

Muhammadiyah as a Progressive Islamic Movement: Tajdid, Modernity, and Social Transformation in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study analyzes Muhammadiyah as a manifestation of Progressive Islam (Islam Berkemajuan), focusing on its reformist vision of tajdid, engagement with modernity, and role in social transformation in Indonesia. Established in 1912 by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah has consistently promoted Islamic renewal through a dual approach that combines the purification of religious teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah with constructive reinterpretation responsive to socio-historical change. Employing a qualitative descriptive method based on systematic literature review, this research examines the historical genealogy, ideological foundations, and institutional practices of Progressive Islam within Muhammadiyah. The findings demonstrate that Muhammadiyah conceptualizes tajdid as an integrative process encompassing theological authenticity, rational reasoning, and ethical social engagement. This paradigm is institutionalized through extensive contributions in education, healthcare, social welfare, and economic empowerment, reflecting a synthesis between Islamic values and modern knowledge. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah's emphasis on moderation, contextual ijtihad, and civil society engagement positions it as a key agent of social transformation within Indonesia's pluralistic and democratic context. The study argues that Islam Berkemajuan represents a coherent model of Progressive Islam that enables Muhammadiyah to respond adaptively to globalization, technological advancement, and contemporary ethical challenges without compromising its normative foundations. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic reform by highlighting Muhammadiyah as an empirical model of progressive, socially grounded, and future-oriented Islamic movement with relevance beyond the Indonesian context.

Keywords : Muhammadiyah, Progressive Islam, Islamic reform, tajdid, social transformation.

1. Introduction

Globalization has profoundly reshaped contemporary societies by accelerating the flow of information, technology, capital, and cultural values across national and religious boundaries. Advances in science, digital technology, communication, and transportation have transformed patterns of human interaction, social organization, and modes of knowledge production. Within this rapidly changing context, religious traditions and movements face increasing pressure to redefine their roles and relevance. They are expected not only to preserve theological authenticity but also to respond constructively to new social realities, ethical dilemmas, and structural inequalities generated by modernity. For Islam, this challenge entails negotiating continuity and change—maintaining its normative foundations while engaging meaningfully with evolving socio-cultural and technological conditions.

In Muslim-majority societies, the encounter between Islam and modernity has generated diverse responses, ranging from resistance and revivalism to reformist and progressive reinterpretations. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, offers a particularly rich context for examining this dynamic. Its pluralistic social fabric, democratic political system, and deep integration into global networks have intensified debates on religious authority, identity, reform, and social responsibility. Modernization has brought significant improvements in education, health, and economic development, yet it has also produced complex challenges such as moral disorientation, widening socio-economic inequality, cultural fragmentation, and ethical concerns related to technological advancement. These challenges demand responses that transcend purely technical solutions and incorporate moral, spiritual, and social considerations.

Within this context, Islamic organizations in Indonesia play a strategic role as mediators between religious values and societal change. Among these organizations, Muhammadiyah stands out as one of the oldest, largest, and most influential Islamic movements. Founded in 1912 by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah emerged during a period marked by colonial domination, educational backwardness,

and religious traditionalism. From its inception, Muhammadiyah articulated a reformist agenda centered on *tajdid* (renewal), emphasizing a return to the Qur'an and Sunnah while simultaneously advocating rational thought, education, social activism, and openness to scientific knowledge. This dual commitment enabled Muhammadiyah to position Islam not merely as a system of ritual obligations but as a transformative force for social progress.

Historically, Muhammadiyah's reformist vision was shaped by Dahlan's critical engagement with both religious stagnation and the realities of modern life. Observing what he perceived as ritual formalism, uncritical adherence to tradition, and social indifference, Dahlan promoted a form of Islamic renewal that combined purification of belief (*tanzih*) with social empowerment (*tamkin*). Inspired by Qur'anic ethics—most notably the social message of Surah Al-Ma'un—Muhammadiyah sought to address poverty, ignorance, and injustice through concrete institutional initiatives. This orientation distinguished Muhammadiyah from purely doctrinal reform movements by grounding theological renewal in social praxis.

Over time, Muhammadiyah has developed an extensive organizational infrastructure encompassing education, healthcare, social welfare, and economic empowerment. The establishment of schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, and community-based economic institutions reflects its belief that social transformation must be institutionalized to achieve sustainability. Today, Muhammadiyah operates one of the largest non-state educational and healthcare networks in Indonesia, serving diverse socio-economic groups. These achievements have contributed to Muhammadiyah's reputation as a trusted moral and civic force, reinforcing its relevance across different historical periods.

Scholarly discourse has described Muhammadiyah using various conceptual labels, including modernist Islam, moderate Islam, puritan Islam, and civil Islam. While these classifications highlight important aspects of Muhammadiyah's identity, they often fail to fully capture the coherence of its reformist paradigm. In recent decades, Muhammadiyah has increasingly articulated its ideological orientation through the concept of *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam). Although the notion of "progress" (*kemajuan*) has been embedded in Muhammadiyah's organizational vision since its early years—as evidenced by its founding objectives—the explicit conceptualization of *Islam Berkemajuan* has gained prominence in contemporary discourse as a response to global challenges and internal reflections on Islamic reform.

Islam Berkemajuan represents a forward-looking, inclusive, and transformative understanding of Islam. It emphasizes the integration of theological authenticity with rational inquiry, ethical responsibility, and social engagement. Rather than viewing modernity as inherently contradictory to Islamic values, this paradigm positions Islam as a moral framework capable of guiding scientific advancement, technological innovation, and socio-economic development. Central to this framework is Muhammadiyah's interpretation of *tajdid* as a comprehensive process that encompasses purification, renewal, and reconstruction simultaneously.

Unlike reformist movements that emphasize rigid textualism or, conversely, unbounded liberalization, Muhammadiyah conceptualizes *tajdid* as a balanced and dynamic endeavor. The institutionalization of this approach through the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid illustrates Muhammadiyah's commitment to scholarly rigor and methodological pluralism. By employing textual (*bayani*), rational (*burhani*), and ethical-spiritual (*irfani*) approaches, Muhammadiyah seeks to ensure that Islamic interpretations remain normatively grounded while being responsive to contemporary realities. This epistemological framework allows Muhammadiyah to engage with issues such as globalization, digitalization, and ethical challenges in science and technology without undermining its religious foundations.

Despite Muhammadiyah's long history and extensive contributions, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on its institutional growth, historical development, or sociopolitical role. Fewer studies engage deeply with *Islam Berkemajuan* as a coherent conceptual framework that integrates theology, rationality, and social praxis. In many cases, Muhammadiyah's reformism is interpreted narrowly as either puritanical or merely adaptive to modernity, without sufficient analysis of how its understanding of *tajdid* operates as a unifying paradigm of progressive Islamic thought. This gap limits our understanding of Muhammadiyah's intellectual contribution to broader debates on Islam and modernity.

Moreover, contemporary global challenges—including digital transformation, ethical crises in technological development, economic inequality, and cultural polarization—underscore the need for renewed approaches to Islamic reform. These challenges require religious movements to articulate responses that are ethically grounded, socially inclusive, and future-oriented. Muhammadiyah's emphasis on moderation (*wasatiyyah*), rational engagement, and civil society empowerment offers a valuable case for examining how Islamic movements can navigate these complexities constructively. Its deliberate choice to remain outside formal party politics further reinforces its role as a moral guide and social actor rather than a vehicle for power contestation.

This study therefore seeks to analyze Muhammadiyah as a manifestation of Progressive Islam by examining the ideological foundations, historical evolution, and practical expressions of *Islam Berkemajuan*. By adopting a qualitative, literature-based approach, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on Islamic reform by framing Muhammadiyah as an empirical model of progressive, socially grounded, and future-oriented Islamic movement. The central argument advanced in this study is that Muhammadiyah's interpretation of *tajdid* enables it to reconcile Islamic authenticity with modern values, positioning Islam as an active agent of social transformation.

Understanding Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic paradigm is essential not only for appreciating its role within Indonesian society but also for offering insights into how Islamic movements globally can engage with modernity while maintaining ethical and spiritual integrity. By situating Muhammadiyah within broader debates on Islam, modernity, and social change, this study seeks to enrich scholarly discussions on the possibilities of Progressive Islam in pluralistic and rapidly changing societies.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine Muhammadiyah as a manifestation of Progressive Islam (*Islam Berkemajuan*). A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research aims to explore ideological constructions, historical narratives, and interpretive frameworks related to Islamic reform rather than to test hypotheses or measure variables quantitatively. The study focuses on understanding meanings, concepts, and patterns of thought underlying Muhammadiyah's reformist orientation toward *tajdid*, modernity, and social transformation. Methodologically, this research is positioned within interpretive social research, which emphasizes contextual understanding of religious ideas and organizational practices as socially embedded phenomena. Muhammadiyah is analyzed not merely as an institution, but as a socio-religious movement whose progressive Islamic paradigm evolves through historical experience, intellectual discourse, and institutional praxis.

2.1 Research Strategy

The study employs a library-based (documentary) research strategy, drawing on authoritative textual sources to reconstruct and analyze Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic framework. This

strategy is suitable given the conceptual and historical nature of the research, which requires engagement with primary and secondary texts that articulate Muhammadiyah's ideology, reform agenda, and institutional development.

Rather than treating documents as static records, this study approaches texts as sites of meaning production. Official Muhammadiyah documents, scholarly writings, and historical sources are examined critically to identify underlying assumptions, normative orientations, and reformist narratives associated with *Islam Berkemajuan*.

2.3 Data Sources

The data consist exclusively of secondary sources, selected based on relevance, credibility, and scholarly significance. The sources include:

1. Academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles on Muhammadiyah, Islamic reform, Progressive Islam, and socio-religious movements in Indonesia;
2. Official Muhammadiyah documents, including organizational statutes, guidelines, ideological statements, and publications issued by Muhammadiyah institutions;
3. Historical texts and biographies related to K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and the early development of Muhammadiyah;
4. Reputable online sources, particularly official Muhammadiyah platforms and recognized academic or institutional websites that provide contextual and updated information.

The use of multiple categories of sources allows for a comprehensive understanding of Muhammadiyah's reformist paradigm from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

Data Collection Procedure

1. Data were collected through a systematic literature review process. This process involved several stages:
2. Identification of relevant literature through academic databases and institutional repositories;
3. Screening of sources based on thematic relevance to Progressive Islam, *tajdid*, modernity, and social transformation;
4. Critical reading and annotation of selected texts to extract key concepts, arguments, and empirical descriptions related to Muhammadiyah's reformist practices.

This procedure ensured that the collected data were not only thematically aligned with the research objectives but also methodologically reliable and academically robust.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis combined with qualitative content analysis. Texts were coded and categorized into major analytical themes, including:

- (1) The genealogy and conceptualization of *Islam Berkemajuan*;
- (2) Muhammadiyah's interpretation of *tajdid* as purification and renewal;
- (3) Engagement with modernity through education, healthcare, and economic empowerment;
- (4) Rationality, moderation, and ethical Islamic practice;
- (5) Muhammadiyah's role as an agent of social transformation.

These themes were interpreted analytically by linking textual findings to broader theoretical discussions on Islamic reform, Progressive Islam, and civil society engagement. Interpretation was conducted iteratively, allowing emerging patterns to refine the analytical framework throughout the research process.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies source triangulation by comparing interpretations across different types of literature, including academic studies, official organizational documents, and historical accounts. Consistency of interpretation was maintained through careful cross-referencing and critical evaluation of sources.

In addition, analytical transparency was ensured by clearly articulating the research procedures, data sources, and interpretive framework. This allows readers to assess the reliability and replicability of the study's analytical process.

Ethical Considerations

This research relies exclusively on publicly accessible documents and published materials. It does not involve human participants, interviews, or confidential data; therefore, formal ethical clearance was not required. Nevertheless, academic integrity was maintained through accurate citation, acknowledgment of sources, and avoidance of misrepresentation or selective interpretation of texts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Islam Berkemajuan as a Historically Rooted Progressive Paradigm

The results of this study demonstrate that *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam) within Muhammadiyah is not a recent ideological construction but a historically embedded paradigm that has shaped the organization since its establishment in 1912. Early Muhammadiyah statutes explicitly articulated the mission of *memajukan* (advancing) Islamic life, indicating that progress was perceived as an intrinsic religious obligation rather than a secular aspiration. This finding confirms that Muhammadiyah's engagement with modernity is not reactive but constitutive of its foundational vision. Historical analysis of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's reformist thought reveals that progress (*kemajuan*) was conceptualized as a synthesis of faith, reason, and social responsibility. Dahlan emphasized that religious piety must be accompanied by intellectual openness, ethical conduct, and concrete social action. His interpretation of Islam was forward-looking and transformative, challenging ritual formalism and passive religiosity that, in his view, hindered Muslim advancement. This theological orientation positioned Islam as a dynamic moral force capable of responding to historical change.

Although the explicit terminology of *Islam Berkemajuan* gained prominence in Muhammadiyah's contemporary discourse, particularly after the publication of *Islam Berkemajuan: Kisah Perjuangan K.H. Ahmad Dahlan dan Muhammadiyah Masa Awal* (2009), the substance of progressive Islam has consistently guided Muhammadiyah's reform agenda. This finding supports the argument that *Islam Berkemajuan* functions as a comprehensive paradigm integrating theological purification, intellectual renewal, and social reconstruction. Consequently, Muhammadiyah's progressive identity is best understood as a continuity of reformist thought rather than an ideological shift.

3.2. Tajdid as an Integrative Process of Purification and Renewal

A central finding of this research is that Muhammadiyah conceptualizes *tajdid* (renewal) as an integrative and continuous process combining purification (*tanzih*) and contextual renewal. Unlike reform movements that prioritize either rigid textualism or excessive liberalization, Muhammadiyah balances fidelity to the Qur'an and Sunnah with rational and contextual interpretation. Purification aims to eliminate practices considered inconsistent with authentic Islamic teachings, while renewal seeks to reinterpret religious principles in response to evolving socio-historical conditions. This balanced understanding of *tajdid* is institutionalized through the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid, which employs diverse epistemological approaches—*bayani* (textual), *burhani* (rational), and *irfani* (ethical-spiritual). The findings indicate that this methodological pluralism enables Muhammadiyah to avoid doctrinal rigidity

while maintaining theological integrity. By integrating reason and ethics into religious interpretation, Muhammadiyah produces adaptive religious responses to contemporary challenges such as globalization, digitalization, biomedical ethics, and economic transformation.

Furthermore, the study reveals that Muhammadiyah's *tajdid* is future-oriented. Religious interpretations are not confined to historical precedents but are continuously reassessed to anticipate emerging challenges. This forward-looking orientation reinforces Islam's relevance in modern society and supports the argument that Muhammadiyah represents a form of progressive reform that is both normatively grounded and socially responsive.

3.3. Progressive Modernity in Muhammadiyah's Educational Institutions

Education emerges as one of the most concrete manifestations of *Islam Berkemajuan*. The findings show that Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy integrates Islamic ethics with modern scientific knowledge, challenging the dichotomy between "religious" and "secular" education. Since its early initiatives, Muhammadiyah has promoted an educational model that combines religious instruction with general sciences, emphasizing critical thinking, moral integrity, and social responsibility. The establishment of institutions such as Madrasah Mu'allimin and Mu'allimat, followed by the development of universities and international educational networks, demonstrates Muhammadiyah's long-term commitment to intellectual progress. Today, Muhammadiyah operates one of the largest non-state educational systems in Indonesia, encompassing thousands of schools and hundreds of higher education institutions. This extensive infrastructure reflects the organization's belief that social transformation must be rooted in knowledge production and dissemination.

The findings further indicate that Muhammadiyah's educational institutions function as mechanisms of social mobility and empowerment. By providing accessible education to diverse socio-economic groups, Muhammadiyah contributes to reducing inequality and fostering inclusive development. This confirms that *Islam Berkemajuan* is operationalized through institutional practices that directly enhance human capital and societal welfare.

3.4. Rational Religious Practice and Moderation

Another significant finding concerns Muhammadiyah's emphasis on rational and contextual religious practice. Muhammadiyah encourages critical engagement with religious texts through *ijtihad*, rejecting uncritical traditionalism and ritualism that lack normative justification. This reformist orientation positions religion as a living ethical system rather than a static collection of rituals. Muhammadiyah's approach prioritizes moderation (*wasatiyyah*), tolerance, and openness to diversity. While grounded in Salafi principles of returning to primary sources, Muhammadiyah avoids extremist interpretations by maintaining an inclusive and balanced outlook. This has enabled the organization to foster a form of Islamic practice that is compatible with pluralistic and democratic society. The findings suggest that Muhammadiyah's rational religious framework strengthens social cohesion and intergroup harmony. By promoting dialogue and ethical engagement, *Islam Berkemajuan* functions as a stabilizing moral force that counters both religious conservatism and secular materialism. This positioning enhances Muhammadiyah's legitimacy as a moral authority within Indonesian society.

3.5. Social and Economic Empowerment as Ethical Praxis

The study reveals that social and economic empowerment constitutes a core dimension of Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic identity. Inspired by Qur'anic ethics—particularly the social justice message of Surah Al-Ma'un—Muhammadiyah has institutionalized compassion through extensive social welfare initiatives. These include hospitals, orphanages, disaster relief programs, and community development projects.

The transformation of early PKO (Penolong Kesengsaraan Oemoem) clinics into modern hospitals illustrates Muhammadiyah's capacity to integrate ethical commitment with professional management. These institutions provide accessible healthcare services while maintaining ethical standards rooted in Islamic values. This demonstrates that *Islam Berkemajuan* emphasizes not only moral intention but also institutional effectiveness. Economically, Muhammadiyah promotes grassroots empowerment through cooperatives, microfinance institutions, and Islamic economic initiatives. The findings indicate that these activities are guided by principles of justice, mutual assistance, and sustainability rather than profit maximization alone. This ethical economic model aligns with progressive Islamic values and contributes to long-term social resilience.

3.6. Muhammadiyah as an Agent of Social Transformation

The findings confirm that Muhammadiyah functions as an agent of social transformation rather than merely a religious organization. Through education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and ethical advocacy, Muhammadiyah actively contributes to nation-building and democratic development. Its decision to remain independent from formal party politics reinforces its role as a civil society movement focused on moral guidance and public welfare. Muhammadiyah's adaptive capacity enables it to respond to contemporary challenges without abandoning its ideological foundations. Scholars often describe this orientation as *Salafiyyah Wasathiyyah*, reflecting a moderate reformism that balances authenticity and adaptability. This positioning allows Muhammadiyah to engage constructively with modernity while resisting both radicalism and moral relativism. In comparative perspective, Muhammadiyah represents a distinctive model of Progressive Islam that differs from Middle Eastern reform movements. Its localized yet globally engaged approach demonstrates how Islamic movements can navigate modern challenges within pluralistic societies.

3.7. Implications for Islamic Reform and Global Discourse

The discussion highlights that Muhammadiyah's *Islam Berkemajuan* contributes significantly to broader debates on Islamic reform and modernity. By integrating theology, rationality, and social praxis, Muhammadiyah challenges narratives that portray Islam as incompatible with progress. Instead, it offers an alternative framework grounded in ethical transformation, institutional development, and social responsibility. The findings suggest that Muhammadiyah's experience holds relevance beyond Indonesia. As Muslim societies globally confront digital ethics, economic inequality, and cultural polarization, Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic paradigm provides a reference model for context-sensitive yet normatively grounded reform. This study therefore positions Muhammadiyah as an empirical example of how Islamic movements can remain faithful to religious principles while actively shaping a just, prosperous, and dignified society.

4. Conclusion

4. 1. Summary of Key Findings

This study demonstrates that Muhammadiyah represents a distinctive and coherent model of Progressive Islam (*Islam Berkemajuan*) that integrates theological authenticity with rationality, modern knowledge, and social engagement. Grounded in the principle of *tajdid*, Muhammadiyah conceptualizes Islamic reform as a unified process of purification and renewal, enabling the organization to remain doctrinally rooted while being adaptive to socio-cultural, technological, and global transformations. The findings confirm that Islam Berkemajuan is not merely a normative discourse but an operational paradigm manifested through education, healthcare, social welfare, and economic empowerment.

4.2. Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the discourse on Islamic reform by positioning Muhammadiyah as an empirical model of Progressive Islam that bridges normative theology and social praxis. The study enriches existing literature by highlighting how *tajdid* within Muhammadiyah transcends rigid dichotomies between traditionalism and modernism, offering a dynamic framework that integrates faith, reason, and ethical responsibility. This reinforces the argument that Islamic movements can constructively engage with modernity without compromising religious authenticity.

4.3. Practical and Societal Contributions

Practically, the findings illustrate that Muhammadiyah's institutional practices function as effective mechanisms of social transformation. Through its extensive educational network, healthcare services, and socio-economic initiatives, Muhammadiyah translates Islamic values into tangible contributions that promote social justice, inclusivity, and human development. Its positioning as a civil society organization—Independent from formal political power—enhances its moral authority and capacity to contribute constructively to democratic governance and social cohesion in Indonesia's pluralistic context.

4.4. Global Relevance of Muhammadiyah's Progressive Islamic Model

Beyond the Indonesian context, Muhammadiyah's Islam Berkemajuan offers broader relevance for global Islamic discourse. In an era marked by digital transformation, ethical challenges in science and technology, economic inequality, and cultural polarization, Muhammadiyah provides an alternative model of Islamic reform that emphasizes moderation (*wasatiyyah*), adaptability, and ethical engagement. This model challenges narratives that frame Islam as incompatible with progress and underscores its potential role as a moral compass in contemporary global society.

4.5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is limited by its reliance on qualitative literature-based analysis, which may not fully capture variations in the implementation of Islam Berkemajuan at local and grassroots levels. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative, ethnographic, or mixed-method approaches to explore diverse Muhammadiyah practices across regions and to assess the applicability of its progressive Islamic paradigm in different socio-political and cultural contexts. Such studies would further strengthen the understanding of Progressive Islam as a living and evolving framework within global Muslim societies.

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