

Muhammadiyah's Role in the Socio-Religious Life of Minority Communities in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines Muhammadiyah's role in the socio-religious life of minority communities in Indonesia by distinguishing between Muslim minorities living in predominantly non-Muslim regions and non-Muslim minorities participating in Muhammadiyah institutions. It employs qualitative comparative document analysis rather than a systematic literature review. The corpus consists of Muhammadiyah ideological and organizational documents, institutional publications, and empirical studies published no later than 2023, with particular attention to Papua, West Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, and selected Muhammadiyah higher-education settings. The findings identify four interconnected roles: institution-building for Muslim civic survival, inclusive provision of education and social services, mediation of interreligious coexistence, and formation of a public Islamic identity through *da'wa bil-hal*. Muhammadiyah's schools, universities, clinics, charitable bodies, and local branches create durable infrastructures through which minority Muslims gain religious continuity and social mobility, while non-Muslim participants encounter Islam through professional service rather than coercive proselytization. However, inclusion remains uneven. Tensions persist around Islamic institutional identity, compulsory religious formation, local cultural recognition, leadership asymmetry, and the gap between central normative commitments and local practice. The article argues that Muhammadiyah contributes most effectively to minority life when it treats institutional presence as reciprocal civic participation rather than demographic or confessional expansion.

Keywords: *Muhammadiyah; minority communities; religious tolerance; Islamic civil society; inclusive education.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is commonly described as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, yet this national description conceals substantial regional and institutional diversity. Muslims constitute demographic minorities in several eastern provinces, islands, districts, and localities, including substantial parts of Papua, West Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, North Sulawesi, Bali, and the interior of several other regions. At the same time, non-Muslim citizens regularly participate in institutions established by Muslim organizations, particularly schools, universities, hospitals, and humanitarian agencies. Minority status in Indonesia is therefore relational rather than fixed. It can refer to demographic position within a territory, unequal access to public institutions, limited capacity to reproduce communal life, or subordinate participation within an organization whose normative identity is defined by another religious tradition. Any analysis of Muhammadiyah's role must begin with this conceptual distinction.

Muhammadiyah, founded in Yogyakarta in 1912, is one of Indonesia's largest Islamic civil-society organizations. Its public significance has never rested only on preaching or doctrinal reform. The movement developed an extensive network of schools, universities,

hospitals, orphanages, philanthropic bodies, mosques, disaster-response units, women's organizations, and youth associations. This institutional orientation embodies what is often described as *da'wa bil-hal*: religious communication through socially beneficial action. In settings where Muslims are minorities, such institutions can function as mechanisms of communal continuity, civic recognition, education, leadership formation, and negotiation with local majorities. In Muhammadiyah institutions attended by non-Muslims, the same infrastructure can become a site of interreligious encounter and a test of whether an Islamic organization can combine confessional integrity with equal citizenship.

Existing scholarship has generated valuable case studies of Muhammadiyah in West Papua, Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, and religiously diverse campuses. Studies of Sorong and other West Papuan settings show that Muhammadiyah's educational and social institutions contribute to the life of Muslim minorities while also serving non-Muslim populations (Wekke et al., 2019; Rusdi, 2020). Research on Muhammadiyah higher education in West Papua emphasizes its contribution to religious tolerance through everyday interaction among students and staff from different religious backgrounds (Wekke et al., 2020). Other studies address the social identity of non-Muslim students and the teaching of *Al-Islam* and *Kemuhammadiyahan* in plural classrooms (Hamzah et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2023). These studies demonstrate the importance of institutional practice, but they are often geographically bounded or focus on one sector. A broader analytical account is needed to explain how Muhammadiyah's different roles are connected and where their limits lie.

The central problem is not whether Muhammadiyah is simply “tolerant” or “intolerant.” Such binary classification is analytically weak. A major religious organization can endorse tolerance at the national level while producing uneven experiences across local institutions. It can provide essential services to non-Muslims while retaining asymmetric authority over curricula, leadership, symbols, and institutional rules. It can strengthen a vulnerable Muslim minority without necessarily transforming relations with the religious majority. Conversely, confessional clarity does not automatically imply exclusion. Minority communities often require institutions capable of preserving religious identity, transmitting knowledge, and representing collective interests. The relevant question is how these functions are performed and whether they deepen equal citizenship or reproduce hierarchy.

This article therefore asks: How does Muhammadiyah shape the socio-religious life of minority communities in Indonesia? What institutional mechanisms connect Islamic *da'wa*, social service, minority resilience, and interreligious coexistence? Under what conditions does Muhammadiyah's presence become inclusive civic infrastructure, and where do tensions or exclusions remain? To answer these questions, the article compares two analytically distinct arenas. The first concerns Muslim minorities in predominantly non-Muslim regional environments, especially in eastern Indonesia. The second concerns non-Muslim minorities within Muhammadiyah educational and social institutions. The comparison is not intended to equate their experiences. It is designed to reveal how the same organization operates from different positions: as a representative infrastructure for a demographic minority and as a majority-defining institution responsible for

protecting minority participants.

The article advances three arguments. First, Muhammadiyah's most consequential contribution is institutional rather than rhetorical. Schools, universities, mosques, clinics, charitable bodies, and organizational branches enable minority Muslims to reproduce communal life and participate in wider society. Second, Muhammadiyah's institutions can create practical forms of interreligious coexistence because service provision produces sustained contact, mutual dependence, and shared professional norms. Third, inclusion is conditional and incomplete. Its quality depends on local leadership, cultural literacy, rules governing religious instruction, representation of non-Muslim participants, and the organization's willingness to distinguish *da'wa* from coercive assimilation. The findings contribute to debates on Islamic civil society, religious minorities, and the institutional foundations of tolerance in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative comparative document analysis. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive coverage of all publications on Muhammadiyah or minority communities. The method was selected because the research question concerns the meanings, institutional roles, and tensions expressed across heterogeneous sources rather than the measurement of a pooled effect or the comprehensive mapping of a scholarly field. Documents are treated as evidence of organizational norms, public representation, institutional experience, and empirically observed practice.

The corpus includes four types of material published no later than 31 December 2023. The first consists of Muhammadiyah's ideological and organizational texts, including *The Progressive Islamic Treatise*, statements on national and humanitarian issues, formulations concerning Indonesia as *Dar al-'Ahd* wa al-Shahadah, and official descriptions of educational, social, and humanitarian missions. These materials establish the movement's normative vocabulary: *tajdid*, *Islam Berkemajuan*, *al-Ma'un*, *wasatiyyah*, tolerance, justice, public service, and national commitment. The second category consists of official institutional publications concerning Muhammadiyah activities in eastern Indonesia and religiously diverse environments. The third category includes peer-reviewed qualitative studies of Muhammadiyah institutions in West Papua, Papua, and East Nusa Tenggara, as well as studies of non-Muslim students in Muhammadiyah higher education. The fourth category consists of broader scholarship on Indonesian Islamic civil society, democratic citizenship, religious pluralism, and minority-majority relations, used to contextualize the cases.

Cases were selected purposively. West Papua and Papua were included because Muhammadiyah's educational institutions there serve regions with substantial Christian populations and, in several campuses, enroll significant numbers of non-Muslim students. Sorong, Manokwari, and surrounding areas also provide documented examples of Muhammadiyah's role in sustaining Muslim community life through education, worship, social welfare, and philanthropy. East Nusa Tenggara was included because Muhammadiyah operates within a predominantly Christian provincial environment and has developed schools, universities, branches, mosques, and social initiatives through

long-term interaction with local communities. Studies of non-Muslim students were included to examine the reverse institutional position: Muhammadiyah as the owner and normative authority of an institution in which non-Muslims form a numerical or socially visible minority.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, documents were read for explicit descriptions of institutional function, target communities, religious identity, service provision, interreligious relations, and local challenges. Second, passages were coded according to six analytical categories: communal reproduction, social-service access, civic recognition, interreligious contact, cultural adaptation, and institutional asymmetry. Third, patterns were compared across the two arenas and across sectors, particularly education, religious organization, philanthropy, and social services. Negative evidence and tensions were retained rather than absorbed into a celebratory narrative. For example, an institution's enrollment of non-Muslim students was not automatically coded as substantive inclusion. Attention was given to whether those students were recognized as full participants, how Islamic courses were implemented, whether local cultures were respected, and whether decision-making remained exclusively confessional.

The concept of minority used here is multidimensional. A demographic minority is a group numerically smaller within a defined territorial setting. An institutional minority is a group that participates in an organization governed by another religious tradition. A power minority is a group with limited authority over rules, resources, or public representation even when its numerical size is not negligible. These dimensions may overlap but should not be collapsed. A Muslim community in a Christian-majority district may possess national-majority confidence but local vulnerability. A Christian student in a Muhammadiyah university may belong to a local demographic majority while remaining an institutional minority. This relational approach prevents national demography from obscuring local power.

The method has limitations. Documentary evidence cannot capture the full range of everyday experiences, and official publications tend to emphasize institutional success. The available empirical literature is uneven across provinces and sectors, with more documentation on higher education in West Papua than on hospitals, villages, or informal religious life. The study does not infer that all Muhammadiyah branches behave identically. Instead, it identifies recurring mechanisms and tensions that can be tested through future fieldwork. Its contribution is analytical synthesis grounded in selected cases, not statistical generalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Institutional infrastructure and the survival of Muslim minority life

The first and most consistent finding is that Muhammadiyah supports minority communities through institution-building. In regions where Muslims are locally outnumbered, communal life depends on more than the availability of formal religious freedom. It requires schools that transmit religious knowledge, mosques and prayer facilities, teachers and preachers, welfare organizations, leadership networks, and channels connecting local communities to wider national resources. Muhammadiyah's

organizational model is particularly suited to this task because it converts religious commitment into durable associations and service institutions.

Research in Sorong identifies education and social action as central forms of *da'wa bil-hal*. Muhammadiyah institutions provide structured environments in which Muslim families can educate children, develop organizational cadres, and maintain religious practices while participating in a plural regional society (Wekke et al., 2019). These institutions also reduce dependence on episodic missionary visits or informal leadership. A school, university, orphanage, mosque, or branch office establishes continuity. It creates regular schedules, administrative roles, budgets, professional positions, and intergenerational transmission. Minority resilience therefore emerges from organizational routine rather than defensive isolation.

The importance of education is especially visible in West Papua. Muhammadiyah's movement there developed across levels from early childhood and primary education to higher education. Rusdi (2020) describes the “Sang Surya” educational movement in Muslim-minority areas as an instrument of educational advancement that serves both Muslims and non-Muslims. This dual function matters. For Muslim minorities, schools create a secure setting for religious learning and social mobility. For the broader public, they provide educational capacity in regions where state provision may be limited or uneven. The institution consequently gains legitimacy not merely as a communal enclave but as a contributor to regional development.

The institutional network also creates civic recognition. A dispersed minority can be socially present yet politically or administratively invisible. Formal organizations provide interlocutors for government, religious forums, disaster agencies, and other civil-society actors. Muhammadiyah branches can represent community needs, negotiate access to land or facilities, coordinate religious celebrations, and participate in interreligious forums. This representative role does not eliminate internal diversity among Muslims, but it increases their capacity to be recognized as organized citizens rather than temporary migrants or marginal residents.

In East Nusa Tenggara, Muhammadiyah's durability has depended on adaptation to a predominantly Christian social environment. Studies of Sikka and Flores show that organizational preservation is connected to education, community relationships, and local forms of cooperation rather than confrontational expansion. The movement's presence has had to be socially negotiated, especially where Muslim populations are small and kinship, customary authority, and church institutions shape public life. Muhammadiyah's survival in such contexts demonstrates that reformist Islam is not confined to Muslim-majority urban settings. However, it also requires a less standardized approach than the movement's central institutional model might suggest.

Institutional support is not identical to demographic expansion. In the cases examined, the strongest evidence concerns consolidation and service: enabling Muslims to worship, study, organize, and contribute to local society. Framing every school or social program primarily as an instrument for increasing Muslim numbers would misread both the evidence and the ethical basis of public service. Muhammadiyah's *al-Ma'un* tradition emphasizes assistance to vulnerable people, while Islam Berkemajuan presents religious

action as a contribution to shared civilization. The institutional role becomes socially legitimate when it addresses public needs without making access conditional on conversion.

2. Education as both communal reproduction and shared civic space

Education is the principal arena in which Muhammadiyah's dual role becomes visible. A Muhammadiyah school or university is simultaneously an Islamic institution, a public-facing provider of knowledge, a workplace, and a site of everyday contact among religious communities. These functions can reinforce one another, but they can also generate tension.

For Muslim minority families, Muhammadiyah education offers continuity between religious identity and modern professional aspiration. Students need not choose between access to contemporary science and participation in an Islamic moral environment. Muhammadiyah's historical integration of general and religious education is therefore significant in minority settings, where specialized Islamic institutions may be scarce. The presence of universities in Sorong, Manokwari, and other eastern locations also allows students to remain within their regions rather than migrate to distant Muslim-majority centers. This contributes to local human-capital formation and produces graduates who can participate in government, education, health care, and business.

At the same time, Muhammadiyah institutions in West Papua enroll non-Muslim students and employ staff from different religious backgrounds. Wekke et al. (2020) argue that higher-education institutions foster tolerance through shared academic activities and sustained social interaction. Tolerance here is not primarily an abstract doctrine. It is produced through classrooms, group assignments, student organizations, ceremonies, and routine professional relationships. Participants learn how religious difference is expressed, negotiated, and bounded in practice.

The presence of non-Muslim students changes the meaning of Islamic institutional identity. A university may retain Muhammadiyah symbols, courses, dress norms, and moral expectations, but it must decide which elements are confessional obligations and which are universal ethical standards. Research on non-Muslim students indicates that their experiences are shaped by both acceptance and difference. Hamzah et al. (2021) show that students negotiate their social identity through encounters with an Islamic campus and may develop more complex perceptions of Islam and Muhammadiyah. Ali et al. (2023) find that Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan courses can communicate tolerance, ethics, and moral conduct to non-Muslim students, but this outcome depends on pedagogical interpretation.

This produces a central institutional test. If Islamic courses are delivered as compulsory confessional conformity, non-Muslim students may experience the curriculum as assimilation. If the courses are reframed as academic and ethical engagement with Muhammadiyah's history, values, and contribution to Indonesia, they can become a form of religious literacy. The difference lies not in removing the institution's identity but in protecting conscience and recognizing students as subjects rather than objects of *da'wa*. Inclusive pedagogy requires alternative assessment where necessary, space for questions,

explicit non-coercion, and instructors capable of distinguishing Islamic moral formation for Muslim students from comparative learning for non-Muslims.

The evidence suggests that Muhammadiyah's educational contribution is strongest when institutional confidence reduces rather than intensifies coercion. An organization secure in its identity can explain its tradition openly without demanding that all participants imitate Muslim ritual. This approach also supports Muslim students, who learn that religious commitment can coexist with fairness toward others. In this sense, a plural campus becomes a laboratory of Islamic citizenship: it tests whether values such as justice, trustworthiness, discipline, and service are applied consistently across religious boundaries.

3. Da'wa bil-hal and inclusive social service

The third finding concerns the role of service as religious communication. Muhammadiyah's da'wa bil-hal does not rely solely on verbal persuasion. It presents Islam through schools, clinics, hospitals, orphanages, disaster response, scholarships, and philanthropy. In minority settings, this mode of da'wa has two advantages. It responds to concrete needs, and it reduces the social distance between religious identity and public benefit.

Service provision can strengthen Muslim minorities by developing internal solidarity and external credibility. Charitable activity mobilizes donations, volunteers, professional expertise, and organizational discipline. It teaches members that minority status should not lead only to defensive self-preservation; the community can serve others and contribute to the common good. This orientation changes the public image of a minority from recipient to civic actor. It also aligns with Muhammadiyah's interpretation of al-Ma'un, in which devotion is judged through responsibility toward the poor, orphans, and socially vulnerable people.

For non-Muslim beneficiaries, Muhammadiyah's services create direct experience of an Islamic organization. This encounter may be more influential than formal interfaith dialogue because it occurs through treatment, teaching, disaster assistance, and everyday administration. The public credibility of Muhammadiyah in diverse regions depends heavily on whether services are genuinely non-discriminatory. Official Muhammadiyah discourse repeatedly frames humanitarian service in universal terms and connects Progressive Islam with justice, equality, cooperation, and respect for diversity (Muhammadiyah, 2022a, 2022b). Such claims acquire meaning only when local institutions apply them in admission, employment, aid distribution, and professional care.

The service model nevertheless contains an ambiguity. Da'wa bil-hal may be interpreted as witness through ethical action, or as an indirect strategy of conversion. The same practice can be perceived differently by providers and recipients. In religiously sensitive regions, suspicion can emerge when institutional growth is read as demographic competition. Muhammadiyah reduces this risk when it separates service eligibility from religious adherence, communicates transparently with local religious leaders, employs local residents, and recognizes indigenous cultural authority. Public service must be accountable to beneficiaries, not merely presented as evidence of organizational virtue.

Minority contexts also expose the limitations of standardized institutional expansion. A model developed in Java cannot simply be transferred to Papua or Flores without attention to language, customary structures, transportation, local economies, and interreligious histories. Effective da'wa bil-hal requires contextual knowledge. Recruiting teachers and administrators from outside may provide technical capacity, but long-term legitimacy depends on developing local leadership. Institutions that remain controlled by outsiders risk appearing extractive even when they provide valuable services.

4. Interreligious mediation and everyday tolerance

The fourth role is mediation. Muhammadiyah's institutions create spaces in which religious communities encounter one another outside explicitly theological debate. Schools, campuses, clinics, professional associations, and humanitarian projects generate what may be called practical interreligious relations. Participants cooperate because they share tasks and institutions, not because they have resolved doctrinal differences.

This form of tolerance is especially relevant in Indonesia, where interreligious harmony is often managed through formal ceremonies and elite forums. Formal dialogue has value, but it can remain detached from ordinary experience. In contrast, a non-Muslim student who studies for several years in a Muhammadiyah university, or a Christian employee who works in a Muhammadiyah institution, encounters Islamic norms through repeated interaction. Muslim students likewise confront the fact that religious difference is embodied by colleagues and friends rather than abstract categories.

Research in West Papua demonstrates that higher education can foster tolerance by normalizing cooperation while preserving religious identity (Wekke et al., 2020). The mechanism is not the erasure of difference. It is the development of institutional rules that prevent difference from becoming exclusion. Academic merit, professional competence, and shared responsibility provide alternative bases of belonging. When disputes arise, institutional leadership can mediate through dialogue and procedural fairness.

Muhammadiyah's national conception of Indonesia as Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah also supports this role. The formulation presents the Indonesian state as a collective covenant and a field in which Muslims demonstrate the value of their faith through constructive citizenship. This reduces the theological pressure to treat non-Muslim-majority regions as deficient or hostile spaces. Local Christian majorities are fellow participants in a national agreement, while Muhammadiyah's task is to contribute through education, health, social welfare, and ethical public action.

However, formal moderation does not automatically resolve local conflict. Relations are shaped by memories of communal violence, migration, competition over land, political mobilization, and unequal access to state resources. Local branches may also reflect broader polarization within Indonesian Islam. The presence of an official tolerance doctrine cannot substitute for conflict-sensitive leadership. Muhammadiyah's mediating capacity is strongest where it maintains communication with churches, customary leaders, government agencies, and other Muslim organizations before crises occur.

5. Cultural negotiation and the limits of universalism

A fifth result concerns culture. Muhammadiyah historically identifies with reform, purification, and critique of religious practices considered unsupported by the Qur'an and Sunnah. In culturally diverse minority settings, this orientation can produce productive ethical reform but also friction. Local communities do not experience religion as doctrine alone; it is embedded in kinship, customary ceremonies, language, land, and collective memory.

The movement's universalist vocabulary—justice, education, rationality, service, and monotheism—can facilitate cross-cultural work because it provides clear principles. Yet universalism can become culturally thin when institutional actors assume that one organizational style is suitable everywhere. In Papua, recognition of indigenous identity is essential. Non-Muslim students should not be treated merely as beneficiaries of Islamic modernization; they possess cultural and religious traditions that shape the institution itself. In Flores and other parts of East Nusa Tenggara, cooperation often passes through local kinship and customary relationships that cannot be replaced by formal organizational procedure.

The available cases indicate that Muhammadiyah adapts most successfully when it distinguishes theological principle from organizational habit. Core commitments can remain firm while language, ceremonial protocol, student support, community engagement, and leadership recruitment respond to local conditions. Such adaptation is not theological surrender. It is institutional competence. Conversely, the failure to recognize local culture can transform an intended service institution into a symbol of external domination.

6. Institutional asymmetry and uneven inclusion

The final finding is that Muhammadiyah's role is structurally asymmetric. In Muslim-minority regions, Muhammadiyah seeks recognition and protection for its members. Within Muhammadiyah institutions, however, it possesses authority over non-Muslim participants. Ethical consistency requires the organization to apply to others the protections it seeks for itself: freedom of conscience, fair access, cultural dignity, and meaningful participation.

Several forms of asymmetry remain. Governance boards and senior leadership are generally reserved for Muhammadiyah members, even where non-Muslim students or employees form a substantial part of the institution. Islamic symbols define the institutional environment. Curricula include Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyahan. Recruitment may prioritize ideological commitment for strategic positions. These features are understandable in a confessional organization, but their cumulative effect can leave minority participants with limited influence over decisions that affect them.

The answer is not to secularize Muhammadiyah institutions or erase their Islamic identity. It is to differentiate ownership, mission, and participation. An institution may be owned by Muhammadiyah and guided by Islamic ethics while establishing consultative mechanisms for non-Muslim students and staff, transparent grievance procedures, accommodation of worship, anti-discrimination standards, and culturally representative services. Such measures convert tolerance from personal goodwill into institutional

protection.

Inclusion is also uneven across localities. Strong examples of cooperation should not be generalized to every branch. Central Muhammadiyah texts articulate broad commitments, but implementation depends on local leaders, resource capacity, staff training, and political context. This center-local gap is not unique to Muhammadiyah; it is characteristic of large federated organizations. Nevertheless, it means that organizational claims should be evaluated through procedures and outcomes, not only statements.

Discussion

The findings show that Muhammadiyah's contribution to minority communities is best understood through the concept of civic infrastructure. Civil-society organizations do more than articulate interests or provide moral discourse. They build institutions through which citizens access education, social welfare, professional networks, representation, and public recognition. For Muslim minorities, Muhammadiyah's infrastructure supports communal reproduction without requiring withdrawal from wider society. For non-Muslim participants, it can provide valuable services and sustained interreligious contact. The same infrastructure, however, concentrates authority and therefore creates obligations of fairness.

This interpretation extends conventional accounts of Indonesian tolerance. Tolerance is often treated as an attitude measured through acceptance of other groups or support for abstract rights. The cases examined here suggest that tolerance is also organizational. It depends on admission rules, curricula, employment practices, grievance procedures, leadership behavior, and allocation of resources. A tolerant statement cannot compensate for discriminatory administration. Conversely, institutions may produce meaningful coexistence even when participants retain conservative theological boundaries. The crucial issue is whether difference is managed through equal treatment and non-coercion.

Muhammadiyah's role also complicates the simple distinction between majority and minority Islam. Nationally, Muhammadiyah belongs to the Muslim majority and possesses significant institutional power. Locally, its members may be minorities whose religious continuity depends on organized support. This multiscalar position gives Muhammadiyah both vulnerability and responsibility. It understands the need for minority protection from its own experience in eastern Indonesia, but it must translate that understanding into protections for non-Muslims within its institutions.

The concept of *da'wa bil-hal* is central to this translation. When interpreted as ethical witness through public service, it offers a strong model of non-coercive religious presence. It allows Muhammadiyah to remain explicitly Islamic while serving citizens across religious boundaries. It also shifts the measure of religious success from numerical conversion to social benefit, trust, and institutional integrity. This is consistent with *al-Ma'un* ethics and the movement's progressive Islamic discourse.

Yet *da'wa bil-hal* should not be romanticized. Service relationships can be unequal. Beneficiaries may feel pressure to conform to the identity of the provider, especially when alternative services are scarce. Scholarships, employment, or education can create

dependency. Ethical service therefore requires safeguards: explicit statements that assistance is not conditional on religious change, respect for recipients' religious practices, and channels through which complaints can be raised without retaliation. Such safeguards are particularly important where Muhammadiyah institutions dominate local educational provision.

The comparison between West Papua and East Nusa Tenggara highlights the importance of context. In West Papua, universities are prominent sites of interaction, and non-Muslim enrollment creates a direct challenge for inclusive Islamic education. The institution must accommodate religious and cultural plurality within its own governance. In East Nusa Tenggara, Muhammadiyah's organizational survival often depends on relationships with Christian-majority communities, customary authorities, and local networks. Here the challenge is less about managing a large non-Muslim student body and more about sustaining a legitimate Muslim institutional presence within a dense Christian social environment. A single national policy cannot fully address both contexts.

The findings also reveal the value of professionalization. Teachers, lecturers, doctors, administrators, and humanitarian workers interact through occupational standards that can transcend religious difference. Professional service creates a language of competence, accountability, and care. Muhammadiyah's long investment in modern organizations enables it to engage minorities through more than clerical authority. However, professionalization can produce bureaucratic distance. Institutions may become focused on accreditation, growth, and financial survival while neglecting the relational work needed for trust. Minority inclusion should therefore be treated as a quality indicator, not an optional symbolic program.

A critical issue is representation. Non-Muslim participants may be welcomed as students, patients, or employees but remain absent from institutional deliberation. This creates what may be called inclusive access without inclusive voice. Access is significant, particularly in underserved regions, but it does not exhaust the meaning of equality. Muhammadiyah institutions could establish advisory bodies, student forums, intercultural councils, and independent complaint mechanisms that include minority participants. These mechanisms need not alter the organization's ownership or doctrinal identity. They would improve information, reduce arbitrary decisions, and signal that beneficiaries are also stakeholders.

Cultural recognition is equally important. Indonesian religious pluralism is inseparable from ethnicity and indigeneity. In Papua, a policy that recognizes Christian worship but ignores Papuan cultural dignity remains incomplete. In East Nusa Tenggara, interreligious cooperation often operates through kinship and adat. Muhammadiyah's reformist preference for standardized modern organization can be an advantage in providing reliable services, but it should not displace local knowledge. Contextualization requires recruitment and promotion of local cadres, use of local languages where appropriate, and consultation with customary leaders.

The article's analysis supports a distinction among three models of Muhammadiyah presence. The first is the enclave model, in which institutions primarily protect and reproduce Muslim identity. This model can be necessary where a minority lacks basic

religious infrastructure, but it provides limited interreligious engagement. The second is the service model, in which Muhammadiyah institutions address general public needs and admit participants across religious boundaries. This model expands legitimacy but may leave governance asymmetry unexamined. The third is the reciprocal civic model, in which service, minority protection, representation, cultural recognition, and interreligious cooperation are integrated. The third model offers the strongest basis for sustainable contribution.

Reciprocity is the normative core of this model. Muhammadiyah expects Muslim minorities to receive fair treatment in Christian-majority regions. It should therefore protect non-Muslim minorities in its own institutional spaces. It asks local communities to recognize the public value of Islamic schools and social organizations. It should likewise recognize churches, customary bodies, and non-Muslim organizations as legitimate civic partners. Reciprocity transforms tolerance from benevolence by a stronger actor into a shared rule of public life.

This framework also clarifies the relationship between theological boundaries and civic inclusion. Muhammadiyah does not need to endorse theological relativism in order to treat non-Muslims fairly. Religious traditions can maintain distinct truth claims while supporting equal citizenship. The relevant boundary is between conviction and coercion. Institutional identity is legitimate; compelled participation in worship or unequal access based on religion is not. Teaching Muhammadiyah's history is legitimate; assessing non-Muslim students as if they were Muslim believers is pedagogically questionable. Public da'wa is legitimate; conditioning essential services on religious conformity is not.

Several policy implications follow. First, Muhammadiyah should develop explicit national guidance for non-Muslim students and staff in its educational institutions. Guidance should cover religious courses, worship accommodation, dress, ceremonies, assessment, holidays, and grievance mechanisms. Local flexibility is necessary, but minimum rights should not depend entirely on the discretion of a rector or school principal. Second, leadership development in minority regions should prioritize local cadres from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Third, partnerships with churches and customary organizations should move beyond ceremonial dialogue toward shared programs in education, health, environmental protection, disaster response, and poverty reduction. Fourth, institutional evaluation should include evidence of non-discrimination, minority participation, and community trust.

The analysis also identifies directions for research. Field studies should compare student and employee experiences across several Muhammadiyah universities, including institutions where non-Muslims are a small minority and those where they constitute a large proportion of enrollment. Research should examine hospitals and clinics, which remain underrepresented in the literature despite their importance for interreligious service. Longitudinal studies could assess whether graduates of Muhammadiyah institutions develop durable cross-religious networks. Finally, research should include the perspectives of churches, customary leaders, parents, and local government rather than relying only on Muhammadiyah sources.

These implications should not obscure Muhammadiyah's substantial achievements. In

many underserved areas, its institutions provide opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. The movement has demonstrated that an Islamic organization can operate schools and universities serving non-Muslim populations while maintaining a clear religious identity. It has also enabled Muslim minorities to develop civic confidence without necessarily adopting isolationist politics. The critical task is to consolidate these achievements through rights-based procedures, reciprocal partnerships, and greater local representation.

CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah plays a multidimensional role in the socio-religious life of minority communities in Indonesia. For Muslim minorities in predominantly non-Muslim regions, it provides institutional continuity through education, worship, philanthropy, social organization, and civic representation. These institutions enable communities to preserve religious identity, develop leaders, access modern education, and contribute visibly to regional society. For non-Muslims who study, work, or receive services in Muhammadiyah institutions, the organization creates spaces of practical interreligious encounter and access to education and social welfare.

The analysis demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's contribution cannot be reduced to formal tolerance discourse. Its real effects are generated by institutions and everyday procedures. Schools, universities, clinics, branches, and charitable bodies can turn Islamic ethics into public benefit. They can also reproduce hierarchy when minority participants lack voice, cultural recognition, or protection from coercive practices. The quality of inclusion therefore depends on how Muhammadiyah governs its institutions, not simply on whether it admits non-Muslims or operates in minority regions.

The article argues that Muhammadiyah is most effective when it adopts a reciprocal civic model. This model combines confessional integrity with non-discrimination, minority resilience with service to the wider public, and national organizational capacity with local cultural adaptation. It requires Muhammadiyah to extend to non-Muslims within its institutions the same fairness and religious freedom that Muslim minorities seek in wider society. It also requires local communities to recognize Muhammadiyah institutions as civic partners rather than treating Islamic presence as inherently threatening.

Muhammadiyah's experience shows that religious organizations can strengthen plural citizenship through institution-building. However, inclusive outcomes are not automatic. They must be secured through transparent rules, context-sensitive leadership, meaningful participation, and continuing evaluation. The future significance of Muhammadiyah in minority settings will depend less on the numerical expansion of the organization than on whether its institutions are trusted as places where religious conviction, professional service, and equal citizenship reinforce one another.

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