

RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ULAMA PERSPECTIVES

Ani Maghfiroh¹; Selvi Ratna Sari²; Zuhdiyah³; Maryamah⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang

¹Corresponding E-mail: animaghfiroh9012@gmail.com

Abstract

Religious Religious moderation (wasathiyah) has emerged as a critical discourse in responding to the challenges of globalization, religious extremism, and increasing social polarization. Although the concept has deep roots in classical Islamic scholarship, its contemporary interpretation has evolved to address modern social realities. This study aims to analyze the concept of religious moderation from the perspectives of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, identify their similarities and differences, and examine its relevance to contemporary society. The research employs a qualitative descriptive-comparative approach through library research and qualitative content analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic literature. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify major patterns and conceptual relationships. The findings reveal that both classical and contemporary scholars share the same normative foundations of religious moderation, namely balance (tawazun), justice ('adl), wisdom (hikmah), and public welfare (maslahah). However, classical scholars primarily emphasize moderation as a moral and spiritual principle, while contemporary scholars expand its application to issues of pluralism, democracy, social cohesion, and the prevention of religious extremism. The study further demonstrates that contemporary interpretations of wasathiyah represent a contextual adaptation rather than a departure from classical Islamic thought. By integrating these two perspectives, this research proposes a comprehensive framework of religious moderation that combines theological authenticity with social relevance. The findings contribute to the development of Islamic studies and provide practical implications for strengthening moderation through education, religious leadership, and public policy in multicultural societies.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation; Wasathiyah; Classical Ulama; Contemporary Ulama; Islamic Thought*

A. Introduction

Religious moderation has become an increasingly significant topic in the contemporary global context. The rapid expansion of globalization, migration, and communication technologies has transformed the ways in which people understand and practice religion. At the same time, these developments have created opportunities for the dissemination of extremist ideologies through digital media, often resulting in social polarization and horizontal conflicts. Wolfowicz et al. (2021) argue that radicalization processes are strongly influenced by exposure to digital propaganda and intolerant narratives circulating extensively in cyberspace. This phenomenon underscores the urgent

need to promote a model of religious understanding that is moderate, inclusive, and adaptive to contemporary societal changes.

Although the concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) has received considerable scholarly attention, most existing studies examine either the perspectives of classical Islamic scholars or the interpretations of contemporary ulama independently. Consequently, there remains a limited comparative analysis that systematically explores the continuity and transformation of the concept across different intellectual and historical contexts. This gap is significant because the principles developed by classical ulama provide the normative and theological foundations of *wasathiyah*, while contemporary ulama reinterpret these principles in response to modern challenges such as globalization, pluralism, digital communication, and religious extremism.

Comparing the perspectives of classical and contemporary ulama is therefore essential for understanding how the concept of *wasathiyah* has evolved while preserving its core Islamic values. Such a comparison enables the identification of both enduring principles and contextual adaptations, thereby strengthening the theoretical and practical relevance of religious moderation in modern society. Accordingly, this study aims to conduct a comparative conceptual analysis of the perspectives of classical and contemporary ulama to develop a more comprehensive understanding of religious moderation as a framework for promoting social harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in the contemporary world.

From a broader socio-political perspective, religious extremism and intolerance pose significant threats to peace, social cohesion, and national unity. Reports published by the United States Institute of Peace (Mandaville, 2017) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2017) emphasize that religious actors play a strategic role in preventing violent extremism and promoting sustainable peace. Consequently, religious moderation should not merely be understood as a theological concept but also as a social strategy that contributes to maintaining harmony and stability within multicultural societies such as Indonesia.

From the perspective of Islamic scholarship, the concept of moderation (*wasathiyah*) has deep roots in the classical intellectual tradition. Prominent scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and al-Qarafi emphasized the importance of balance (*tawazun*), wisdom (*hikmah*), and the avoidance of both extremism (*ghuluw*) and negligence (*tafrith*) in religious practice (Wilkinson, 2021). These principles constitute the moral foundation for cultivating Muslims who maintain equilibrium between worldly responsibilities and spiritual aspirations. According to al-Ghazali, moderation represents the middle path between two opposing extremes, as articulated in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, where genuine happiness can only be attained through harmony among reason, the heart, and human actions.

These classical ideas have regained relevance in the modern era. Contemporary Muslim scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Wahbah al-Zuhaili, and Quraish Shihab have

sought to revitalize the concept of *wasathiyah* by aligning it with contemporary realities characterized by religious pluralism, democracy, and human rights discourse (Purwanto, 2023). They argue that religious moderation does not imply compromising fundamental religious principles; rather, it reflects a balanced approach that combines firm commitment to Islamic beliefs with openness toward diversity. In Quraish Shihab's (2021) view, moderate Islam is an interpretation of Islam capable of engaging constructively with diversity while preserving its essential religious identity.

Previous studies have examined religious moderation from various perspectives. Purwanto (2023), for instance, highlights the contribution of al-Ghazali's Sufi thought to Islamic higher education as a foundation for developing moderate character. Similarly, studies conducted by Walisongo (2021) and Shihab (2021) explore the implementation of *wasathiyah* values within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Overall, these studies demonstrate that education and the authority of religious scholars play vital roles in instilling values of moderation. Nevertheless, most existing research remains partial, focusing either on classical or contemporary perspectives without establishing a comprehensive dialogue between the two intellectual traditions.

This situation reveals a significant research gap, namely the limited number of comparative studies that systematically examine the perspectives of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars within a unified analytical framework. Most previous studies concentrate on normative conceptualizations without sufficiently exploring the socio-historical contexts that shaped the emergence and evolution of moderation discourse. As a result, the concept of *wasathiyah* often remains confined to theoretical discussions rather than being critically evaluated in relation to contemporary social realities. Furthermore, methodological approaches that integrate classical textual analysis with empirical evidence remain relatively scarce, limiting the capacity of existing scholarship to address current societal challenges effectively (Pfundmair et al., 2024).

The urgency of this study becomes increasingly evident considering the growing need to synthesize normative classical values with context-sensitive contemporary approaches. Classical scholars provide the epistemological foundations for the concept of balance, whereas contemporary scholars translate these principles into practical social frameworks. Through a comparative approach, this study seeks to formulate a renewed understanding of religious moderation that encompasses not only theological dimensions but also practical functions within modern social life.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in a hermeneutic approach to classical Islamic texts and in social change theory, which examines the relationship between religion and cultural context. Hermeneutic analysis enables the reinterpretation of classical texts while preserving their historical context, whereas social change theory facilitates an understanding of how moderation values are reformulated to address contemporary realities such as globalization, secularization, and religious pluralism.

The concept of *wasathiyyah* constitutes the principal theoretical foundation of religious moderation in Islamic thought. Derived from the Qur'anic notion of *ummatan wasatan* (Qur'an 2:143), *wasathiyyah* embodies the principles of balance (*tawazun*), justice (*'adl*), moderation (*i'tidal*), and tolerance (*tasamuh*), positioning Muslims as a community that avoids both extremism and excessive liberalism. Classical Muslim scholars interpreted these principles primarily within the framework of preserving Islamic orthodoxy and social harmony, whereas contemporary ulama have expanded their application to address modern issues such as pluralism, globalization, democracy, human rights, and digital religious discourse. Consequently, *wasathiyyah* should be understood not merely as a theological doctrine but also as a dynamic ethical and social paradigm capable of responding to evolving societal challenges.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, this study aims to describe the concept of religious moderation from the perspectives of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, analyze their similarities and differences, and examine the relevance of these perspectives in addressing contemporary religious challenges. Furthermore, it seeks to develop a conceptual framework that may serve as a reference for strengthening Islamic moderation within educational institutions and broader society. The underlying hypothesis is that synthesizing the normative values articulated by classical scholars with the contextual approaches developed by contemporary ulama will produce a more comprehensive and effective model of religious moderation for fostering social tolerance and harmonious coexistence.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative conceptual analysis that systematically integrates two major traditions of Islamic scholarship within a single analytical framework. While previous studies have generally focused either on the historical foundations of *wasathiyyah* or on contemporary policies and practices of religious moderation, they rarely examine the continuity and transformation of the concept across classical and contemporary intellectual traditions. By comparing these perspectives, this article demonstrates how enduring Islamic principles can be reinterpreted to address present-day challenges without abandoning their theological foundations. Therefore, this study not only enriches academic discourse on *wasathiyyah* but also offers a conceptual contribution for developing a balanced model of religious moderation that is theoretically grounded, contextually relevant, and applicable to contemporary multicultural societies. In an increasingly polarized global environment characterized by ideological tensions and identity conflicts, such an integrated perspective provides an important foundation for promoting justice, peaceful coexistence, and a civilized society.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-comparative research design, which is appropriate for examining and comparing the conceptual foundations of religious moderation articulated by classical and contemporary Muslim scholars. Rather than

measuring variables quantitatively, qualitative research seeks to understand meanings, values, and interpretations embedded within religious texts and scholarly discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The comparative approach enables the identification of both continuity and transformation in the concept of *wasathiyah* across different intellectual and historical contexts.

The research primarily adopts a library research method, with supporting empirical insights obtained through limited semi-structured interviews. The literature reviewed consists of primary sources, including classical Islamic texts and the writings of contemporary Muslim scholars, and secondary sources, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and policy documents discussing religious moderation and *wasathiyah*. The scope of the literature covers publications on Islamic moderation, tolerance, justice, balance, and coexistence produced in both classical and modern periods.

To ensure academic rigor, the study applies explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Literature was included if it: (1) explicitly discusses the concept of *wasathiyah* or religious moderation within Islamic thought; (2) represents authoritative scholarly works recognized in Islamic studies; (3) provides conceptual or theoretical explanations relevant to moderation, tolerance, justice, or balance; and (4) is available in reliable academic or classical sources. Conversely, literature was excluded if it: (1) focused solely on political or sociological issues without discussing the conceptual foundations of religious moderation; (2) lacked scholarly credibility or sufficient academic documentation; or (3) merely repeated existing arguments without contributing to conceptual analysis.

The comparative analysis focuses on selected classical and contemporary Muslim scholars who have significantly contributed to discussions of moderation in Islam. The classical perspective is represented by scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Al-Shatibi, whose works provide normative and theological foundations concerning justice, balance, and the objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*). The contemporary perspective includes scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Wahbah al-Zuhayli, and Abdullah bin Bayyah, whose writings reinterpret the principles of *wasathiyah* in response to modern challenges including globalization, pluralism, democracy, human rights, and religious extremism. These scholars were selected because of their substantial influence on Islamic intellectual discourse and the availability of widely recognized scholarly works.

Qualitative content analysis was employed as the principal analytical technique following the systematic procedures proposed by Krippendorff (2019). The analysis consisted of several stages. First, relevant texts were collected and organized according to the predetermined inclusion criteria. Second, the texts underwent intensive reading to identify meaningful units related to religious moderation. Third, an open coding process was conducted to label significant concepts and ideas. Fourth, similar codes were grouped into broader thematic categories, including justice (*'adl*), balance (*tawazun*), moderation (*i'tidal*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and public welfare (*maslahah*). Fifth, these themes were compared across classical and contemporary sources to identify areas of continuity,

divergence, and contextual adaptation. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a comparative conceptual framework explaining how the principles of *wasathiyah* have evolved while maintaining their essential theological foundations.

To complement the documentary analysis, a limited field inquiry was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with selected Islamic scholars, educators, and religious leaders possessing recognized expertise and practical experience in promoting religious moderation. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that they had relevant academic qualifications or professional involvement in Islamic education and religious discourse (Patton, 2015). The interview findings were used to enrich and triangulate the conceptual interpretations derived from the literature rather than serving as the primary source of analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), involving data familiarization, coding, theme development, comparison between classical and contemporary perspectives, interpretation, and conceptual synthesis. This analytical procedure enhances the transparency and academic accountability of the research while enabling the development of a comprehensive framework of religious moderation grounded in both classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary intellectual discourse.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia by providing a theoretical and practical foundation for the development of Islamic education curricula, religious leadership and da'wah training programs, and communication strategies emphasizing tolerance, justice, and peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, the proposed conceptual framework may serve as a valuable reference for policymakers, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations in reinforcing social resilience against religious radicalism, intolerance, and ideological polarization, thereby supporting sustainable social cohesion within Indonesia's multicultural society.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Religious Moderation in the Perspective of Classical Muslim Scholars

The analysis of classical Islamic literature demonstrates that the concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) is deeply rooted in the normative framework of Islamic teachings. Rather than promoting rigid literalism or unrestricted flexibility, classical scholars consistently advocated a balanced approach that integrates spiritual devotion, ethical conduct, and social responsibility. This principle is reflected in the Qur'anic description of Muslims as "*ummatan wasatan*" (a middle or just community) in Qur'an 2:143, which has long served as the theological foundation for moderation in Islamic thought.

Al-Ghazali conceptualized moderation as the equilibrium between excessive and deficient behavior. In *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, he argues that human perfection can only be achieved when reason, desire, and spiritual consciousness function harmoniously. According to him, virtues such as courage, generosity, and justice exist as intermediate positions between two opposing extremes, thereby making moderation an ethical

principle rather than merely a theological doctrine (Al-Ghazali, 2002). This perspective indicates that moderation is inseparable from character formation and moral education.

Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that extremism (*ghuluw*) constitutes a deviation from authentic Islamic teachings because it generates social conflict and sectarian division. His interpretation of Islam as the religion of balance rejects both excessive rigidity and excessive leniency in religious practice (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2001). Consequently, moderation functions as a mechanism for preserving social harmony while maintaining doctrinal integrity.

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, Al-Shafi'i and Al-Qarafi demonstrated that legal reasoning should consider changing social circumstances without abandoning scriptural authority. Al-Qarafi explicitly stated that legal opinions (*fatwas*) may change according to differences in time, place, and social conditions, illustrating the dynamic nature of Islamic law (Al-Qarafi, 1994). Therefore, moderation within classical scholarship extends beyond personal ethics to include adaptive legal reasoning aimed at achieving public welfare (*maslahah*).

Overall, the findings reveal that classical scholars consistently conceptualized moderation through three interconnected dimensions: theological balance, ethical virtue, and social justice. These dimensions collectively establish moderation as a comprehensive paradigm governing both individual conduct and societal relations.

Religious Moderation in the Perspective of Contemporary Muslim Scholars

The examination of contemporary scholarship demonstrates that the concept of *wasathiyah* has evolved into a comprehensive framework for addressing the challenges of globalization, multiculturalism, democracy, and religious extremism. Although contemporary scholars maintain the theological foundations established by classical scholars, they reinterpret these principles within modern socio-political contexts.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi identifies *wasathiyah* as the defining characteristic of Islam, arguing that it represents equilibrium between revelation and reason, tradition and innovation, and individual rights and collective welfare (Al-Qaradawi, 2010). His formulation positions moderation not merely as an ethical attitude but as a methodological approach for responding to contemporary social problems.

Likewise, Wahbah al-Zuhaili argues that many conflicts within Muslim societies originate from fragmented interpretations of religious texts detached from their broader objectives (*maqasid al-shari'ah*). He therefore advocates a contextual understanding of Islamic law that combines textual fidelity with rational analysis and social realities (Al-Zuhaili, 2009). This approach broadens the application of moderation from jurisprudential reasoning to public policy and social relations.

Quraish Shihab further emphasizes that moderation should not be equated with relativism or theological compromise. Instead, it represents proportionality and fairness in engaging religious diversity while preserving Islamic identity (Shihab, 2021). In pluralistic societies such as Indonesia, this interpretation positions Islam as a force for social cohesion rather than social fragmentation.

Furthermore, contemporary scholars increasingly recognize education and digital communication as strategic instruments for institutionalizing moderation. Recent studies indicate that integrating moderation values into Islamic education contributes significantly to reducing susceptibility to radical narratives among young Muslims (Amin & Rahman, 2020). Similarly, religious organizations utilize digital platforms to disseminate narratives emphasizing tolerance, coexistence, and peaceful citizenship, thereby transforming moderation into a practical social movement rather than a purely theological discourse.

The findings therefore suggest that contemporary scholarship expands the scope of moderation from an individual ethical principle into a multidimensional framework encompassing education, governance, intercultural dialogue, and conflict prevention.

Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis demonstrates a substantial continuity between classical and contemporary perspectives on religious moderation. Both traditions consistently identify balance (*tawazun*), justice (*'adl*), and public welfare (*maslahah*) as the normative foundations of Islamic moderation. This continuity indicates that contemporary interpretations do not represent a departure from classical Islamic thought but rather its contextual development.

Nevertheless, important differences emerge regarding their primary orientation. Classical scholars concentrated primarily on cultivating personal morality, spiritual discipline, and jurisprudential equilibrium within relatively homogeneous societies. Their discussions focused on preventing theological deviation and promoting ethical excellence among believers.

In contrast, contemporary scholars address moderation within increasingly pluralistic and globalized societies characterized by ideological polarization, religious diversity, and digital communication. Consequently, moderation has expanded beyond individual spirituality to encompass democratic participation, interfaith dialogue, human rights, and social resilience against extremism.

Another significant finding concerns methodological evolution. Classical scholarship predominantly relied on textual interpretation, jurisprudence, and spiritual ethics, whereas contemporary scholarship incorporates interdisciplinary approaches drawing from sociology, political science, education, and communication studies. Despite these methodological differences, both traditions pursue the same normative objective: achieving harmony between religious commitment and social responsibility.

2. Discussion

The Continuity and Transformation of *Wasathiyah*: From Classical Normativity to Contemporary Contextualization

The findings demonstrate that the concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) has maintained a remarkable degree of epistemological continuity throughout the history of Islamic thought while simultaneously undergoing significant contextual transformation in response to changing social realities. Rather than representing competing paradigms, the perspectives of classical and contemporary ulama should be understood as complementary stages within the same intellectual tradition. Both traditions consistently

identify balance (*tawazun*), justice (*'adl*), and public welfare (*maslahah*) as the normative foundations of Islamic moderation. This continuity supports Auda's (2008) argument that the objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) are dynamic principles intended to preserve human welfare across different historical contexts.

Nevertheless, the comparative analysis reveals important differences in emphasis. Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Al-Shafi'i primarily discussed moderation within relatively homogeneous Muslim societies, where the central challenge was maintaining doctrinal orthodoxy while preventing theological excesses. Al-Ghazali, for example, viewed moderation as the equilibrium between reason, desire, and spirituality, arguing that moral virtues emerge from avoiding extremes. In contrast, Ibn Taymiyyah criticized *ghuluw* (religious excessiveness) because it threatened communal unity and generated sectarian conflict. Thus, classical scholarship conceptualized moderation mainly as an ethical and spiritual principle aimed at preserving internal harmony within the Muslim community.

Contemporary scholars, however, reinterpret these same principles within a global environment characterized by religious pluralism, democratization, globalization, and rapid technological development. Yusuf al-Qaradawi expands *wasathiyah* beyond individual morality by presenting it as a methodological approach that balances revelation and reason, tradition and innovation, and individual rights with collective welfare. Likewise, Wahbah al-Zuhayli argues that many contemporary conflicts originate from fragmented interpretations of religious texts detached from the broader objectives of Islamic law. Rather than abandoning classical principles, these scholars contextualize them to address new social realities. Therefore, the transformation of *wasathiyah* should be understood as contextual adaptation rather than theological revisionism.

Religious Moderation as an Epistemological Framework Rather Than Merely a Moral Attitude

An important implication of this study is that religious moderation should be understood not merely as an ethical recommendation but as a comprehensive epistemological framework governing the interpretation and application of religious knowledge. The comparison between classical and contemporary scholars demonstrates that moderation begins at the methodological level before influencing social behavior or public policy.

Al-Ghazali's conception of intellectual equilibrium illustrates that both excessive rationalism and excessive literalism distort the holistic nature of Islamic teachings. Similarly, Al-Qaradawi argues that Islamic jurisprudence should avoid rigid textualism while simultaneously rejecting unrestricted liberal interpretation. Although emerging from different historical contexts, both scholars advocate methodological balance by integrating revelation, reason, and social realities. This convergence indicates that *wasathiyah* functions as an intellectual method capable of reconciling continuity with adaptation.

This analytical perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary debates on religious extremism. Many extremist movements selectively employ scriptural texts

without considering historical context, the objectives of Islamic law, or broader ethical principles. Conversely, excessively relativistic interpretations may detach religion from its normative foundations. The comparative findings therefore suggest that *wasathiyah* provides a mediating epistemological framework capable of preserving theological authenticity while ensuring contextual relevance. This interpretation supports Esposito and Kalin (2019), who argue that moderation in Islam represents an intellectual methodology rather than a political compromise between opposing ideological positions.

The Social Function of *Wasathiyah* in Addressing Pluralism, Democracy, and Religious Extremism

The comparison between classical and contemporary scholarship also demonstrates a significant expansion in the social function of religious moderation. Classical scholars primarily emphasized individual moral refinement through *tazkiyah al-nafs* (spiritual purification) and ethical cultivation. Contemporary scholars, by contrast, increasingly position moderation as a mechanism for strengthening social cohesion, managing religious pluralism, and preventing violent extremism.

This transformation reflects broader structural changes in modern society. Religious authority is no longer transmitted exclusively through traditional institutions but is increasingly disseminated through digital media, where algorithmic amplification often favors sensational and polarizing narratives. Consequently, extremist interpretations can spread more rapidly than balanced scholarly discourse. Wolfowicz et al. (2021) demonstrate that digital propaganda significantly contributes to radicalization by reinforcing ideological echo chambers. Under these conditions, moderation functions not only as a theological principle but also as a preventive strategy against digital extremism through critical thinking, contextual interpretation, and constructive dialogue.

The comparative findings are equally relevant to the issue of pluralism. Classical scholars primarily sought to preserve harmony within Muslim societies, whereas contemporary scholars such as Quraish Shihab extend the concept of moderation to interactions with religious and cultural diversity. His interpretation emphasizes fairness and proportionality rather than theological relativism, thereby allowing Muslims to engage positively with pluralistic societies while maintaining their religious identity. Consequently, moderation becomes an instrument for coexistence rather than merely a mechanism for internal doctrinal balance.

Similarly, the principle of *maslahah* provides an important bridge between Islamic values and democratic governance. Classical scholarship associated justice with ethical leadership and good governance, while contemporary scholarship expands this principle to include civic participation, equal citizenship, human rights, and constitutional order. Therefore, religious moderation should be understood not as a concession to modern political systems but as the practical realization of Islamic ethical objectives within contemporary democratic societies.

Educational Institutions as Strategic Arenas for Institutionalizing Religious Moderation

Another important implication emerging from the findings concerns the strategic role of education in institutionalizing moderation. Both classical and contemporary

traditions assign significant importance to education, although their pedagogical orientations differ substantially.

Classical Islamic education emphasized moral discipline, spiritual purification, and intellectual formation through close interaction between teacher and student. Knowledge was regarded as inseparable from ethical responsibility, meaning that education aimed not only to produce knowledgeable individuals but also morally virtuous members of society. Contemporary educational institutions, however, operate within environments characterized by globalization, technological advancement, and ideological diversity. Consequently, moderation education must extend beyond theological instruction toward developing critical thinking, intercultural competence, digital literacy, and democratic citizenship.

Recent studies indicate that integrating moderation values into Islamic education significantly reduces students' susceptibility to radical narratives while strengthening tolerance and social responsibility (Amin & Rahman, 2020). These findings suggest that educational institutions should function as laboratories for cultivating balanced religious understanding rather than merely transmitting doctrinal knowledge. Such an approach transforms *wasathiyah* into a practical educational paradigm capable of producing socially responsible and intellectually open-minded citizens.

Toward an Integrative Model of Religious Moderation

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study lies in proposing an integrative model that synthesizes classical normative principles with contemporary contextual approaches. Classical scholars provide the philosophical and theological foundations through concepts such as balance, justice, wisdom, and public welfare, whereas contemporary scholars expand these principles into practical domains including democratic governance, intercultural dialogue, digital communication, and peacebuilding.

Accordingly, religious moderation should be understood as a multidimensional framework consisting of four interconnected dimensions: (1) theological moderation, which balances commitment to Islamic doctrine with recognition of human diversity; (2) epistemological moderation, which integrates revelation, rational inquiry, and contextual interpretation; (3) social moderation, which promotes coexistence, justice, and civic responsibility within pluralistic societies; and (4) institutional moderation, which operationalizes these values through education, public policy, and religious organizations.

By integrating these dimensions, *wasathiyah* evolves from a normative theological concept into a comprehensive paradigm for addressing contemporary challenges related to pluralism, democracy, social cohesion, and religious extremism. The findings therefore demonstrate that the future development of religious moderation depends not on choosing between classical and contemporary perspectives but on synthesizing both traditions into a coherent intellectual framework capable of preserving Islamic authenticity while fostering peaceful coexistence in increasingly diverse societies.

E. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) exhibits both continuity and transformation within Islamic intellectual tradition. Classical

and contemporary ulama share the same normative foundations namely balance (*tawazun*), justice ('*adl*), and public welfare (*maslahah*) but differ in their contextual application. Classical scholars primarily emphasized moral integrity, spiritual discipline, and doctrinal balance, whereas contemporary scholars extend these principles to address challenges arising from pluralism, democracy, globalization, digital communication, and religious extremism. Therefore, the differences between the two perspectives reflect contextual adaptation rather than theological contradiction.

The principal contribution of this study lies in proposing an integrative conceptual framework that combines the normative foundations of classical Islamic thought with the contextual approaches developed by contemporary scholars. This synthesis demonstrates that *wasathiyah* should be understood not merely as an ethical ideal but as a dynamic intellectual and social framework capable of promoting peaceful coexistence and social harmony in increasingly diverse societies.

From a practical perspective, the findings have important implications for several sectors. In Islamic education, the principles of *wasathiyah* should be integrated into curricula through the development of critical thinking, intercultural competence, and digital literacy alongside religious knowledge. For religious leadership, scholars and preachers should adopt contextual and inclusive approaches that balance fidelity to Islamic teachings with responsiveness to contemporary social realities. In terms of public policy, the integrative model proposed in this study can serve as a reference for designing programs that strengthen social cohesion, prevent religious extremism, promote interfaith dialogue, and reinforce democratic citizenship within multicultural societies.

Future research is encouraged to complement this conceptual analysis with empirical studies across different educational institutions, religious organizations, and national contexts in order to evaluate how the principles of *wasathiyah* are implemented and how they contribute to sustainable peace and social resilience.

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