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RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND CULTURE OF PEACE: THE CONFIGURATION OF MODERATE SOCIETY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF UNESCO AND CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Abstract

This article formulates a configuration of a "moderate society" through a conceptual dialogue between the framework of religious moderation grounded in wasaṭiyyah and the United Nations and UNESCO paradigm of the culture of peace. It employs a qualitative normative-conceptual approach and library research on the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, learning to live together initiatives, and contemporary Islamic thought on moderation, especially the works of Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Quraish Shihab, and recent Indonesian scholarship on religious moderation. Data are examined through qualitative content analysis and conceptual-comparative analysis to map clusters of values and trace normative convergences between the two traditions. The study identifies a strong convergence around four shared pillars: respect for human dignity, rejection of violence, commitment to inclusive justice, and dialogical engagement with difference. On this basis, it proposes a model of moderate society comprising a value foundation, institutional structures in education, religious organizations, civil society, and media, and everyday civic practices. The study concludes that religious moderation and the culture of peace function as complementary normative horizons for building a just, inclusive, and peaceful Indonesian society.

Introduction

Religious radicalism, identity polarization, and religious-based violence in the last two decades show that religion functions on an ambivalent spectrum. On the one hand, religion provides a source of peace ethics, on the other hand, it is often mobilized as a legitimacy for conflict and social exclusion. In the Indonesian

context, the very high penetration of digital media among young people makes intolerant and exclusive narratives spread much faster than the capacity of educational and religious institutions to carry out systematic corrections and counter-narratives. Several recent surveys of the younger generation and religious educators show that there is an alarming distance between verbal rejection of violence and acceptance of intolerant attitudes towards religious groups that are considered different or deviant (Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM UIN Jakarta) 2018; International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development 2021). The educational space that should be an arena for internalizing the value of diversity risks turning into a medium for reproduction of prejudices, stereotypes, and exclusive attitudes.

At the national policy level, the response to this dynamic is crystallized in the religious moderation agenda mainstreamed by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. Through the Religious Moderation document and its integration into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020–2024, Religious moderation is formulated as a commitment to balance loyalty to religious teachings with respect for pluralism, the constitution, and national consensus (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2020). Religious moderation is not interpreted as an effort to "moderate religion" but as a fair and balanced way of religion in responding to differences, so that the tension between text and context, faith and humanity, and identity and coexistence can be processed constructively. Thus, religious moderation appears as a normative framework that seeks to reorganize religious practices in a plural and democratic Indonesian public space.

In parallel, the international community is developing a culture of peace paradigm as a correction to the culture of war paradigm that has long dominated relations between countries and conflict management. The Declaration and Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace adopted by the UN General Assembly through Resolution A/RES/53/243 defines the culture of peace as a set of values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life based on respect for life, rejection of violence, respect for human rights, tolerance, solidarity, democratic participation, and commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts (United Nations General Assembly 1999). UNESCO then incorporated this framework into educational and cultural programmes, mainly through the idea of learning to live together which places co-living learning, empathy, cross-cultural dialogue, and appreciation of diversity at the heart of 21st-century education (UNESCO 2014). Reports on the development of a culture of peace suggest that the shift from the logic of "post-violent conflict management" to "peacebuilding in everyday habits and institutions" is highly dependent on the role of civil society and educational institutions. (Adams 2010).

n terms of contemporary Islamic thought, the concept of wasaṭiyyah was developed as a principle of moderation rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2015) emphasized that wasaṭiyyah rests on two main axes, namely justice and balance. Moderation does not simply mean a numerical middle position, but an ethical orientation that rejects both extremes and maintains the proportions between spiritual and material dimensions, individual rights and public welfare, as well as the legacy of tradition and the demand for change. Other studies of Yusuf al-Qaradawi's thought show that

wasaṭiyyah requires a fair attitude, openness to ijtihad, and sensitivity to maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and social contexts, so moderation becomes a mechanism to reject rigid puritanism and liberalism that ignores normative boundaries (Arif 2025). In the Indonesian context, the study of religious moderation referring to the thoughts of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Quraish Shihab, and Salman al-Farisi shows that moderation is understood as a middle ground that mediates differences in interpretation, prevents radicalism and fanaticism, and at the same time affirms the priority of human values and the common good (Nadhrah, Casram, and Hernawan 2023; Wahab 2024).

Reasearch Methods

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a normative-conceptual literature study design. The main focus is to examine and synthesize two corpus of discourse, namely the concept of culture of peace in UN and UNESCO documents and the concepts of religious moderation and wasaṭiyyah in contemporary Islamic thought, to formulate the configuration of a moderate society. The choice of this approach is in line with the purpose of the research which emphasizes more on deepening meaning, conceptual reconstruction, and normative argumentation than quantitative measurement (Creswell and Poth 2018).

The main source of data for this research is written documents. On the international side, primary sources include the Declaration and Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace (A/RES/53/243) and related resolutions and UNESCO-derived documents on education for learning to live together and the mainstreaming of a culture of peace (Adams 2010; UNESCO 2014; United Nations General Assembly 1999). On the side of Islamic thought, primary sources include the work of Mohammad Hashim Kamali on the principle of wasaṭiyyah, writings on wasathiyah according to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, as well as works on religious moderation in the Indonesian context, including the formulation of the policy of the Ministry of Religion and the study of contemporary figures (Arif 2025; Kamali 2015; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2020; Nadhrah, Casram, and Hernawan 2023; Wahab 2024). Secondary sources in the form of journal articles, books, and relevant research reports on religious moderation, peace education, pluralism, and democracy are used to enrich critical reading of primary texts.

Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui studi dokumentasi, yaitu penelusuran sistematis, pembacaan mendalam, dan pencatatan bagian-bagian teks yang relevan dengan fokus penelitian (Bowen 2009). The selected texts were then manually coded into initial thematic categories derived from the research objectives, including non-violence, respect for life and human rights, tolerance, solidarity, democratic participation, justice, balance, respect for diversity, and religious moderation, among others. The coding process is iterative so that researchers can adjust and refine the categories when they find new nuances in the text.

Data analysis was carried out through a combination of qualitative content analysis and comparative-conceptual analysis. Content analysis was used to identify and map the formulation of values, attitudes, and practices that form the culture of peace in international documents as well as Islamic moderation in

contemporary Islamic thought (Krippendorff 2018). Comparative-conceptual analysis is then used to trace the common points and conceptual differences between the pillars of the culture of peace and the values of wasaṭiyyah so that a model of moderate society configuration that is coherent with the two normative traditions can be prepared. The credibility of the findings is maintained through repeated reading, triangulation between sources in each corpus, and tracing of the internal consistency of arguments, so that the resulting synthesis is not only descriptive, but also argumentative and can be accounted for philosophically and practically (Creswell and Poth 2018).

Discussion

Configuration of the values of culture of peace in global documents and cutting-edge studies

An analysis of the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and its derivative documents shows that the culture of peace is formulated as a set of values, attitudes, and social practices that reject violence, respect human dignity, and promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue and democratic participation (United Nations General Assembly 1999). In it, we see a paradigm shift from the logic of "war preparation" to the logic of "peacebuilding" which is rooted in cultural transformation, not only in the structuring of political institutions.

David Adams's writings on the history of the culture of peace confirm that this change is not just a change in terminology, but a long-term historical project to shift the center of gravity of civilization from a culture of war to a culture of peace, by placing families, local communities, cities, and civil society organizations as the main actors (Adams 2010, 2015). In Adams' perspective, the culture of peace is built through eight areas of action, including education for peace, sustainable economic development, respect for human rights, gender equality, democratic participation, tolerance and solidarity, freedom of information, and disarmament.

David Wick's article on "Culture of Peace Description and Background" shows that this idea is increasingly understood as a change in outlook and behavior at all levels of social life. He emphasizes that the path to a culture of peace moves through local efforts in the education, government, business, and environmental sectors that are networked with each other, with peace education as a fulcrum (Wick 2014). The link between education and the culture of peace is increasingly evident in a study by Wahyu Nanda Eka Saputra and colleagues who compared the role of peace educators in Indonesian and Malaysian schools. Their findings suggest that educators who consciously integrate the values of non-violence, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution are able to make schools a concrete learning space for a culture of peace, not just a normative discourse (Saputra et al. 2024).

Mark Anthony Lataza's writings on the culture of peace as the "social character of the contemporary world" add a strong humanistic dimension. By reading Erich Fromm, Lataza argues that structural violence and modern materialism can only be transformed through the fulfillment of basic human needs such as connectedness, identity, and transcendence, as well as the development of a life-loving (biophilic) orientation to life. Here, the culture of peace is understood

as a social character that places humanity, rationality, and love as the principles that govern common life (Lataza 2025).

From this entire corpus, the results of the analysis show that the culture of peace is configured in several interrelated value clusters: respect for human life and dignity, rejection of violence, respect for human rights and social justice, gender equality, solidarity and cooperation across identities, democratic participation, and the central role of education and civil society. These values are inclusive and explicit using the language of modern human rights, but substantively open up spaces for dialogue with religious traditions, including Islam.

The configuration of the values of religious moderation and wasaṭiyyah in contemporary Islamic thought

In terms of contemporary Islamic thought, the reading of the works of Mohammad Hashim Kamali, the conceptual study of wasathiyyah according to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and various studies on religious moderation in Indonesia show a configuration of values that is no less systematic. Kamali (2015) Placing wasaṭiyyah as a Qur'anic principle rests on two axes: justice and balance. Moderation is understood as an ethical orientation that maintains a proportion between the spiritual and material dimensions, between individual rights and the public good, as well as between fidelity to tradition and openness to change.

Tazul Islam and Amina Khatun, through a comparative study of Orientalist scholarship and Muslim scholars, show that the term "Islamic moderation" in the West is often politically charged and associated with liberalism, pluralism, and democracy, whereas in contemporary Muslim discourse it is more associated with justice, balance, and the rejection of extremism (Islam and Khatun 2015). This difference in horizon further emphasizes the need for the articulation of wasaṭiyyah from within the Islamic tradition itself so that it is not reduced to mere political labels.

Khairan Muhammad Arif's article on wasathiyyah in sharia according to Yusuf al-Qaradawi emphasizes that wasaṭiyyah entrusts the reading of nash that pays attention to maqāṣid, social context, and the distinction between the main principle and the branches, so that moderation is not synonymous with compromise on basic values, but with the ability to weigh priorities and proportionality (Arif 2025). The study of Nadhrah, Casram, and Hernawan shows that in the view of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Quraish Shihab, and Salman al-Farisi, religious moderation functions as a mediation mechanism that prevents radicalism and fanaticism while maintaining the integrity of the teachings (Nadhrah, Casram, and Hernawan 2023).

At the praxis level, Abdul Wahab's article on religious moderation in Islamic education shows how the values of justice, tolerance, balance, and deliberation are integrated into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum to form an inclusive and dialogical character of students (Wahab 2024). Ujang Supriyadi's study of the thought and implementation of Yusuf al-Qaradawi in Indonesia shows that the concept of al-wasaṭiyyah is used as a fortress against radicalism as well as a foundation for da'wah that emphasizes compassion, mercy, and non-violence (Supriyadi 2023).

The socio-political dimension of wasaṭiyyah is seen in the study of

Muhammad Jailani and colleagues on the wasathiyyah political movements of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in post-reform North Sumatra. They found that the construction of the NU movement was rooted in the concept of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah with the characteristics of tawassuṭ, i'tidāl, tawāzun, and tasāmuḥ, while Muhammadiyah based itself on tajdid, education, and social charity with the theological basis of surah al-Mā'ūn, so that both articulated moderation as a praxis of social justice and anti-violence (Jailani et al. 2024).

At the local level, research by Al Fiqri Ardiansyah and colleagues on the understanding of religious moderation and Qur'anic verses on interreligious relations among scholars in Binjai City shows that scholars associate moderation with the obligation to act fairly and respect the beliefs of others, while maintaining a commitment to their own teachings. The internality of these values contributes to interreligious harmony at the community level (Ardiansyah, Nasution, and Darta 2024).

In the digital context, Fikri Mahzumi and colleagues' article on cyber-Islamic moderation in Indonesia shows that platforms such as Islami.co and IBTimes.id actively produce inclusive and non-violent moderate Islamic narratives, as well as serve as an ideological counterpoint to radicalism in the online space. This digital activism has been shown to have an influence on the way young generations interpret Islam and differences (Mahzumi, Aminuddin, and Mahfudh 2025).

Based on this corpus, the results of the analysis can be summarized into three clusters of values of religious moderation and wasaṭiyyah: first, the theological-epistemic dimension in the form of affirmation that Islam is a religion of grace that rejects violence and outrage; second, the ethical dimension in the form of an emphasis on justice, balance, tolerance, and deliberation; third, the institutional-practical dimension in the form of organizational movements, education, and digital activism that internalize these values in public policy and culture.

The normative meeting point between the culture of peace and wasaṭiyyah

When the above two configurations are compared conceptually, there appears to be a strong overlap at the value level. First, the rejection of violence and respect for life that are at the core of the culture of peace are in line with the principle of ḥifẓ al-nafs and the prohibition of excessive violence articulated by moderate thinkers as part of al-wasaṭiyyah (Kamali 2015; Supriyadi 2023). Second, the UN and UNESCO's emphasis on respect for human rights, social justice, and gender equality resonates with moderate Islamic thinkers' focus on justice ('adālah), balance (tawāzun), and human dignity as karāmah insāniyyah (Arif 2025; Nadhrah, Casram, and Hernawan 2023).

Third, the idea of dialogue, tolerance, and cross-identity solidarity as pillars of the culture of peace finds parallels in the emphasis of al-Qaradawi and other thinkers on the importance of interreligious dialogue, respect for differences, and the avoidance of fanaticism (ta'aṣṣub) and disbelief (Ardiansyah, Nasution, and Darta 2024; Supriyadi 2023). Fourth, the attention of the culture of peace to the role of education and civil society is very close to the fact that the internalization of wasaṭiyyah in Indonesia actually takes place through Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, religious organizations, and digital communities

(Jailani et al. 2024; Mahzumi, Aminuddin, and Mahfudh 2025; Saputra et al. 2024; Wahab 2024).

The main difference between these two traditions lies in the language and epistemic horizon. The culture of peace uses the language of human rights, democracy, and sustainable development, while wasaṭiyyah uses sharia grammar, maqāṣid, and scholarly authority. However, this difference in language does not erase the substantive proximity. Instead, this study shows that both can be understood as two "ethical dialects" that seek to answer the same problem, namely how to organize society to be free from structural and symbolic violence, while ensuring justice and respect for human dignity.

Thus, the normative meeting point between the culture of peace and wasaṭiyyah can be formulated in four pillars: respect for human dignity, rejection of violence, inclusive justice, and dialogue that respects differences. Tensions that may arise, for example regarding the interpretation of gender norms or the limits of freedom of expression, should not be read as total contradictions, but rather as spaces for dialogue that require the sharpening of maqāṣid and the reinterpretation of some concepts in both traditions.

The model of moderate society configuration and its implications for the Indonesian context

Based on the above mapping, this study proposes a three-layered model of "configuration of a moderate society". The first layer is the foundation of values, which is the internalization of the four pillars that are mutually recognized by the culture of peace and wasaṭiyyah: respect for human dignity, rejection of violence, inclusive justice, and dialogue that respects differences. The second layer is the social structure, namely the institutions that operationalize these values: the education system, religious organizations, the media, and political institutions. Findings from the study on peace educators, the NU-Muhammadiyah wasathiyyah movement, and digital activism Islami.co and IBTimes.id show that these institutions are key arenas where the values of moderation and a culture of peace are negotiated and strengthened(Jailani et al. 2024; Mahzumi, Aminuddin, and Mahfudh 2025; Saputra et al. 2024; Wahab 2024).

The third layer is citizen praxis, which is the daily habits and choices of individuals and communities. Here the field findings show that moderation does not stop at the level of policy or curriculum discourse, but must be present in the practice of mercy da'wah, local conflict management, and responsible use of digital media. Research on Binjai ulama, the wasathiyyah movement in North Sumatra, and the application of the value of moderation in Indonesian-Malaysian schools shows that when the values of justice, tolerance, and non-violence are truly internalized by local actors, then interreligious harmony and a culture of peace gain a stronger foundation (Ardiansyah, Nasution, and Darta 2024; Jailani et al. 2024; Saputra et al. 2024).

In the Indonesian context, this model has two important implications. First, the state's religious moderation agenda will be stronger if it is explicitly combined with the UN and UNESCO's culture of peace framework, so that moderation is not perceived simply as a domestic sectoral project, but as part of a global commitment to peace rooted in universal and religious values. Second, the wasaṭiyyah-based religious moderation movement has great potential to fill the

substance of the culture of peace with Islamic vocabulary and imagination that is familiar to the experience of the majority of citizens, so that the language of human rights and democracy no longer feels foreign, but is read in line with religious teachings.

In other words, the results of this study show that religious moderation and culture of peace are not two independent agendas, but two normative horizons that can reinforce each other. When both are synthesized in the configuration of a moderate society, there are opportunities to formulate educational strategies, public policies, and social movements that are more sensitive to Indonesia's religious reality, while remaining connected to the global peace ethos.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this study show that the discourse of culture of peace and religious moderation based on wasaṭiyyah actually moves towards a similar ethical horizon, although using different epistemic language and tools. An analysis of UN and UNESCO documents reveals that the culture of peace is constructed as a value system that rejects violence, upholds human dignity, and places education and citizen participation as the main medium of social transformation. On the other hand, a reading of the thoughts of Kamali, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and a number of contemporary scholars shows that wasaṭiyyah functions as a normative principle that directs Islamic praxis to justice, balance, and rejection of all forms of extremism.

From the encounter of the two corpuses, this study formulates four common pillars that can be the foundation of the "configuration of a moderate society": respect for human dignity, rejection of violence, commitment to inclusive justice, and the strengthening of dialogue that respects differences. These pillars do not stop at the abstract level, but find their form in institutional practices and social movements: religious education curricula that instill the value of moderation, the wasathiyyah movement of religious organizations, peaceful education initiatives in schools, to digital activism that promotes a friendly and non-violent Islam. Thus, the culture of peace and wasaṭiyyah do not need to be opposed, but can be read as two ethical dialects that reinforce each other in the project of building a just, inclusive, and peaceful society.

For the Indonesian context, this normative synthesis contains two main implications. First, the state's religious moderation agenda acquires legitimacy and conceptual depth when consciously linked to the framework of the culture of peace, so that national policies are tethered to a global ethical compass without being uprooted from the roots of the religious traditions of the majority. Second, wasaṭiyyah provides an "inner language" that allows the values of human rights, democracy, and social justice to be read in harmony with Islamic teachings, not as foreign discourses. This research, because it is conceptual and based on literature studies, opens up further space for empirical studies at various levels of schools, Islamic boarding schools, community organizations, and digital spaces to test the extent to which the moderate social configuration offered here can be operationalized concretely and sustainably in Indonesia's pluralistic social life.

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