarianism. During the New Order, he frequently spoke out against centralized power and repression. While many religious elites aligned themselves with the ruling regime or remained silent, Gus Dur openly challenged anti-democratic policies. One of the most critical moments was his support for the 1998 reform movement, which called for systemic changes in Indonesia's political structure. As President, Gus Dur initiated a series of policies aimed at decentralization, civilian supremacy over the military, and the expansion of civic participation. He empowered civil society through policies supporting religious organizations, press freedom, and pluralist values. However, these efforts faced resistance from entrenched military and bureaucratic interests. The friction between reformist ideals and the status quo ultimately contributed to his impeachment³¹.

Nonetheless, Gus Dur's resistance to authoritarianism did not end with his presidency. He continued to be a moral voice in post-reform Indonesia, criticizing deviations from democratic ideals, including military dominance and religious intolerance. He repeatedly emphasized that democracy should not be understood merely as a procedural mechanism but as a value-based system rooted in ethics, freedom, and constitutionalism³².

Through his actions and commitments, Gus Dur demonstrated that Islam and democracy need not be in conflict. Through the framework of Civic Islam and his advocacy for minorities, he proved that religion can serve as a moral compass for confronting injustice and correcting the abuses of power. His approach stands as a model for how religious values can strengthen, rather than undermine, democratic governance. Thus, this finding reinforces the position that Gus Dur's political *da'wah* was grounded in solidarity with the marginalized and the consolidation of civil institutions. He represented a religious leader who refused to be confined by ritual formalism and instead used his faith as a means to uphold

²⁹ Huda, "Studi Pemikiran Gus Dur Tentang Perekonomian Kelautan 1999-20009."

³⁰ Suaedy, *Gus Dur: Islam Nusantara & Kewarganegaraan Bineka*.

³¹ Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President*.

³² Nanda Khairiyah and Ali Abdillah, "Peradaban Islam Nusantara Mewarnai Corak Keislaman Di Asia Tenggara," *Alhamra Jurnal Studi Islam*, 2023, 157–69.

humanity and justice. In today’s climate, where religious populism and neo-authoritarianism are on the rise, Gus Dur’s legacy offers a timeless ethical model for inclusive and transformative engagement in the public sphere.

3. Islam and the Democratic State: A Synergistic Relationship

One of the most enduring contributions of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) to Islamic political thought is his assertion that Islam and democracy are not only compatible but fundamentally synergistic. This perspective challenges the long-standing dichotomy that pits religious identity against democratic institutions. Instead of viewing democracy as a Western import or as antithetical to Islamic teachings, Gus Dur advanced the idea that the core values of Islamic justice (*keadilan*), consultation (*syura*), and compassion (*rahmah*) could enrich and sustain democratic life in Indonesia³³.

Matrix of Synergistic Relationship between Islamic Values and Democratic Principles

	Voting Rights	Human Rights	
		Pluralism	Pluralism
Justice (Keadilan)	Ensuring fair electoral processes	Upholding dignity and equality	Guaranteeing freedom of belief
Consultation (Syura)	Fostering participatory governance	Promoting civic engagement	Strengthening social harmony
Compassion (Rahmah)	Advancing inclusive representation	Protecting marginalized groups	Encouraging peaceful coexistence

Figure 3. Matrix of Synergistic Relationship between Islamic Values and Democratic Principles

In Gus Dur’s framework, democracy is not merely a procedural system of elections, but a moral and ethical project grounded in inclusivity, accountability, and respect for human dignity. For him, the Islamic principle of justice calls for fair electoral processes, protection of rights, and the eradication of structural inequalities. Likewise, the concept of *syura* (consultation) resonates with participatory governance, where decision-making involves dialogue, consent, and mutual respect among citizens. Compassion (*rahmah*), meanwhile, mandates inclusive representation and the protection of the marginalized principles deeply aligned with modern human rights discourse³⁴.

³³ Wahid, “Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi.”

³⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, *Dialog Peradaban Untuk Toleransi Dan Perdamaian*.

This integrative view stands in contrast to formalist approaches that seek to codify Islamic law within state legislation. Gus Dur's position did not promote the institutionalization of Islam as a political system, but rather its function as an ethical force that informs and elevates public policy. In this way, the moral imperatives of Islam become part of a civic culture that values pluralism, tolerance, and coexistence, qualities essential to democratic sustainability. He famously argued that "*democracy needs religion to remain humane, and religion needs democracy to stay relevant*"³⁵.

Gus Dur's thought was not developed in a vacuum. He drew upon both classical Islamic sources and modern political philosophy to propose a contextualized vision of Islam for Indonesia's multiethnic, multireligious society. His idea of "Islam Nusantara," an Indonesian Islam rooted in local culture, became a cultural-theological response to the rigid, exclusivist tendencies of some transnational Islamic ideologies. For Gus Dur, Indonesia's rich traditions of *gotong royong* (cooperation), tolerance, and communal autonomy provided fertile ground for a form of Islam that could strengthen democratic institutions, not undermine them³⁶.

His presidency (1999–2001) was a living testament to this belief. Gus Dur implemented various pluralist and reformist policies, including the restoration of minority rights, decentralization, and the promotion of civil liberties. These actions were not only political moves but expressions of his deep conviction that Islamic values must be translated into inclusive and ethical governance. Even when faced with resistance from conservative groups and elements of the military, Gus Dur remained committed to the idea that democracy was the most just political system for a pluralistic society.

The synergy between Islam and democracy in Gus Dur's vision can be further understood through a matrix of values and principles. As illustrated in the diagram, Islamic values such as justice, consultation, and compassion intersect with democratic principles like voting rights, human rights, and pluralism. This intersection forms the foundation of what can be called "*Islamic democratic ethics*," a normative framework that does not seek to dominate the state with religious dogma but to elevate public life through shared ethical commitments³⁷.

Importantly, Gus Dur's view was not utopian. He was aware of the institutional and cultural challenges that hinder democratic consolidation in Muslim-majority societies. Nevertheless, he believed that the way forward was not through sectarian politics or ideological purification, but through dialogue, inclusivity, and ethical integrity. He reminded Muslims that their role in a democratic society was not to impose theology but to contribute moral clarity and social responsibility.

In a global context where religion is often politicized for exclusionary or authoritarian ends, Gus Dur's vision offers a powerful alternative. It suggests that religious identity, when grounded in compassion and justice, can serve the public good without threatening democratic norms. His legacy thus calls for a

³⁵ Huda, "Studi Pemikiran Gus Dur Tentang Perekonomian Kelautan 1999-20009."

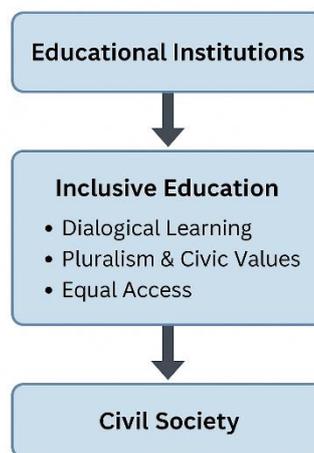
³⁶ Suaedy, *Gus Dur: Islam Nusantara & Kewarganegaraan Bineka*.

³⁷ Khairiyah and Abdillah, "Peradaban Islam Nusantara Mewarnai Corak Keislaman Di Asia Tenggara."

reinterpretation of Islamic political engagement—not as a quest for domination, but as a commitment to ethical pluralism.

4. Model of Inclusive Education in Gus Dur's Da'wah: From Educational Institutions to Civil Society

The notion of inclusive education occupies a central position in the political da'wah strategy of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). Far from being a mere channel of doctrinal transmission, education in Gus Dur's framework is a cultural and political project, one that empowers individuals, fosters pluralist values, and equips citizens with the intellectual and moral tools to participate in democratic life. This educational vision not only underpins his theological thought but also forms the operational foundation of his transformative political activism.



Model of Inclusive Education in Gus Dur's Da'wah

Figure 4. *Model of Inclusive Education in Gus Dur's Da'wah: From Educational Institutions to Civil Society*

The diagram titled “*Model of Inclusive Education in Gus Dur's Da'wah: From Educational Institutions to Civil Society*” illustrates the conceptual progression of education as envisioned by Gus Dur. It begins with the foundational role of educational institutions, transitions through the principles of inclusive education, and culminates in the formation of a vibrant and ethical civil society. Each phase represents a crucial stage in cultivating a generation capable of embodying religious values while responsibly engaging in the public sphere.

The first stage, educational institutions, refers broadly to both formal and informal settings—schools, pesantren, universities, and community-based learning centers. Gus Dur viewed these institutions not merely as spaces to deliver religious content but as critical arenas for cultivating civic ethics, critical thinking, and dialogical awareness. While rooted in religious tradition, these institutions must open themselves to sociopolitical realities and embrace

pedagogical reforms that prioritize democratic values. For Gus Dur, education that fails to develop a sense of social justice and public responsibility is an incomplete education. The second stage introduces the idea of inclusive education as the transformative core of Gus Dur's vision. This model is constructed upon three interlinked principles:

- a. **Dialogical Learning** – Emphasizing interactive and reflective pedagogy, where students are not passive recipients but active agents in knowledge construction. This approach challenges authoritarian teaching models and fosters the ability to question, interpret, and engage across differences.
- b. **Mainstreaming Pluralism and Civic Values** – Education must prepare learners to navigate and respect religious, ethnic, and ideological diversity. This includes teaching values such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), equality (*musawah*), and mutual responsibility. For Gus Dur, pluralism is not an obstacle but the very condition of an ethical society.
- c. **Equal Access to Education** – Inclusive education also demands the removal of structural barriers that limit participation. This includes advocating for the rights of marginalized communities—such as religious minorities, indigenous peoples, women, and persons with disabilities—to access and thrive within the educational system.

Through these principles, education becomes a vehicle not only for individual upliftment but also for collective transformation. It creates a generation that is both theologically grounded and civically engaged.

The final stage in the diagram is the emergence of civil society, which, in Gus Dur's thought, represents the highest expression of ethical citizenship. A robust civil society consists of empowered citizens who actively contribute to the preservation of public ethics, the defense of minority rights, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Gus Dur rejected the idea that religion should dominate the state, but he strongly believed that religion must inform public life with compassion, justice, and moral clarity.

The link between inclusive education and civil society is not incidental. Gus Dur believed that a pluralist and democratic society could not be sustained without an educational system that nurtures empathy, critical consciousness, and solidarity. Hence, he argued for a paradigm of Islamic education that is deeply embedded in local culture (*Islam Nusantara*), respectful of human rights, and open to universal values.

By promoting inclusive education, Gus Dur not only redefined the role of educators and religious institutions but also articulated a broader political vision in which Islam serves as a force for liberation rather than domination. His model breaks away from rigid and exclusivist interpretations of religion and instead offers a framework for da'wah that is ethically rooted, socially engaged, and future-oriented.

In today's context marked by polarization, identity-based conflicts, and erosion of public trust in democratic institutions, this model offers profound relevance. It reminds us that education is not a neutral endeavor. It is a battleground of values, and in Gus Dur's case, a strategic axis of political da'wah that fosters inclusive citizenship, defends pluralism, and builds a moral civil society.

Thus, the diagram serves not merely as a conceptual map but as a normative model for future research and praxis. It can inspire further studies on Islamic education reform, da'wah strategies, and the integration of civic ethics in religious curricula across diverse Muslim societies. It also offers practical implications for educators, policymakers, and religious leaders who seek to uphold democracy not despite religion, but through it.

5. Thematic Synthesis of Findings: Toward an Ethical and Civic-Oriented Islamic Da'wah Strategy

This study synthesizes the five major findings derived from the content analysis and contextual hermeneutics of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur's) educational and political thought. These findings, spanning the concepts of Civic Islam, minority advocacy, anti-authoritarian resistance, Islamic-democratic synergy, and inclusive education, are not isolated elements but interconnected components of a comprehensive and transformative da'wah paradigm. Together, they form the foundation for a contemporary Islamic da'wah strategy that is both ethically grounded and civically engaged.

The synthesis presented here is not merely descriptive; it constructs a strategic model that positions Islam as a moral force in the public sphere, one that upholds justice, pluralism, and human dignity, rather than seeking religious domination or ideological supremacy.

Thematic Findings	Strategic Implications
Civic Islam	Islam as a source of ethical citizenship rather than identity politics
Advocacy for Minorities & Resistance to Authoritarianism	Da'wah as a defense of the oppressed and a challenge to autocratic power
Islam & Democracy	Bridging Islamic values—justice, <i>shura</i> , <i>rahmah</i> —with democracy
Inclusive Education	Education as a means to instill pluralist values and civic agency
Civil Society	The ultimate goal of a plural and just Islamic da'wah

Figure 5. Matrix of Findings and Implications.

The first axis, *Civic Islam*, serves as the epistemological and normative foundation of Gus Dur's da'wah strategy. As the primary novelty of this research, Civic Islam redefines the role of religion in politics not as a tool of identity politics or state ideology, but as a source of ethical citizenship. It underscores that the

essence of Islamic preaching lies in fostering inclusive and responsible civic participation, regardless of one's faith or ethnicity.

The second dimension, *advocacy for minorities and resistance to authoritarianism*, embodies the praxis of Civic Islam. Gus Dur's consistent defense of the marginalized was not merely a human rights stance; it was a theological imperative. He demonstrated that true Islamic da'wah involves moral courage, the willingness to stand with the oppressed, even against dominant political and religious structures. This approach reinforces da'wah as both spiritual and socio-political commitment.

The third theme articulates the *synergistic relationship between Islam and democracy*. Gus Dur's thought disrupts the common dichotomy between religion and democracy by emphasizing that core Islamic values justice (*'adalah*), consultation (*shura*), and compassion (*rahmah*) are deeply compatible with democratic principles. This synergy forms a crucial bridge between religious ethics and democratic institutions, advancing a da'wah strategy that not only addresses intra-faith discourse but also contributes to public governance and political reform.

The fourth element, *inclusive education as the pillar of political da'wah*, highlights the cultural and generational sustainability of Gus Dur's vision. Education, in this model, is not a neutral or technical process; it is the strategic arena where pluralist consciousness, moral responsibility, and civic agency are cultivated. Through dialogical and accessible learning processes, education becomes a central mechanism for internalizing pluralistic Islamic values and preparing future citizens to participate constructively in a democratic society.

All of these elements converge in the fifth and final axis: the aspiration for a *plural, just, and democratic civil society*. This represents the ultimate horizon of Gus Dur's political da'wah. Civil society here is not merely defined by the absence of state control but by the presence of ethical citizens and participatory institutions that sustain justice and inclusivity in the everyday life of the nation. In this ecosystem, Islam plays a central role not through formal power, but through moral influence and transformative engagement.

This thematic synthesis leads to the construction of a strategic model of Islamic da'wah that is relevant, actionable, and grounded in lived Islamic ethics. It offers a response to contemporary challenges such as the rise of religious populism, erosion of democratic trust, and the politicization of identity. The model presented here is both a theoretical contribution to the discourse on Islamic political thought and a practical framework for da'wah practitioners, educators, and policymakers committed to building inclusive and ethical societies.

By advancing this synthesis, the study asserts that the legacy of Gus Dur is not limited to historical reflection but constitutes a living paradigm, a source of inspiration for reforming Islamic education, reshaping public da'wah, and reaffirming Islam's role in advancing justice and pluralism in the modern world.

D. CONCLUSION

This study was initiated by an urgent intellectual and socio-political concern: how can Islamic da'wah be reimagined as a constructive force in plural and democratic societies? In the face of growing religious exclusivism, identity-based populism, and declining public trust in democratic institutions, the legacy of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) offers a compelling framework for reconceptualizing Islamic political engagement. At the heart of this inquiry were three central questions: (1) What are the philosophical and sociological foundations of Gus Dur's pluralist thought? (2) How does his model of political education and da'wah internalize civic and inclusive values? (3) To what extent do these ideas influence the formation of civic engagement within Indonesian society?

Through a qualitative-descriptive approach employing literature analysis and hermeneutical interpretation, this research has revealed that Gus Dur's thought is anchored in a robust intellectual tradition that synthesizes Islamic ethics, democratic values, and cultural contextualization. The findings demonstrate that Gus Dur did not reduce da'wah to ritualistic preaching nor to political mobilization for power. Instead, he advanced a model of political da'wah grounded in *Civic Islam*, a paradigm that frames Islam as a source of ethical citizenship rather than a tool of identity politics.

Each thematic finding elaborated in this study serves as a coherent response to the research questions. His advocacy for minority rights and resistance to authoritarianism reflect the practical manifestation of inclusive da'wah rooted in Islamic teachings and constitutional ethics. His firm belief in the synergy between Islam and democracy offers a normative foundation that reconciles religious values with modern governance, while his emphasis on inclusive education illustrates how transformative learning serves as the cultural infrastructure for long-term civic engagement. The culmination of these elements is the vision of a pluralistic and ethical civil society an arena where Islamic principles operate not as hegemonic dogmas but as moral contributions to the public good.

Thus, the research has successfully answered its guiding questions by articulating a conceptual model of Islamic da'wah that is pluralist, ethical, and forward-looking. Rather than merely responding to intolerance and identity fragmentation, this study reconstructs Gus Dur's thought as a normative paradigm capable of transforming da'wah into a strategy of moral empowerment and civic solidarity. The implications of this model extend beyond the Indonesian context, offering critical insights for Islamic societies grappling with the intersection of religion, politics, and pluralism. In this way, Gus Dur's vision remains not only relevant but urgently needed in our collective pursuit of justice, inclusivity, and democratic renewal.

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