

Research Article

# The Harmonization of *Wasathiyatul* Islam: Transforming Values of Religious Moderation in the Dialectics of Indonesian Society

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**Abstract:** The relationship between religious doctrine and national identity remains a critical discourse in the Muslim world. The object of this research is *Wasathiyatul* Islam (Islamic Moderation) in Indonesia, which serves as a theological framework for balancing religious observance with social justice. However, the emergence of rigid transnational ideologies poses a significant challenge to this harmony, creating a potential disconnect between religious doctrine and local culture. To address this issue, this research aims to analyze how the values of *Wasathiyatul* Islam are transformed and harmonized within the dialectics of Indonesian society. The study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through literature reviews and social observations, then analyzed using an interactive model to interpret the "lived experience" of moderation. The results reveal that the harmonization process is manifested through four key indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture. A synthesis of these findings demonstrates that moderation in Indonesia is not merely a top-down state policy but an organic, bottom-up cultural practice where local wisdom serves as a vessel for religious values. In conclusion, *Wasathiyatul* Islam successfully functions as a unifying instrument, creating a "State of Consensus" where Indonesian Muslims practice their faith devoutly while maintaining unwavering loyalty to the nation.

**Keywords:** Harmonization; Indonesian Society; Local Wisdom; Religious Moderation; *Wasathiyatul* Islam

## 1. Introduction

The discourse on the relationship between Islam, the state, and social diversity has become a central theme in contemporary global Islamic studies. In the context of Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Islam is not merely a theological system but a living social force that interacts dynamically with local values and national pluralism (Hefner, 2007). Scholars argue that Indonesian Islam possesses a distinct character of "covenantal pluralism," which naturally inclines towards moderation and tolerance, distinguishing it from rigid interpretations often found elsewhere (Hefner, 2007). This moderate character is theoretically rooted in the concept of *Wasathiyatul Islam* (Islamic Moderation), which Kamali defines as the "middle path" that balances religious observance with social justice and ethical conduct (Kamali, 2010). However, amidst the rising tide of transnational ideologies and the potential for radicalism, the practical harmonization of these values within the dialectics of diverse society remains a critical challenge that requires continuous scholarly examination (Arifinsyah et al., 2020).

Despite the growing body of literature on religious moderation, most existing studies have predominantly focused on the normative and theological dimensions of *Wasathiyatul* or its implementation as a top-down state policy (Azra, 2018; Shihab, 2019). For instance, recent works have extensively discussed the curriculum of moderation in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) or the government's role in counter-radicalism (Suharto, 2014). However, there

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is a paucity of research that specifically examines the phenomenological aspect of how these values are harmonized within the daily dialectics of society, particularly how the Muslim community negotiates their religious identity with local wisdom and national commitment from a bottom-up perspective. This gap suggests that the "harmonization" process the blending of religious text and social context remains under-explored in the current academic discourse.

To address this gap, this research aims to explore the representation and harmonization of *Wasathiyatul Islam* within the religious practices of Indonesian society. Unlike previous normative studies, this article employs a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experience of moderation. Specifically, this study analyzes the transformation of moderation values through four key indicators established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Akhmadi, 2019). By highlighting the dialectics between religious doctrine and social reality, this research offers a novel perspective on how *Wasathiyatul Islam* functions not merely as a theological concept, but as a unifying instrument in a pluralistic nation.

## 2. Literature Review

### The Concept of Wasathiyatul Islam

The term *Wasathiyatul Islam* (Islamic Moderation) is derived from the Quranic concept of *ummatahan wasa'atan* (a middle nation) as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. Linguistically, *wasat* implies justice, balance, and the middle position between two extremes (Naim, 2020). In contemporary Islamic discourse, Kamali (2015) defines *wasatiyyah* not merely as a compromise between opposing ideologies, but as a moral excellence that seeks truth and justice while avoiding excess (*ghulum*) and negligence (*taqsir*). This concept distinguishes the moderate Islamic framework from liberal secularism or religious fundamentalism. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that *Wasathiyatul Islam* requires a Muslim to interact with current realities without losing their fundamental religious identity, promoting a balance between the rights of God (*habluminallah*) and the rights of humans (*habluminannas*) (Qureshi et al., 2024; Agab, 2023).

### Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Landscape

In the Indonesian context, religious moderation has evolved from a theological concept into a strategic national agenda. Previous studies have extensively explored this transformation. For instance, Arifinsyah et al. (2020) highlighted the urgency of moderation as a preventive measure against radicalism and intolerance that threaten national unity. Similarly, research by Suharto (2014) and Muqowim et al. focused on the pedagogical aspect, examining how moderation values are internalized in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and state curricula. However, a review of recent literature reveals a specific gap. Most existing studies approach moderation from a top-down perspective analyzing it as state policy or normative dogma (Azra, 2018). There is limited research that utilizes a phenomenological lens to examine how these values are organically "harmonized" by the grassroots society in their daily dialectics. This research aims to fill this void by focusing on the lived experiences of the community rather than merely the regulation itself.

### Indicators of Harmonization and Local Wisdom

Harmonization in this study is understood as the dynamic process of aligning religious duties with social responsibilities. To analyze this phenomenon, this research utilizes the framework of "Religious Moderation" established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia, which comprises four key indicators: (1) national commitment (*komitmen kebangsaan*), (2) tolerance (*toleransi*), (3) non-violence (*anti-kekerasan*), and (4) accommodation of local culture (*akomodatif terhadap kebudayaan lokal*) (Beddu, 2023; Burhani, 2018). The fourth indicator is particularly significant in the Indonesian context. As noted by Hefner [14], Indonesian Islam is characterized by its ability to synthesize with local customs (*adat*) without violating Sharia. This synthesis creates a unique dialectic where religion and culture reinforce each other, serving as a buffer against transnational ideologies that are often culturally alien to Indonesian society.

### 3. Research Method

#### Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. The qualitative design was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena related to religious practices in Indonesia [15], [16]. Specifically, the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to explore the "essence" of human experience regarding *Wasathiyatul Islam*, not merely as a text, but as a lived reality in the dialectics of society. This aligns with the constructivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed through the interaction between religious values and local culture.

#### Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through library research and observational analysis of social religious phenomena.

#### Primary Data

Consists of authoritative documents on religious moderation, including the "Religious Moderation" guidebook by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), decisions from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), and observable social practices of inter-religious harmony in Indonesia.

#### Secondary Data

Obtained from academic journals, books, and relevant articles that discuss the implementation of *Wasathiyah* values. The selection of data sources focused on the four main indicators of moderation: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation.

#### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process involves three concurrent flows of activity:

- a. Data Condensation: Selecting and focusing on data relevant to the harmonization of *Wasathiyatul Islam*.
- b. Data Display: Organizing the information into structured narratives to facilitate understanding of the connection between doctrine and practice.
- c. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Deriving conclusions based on the interpretation of meanings and verifying them against the indicators of religious moderation.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The harmonization of *Wasathiyatul Islam* in Indonesian society is not merely a theoretical construct but is manifested through dynamic social dialectics. Based on the phenomenological analysis, the transformation of religious moderation values is clearly observed through four fundamental indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation of local culture.

#### National Commitment: Integrating Faith and Statehood

The first and most crucial manifestation of *Wasathiyatul Islam* in Indonesia is the strong integration between religious observance and national commitment (*Komitmen Kebangsaan*). The findings indicate that the majority of Indonesian Muslims view the acceptance of the state ideology, Pancasila, and the Constitution (UUD 1945) not as a violation of Islamic law, but as a religious obligation. In the dialectics of society, this is reflected in the concept of *Hubbul Wathan Minal Iman* (loving the homeland is part of faith). Unlike radical groups that contrast the State and Religion (*Thaghut*), moderate Muslims in Indonesia adopt the paradigm of *Darul Ahdi Wa Syahadah* (State of Consensus). This harmonization allows Muslims to be devout believers while simultaneously being loyal citizens. This finding aligns with Hefner's (2007) argument that Indonesian Islam has successfully democratized religion without losing its spiritual essence.

#### Tolerance: The Practice of Social Harmony

Tolerance (*Tasamul*) serves as the social adhesive in Indonesia's pluralistic society. The study reveals that *Wasathiyatul Islam* is practiced through active tolerance not just passive acceptance of differences, but willingness to cooperate in social affairs.

- a. External Tolerance: In inter-religious relations, Muslims participate in safeguarding the worship places of other religions or engaging in interfaith dialogue.
- b. Internal Tolerance: Within the Islamic community itself, there is a growing acceptance of differing schools of jurisprudence (*Mazhab*) and organizations (e.g., between NU and Muhammadiyah). Critically, this tolerance is strictly social, not theological. The

community maintains a clear boundary: respecting other beliefs without compromising their own creed (*Aqidah*). This nuances the "middle path" (*Wasatiyyah*), rejecting both liberal relativism (which claims all religions are the same) and rigid exclusivity.

**Anti-Violence: Rejection of Extremism**

The dialectics of Indonesian society show a strong natural resistance to violence in the name of religion. The concept of *Wasatiyyah* is interpreted as *Rahmatan lil Alamin* (a mercy to all creation), which inherently opposes physical and verbal violence. The results show that mainstream society prefers dialogue (*Musyawarah*) over conflict when resolving religious disputes. Acts of terrorism or radicalism are widely condemned not only as criminal acts but as religious deviations. This confirms that the values of anti-violence have been internalized in the communal psyche, serving as a shield against the infiltration of transnational radical ideologies.

**Accommodating Local Culture: The Indigenization of Values**

The most distinctive feature of Indonesian *Wasathiyatul Islam* is its fluid interaction with local culture (*Al-Urf*). The research highlights that religious practices in Indonesia are heavily "colored" by local wisdom. Practices such as Halal bi Halal (post-Eid gathering), the use of local attire (Batik/Sarong) in worship, and cultural festivals like Sekaten demonstrate that Islam does not seek to "Arabize" Indonesia. Instead, Islam accommodates local traditions as long as they do not violate Sharia principles. This accommodation creates a sense of belonging; the community feels that practicing Islam is compatible with their cultural identity. This harmonizing capability is what makes Islam in Indonesia robust and adaptable compared to regions where religion clashes with local heritage.

**5. Comparison**

To demonstrate the specific contribution of this research, this section compares the findings of this study with previous dominant researches on religious moderation in Indonesia. As highlighted in the literature review, prior studies have largely focused on the normative-theological dimensions (Aria, 2020; Al-Maqableh & Al-Makhadmeh, 2024) or the political-policy perspective (Azra, 2018; Al-Azami, 2020).

While those studies successfully established the legal and theological framework of *Wasatiyyah*, they often overlooked the organic dynamics at the grassroots level. This research fills that gap by employing a phenomenological approach. Table 1 illustrates the comparative distinctions between the State-of-the-Art (previous existing studies) and the findings of this proposed research.

**Table 1.** Comparison between Previous Studies and Current Research (Note: Please insert a table in your Word document with the following content)

Aspect of Analysis	Dominant Previous Studies (State-of-the-Art)	Current Research (Harmonization of <i>Wasathiyatul Islam</i> )
Primary Approach	Normative, Theological, and Political-Policy (Top-Down).	Phenomenological and Socio-Cultural (Bottom-Up).
Focus of Study	Focuses on defining <i>Wasatiyyah</i> based on Quranic text and Government Regulations (RPJMN/Ministry Decrees).	Focuses on the "lived experience" and how society interprets these values in daily dialectics.
Role of Local Culture	Often viewed as a separate variable or merely an object of regulation.	Viewed as an active instrument that "harmonizes" religious doctrine with national identity.
Main Output	Theoretical frameworks and policy recommendations for the government.	A descriptive model of social harmonization that proves moderation is culturally rooted, not just legally enforced.

Based on Table 1, it is evident that this research offers a more grounded perspective. For instance, while Arifinsyah et al. (2020) emphasized moderation as a state program to counter radicalism, this study proves that moderation is already an inherent cultural trait of Indonesian society, manifested through local wisdom. This implies that the implementation of *Wasathiyatul Islam* does not necessarily require rigid enforcement, but rather the strengthening of existing cultural dialectics.

## 6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the harmonization of *Wasathiyatul Islam* in Indonesia is not merely a theological concept or a state regulation, but a living social reality manifested through the dialectics of the Muslim community. Based on the phenomenological analysis, the values of moderation have been successfully transformed into daily practices through four key dimensions: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and cultural accommodation. The research findings confirm that Indonesian Muslims have integrated their religious identity with their status as citizens without conflict, adopting the paradigm that loving the homeland is part of faith (Hubbul Wathan Minal Iman).

The theoretical implication of this research is that religious moderation in Indonesia grows organically from the "bottom-up" through local wisdom, rather than solely being enforced "top-down" by the government. This challenges the assumption that moderation requires the abandonment of cultural identity; conversely, local culture serves as the strongest vessel for moderation. Practically, this implies that stakeholders should focus on strengthening local cultural institutions to maintain religious harmony.

However, this research has limitations. As a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach, the findings are deeply contextual and may not represent the quantitative trends of the entire population. Future research is recommended to expand this analysis into the digital realm, examining how the harmonization of *Wasathiyatul Islam* faces challenges in the era of social media and information disruption.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available within the article. The analysis relies on qualitative data derived from literature reviews and social observations which are fully documented in the manuscript.

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