

RELIGIOUS MODERATION AS A RESPONSE TO RADICALISM: INSIGHTS FROM THE QUR'AN, HADITH, AND THE PROPHET'S CHARACTER

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Abstract

Religious radicalism in Indonesia deviates from Islam's core values of justice, mercy, and balance, often manifesting in exclusivism, intolerance, and violence. This article explores the normative principles of religious moderation (*wasathiyyah*) as expressed in the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary character, analysing their relevance in countering contemporary radicalism. Using a qualitative method, it examines primary Islamic texts and secondary scholarship, identifying key themes through socio-historical interpretation and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The findings show that moderation understood as a balanced middle path between excess (*ifrāt*) and negligence (*tafrīt*) is a central Islamic tenet, affirmed in Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143 and Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13. The Prophet embodied moderation through gentleness, openness, and respect for diversity, providing a model for balanced thought and practice. Moderation also applies to theology, worship, ethics, and law, shaping an inclusive, peace-oriented Islamic framework. Integrating these values into education, preaching, and policy is vital to counter radicalism, strengthen tolerance, and maintain Islam's role as *rahmatan lil-ālamīn*. Moderation thus emerges as both a normative imperative and an effective strategy for harmony in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: religious moderation; *wasathiyyah*; radicalism; Prophet Muhammad; Islamic education

Abstrak

Radikalisme agama di Indonesia menyimpang dari nilai inti Islam, yaitu keadilan, kasih sayang, dan keseimbangan, yang sering termanifestasi dalam sikap eksklusif, intoleran, dan kekerasan. Artikel ini mengkaji prinsip normatif moderasi beragama (wasathiyyah) sebagaimana tercermin dalam Al-Qur'an, Hadis, dan teladan Nabi Muhammad SAW, serta relevansinya dalam menghadapi radikalisme kontemporer. Dengan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini menelaah teks-teks Islam primer dan literatur akademik sekunder, mengidentifikasi tema utama melalui interpretasi sosio-historis dengan pertimbangan maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa moderasi jalan tengah yang seimbang antara ifrāt (berlebihan) dan tafrīt (meremehkan) merupakan ajaran utama Islam, ditegaskan dalam Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143 dan Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13. Nabi meneladani moderasi melalui kelembutan, keterbukaan, dan penghormatan terhadap keragaman, menjadi model bagi keseimbangan pemikiran dan praktik. Moderasi juga mencakup akidah, ibadah, etika, dan hukum, membentuk kerangka Islam yang inklusif dan damai. Integrasi nilai-nilai ini dalam pendidikan, dakwah, dan kebijakan publik penting untuk melawan radikalisme, memperkuat toleransi, dan menjaga Islam sebagai rahmatan lil-ālamīn. Moderasi terbukti sebagai keharusan normatif dan strategi efektif membangun harmoni dalam masyarakat plural.

Kata Kunci: moderasi beragama; *wasathiyyah*; radikalisme; Nabi Muhammad; pendidikan Islam

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INTRODUCTION

Religious radicalism has emerged as a critical issue within contemporary Muslim societies, including Indonesia. This phenomenon is characterized by the rise of exclusive, intolerant interpretations of religion, often accompanied by violence in asserting claims to religious truth. In recent decades, radical ideologies have increasingly targeted younger generations through narrow-minded education, ideological propaganda, and the strategic use of social media (Laisa, 2014; Mufaizin, 2020).

Etymologically, the term *radicalism* derives from the Latin *radix*, meaning “root.” However, in its contemporary development it has come to signify a tendency to transgress the bounds of moderation (*ghuluw*) and to disregard the principle of justice (Duderija, 2017). From the Islamic perspective, such an attitude clearly contradicts the principle of *wasathiyah*, which emphasizes balance in religious life. The Qur’an explicitly describes the Muslim community as *ummatan wasatan*, a moderate and just community (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143). Moderation thus represents a core Islamic teaching, rejecting all forms of extremism, valuing diversity, and prioritizing peace (Kamali, 2015).

Several studies have identified underlying factors contributing to radicalism, including superficial understanding of religion, socio-economic hardship, and weak character education that fails to instill the values of tolerance (Asrori et al., 2020; Dodego & Witro, 2020a; Nisa, 2018; Nurhayati & Hamid, 2020). This suggests that radicalism should not be viewed merely as a doctrinal problem but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon requiring a comprehensive approach.

In Islamic history, Prophet Muhammad SAW provided a concrete example of moderation through his gentle, just, and compassionate conduct, even toward those who opposed him. His exemplary character remains relevant as a foundation for character education to safeguard Muslim youth from radical ideologies (Raffin et al., 2024). Similarly, the peaceful methods of the *ulama* and *wali* in the Indonesian archipelago in spreading Islam further demonstrate that moderation constitutes an effective path to building a harmonious civilization (Anshori et al., 2021).

This article aims to examine the values of religious moderation from the perspectives of the Qur’an, Hadith, and the practices of Prophet Muhammad SAW. A comprehensive understanding of these principles is expected to serve as a reference for strengthening Islamic education that is inclusive, tolerant, and responsive to contemporary socio-religious dynamics.

METHOD

The qualitative approach enables the author to explore the meanings, values, and normative principles of moderation within religious texts and their relevance to contemporary radicalism (Creswell, 2014). The primary data sources consist of the Qur’an,

authentic Hadith, and historical accounts of the Prophet's exemplary conduct reflecting the principle of *wasathiyah*. In addition, secondary sources include books, scholarly articles, and research findings that discuss Islamic moderation normatively, its historical practice, and the challenges of radicalism within Indonesia's socio-religious context.

Data were collected through a review of printed and digital documents from credible scholarly sources, including Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith compilations, and academic publications on religious moderation and Islamic education. The analysis involved identifying key themes, interpreting the meaning of texts within their socio-historical context, and synthesizing the values of moderation relevant to strengthening moderate character education. The principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* was taken into account to ensure that interpretations remain aligned with the universal objectives of Islamic law. The findings are presented descriptively, outlining the principles of moderation derived from Islamic texts, their significance for contemporary Islamic education, and recommendations for reinforcing moderate Islamic education in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Radical Discourse

The world, including Indonesia, continues to experience various forms of radical and anarchic acts, violence, threats, murder, religious desecration, and even rape accompanied by killing and sexual abuse. Among these many radical actions, and without disregarding concern for radicalism driven by socio-economic, political, or humanitarian factors, this article focuses on forms of radicalism that use Islam as their justification or ideological cover.

Etymologically, the term *radicalism* is often translated into Arabic as *at-tatharruf*. This word derives from the root *tharafa-yathrafu-tharfan*. Ibn Faris explains that *tharafa* carries two meanings: first, something that indicates an edge or limit; second, a movement of certain parts of the body (faris, 2008). An example in Arabic is the phrase *wa tharrafat al-mar'atu banānaha tathrīfan*, meaning a woman moved her fingers to one side or stretched out her fingertips.

Another meaning of *at-tharf* refers to a group (Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ali Al Fayyumi, 2000), while *tatharrafa* means turning to one side. For instance, *tatharrafat al-shamsu; danat minal ghurūb* refers to the sun moving toward the horizon at sunset. Similarly, *tatharrafa fi kadza* connotes a tendency to excess, crossing the bounds of proper moderation (*jawāza hadal i'tidāl fihī*).

Terminologically, *at-tatharruf* is a modern term not known among classical Islamic scholars, and it likely originates from Western discourse. According to *al-Mawsû'ah al-'Arabīyyah al-Ālamiyyah, ar-râdikalīyyah* or *at-tatharruf* is described as a political philosophy aimed at eliminating all forms of injustice and tyranny within the social system (al-Jawhānī, n.d.). The word *radicalism* itself derives from the Latin *radix*, meaning "root" or "source,"

and broadly refers to efforts to identify and eliminate the roots of social, political, or economic injustice.

At-tatharruf has also been understood as deviation and violation of the Sharia. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, commenting on errors among exegetes, wrote: "I have seen among some scholars of tafsir and others writings that contradict the truth they themselves believe, yet they persist due to their *tatharruf* (radicalism) and *dhalâl* (misguidance)" (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). Similarly, in *al-Irhâb wal-'Uruf wa al-Tatharrufi Dhaw'i al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*, radicalism is defined as a violent path that transgresses moderation, rejects gentleness, and denies tolerance, whether in thought, perspective, or action. According to Jajang Jahroni, such groups are often referred to as fundamentalists (Alyusif, 1997)

From these definitions, when applied to Islam, *Islamic radicalism* refers to the absolutization of a single religious interpretation while rejecting alternative views. Researchers at the Wahid Institute define Islamic radicalism as actions by individuals or groups who absolutize their religious understanding, show intolerance toward other beliefs, display hostility toward those with differing opinions, seek to impose their views on others, reject Pancasila, and aspire to establish an Islamic caliphate.

According to Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), religious radicalism seeks to win popular support by invoking slogans of defending and upholding Islam through *tarbiyah* (religious education) and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong). These slogans are effective in attracting segments of the Muslim community, including the highly educated, despite their failure to grasp the essence of Islam as understood by the *wali*, *ulama*, and the nation's founders (Wahid, 2009). They tend to confine Islam to literalist interpretations and narrow ideological-political frameworks, which makes it easy to declare fellow Muslims outside their fold. Arkoun and Esposito emphasize that radicalism is not purely a religious phenomenon but rather a political and social distortion cloaked in religious language.

According to Abu Zayd, the discourse of radical religious groups employs five mechanisms similar to those found among moderate groups: (1) conflating religion and thought without epistemological distinction, (2) interpreting social and natural phenomena solely through divine principles, disregarding cause-and-effect reasoning, (3) reliance on the authority of the *salaf* and tradition, (4) binary thinking characterised by absolute certainty and rejection of dialogue, and (5) denial of the historical context and dimensions of religious texts (Abu Zayd, 1994).

Syamsul Bakri identifies several contributing factors to radicalism, including socio-political conditions, religious emotions, cultural dynamics, anti-Western ideology, and state policy (Bakri, 2004). Beyond these factors, religious radicalism exhibits a number of characteristics that set it apart from other religious movements. First, it emerges as a response to conditions, ideas, values, or institutions perceived to deviate from what adherents consider the absolute truth of religious teachings. This attitude reflects a drive to resist what they

understand as injustice or deviation from Islamic principles. Second, radicalism does not merely reject the existing order but aspires to replace the prevailing socio-political system with one deemed more aligned with their ideological convictions. Third, radicalism is underpinned by a strong ideological commitment, often marked by fanaticism, literalism, and textualism, which rejects more moderate and contextual interpretations. This ideological rigidity often manifests in exclusivism, intolerance, and justification of violence as a form of struggle.

Radical groups also typically reject dialogue with those holding different views, display sectarian fanaticism, and ignore the historical dimensions of religious teachings. In the Indonesian context, radicalism has additionally been shaped by political factors, structural poverty, globalisation, and the influx of ideology and funding from Middle Eastern transnational networks. As such, religious radicalism is not merely a theological phenomenon but also a complex socio-political one (Muzakki, 2014).

In Indonesia, religious radicalism has also been fuelled by the impacts of modernisation and development policies that often fail to ensure fair participation for all segments of society. This exclusion has generated feelings of disenfranchisement and driven some groups to resist the state through radical means. Although the number of adherents remains relatively small, their presence continues to alarm the wider Muslim community and threatens social harmony.

Various religious figures have responded to this phenomenon with wisdom and an emphasis on moderation. KH. Hasyim Muzadi, for example, advised Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) to accept *Pancasila* as the national consensus of Indonesian Muslims and to reject violence as a means of struggle (Wahid, 2009). Similarly, KH. Said Aqil Siradj has underscored that Islam and nationalism are inseparable and mutually reinforcing in the effort to build a civilised nation (*Pandangan Kiai Said Agil Siradj tentang Islam dan Negara Bangsa - Tidar Islam*, 2025). The Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) has also firmly rejected the presence of ISIS, which tarnishes Islam's image as a religion of mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil-'alamin*) (Waluyo, 2014). Major organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and other Islamic civil society groups have likewise strongly condemned radical acts carried out in the name of Islam, while continuing to advocate the importance of instilling the values of moderation throughout society.

The Prophet's Character as a Model of Religious Moderation

History clearly records that the success of Prophet Muhammad SAW in transforming the harsh and hostile Arab society was not achieved through radical methods, but through an approach rooted in peace and gentleness. This reflects the principle of moderation (*wasathiyah*), affirmed in the Qur'an (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143) as a defining characteristic of the Muslim community: just, balanced, and rejecting extremism (Kamali, 2015).

One of the most illustrative stories of the Prophet's character concerns his encounter with Zaid ibn Sa'nah, a Jewish rabbi who sought to test him. In front of his companions, Zaid roughly pulled the turban around the Prophet's neck, choking him, and shouted: "Pay your debt, O Muhammad! The descendants of Hashim are always delaying payments!" Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) immediately rose to punish Zaid, but the Prophet calmed him and said: "That is not the way. He and I both need gentleness. Tell him to demand repayment properly, and I will repay properly." Astonished, Zaid said: "I only tested you because I read in the Torah that your character is gentle even in anger. And now I see it for myself". (*Kisah Pendeta Yahudi Masuk Islam Setelah Cekik Nabi SAW*, 2019).

This story shows that the Prophet not only restrained his own anger but also taught his companions to uphold good character. His gentleness was a manifestation of God's mercy, which kept people close to him, as stated in Q.S. Ali 'Imran: 159:

"It is by Allah's mercy that you are gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, ask forgiveness for them, and consult them in affairs..."

In this way, the Prophet's gentleness reflected divine mercy, which became a powerful attraction for his followers. Ibn 'Aqil emphasised that one who relies solely on knowledge without adorning it with noble character loses credibility, just as the community would have distanced themselves had the Prophet been harsh.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW stands as the most complete role model for humanity in all aspects of life, as the Qur'an affirms:

"Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example (uswah hasanah) for those who hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah often" (Q.S. Al-Ahzab: 21).

His example was evident not only in his steadfast commitment to the truth of Islam but also in his humility, openness to criticism, and willingness to accept correction with grace. This is exemplified, for instance, when Allah rebuked him in Q.S. 'Abasa 1–10 for failing to give adequate attention to a blind companion seeking religious knowledge. The Prophet did not respond with anger but instead humbly corrected his conduct, demonstrating spiritual maturity in seeing himself as a servant of the community rather than someone beyond reproach.

Perhaps the most concise yet comprehensive testimony to the Prophet's character came from 'Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her), who, when asked about his behaviour, replied: *"His character was the Qur'an"* (Sahih Muslim, no. 746). This statement underscores that his entire conduct embodied the lofty Qur'anic values of justice, courtesy, inclusiveness, peace, and universal compassion. His character was not merely a personal virtue but also an ethical and moral foundation, offering a timeless framework for moderate character education among Muslims.

The Prophet's character remains profoundly relevant as a model for cultivating moderate character in Islamic education. An education oriented toward moderation must go beyond imparting knowledge to shaping personalities that respect differences, reject violence, and prioritise compassion (Ma'arif et al., 2024; Mujahid, 2021; Wulandari et al., 2024). The Prophet's example demonstrates that the peaceful propagation of Islam has always been far more effective than radical approaches.

Religious Moderation in the Qur'an and Hadith

The principle of moderation (*al-wasathiyyah*) is a fundamental value in Islamic teachings and serves as the antithesis of all forms of radicalism committed in the name of religion (Dodego & Witro, 2020b; Mutawali, 2023). The term derives from the word *wasath*, which, according to Al-Asfahani, refers to a just middle position between two extremes, embodying balance and proportionality. A similar definition appears in *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, which describes *wasath* as *'adl* (justice) and *khiyār* (the best), reflecting moderation, equilibrium, and the ability to reject extremism in both thought and action. This underscores that moderation means avoiding extreme behaviour and speech, making it relevant both in religious and social contexts.

In Islam, moderation or *wasathiyyah* can be understood as a commendable attitude that safeguards the community from *ifrāt* (excessiveness) and *tafrīt* (negligence). Quraish Shihab, quoting Aristotle, notes that virtue lies in the midpoint between two vices (Shihab, 2015). This aligns with the Qur'anic mandate in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143, which describes Muslims as *ummatan wasathan*—a just, balanced community, worthy of bearing witness over other nations.

The practice of moderation in Islam is reflected across several dimensions: 1) **Theological moderation** (*aqīdah*), as in Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 111, which discourages exclusivism and blind fanaticism.; 2) **Moderation in worship**, as in Q.S. Al-Jumu'ah: 9–10, which promotes balance between worldly and spiritual pursuits; 3) **Moderation in social ethics**, exemplified by the Prophet in Hadith that emphasise balancing the rights of God and the rights of fellow humans; 4) **Moderation in legislation** (*tashrī'*), as seen in Q.S. Ar-Rahman: 7–9, which stresses the importance of maintaining balance.

Moderation is also evident in the Qur'an's emphasis on respecting human diversity. Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13 reminds believers that God created humanity in nations and tribes so they might come to know one another, not to engage in hostility. The *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) of this verse relates to an incident of discrimination against Abu Hind, which God rebuked by affirming that human dignity is measured by piety rather than social status (patoni, 2022). This illustrates that diversity is part of God's design (*sunnatullah*) and must be approached inclusively.

According to Kamali, the value of moderation taught in the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet is a vital pillar in building a peaceful, inclusive, and just Islamic civilisation. Moderation is not merely an ethical choice but a normative obligation that protects the Muslim community from radicalism, which tarnishes the image of Islam. It rejects two extremes: harsh radicalism and loose liberalism that compromises the *sharī'ah* (Kamali, 2015).

The implementation of moderation is also highly relevant in the context of contemporary Islamic education (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). Islamic education should aim to produce a generation that understands religion proportionally, respects diversity, and rejects violence as a means of expressing religious belief (Muhtifah et al., 2021). As exemplified by the *wali sanga* in the Indonesian archipelago, the success of Islamic propagation was due to its emphasis on gentleness, tolerance, and appreciation of local culture.

Thus, the values of moderation, as taught in the Qur'an and demonstrated by the Prophet, must continue to be internalised through education, preaching, and the daily religious practices of Muslims. This is essential to preserving national unity, strengthening tolerance, and maintaining Islam as a religion of mercy for all creation (*rahmatan lil-ālamīn*).

CONCLUSION

The rise of religious radicalism in Indonesia represents a deviation from the core values of Islam, which affirm the principle of *rahmatan lil-ālamīn*—bringing mercy to all creation. This phenomenon not only undermines the normative dignity of Islam but also generates negative socio-political consequences, including disrupting interfaith harmony, fuelling horizontal conflicts, and threatening national unity. The emergence of radicalism is driven by internal factors such as narrow-minded fanaticism, superficial religious understanding, and weak religious literacy, as well as external factors such as socio-economic injustice and the ideological misuse of religious texts.

As the antithesis of radicalism, Islam advocates the principle of moderation (*wasathiyyah*), which embodies justice, inclusiveness, and fairness. This principle is firmly established in the Qur'an (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143; Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13) and the Hadith, and is exemplified in the Prophet Muhammad's character, marked by gentleness, tolerance, and compassion. Moderation is not merely a normative concept; history has shown its effectiveness in the peaceful propagation of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago by the *wali sanga*, who wisely embraced cultural diversity through inclusive approaches.

In the contemporary context, internalising the values of moderation is crucial—not only to confront the challenges posed by radicalism but also to ensure that Islam remains relevant in a pluralistic society. Islamic education plays a strategic role in cultivating an inclusive,

tolerant, and peace-loving generation of Muslims. Educational curricula should be designed to strengthen moderate religious literacy, foster critical thinking against radical ideologies, and instil respect for universal human dignity.

In addition, the *da'wah* efforts of scholars, religious leaders, and preachers should prioritise approaches grounded in wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and good counsel (*mau'izhah ḥasanah*), employing persuasive methods that respect differences. The government and civil society must also work synergistically through public policies supportive of moderation, community-based deradicalisation programmes, and the firm yet rights-respecting enforcement of the law. Such collective efforts are expected to strengthen Islam's role as a religion of mercy to all creation and to realise a peaceful, just, and harmonious society amid diversity.

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