

## WASATIYYAT ISLAM IN MUHAMMADIYAH'S MOVEMENT FOR STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This study is the concept of wasatiyyat and its application in civil society through the lens of Muhammadiyah. The main objective of this research is to see how Muhammadiyah uses wasatiyyat principles to create social attraction, encourage interfaith conversations, and strengthen democratic principles in a pluralist society. The study used a library research approach, which evaluated various sources, including journals, scholarly articles and relevant literature. The results show that Muhammadiyah has successfully incorporated wasatiyyat principles into multiple fields, including education, health, and social advocacy. These efforts show that Islamic moderation can help social harmony and democracy and contribute to developing an inclusive civil society. The results of this study confirm that the wasatiyyat approach through Muhammadiyah has a broader impact, offering a practical framework for dealing with challenges in a multicultural society. This contribution can enrich the discourse on Islam and civil society and highlight the potential of wasatiyyat values in promoting sustainable social development and peace efforts globally.

**Keywords:** wasatiyyah; civil society; Muhammadiyah

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini membahas konsep wasatiyyah dan penerapannya dalam masyarakat sipil melalui perspektif organisasi Muhammadiyah. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk melihat bagaimana Muhammadiyah menerapkan prinsip wasatiyyah dalam menciptakan daya tarik sosial, mendorong dialog antaragama, serta memperkuat prinsip demokrasi dalam masyarakat yang plural. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kepustakaan dengan menganalisis berbagai sumber, termasuk jurnal, artikel ilmiah, dan literatur yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Muhammadiyah telah berhasil mengintegrasikan prinsip wasatiyyah ke dalam berbagai bidang, seperti pendidikan, kesehatan, dan advokasi sosial. Upaya-upaya ini membuktikan bahwa moderasi Islam dapat mendukung harmoni sosial dan demokrasi, sekaligus berkontribusi pada pengembangan masyarakat sipil yang inklusif. Temuan penelitian ini memperkuat bukti bahwa pendekatan wasatiyyah melalui Muhammadiyah memiliki dampak yang luas, menawarkan kerangka kerja praktis untuk menghadapi tantangan di masyarakat multikultural. Kontribusi ini dapat memperkaya wacana tentang Islam dan masyarakat sipil, serta menegaskan potensi nilai-nilai wasatiyyah dalam mendorong pembangunan sosial berkelanjutan dan upaya perdamaian global.*

**Kata Kunci:** wasatiyyah; masyarakat sipil; Muhammadiyah

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has a multicultural and multireligious society that upholds harmony, harmony and inclusiveness (Sukmayadi & Hyangsewu, 2022). As with the concept of wasatiyyat, which etymologically means “middle way” or moderation, it is the core of Islamic teachings that emphasise balance, justice and tolerance (Luthfi & Nursikin, 2023). This principle teaches Muslims to avoid extremism, both in the form of radicalism and excessive liberalism, and to adopt an inclusive approach that respects diversity. In the modern context, wasatiyyat is theologically relevant and a practical solution to various social and political challenges in the Islamic world. Applying these values has become increasingly important due to increasing global group divisions and identity conflicts that often trigger community tensions. As such, wasatiyyat is a normative foundation for building social harmony and promoting interfaith dialogue in plural societies. Effective implementation of this concept can strengthen the social capacity of a nation to face contemporary challenges peacefully and constructively.

In social development, civil society is the central pillar of democracy and a forum for public participation (Hamid, 2019). A strong and independent civil society can encourage accountability, promote social justice, and ensure that minority voices are heard (Erfain, 2022). In developing countries, civil society is often a key driver of social change, particularly in combating inequality and raising public awareness. A civil society with a moderate character can bridge diverse interests, create constructive dialogue and prevent social fragmentation. Therefore, integrating wasatiyyat values in civil society development is crucial to creating an inclusive and equitable social order (Hasbullah, 2024). This approach is theoretically relevant and provides a practical framework for creating sustainable social interest.

Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's most prominent modern Islamic organisation, has long been a clear example of implementing the wasatiyyat principle. Founded in 1912, Muhammadiyah has a vision to advance education, improve social welfare, and strengthen moderate Islamic values (Hamzah et al., 2023). Unlike other religious organisations, Muhammadiyah focuses on spiritual aspects and is active in social activities that aim to create positive societal changes. With an extensive network of educational, health, and social institutions, Muhammadiyah has contributed significantly to building the capacity of civil society in Indonesia. The organisation promotes inclusivity, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue as an integral part of its mission (Fauzia et al., 2024). Therefore, Muhammadiyah is a relevant case study in understanding how wasatiyyat values can be effectively applied in modern civil society.

Thus, this article attempts to provide a new and more in-depth perspective by critically analysing various sources of literature to reveal patterns of challenges and adaptation strategies of the organisation in order to be able to build a more comprehensive narrative of

how Muhammadiyah balances the concept or value of Islamic wasatiyah with social innovation, and how Muhammadiyah remains relevant in facing the pressures of globalisation and social change. In addition, this paper will try to identify the gap between the concept of wasatiyah that has been taught and the conditions in the field. Through a more in-depth analysis of the literature, this paper is expected to provide a new perspective on how Muhammadiyah not only plays the role of a normative actor in civil society, but also as an adaptive and visionary agent of social transformation.

As we know, the role of wasatiyah has also been echoed in various other Islamic organisations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Wahdah Islamiyah religious practices in the city of Makassar, Al-Irsyad, and others that have various approaches in implementing the concept of wasatiyah in various matters. In NU, the concept of wasatiyah is emphasised through the concept of Nusantara Islam by combining Islamic values with local traditions in a moderate way. This can be seen in several pesantren curricula that teach tolerance, respect for differences, and maintaining social harmony (Nasikhin et al., 2022). Then in the religious practice of Wahdah Islamiyah in the city of Makassar, the application of the concept of wasatiyah is carried out through a rational and contextual approach by prioritising the use of reason in understanding religious texts, thus stimulating the ability to think more critically and still within the scope of Islam (Dafid & Ramli, 2023). These things show that every Islamic organisation has a different strategy and approach in implementing the concept of wasatiyah. Given these differences, the researcher wants to look deeper at the concept of wasatiyah in the Muhammadiyah Islamic organisation.

Based on this background, this research focuses on a fundamental question: How does Muhammadiyah apply wasatiyyat principles to strengthen civil society in Indonesia? This research explores and analyses Muhammadiyah's role in promoting Islamic moderation as a foundation for social development. The study also seeks to identify the challenges and opportunities Muhammadiyah faces in implementing these values amidst complex socio-political dynamics. Using a literature review-based qualitative analysis approach, this research will provide insights into the relevance of wasatiyyat in a multicultural society. The results of this research are expected to enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of the relationship between moderate Islam and civil society.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to strengthening the academic discourse on Islamic moderation and social development. The study offers a new perspective on how wasatiyyat values can be integrated into the practice of civil society organisations, particularly in Muslim-majority countries. In addition, this study also provides recommendations for policymakers and other civil society organisations to adopt the principles of moderation to create social harmony. Thus, this research is relevant for academic practitioners and policymakers who seek to build a more inclusive and equitable society.

## METHOD

This study uses the library method or literature study as the primary approach. This method collects data and information from secondary sources such as books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and official documents (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). The library research method is proper because it focuses on analysing concepts, theories, and policies related to the concept of wasatiyah and the role of Muhammadiyah in civil society. In addition, with a literature study, researchers can collect data from various scientific sources that have been tested for credibility, namely researchers taking scientific sources from credible national and international journals, such as *sinta* and *scopus*, with publication years ranging from 2015 to 2024 and having a strong relevance to the concept of wasatiyah in Muhammadiyah organisations for civil society.

The method of analysis used in this study is content analysis, which involves analysing the content of relevant texts to identify the main themes, patterns of thought, and core concepts related to Islamic moderation, civil society, and Muhammadiyah. In addition, this study also uses comparative analysis to compare the various perspectives and approaches found in the literature to provide a more comprehensive picture of the concept of moderation. This literature study began with data collection from reliable sources, such as academic works, Scopus-indexed journals, and journals related to Islamic research institutions. This corpus consists of literature discussing Islamic Wasatiyyat, Civil Society, and Muhammadiyah. To emphasise the important themes of this study, the collected data were analysed descriptively and analytically.

Furthermore, the literature is critically reviewed, which means that the results relate to Indonesia's situation. The advantage of using this technique is that it provides a comprehensive analysis from an academically tested perspective. Although this technique can provide some understanding, it does not provide strong direct evidence. Therefore, this study integrates the theories and cases discussed in the literature to provide a complete perspective on Wasatiyah, civil society, and Muhammadiyah. This study will provide additional analysis on the issue of religious moderation and offer strategic solutions to address this issue in Indonesia through a broad approach.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Wasatiyyat Islam

In the context of Islam, wasatiyyat is taken from the Arabic word “*wasat*,” which means “middle” or “balanced,” so that wasatiyyat is a principle of balance, middle ground, and not excessive in carrying out religious teachings (Putra et al., 2021). In the Qur'an, the term was then mentioned in surah al-Baqarah [2] verse 143:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

Meaning: “And thus (also) We have made you (Muslims), the middle people, so that you may be witnesses to (the actions of) mankind and so that the Messenger (Muhammad) may be a witness to (the actions of) you.”

Based on the view of Quraish Shihab, interpreting this verse means everything is suitable according to the object, so the meaning of *what* develops into the middle, and Muslims uphold the principle of wasathiyah (Husnil, 2019). In addition, the Quran introduced the Quranic paradigm of *waste* 14 centuries ago but has only recently been widely used. Prof. Dr. Azyumardi Azra, MA, CBE, is one of the Indonesian Islamic scholars who is aggressively spreading the discourse of wasathiyah Islam. He said that in the latest nomenclature and Islamic studies, wasathiyat Islam could be said to be “justly-balanced” or “middle path” Islam, so that wasathiyat Islam takes a “middle” position, not extreme to the right or left, up or down (*al-qhuluw wa al-taqsir*) (Putra et al., 2021). In this regard, there is a forum for the High-Level Consultation of Ulama and Scholars of the Muslim World held in Bogor (May 1-3, 2018) formulating the character of wasathiyah Islam, namely *tawasuth* (middle), *tawazun* (balanced), *I'tidal* (fair, straight, firm), *tasamuh* (tolerant), *musawah* (equal), *shura* (consultative), *Islah* (reformist), *awlawiyah* (prioritising priorities), *tatawwur wa al-ibtikar* (innovative), *bahadur* (civilised), and *muwathanah* (love for the country) (Azra, 2021).

Based on some of the explanations above, the concept of wasathiyat Islam is considered more appropriate than the term religious moderation, so later, this concept became the official policy of the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin government (Azra, 2021). Wasathiyah Islam is the Jokowi government's strategy for maintaining national stability by strengthening a moderate and nationalist understanding of Islam. Amid the challenges of radicalism and politicisation of religion, this concept is expected to form Muslims who can live harmoniously in Indonesia's plurality, reject radical ideologies, and support national values and Pancasila as the foundation of the state.

## Civil Society

Civil society is a concept that was born in Ancient Greece and was further developed by modern thinkers such as John Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Tocqueville (Jb & Darmawan, 2016). They state that this concept originated from the philosopher Aristotle, who used the term *politike koinonia* or, in Latin, *Societas Civilis*, which means political society/community (Sudibyo, 2010). Meanwhile, from an Islamic perspective, civil society refers more to the realisation of a civilisation, where civil society departs from the word *al-adin*, which is defined as religion and is related to *al-tamaddun*, which means civilisation (Jb & Darmawan, 2016). The two words are united in the notion of *al-Madinah*, which implies that the city is harmful so that civil society can be interpreted as “civil society” (Jb & Darmawan, 2016). Anis Matta stated that in terms of terminology, civil society is the first Muslim community in Medina, led directly by the Prophet and followed by the caliph Ar-

Rashidin (Jb & Darmawan, 2016). The civil society built during the time of the Prophet Muhammad is identical to civil society, which is often used as a model of modern society. It is said to be modern here because, at that time, the community had made more advanced changes in various ways. Nurcholis Madjid also agrees that the term Madani refers to the Islamic society built by the Prophet Muhammad in the State of Madina (Elfia, 2018).

Other figures and scholars also have an essential role in introducing the concept of civil society in Indonesia, including Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur advocated the idea of civil society based on tolerant and inclusive Islamic values and the views of academics such as Arief Budiman and Marsillam Simanjuntak also introduced this concept through a social and political perspective, emphasising the need for independent space for the community to participate in social control of the government (Jurdi, 2011). Their struggle with these ideas led to the birth of non-governmental organisations that played an essential role in the 1998 reform movement, so civil society became widely known at the end of the New Order era when the Soeharto regime began to lose legitimacy in the eyes of the people (Rahman, 2022). Civil society is a forum for individuals and groups to channel their aspirations and interests outside state institutions and the private sector.

Civil society in Indonesia functions as a *watchdog*, guarding public policies so that they remain in favour of the people's interests (Indrawan et al., 2021). Watchdog means that civil society in Indonesia plays a role as a watchdog, critic, and provider of input on the policies and actions of the government and other institutions to ensure transparency, accountability, and justice. In its development, civil society in Indonesia has become increasingly popular among students and community organisations that want greater freedom and civil rights. Civil society organisations expanded the range of issues they wanted to fight for, ranging from women's empowerment and protection of children's rights to oversight of economic policies. In addition, civil society also plays a role in fighting for press freedom and the rights of minorities who have been marginalised. Through action, civil society challenges old norms that tend to be authoritarian and paternalistic and promotes democratic values and equality (Erfain, 2022).

The role of civil society in Indonesia is also seen in various efforts to address social problems that the government needs to be fully capable of addressing. For example, civil society is often present in education and health to fill the void of public services, especially in remote areas that the government has yet to reach. In the digital era, the role of civil society in Indonesia is growing along with the increasing public access to information and social media. Digitalisation allows civil society organisations to reach a wider audience and engage communities directly in campaigns. Social media and other digital platforms have become practical tools for civil society to disseminate information and garner public support. In addition, digital technology makes it easier for civil society to monitor government performance and communicate their findings quickly.

In some cases, civil society movements started online have successfully pressured the government to revise or cancel unpopular policies, such as in the case of the RUU KUHP

dan UU Cipta Kerja (P. S. Santoso, 2024). Digitalization also allows civil society to strengthen its international network so that local issues in Indonesia can attract global attention. Thus, the digital era has strengthened the role of civil society as an effective agent of change in Indonesia's democratic system.

Overall, civil society in Indonesia plays an essential role in overseeing the democratic process and fighting for people's rights. Civil society serves as a liaison between the people and the government, helping to articulate people's interests in the public sphere. In addition, civil society acts as an agent of control over powers that can potentially abuse authority. By encouraging public involvement in the decision-making process, civil society also supports creating policies that are more participatory and responsive to the needs of the people.

### History of Muhammadiyah

Muhammadiyah is an Islamic organisation founded in Yogyakarta on 18 November 1912 by KH. Ahmad Dahlan was an Islamic scholar and reform thinker in Indonesia who was inspired by the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Al-Afgani (Azman & Helendri, 2022; Hamzah et al., 2023). Abduh and al-Afghani were figures who lived during the Western colonial period, so they knew how Western countries developed rapidly in the fields of science, technology, and economy while many Muslim countries were still trapped in backwardness and poverty (Haryati et al., 2022). Based on this, they felt the need to change Islamic thought to encourage people to be more advanced and able to compete with other countries. Al-Afghani, in particular, argued that the decline of Muslims was mainly due to their inability to understand and apply Islamic teachings dynamically, so al-Afghani taught more to think critically and innovate (Hawi, 2017).

This ability to think critically is one of the main things they have implemented by criticising taqlid, which is the habit of following the opinions of previous scholars without questioning or understanding the reasons behind them (Abdullah, 2015). For Abduh and al-Afghani, taqlid trapped Muslims in unproductive religious routines and distanced them from the true essence of Islamic teachings (Abdillah, 2015). They encouraged people to return to the primary sources of Islam, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah, and conduct ijtihad (interpretation) relevant to the time context. Through ijtihad, they hoped that Muslims could face modern challenges without being bound by traditional understandings that were no longer relevant. Abduh and al-Afghani emphasised the importance of education as the primary means of rebuilding Islamic civilisation. They believed that mastery of modern science was part of Islamic teachings and essential for the progress of the ummah. Through modern education, Abduh and al-Afghani hoped Muslims could strengthen their position in the world and contribute positively to humanity. Both men believed Islam is a flexible religion that can adapt to all times and places.

Muhammadiyah was established earlier than Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Indonesian Muslim Shuro Council (Masyumi). Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded on

January 31, 1926 by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari in Surabaya. NU was formed in response to the renewal movement spearheaded by Muhammadiyah to maintain the Islamic tradition of the archipelago with the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah madhab, which combines Islamic teachings with local culture (Ahmad, 2017). Meanwhile, Masyumi (Indonesian Muslim Shuro Council) was established on November 7, 1945, shortly after Indonesia's independence (Ma'afi, 2013). This organisation was originally a combination of Islamic parties and organisations, including Muhammadiyah and NU, which aimed to unite the voices of Muslims in the political field. However, Masyumi was dissolved in 1960 for political reasons (the involvement of figures in the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) in the 1957-1958 regional uprisings and also because they were in opposition to Sukarno) by the government under President Sukarno (Ma'afi, 2013). So, chronologically, Muhammadiyah was established earlier than NU and Masyumi and significantly influenced the development of the Islamic movement in Indonesia.

### The Journey of Muhammadiyah

Early Period of Establishment (1912-1942), KH Ahmad Dahlan founded Muhammadiyah based on the thoughts of Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Al-Afgani, namely that Muslims need to understand Islamic teachings correctly, deeply, and critically and be able to implement them in everyday life. Another reason KH Ahmad Dahlan founded the Muhammadiyah organisation was that Muslims at that time were facing various challenges, including low levels of education, poverty, and backwardness under Dutch colonialism. One of Muhammadiyah's early contributions was to establish schools, hospitals, and other social institutions. The schools established by Muhammadiyah were more directed towards the spirit of "*tajdid*" or renewal, so the schools established differed from traditional pesantren education by including modern curricula such as general science and religious studies. Muhammadiyah prioritises Islamic practices that are more rational, open, and progress-oriented. So through Muhammadiyah, KH. Ahmad Dahlan hopes to improve the welfare of the people and advance Islamic education that is more rational and logical by the times (Suwarno, 2016).

During the Japanese Occupation and Indonesian Independence Period (1942-1965), during the Japanese occupation and early independence, Muhammadiyah played an essential role in fighting for the rights of Muslims and participating in the struggle for independence. Muhammadiyah supported the struggle for an independent Indonesia, with its members actively involved in the national movement. Some Muhammadiyah figures who played a role included (a) Ki Bagus Hadikusumo was a member of the Investigation Board for Preparatory Efforts for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI) and the Preparatory Committee for Indonesian Independence (PPKI) (P. S. Santoso, 2024). He is known as one of the figures who contributed to the drafting of the Jakarta Charter. Still, he also approved deleting the sentence "with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents" in the first principle of Pancasila as a form of tolerance so that all Indonesian people could accept

Pancasila. (b) Abdul Kahar Muzakkir was involved in BPUPKI and drafted a state foundation that reflected the personality of the Indonesian nation and the spirit of unity (Nakamura, 2019). (c) Kasman Singodimedjo was a member of BPUPKI and PPKI who supported the spirit of nationalism and moderation in the concept of a Pancasila-based state and fought for inclusive religious values (Jingga, 2018). These figures made significant contributions in drafting the foundation of the state and fighting for the values of Pancasila as a foundation based on the diversity of the Indonesian nation while reflecting moderate religious values. During this period, Muhammadiyah expanded schools, hospitals, and social institutions. The first Muhammadiyah University was established, Muhammadiyah University Jakarta, in 1955.

During the New Order period (1965-1998), Muhammadiyah faced challenges from government policies that often limited the space for community organisations, including Muhammadiyah (Jurdi, 2011). Muhammadiyah continued to expand the establishment of universities in various regions in Indonesia. In addition, Muhammadiyah University Jakarta, Muhammadiyah University Yogyakarta, Muhammadiyah University Malang, and many more were established. This strengthens Muhammadiyah's role in the world of higher education. Muhammadiyah established institutions that helped empower the community's economy and social programs such as health services, hospital construction, and poverty alleviation programs. At this time, Muhammadiyah remained a *da'wah* organisation that was neutral in practical politics, unlike other organisations affiliated with political parties. Muhammadiyah rejects the politicisation of its organisation and remains focused on community empowerment.

Reformation Period to the Present (1998-Present): After the 1998 reform, Muhammadiyah has a more complimentary space to play a role in various fields and continues strengthening its position as an independent religious and social organisation. To date, Muhammadiyah manages thousands of schools, hundreds of colleges, and hospitals throughout Indonesia. Education remains one of Muhammadiyah's main focuses, emphasising Islamic character-building and academic quality. Muhammadiyah is also active in digital *da'wah*, adapting to information technology to spread Islamic teachings. At the international level, Muhammadiyah builds cooperation with international institutions and voices global issues such as humanitarianism, which is done by cooperating with WHO to increase the achievement of COVID-19 vaccination as an effort to prevent and handle the COVID-19 pandemic (Nubowo, 2022), Muhammadiyah has the Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC) and IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) which are active in assisting national and international disaster response, and Muhammadiyah organises the World Peace Forum in collaboration with the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation among Civilisations (CDCC) which aims to promote dialogue across religions and cultures, and discuss global issues such as peace, conflict, and social justice. Muhammadiyah also held an international conference (International Conference on Islamic and Muhammadiyah Studies (ICIMS)) related to Islamic education, which involved various educational figures from multiple countries. Besides, Muhammadiyah also actively

voiced solidarity for Palestine through humanitarian campaigns and assistance for the Palestinian people. At this time, Muhammadiyah maintained its position as a socio-religious organisation that was not directly involved in practical politics but still provided views and input on state policies related to the interests of Muslims and the wider community.

### **Muhammadiyah is aligned with Wasatiyyat and Civil Society.**

Muhammadiyah is one of the most prominent Islamic organisations in Indonesia that emphasises the principle of wasatiyyat in the understanding and practice of Islam by integrating Islamic values oriented towards renewal and progress that are tolerant, open, and able to work together in various groups to interact with the broader community, including with non-Muslims and multiple groups with different views, as in the Muhammadiyah Congress which established the Khittah of 12 Steps of Muhammadiyah (T. Santoso et al., 2020). The twelve steps contain the thoughts and reflections of KH Mas Mansur, who has observed Muhammadiyah's position as an Islamic movement and struggle. The contents of the 12-step Khittah have equivalence with the principle of wasatiyyah, which can be seen in the following table 1.

Table 1. Principles of Islam Wasathiyah in Khittah of 12 Steps of Muhammadiyah

No.	Khittah of 12 Steps of Muhammadiyah	Islam Wasathiyah
1.	Deepening the Entry of Faith	Tawassuth
2.	Expanding Understanding of Religion	Tawassuth, Tawazun, dan Tahadhdhur
3.	Produce characters	Tahadhdhur, Tawassuth, dan Tawazun
4.	Guiding Intiqad Practices (self- corrective)	Syura
5.	Strengthening Unity	I'tidal
6.	Uphold Justice	Musawah
7.	Doing Wisdom	I'tidal
8.	Strengthening the Tanwir Assembly	Syura
9.	Hold a Section Conference	Tathawwur wa Ibtikar
10.	Negotiating Decisions	Syura
11.	Monitoring Road Movement	Tathawwur wa Ibtikar
12.	Connecting External Movements	Tasamuh

Based on the table 1, we can see the close relationship between Muhammadiyah and Wasatiyyah. In addition, when we talk about wasatiyyah and Muhammadiyah, this is inseparable from civil society, which is also in line with the principle of wasatiyyat. As previously described, civil society is vital in guarding the democratic process and fighting for people's rights by significantly contributing to developments in Indonesia (Erfain, 2022). This civil society continued to develop until the formation of organisations that showed their contribution to growth in Indonesia. One example of an organisation that aligns with the concept of civil society and wasatiyyah is the Muhammadiyah organisation. Muhammadiyah

has a close relationship with civil society because Muhammadiyah is one of the organisations that play a role in building a better society through education, health, social empowerment, and in fighting for policies regardless of religious background, ethnicity, or social status (Latief & Nashir, 2020).

This education forms a young generation that can contribute to civil society. Muhammadiyah also established hospitals, orphanages, and community health centres in the social and health fields. In running this social program, Muhammadiyah instils the principle of wasatiyyat by providing fair and equitable services for all people and avoiding discrimination to support forming a strong civil society. On the other hand, Muhammadiyah's role in maintaining wasatiyyat Islam is to build a civil society that is civilised, ethical, and upholds individual rights. Muhammadiyah sees that wasatiyyat Islam is in line with the principles of democracy and human rights, which are the core of civil society. Muhammadiyah opposes various forms of injustice, violence, and oppression and always voices the importance of ethics in state and politics. Thus, Muhammadiyah is part of a civil society that fights for social justice, freedom, and tolerance.

Along with the times, the Indonesian state began to implement and strengthen one's character. This aligns with Muhammadiyah, which supports the development of people's character based on Islam but remains open and progressive. The principles of wasatiyyat helped Muhammadiyah create a society that is both religious and adaptive to changing times. Muhammadiyah pays attention to the development of science and technology while maintaining the principles of Islamic morality so that Muslims can play a role in modern life without losing their identity. Islam wasatiyyat also plays an important role in building harmony in a diverse society, making Muhammadiyah a significant force in reducing the potential for inter-group conflict and strengthening national unity to create a better civil society.

### **Challenges for Muhammadiyah in implementing wasatiyyat Islam**

The concept of wasatiyyat emphasises balance and moderation as fundamental principles in religion, so defining and implementing wasatiyyat amid the dynamics of a plural society is a challenge for Muhammadiyah, as the concept of wasatiyyat, or moderation in Islam, emphasises balance, tolerance, and rejection of all forms of extremism (Fitra et al., 2022). In its application in a heterogeneous society, such as in Indonesia, this becomes a challenge, such as how Muhammadiyah and other moderate Islamic organisations can maintain their relevance and effectiveness in the face of extremist narratives that are sometimes more emotionally attractive to some groups. Extreme ideologies often target individuals or groups who feel marginalised, offering instant solutions that are confrontational. In addition, there are also internal challenges in the form of potential differences in interpretation among Muslims regarding the concept of wasatiyyat. Amid a

plurality of religious understanding, Muhammadiyah must be able to explain and promote wasatiyyat inclusively and readily accepted by various levels of society.

In addition, implementing wasatiyyat in education is also a significant challenge for Muhammadiyah. As an organisation with thousands of schools and universities, Muhammadiyah is responsible for instilling the values of moderation in the younger generation. The challenge arises when it comes to ensuring that the implemented curriculum truly reflects moderate values, especially in the face of the threat of extremist ideologies infiltrating the world of education. This is related to Muhammadiyah educational institutions facing criticism of openness to the discourse of pluralism and interfaith tolerance (Mu'ti, 2016). On the one hand, there is pressure from conservatives who want a more exclusive approach; on the other hand, demands from the general public expect a more inclusive approach (Wahid, 2024). Managing these differences requires educational policies that are not only oriented towards Islamic values, but also relevant to the spirit of nationality and universal humanity. Another challenge Muhammadiyah faces in implementing wasatiyyat is maintaining organisational independence and integrity amid external political and ideological pressures. As an organisation committed to moderation, Muhammadiyah faces the challenge of responding to sensitive issues, such as government policies or evolving socio-political dynamics. In this context, the biggest challenge is to ensure that the principle of wasatiyyat remains the primary foundation without getting caught up in short-term pragmatic interests. Therefore, effective communication strategies and consistency in its socio-religious mission are crucial. This effort requires a strong leadership capacity that can maintain the ideological integrity of the organisation in various situations.

Overall, Muhammadiyah's application of the wasatiyyat concept presents challenges that include internal and external aspects. From internal dynamics related to the diversity of interpretations to external challenges such as political and social pressures, Muhammadiyah must be able to formulate policies that are consistent with the principle of moderation. The organisation's success in facing these challenges will determine the extent to which the values of moderation can be translated into concrete practices that support the strengthening of civil society. By understanding these challenges in-depth, this study can make an essential contribution to enriching the academic discourse on the role of moderate Islamic organisations in building an inclusive and equitable society. Therefore, this study is relevant to the Indonesian context and the global perspective on the dynamics of wasatiyyat in plural societies.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, *wasatiyyat* and *civil society* complement each other in the Muhammadiyah movement. Islamic moderation helps Muhammadiyah fulfill its role as a social force that promotes tolerance, justice, and welfare for all groups. With a moderate approach, Muhammadiyah supports forming a strong civil society in Indonesia, where tolerant, progressive, and humanitarian-oriented Islamic values can contribute to the nation's progress. Muhammadiyah, through its combination of the principle of *wasatiyyat* and its commitment to *civil society*, provides a concrete example of how religious organisations can play a role in creating an inclusive, just, and prosperous society.

Although this study shows how *wasatiyyat* (moderation) plays a role in strengthening civil society through the Muhammadiyah movement, it is important to recognise that the implementation of moderation values in actual practice still faces challenges, such as internal and external resistance to the values of inclusivity and progressivity. Therefore, it is necessary to continue reflecting on whether the *wasatiyah* approach has permeated all circles. Muhammadiyah and several Islamic organisations must continue strengthening education and internalisation of *wasatiyah* values to be implemented consistently in various organisational activities and policies.

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