

Reframing State Religion Governance: A Comparative Philosophical-Pedagogical Analysis of Religious Moderation in Indonesia and Wasatiyyah in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT. The global discourse on counterradicalism has prompted Muslim-majority countries to adopt a policy of integrating religious moderation into their respective state policies. Nevertheless, the translation of abstract theological concepts into bureaucratic structures remains a subject that is underexplored, particularly in terms of how such concepts are operationalized into distinct governance models within education systems. This study sets out to compare the institutionalisation of “Religious Moderation” in Indonesia and “Wasatiyyah” in Malaysia in the education sectors. Employing a comparative qualitative approach, this study analysed policy documents, national curricula, and semi-structured interview data from key policymakers, educators, and institutional actors in both countries. The data were examined using thematic coding and cross-case analysis to ensure analytical rigor and comparability. The findings reveal a fundamental divergence in the moderation governance model. Indonesia adopts a decentralized and participatory framework that conceptualizes moderation as a “public good” cultivated through Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI) and civil society engagement. In contrast, Malaysia employs a centralised and state-centric model, wherein Wasatiyyah serves as an instrument of “bureaucratic Islam” to ensure political stability and national unity under the auspices of the Prime Minister’s Department. Pedagogically, Indonesia emphasizes epistemological openness and ethical reasoning, while Malaysia utilizes a formative-instructive model relying on top-down standardization. This study contributes theoretically by proposing a multidimensional typology of moderation governance. It delineates the participatory-public model from the bureaucratic-instrumental model by unpacking their contrasting ontological (humanistic–structural), epistemological (reflective–instructive), and axiological (decentralized–centralized) paradigms. These findings imply that the effectiveness of religious moderation policies depends not only on theological articulation but also on the configuration of political authority and institutional design, offering important insights for policymakers and educators in plural societies.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation, Wasatiyyah, Educational Institutions, Religious Policies, Indonesia, Malaysia.*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse on religious moderation has evolved from a theological discussion to a matter of state policy in the Muslim world (Junaidi et al., 2025; Ma`arif, Rokhman, et al., 2025). The increasing prevalence of transnational extremism, intolerance, and identity politics has compelled Muslim-majority countries to re-evaluate their religious management strategies (R. Hamzah et al., 2024; Obaidi et al., 2020; Rofiq et al., 2025; Svensson & Nilsson,

2025; Tuna et al., 2023; Yono et al., 2025). In the context of Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia are two countries of particular note in their efforts to promote the Islamic middle path (Nabila Tussa'bannniya & Puspa Arum Yasinatul, 2025; Nasir & Rijal, 2021). In the context of the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), Indonesia has adopted a policy of promoting Religious Moderation as a fundamental principle. Meanwhile, Malaysia has initiated measures to strengthen the concept of *Wasatiyyah*, integrating it into the country's administrative structure (Fauzi, 2021; Ichsan et al., 2024; Mohamad Zaidin Mohamad, Mohd Faiz Hakimi Mat Idris, Berhanundin Abdullah, Ahmad Fauzi Hasan, 2023; Nugroho et al., 2025; Qoumas et al., 2024; Sayaka et al., 2025; Suhaila Abdullah et al., 2025). These two concepts, despite being rooted in the same vocabulary of Islamic ethics, are operationalised through significantly different institutional trajectories (Wahyudin, 2025).

Contemporary academic literature explores the concept of moderation in Indonesia and Malaysia, revealing distinct research trajectories in each region. Indonesian scholarship on religious moderation is generally categorized into four domains: religious normative values (AW, 2021; Islam, 2021); institutional strengthening within the Ministry of Religion (Wibisono, 2020; Yeni Huriani, Erni Haryanti, 2021); digital media campaigns (Hefni, 2020; Wibowo, 2019); and the relationship between moderation and education (Khotimah, 2020; Mahyuddin, Rustam Magun Pikahulan, 2020; Sutrisno, 2019). Conversely, studies on *Wasatiyyah* in Malaysia focus on four key areas: the concept's (Mohd Shukri Hanafi, 2014; Mujani et al., 2015); public attitudes and responses (Mazlan Ibrahim et al., 2013; Wan Kamal Mujani, Azyati Azhani Mohd Mazuki & Rozali, 2014); its application in administration and management (Azmi, Ilhaamie Binti Abdul Ghani; Ismail, Sharifah Hayaati Binti Syed; Basir, Siti Arni Binti; Norman, Azah Anir Binti; Yusof, 2015; Dusuki A.W., 2017; Jannah et al., 2026; Khoir et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2025; Minarti et al., 2025); and its integration into the educational system (M. L. Hamzah et al., 2026; Z. Hamzah et al., 2026; Nasharudin Mat Isa & Yahya Don, 2016; Yaakub et al., 2020).

The extant literature is indeed diverse and multi-perspective, but it is conducted in the context of each country (single-country study) and is descriptive-normative. To the best of the author's knowledge, there has been almost no study that has specifically compared moderation in two countries, especially in the process of "institutionalization," i.e., how abstract ideas are translated into public policy, bureaucratic structures, and concrete educational practices. More importantly, the absence of a systematic comparative framework has resulted in a limited understanding of how similar Islamic ethical concepts are recontextualised within different state traditions, governance models, and socio-political configurations. This gap is not merely empirical but also analytical, as existing studies tend to overlook cross-national variation as a critical variable in shaping the trajectory of religious policy institutionalisation. Furthermore, broader global scholarship on state-religion relations still disproportionately focuses on Western secular models or Middle Eastern theocracies, leaving the distinct Southeast Asian paradigm of state-directed religious moderation largely under-theorised on the international stage. Existing studies have also not answered the philosophical pedagogical question of how the ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of moderation are constructed by the state to legitimise educational and religious policies.

The present article aims to address this lacuna by comparing and contrasting the institutionalization of religious moderation in Indonesia and *Wasatiyyah* in Malaysia from a philosophical-pedagogical perspective. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: "How do Indonesia and Malaysia institutionalize religious moderation within their educational governance structures?" and "How can this institutionalization be understood from a philosophical-pedagogical perspective?" To do so, the study adopts a multi-layered theoretical approach that integrates institutional analysis with a philosophical-pedagogical framework. Rather than treating moderation as a purely normative or doctrinal concept, this research approaches it as a state-mediated construct operating across three interrelated dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontologically, the study examines how moderation is defined and

problematised within different state traditions; epistemologically, it analyses its production, transmission, and internalisation through educational systems; and axiologically, it explores how these values are institutionalised within bureaucratic and governance structures. This framework draws on insights from the post-secularism, governance theory, and critical pedagogy. By situating moderation within these intersecting dimensions, the study moves beyond descriptive policy analysis to offer a comparative explanatory model of how states transform ethical-religious concepts into instruments of governance, education, and social order.

The study posits that despite the utilisation of analogous terminology, the institutionalisation models in the domains of education and religion in these two countries reflect the distinctive character of state governance and the moral rationality of each nation. The significance of these findings lies in their capacity to elucidate the manner in which contemporary states navigate the intersection of religion and the public sphere, while preserving the ethical essence of religious teachings.

METHOD

The research method employed is of a qualitative and analytical approach, incorporating a comparative interpretive policy analysis approach. The study examines the institutionalisation of religious moderation policies in Indonesia and wasatiyyah in Malaysia within educational and religious institutions. The qualitative approach was selected for this study as it focuses on understanding meaning, normative foundations and policy practices, rather than on statistical measurement. A comparative analysis, grounded in a philosophical-hermeneutic approach, is employed to interpret policy texts and discourses in the two countries in terms of policy philosophy, conceptual construction, and forms of institutionalisation. The unit of analysis in this study is the policy discourse and its institutional expression, as reflected in official documents and public articulations by key policy actors.

The data sources of this research consist of two types. Initially, the virtual data (i.e. big data) was collated in the form of video recordings of interviews, orations, and discussions involving 15 key informants (comprising authoritative actors of religious moderation and wasatiyyah policies) on various online media channels, especially YouTube, as well as relevant online news. These video data are considered valid as they represent discursive policy construction, capturing how policies are publicly framed, interpreted, and legitimised by authoritative actors. The selection these 15 informants was based on criteria including their formal involvement in policy formulation or dissemination, institutional affiliation, and frequency of engagement in public discourse on moderation and wasatiyyah. Secondly, the written documentation encompasses 20 official policy documents, including decision letters, circulars, and other relevant materials. These are complemented by primary reference books such as *Religious Moderation and Religious Moderation FAQs* (RI, 2019), and *Wasatiyyah's Approach to Embracing 1Malaysia* (Dato' Seri Dr. Abdullah Md. Zain, 2011).

The data was collected through documentation and digital study methods, with instruments that were systematically compiled. The study spanned a period of seven months, commencing in early January and concluding in late July 2025. It involved the meticulous examination and analysis of video recordings of interviews and policy documents. The research was further enriched through the application of probing techniques, as articulated by Masri Singarimbun and Sofian Efendi (Singarimbun, 2008). The selection of Indonesia and Malaysia as case studies is based on the consideration that both are Muslim-majority countries that officially promote moderation as a national discourse, but through different governance models.

This study employed qualitative analysis encompassing data reduction, classification, presentation, and inferential interpretation. The analytical framework combines thematic analysis with interpretive policy analysis, focusing on meaning-making processes, normative assumptions, and institutional narratives. To systematically analyse the dataset, a specific coding technique was applied through iterative reading. This technique involved a two-stage process: first, open coding

was conducted to identify and extract key themes from the transcripts and texts, followed by axial coding to establish theoretical relationships between categories such as policy framing, institutionalisation mechanisms, and actor positioning. Beyond thematic analysis, cross-analysis of video transcripts identified informant variation, while cross-case analysis eliminated redundancy (M. B. Miles et al., 2014; M. Miles & Huberman, 1994). Validity was ensured through triangulation of video and documentary data, along with Lincoln and Guba's credibility criteria using verbatim quotations as empirical evidence (Lincoln et al., 2013). Finally, consistent guidelines and rigorous oversight audits were implemented to ensure the research's reliability and trustworthiness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The philosophy and concepts of “religious moderation” and “wasatiyyah”

The philosophy and concept of religious moderation in Indonesia

From a philosophical perspective, the concept of “religious moderation” in Indonesia can be understood through an examination of its purpose. The main objective of religious moderation in Indonesia is to organise religious life in a comprehensive manner, and to rectify extreme religious practices. In an interview, the expert staff of the Minister of Religious Affairs, Oman Faturrahman, stated the following:

Religious moderation serves as a comprehensive framework for managing religious life. Its primary objective is to address religious extremism, encompassing both the ‘extreme right’ and the ‘extreme left.’ The former, often identified with radicalism, is characterized by rigid textualist interpretations of religion. Conversely, the program also targets the ‘extreme left,’ referring to attitudes and practices that disregard fundamental religious values. Therefore, religious moderation seeks to realign these polarized views toward a balanced practice (Faturrahman, 2021).

Furthermore, the objective of religious moderation is also to forestall the emergence of religious attitudes that could result in violent conflict with the state. Oman Faturrahman asserts that religion must indeed be radical and fundamental in the principles of religion. However, if radicalism is interpreted as an effort to fight the state, it is certainly not allowed. Another key objective is fostering a harmonious, peaceful, and tolerant religious environment among all believers, free from excessive or extreme attitudes (Faturrahman, 2021).

Conceptually, religious moderation in Indonesia is unequivocally defined as the ‘middle way,’ entailing the accurate and balanced implementation of religious teachings; adherents of this path are termed ‘moderates’ (RI, 2019). This concept involves moderating religious views, attitudes, and practices at the interpretive level, rather than altering the religion itself, which is inherently moderate. Thus, religious moderation signifies a mode of practice that avoids excess or extremism, adopting instead a centrist approach (Faturrahman, 2021).

The notion of “religious moderation” encapsulates fundamental tenets of religious doctrine, including the safeguarding of human dignity, the promotion of the public good, the pursuit of justice, the maintenance of balance, and the adherence to the constitution as a national accord (Faturrahman, 2021).

The concept of Indonesian-style religious moderation is comprised of five components (Faturrahman, 2021). First, it emphasizes the social dimension of religious attitudes and practices within communal life, recognizing that specific ritual observances and attire remain matters of individual conviction. Second, it underscores the substantive essence of religious teachings, urging adherents to internalize the profound meaning behind their daily rituals rather than performing them merely as formal obligations. Third, the manifestation of religious expression is strategically aligned with the promotion of the public good, thereby bridging personal piety with broader social welfare. Fourth, it mandates adherence to the state constitution, ensuring that religious expressions are congruent with the national consensus, specifically the Pancasila

ideology and the 1945 Constitution of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Fifth, this framework is anchored in the principles of fairness and equilibrium; it necessitates harmonizing divine devotion with the preservation of human dignity, thereby systematically repudiating political extremism that exploits religious narratives to perpetrate violence and undermine humanitarian values (RI, 2019). In terms of this justice and balance, Minister of Religious Affairs Lukman Hakim Saifudin stated that the manner in which Islam is practised is of paramount importance in ensuring that it does not become excessive (Saifudin, 2019).

Accordingly, religious moderation in Indonesia can be understood as a centrist socio-political framework designed to mitigate ideological polarization, particularly the tension between rigid textual dogmatism and the neglect of doctrinal foundations, without compromising the essential theological integrity of religion. This construct extends beyond the regulation of private belief, instead positioning individual religiosity in alignment with the broader public interest through a firm commitment to constitutional principles. By encouraging a shift from mere ritual formalism to the internalization of substantive ethical values, this framework serves a dual function: it operates as a preventive mechanism against the politicization of religion for subversive or anti-state purposes, while simultaneously fostering a balanced coexistence between spiritual expression and the protection of human dignity within a pluralistic societal context.

The Philosophy and Concept of Wasathiyyah in Malaysia

The Wasathiyyah philosophy in Malaysia is designed to achieve two primary objectives. Firstly, it seeks to establish a unified national identity within the '1Malaysia' framework, encompassing the nation's diverse racial, ethnic, and religious spectrum. The Prime Minister's Religious Advisor and Wasathiyyah Institute Administrator, Abdullah Mohammad Zain argues that promoting this philosophy strengthens the '1Malaysia' concept emphasizing 'people first, country first' which resonates with both Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Zain, 2014).

Secondly, Wasathiyyah serves as a proactive strategy to mitigate religious extremism, which has been argued to pose a significant threat to the state and religious institutions. (Zain, 2014) warns that both radical groups, such as ISIS, and liberal-oriented groups, such as Sisters in Islam, may contribute to the destabilization of the state's political, economic, and social structures.

The concept of Wasathiyyah can be understood from the views of Muhammad Najib, Prime Minister of Malaysia, who emphasized that the term 'Wasathiyyah' is generally understood to denote moderation, centrality, and a balanced learning style (Mujani et al., 2015). Meanwhile, Abdullah Mohammad Zain posits that Wasathiyyah bears five fundamental meanings: namely, simplicity, moderation, middle, balance, justice, and brilliance (Zain, 2014). Wasathiyyah is a concept that can be defined as "an approach to develop human capital, society and the Malaysian nation holistically based on moderate and balanced Islamic practices to produce superior individuals" (Dato' Seri Dr. Abdullah Md. Zain, 2011). The concept of the "superior individual" or "moderate nation" refers to a nation that exhibits equilibrium in three distinct domains: the physical (jasadiyah), the spiritual (ruhiyyah), and the intellectual (Aqliyah). These domains are intricately interwoven, forming a complex and interconnected entity (Dato' Seri Dr. Abdullah Md. Zain, 2011).

In the Malaysian context, the concept of Wasathiyyah, encompasses three fundamental aspects (Mujani et al., 2015). The first of these is wasathiyyah as the principle of acceptance. This means that "all Malaysians belonging to various ethnic groups are free to practice their own beliefs and way of life" (Mujani et al., 2015). Although the Federal Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion (Faruqi, 2003), Wasathiyyah provides for the freedom of non-Muslims to practice their respective beliefs, with the aim of fostering harmony and social cohesion in Malaysia's pluralistic society.

Secondly, *Wasathiyyah* in the Principle of Nationality represents moderation in national commitment; it prioritizes the national language while accommodating Chinese and Indian vernaculars in national-type schools (Wan Kamal Mujani, Azyati Azhani Mohd Mazuki & Rozali,

2014). This principle signifies equality: the status of Malay as the national language serves as a unifying identity without implying bias toward a specific racial group.

It is evident that the implementation of the Wasatiyyah concept within the 1Malaysia framework, in the context of language, does not favour a specific racial identity. This suggests that it does not align itself with a particular linguistic perspective. Conversely, the concept of Bahasa Malaysia encompasses a racial identity that is intrinsic to the Malaysian nation, serving as a symbol and a foundational element of its cultural and social fabric. The acceptance of this identity may be hindered if it is politicised (Wan Kamal Mujani, Azyati Azhani Mohd Mazuki & Rozali, 2014).

Thirdly, *Wasathiyah* embodies the principle of social justice through the application of moderation for the Malaysian population. This Islamic concept safeguards individual rights while prioritizing public interest, a balance demonstrated to benefit both individuals and society. In Malaysia, this moderation manifests in two key domains: the distribution of political power and wealth. Wasathiyah, in the context of political power, emphasizes moderation through the equitable distribution of authority among Malaysia's diverse ethnic groups. This balanced allocation ensures that all communities are represented, thereby reducing the risk of dissatisfaction that could destabilize governance. In Malaysia, the formation of political parties along ethnic lines has been permitted as part of this framework. For instance, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) represents the Malay community, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) represents the Chinese community, and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) represents the Indian community (Wan Kamal Mujani, Azyati Azhani Mohd Mazuki & Rozali, 2014).

The persistent majority-minority dynamic in Malaysia necessitates accommodating non-Malay political aspirations within national leadership, a strategy reflecting the practical application of *Wasathiyah* (Suaedy, 2010). Furthermore, Wasatiyyah in the distribution of wealth is interpreted as moderation applied in the form of the distribution of natural resources in Malaysia to all Malaysian citizens without exception (Mujani et al., 2015).

Consequently, Wasathiyah in Malaysia can be conceptualized as an ideological state instrument that institutionalizes Islamic moderation to foster nation-building and stability within a multiethnic society. It fulfills a dual mandate: consolidating the inclusive identity of "1Malaysia" while functioning as a discursive tool to curtail both radical and liberal extremism. Conceptually, its emphasis on balancing material and spiritual dimensions represents a synthesis of Islamic ethics and developmental rationality. This is operationalized through calibrated religious tolerance, moderate linguistic nationalism, and a consociational distribution of power and resources. However, the framework remains inherently ambivalent; while it promotes pluralism and justice, it simultaneously risks legitimizing state monopoly over the boundaries of "moderation."

The following table offers a concise comparison between the concepts of religious moderation in Indonesia and wasatiyyah in Malaysia.

Table 1. Philosophy and Concept of "Religious Moderation" (Indonesia) and "Wasatiyyah" (Malaysia)

Aspect	Religious Moderation (Indonesia)	Wasatiyyah (Malaysia)
Philosophy & Purpose	Internal Restructuring & Anti-Radicalism: 1. Managing religious life to counter both rigid textualism (extreme right) and liberalism (extreme left). 2. Preventing anti-state violence and fostering intra/inter-religious harmony.	National Unity & Stability: 1. Strengthening national identity under the '1Malaysia' framework. 2. Strategic state security measure to curb extremism for political and economic stability.
Conceptual Definition	Methodological Approach: Defined as the "Middle Way" in religious expression. It focuses on moderating the interpretation and practice of religion	Holistic Development: Defined as a balanced approach to human capital and nation-building. It emphasizes equilibrium across three domains: physical

Key Principles	(viewed as distinct from the doctrine itself) to avoid excess. Five Core Components: 1. Social/Public orientation (vs. private). 2. Emphasis on substantive essence of rituals. 3. Prioritization of public good. 4. Constitutional obedience (Pancasila & 1945 Constitution). 5. Justice and balance (Tawassuth).	(jasadiyah), spiritual (ruhiyyah), and intellectual (aqliyah). Three Fundamental Principles: 1. Acceptance: Freedom of religious practice for all ethnic groups. 2. Nationality: Malay language as national identity with accommodation for vernaculars. 3. Social Justice: Equitable distribution of political power (ethnic representation) and national wealth.
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Source: Synthesized by author (2026)

The Institutionalisation of Religious Moderation in Indonesia

The Mainstreaming of Religious Moderation in Educational Institutions

The institutionalisation of religious moderation is generally regulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Religion No. 18 of 2020 concerning the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Religion 2020-2024 (Peraturan Menteri Agama RI No. 18 Tahun 2020 Tentang Renstra Kementerian Agama 2020-2024, 2020). The implementation of this regulation is manifested in the form of mainstreaming religious moderation in various Islamic educational institutions under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion. This matter is addressed in the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education Number 7272 of 2019 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Religious Moderation in Islamic Education (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Nomor 7272 Tahun 2019 Tentang Pedoman Implementasi Moderasi Beragama Pada Pendidikan Islam ., 2019).

The Decree outlines the implementation of religious moderation in Madrasas through a hidden curriculum—encompassing habituation and school culture—integrated into Islamic Religious Education and Arabic subjects. It explicitly delineates the teacher's role in fostering an inclusive, critical classroom environment. In public schools, moderation is embedded within Islamic Religious Education instructional materials and religious extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, Islamic boarding schools reinforce the *Kitab Kuning* (classical Islamic texts) tradition to instill a clear, moderate intellectual genealogy (*scientific sanad*). Finally, higher education fosters moderation by cultivating critical reasoning, inclusivity, and tolerance through dialogue and digital literacy, complemented by the *Ma'had Al-Jami'ah* program to deepen religious comprehension. (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Nomor 7272 Tahun 2019 Tentang Pedoman Implementasi Moderasi Beragama Pada Pendidikan Islam ., 2019).

Integration into the Curriculum

The concept of religious moderation is incorporated into the curriculum in various elementary, secondary and higher education institutions under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion. The Directorate General of Islamic Education has compiled a Religious Moderation Module for Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Teachers and Education Personnel (GTK), Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI), and Islamic boarding schools. Since 2021, four modules of religious moderation have been created, namely Book 1: *Religious Moderation Based on Islamic Values* (Aziz & Anam, 2021), Book 2: *The Road to Moderation: A Module on Strengthening Religious Moderation for Teachers* (Muhammad & Muryono, 2021), Book 3: *Integration of Religious Moderation in PAI Subjects* (Ali Muhtarom, Mahnan Marbawi, 2021), and Book 4: *9 Great Activities for Moderate Learners: Inspiration, Guide, and Practical Tips for Organizing Fun Activities* (Kholisoh & Amalee, 2021).

In addition to the compilation of the four modules, the application of religious moderation is carried out at various levels of action (Permana, 2021) with significant institutional scale. These levels of action are as follows: Firstly, teacher training has been rolled out to 93.000 of educators nationwide, alongside the preparation of learning resource collections. Secondly, the curriculum

of the madrasah is being revised, resulting in the actual production and distribution of 144 textbooks to 87.937 madrasahs. Thirdly, the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology collaborated to compile 24 textbooks on Islamic Religious Education in schools. Fourthly, a pilot implementation of religious moderation was launched in four provinces (West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, East Java and North Kalimantan). In terms of real implementation, this pilot program translates into concrete school activities such as organising student-led digital campaigns for tolerance, facilitating visits to diverse places of worship, establishing school-level “Moderation Houses,” and ensuring the rigorous oversight of religious extracurriculars by specially trained Master Teachers. The programme will be expanded to a number of other provinces with the assistance of 21 education partner institutions.

The establishment of the “House of Religious Moderation” in universities

At the tertiary level, the promotion of religious moderation within Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI) is institutionalized through the ‘House of Religious Moderation’ (RMB). As stipulated in the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 897 of 2021, the RMB serves as the primary entity responsible for strengthening moderation across the campus environment. To illustrate the scale of this institutionalisation, as of 2023, RMBs have been formally established in 58 State Islamic Universities (PTKIN)] across Indonesia. Its mandate encompasses developing educational materials, enhancing academic literacy, facilitating inter-agency collaboration, integrating moderation into the *Tri Dharma* (Three Pillars of Higher Education), and mitigating intolerance. Strategic initiatives include conducting Training of Trainers (ToT), developing moderate curricula, researching radicalism, publishing scholarly works, providing support for victims of intolerance, ensuring inclusive management of worship facilities, and fostering interfaith dialogue (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Nomor 897 Tahun 2021 Tentang Petunjuk Teknis Rumah Moderasi Beragama., 2021). In practice, the empirical implementation of RMBs is demonstrated by institutions such as UIN Walisongo Semarang, which is evidenced by their training of student moderation agents, facilitation of seminars on patriotism, and the systemic incorporation of an ‘Islam and Religious Moderation’ course into the academic curriculum (Walisongo, 2021).

The Implementation of Religious Moderation in Diverse Religious Services

The implementation of religious moderation in various religious services, as outlined by the Ministry of Religion, encompasses services within the domains of religious instruction, religious education, and religious counselling (Faturrahman, 2021). In various regions of Indonesia, a massive network of approximately 1000 religious extension workers have been tasked with the dissemination of messages of religious moderation through religious lectures (Amin, 2021). The substance of the moderation messages that religious extension workers in Indonesia are tasked with conveying primarily focuses on the four core indicators of religious moderation, namely: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of tradition (Musirawas, 2022).

Drawing upon the aforementioned evidence, the institutionalization of religious moderation in Indonesia employs a systematic, multi-layered approach across educational levels—utilizing regulatory frameworks, curricula, and pedagogical practices. Crucially, these elements serve as mechanisms for both value reproduction and state ideological control over religious discourse. By implementing a hidden curriculum, strengthening pedagogical roles, standardizing instructional modules, and establishing Religious Moderation Houses (RMB) in universities, the state advances a form of governance that shapes both the content and boundaries of acceptable religiosity. This perspective can be further illuminated by insights from Bali et al. (Bali et al., 2021), who conceptualize policy instruments as techniques of governing that extend beyond direct regulation to include procedural tools shaping social behavior and institutional processes. However, the efficacy of this policy remains highly contingent upon

contextual adaptability and the sustained openness of critical dialogue within the educational ecosystem.

The Institutionalisation of Wasatiyyah in Malaysia

Wasatiyyah Education in the Academic Forum

The concept of Wasatiyyah in Malaysia is institutionalised in various activity programmes, including those which are academic in nature. Firstly, the “Discourse of the Panel of Thinkers on the Concept of Wasatiyyah” was delivered on 20 May 2011. The purpose of this discourse was to formulate and agree upon a definition of the concept of Wasatiyyah for general reference (Mujani et al., 2015). Secondly, the National Seminar on Understanding Wasatiyyah and 1Malaysia was inaugurated on 26 November 2011 by the then-Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak. In his capacity as Deputy Minister of the Prime Minister’s Department and Information Chief of UMNO, Datuk Ahmad Maslan participated in a seminar that examined the meaning of Wasatiyyah and the 1Malaysia Concept, as well as its application in the implementation of religious and organisational affairs (Mujani et al., 2015). Thirdly, the International Conference on Moderate Global Movements (ICGMM) was held from 17-19 January 2012 at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. The conference, organised by the Alumni Society of International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), sought to encourage global moderation for the benefit of all, and was attended by over 350 delegates from more than 70 countries. In this activity, Mohammad Najib addressed a range of issues pertaining to moderation, including the management of extremism, violence, and the actions of extremist financiers that result in adverse effects and suffering for numerous individuals. He also outlined steps to promote the development of the concept of moderation at the international level (Mujani et al., 2015).

The Formation of the Wasatiyyah Institute and the Moderate Global Movement (GMM)

The institutionalisation of moderation in Malaysia was achieved through the establishment of an institution known as the Wasatiyyah Institute. The institution, which has been under the Prime Minister’s Department in Kuala Lumpur since January 17, 2012, seeks to “focus activities on the aspects of moderation and balance through respect for democracy, laws and regulations, education, personal dignity and dignity and social justice” (Mujani et al., 2015). The institution’s mission is to ensure the success of the moderation movement in a variety of domains. This includes the organisation of socialisation activities both domestically and internationally. To ensure broad institutional scale, the institution is tasked with the formulation of a Strategic Plan for the implementation of Wasatiyyah across 25 federal ministries and 13 states in Malaysia (Zain, 2014).

The Global Moderate Movement Foundation (GMM) was established in Malaysia with the objective of unifying and disseminating information and campaign materials to all interested parties who wish to participate in efforts to counter extremism. The GMM is a centre that functions as a nexus for these activities, and is comprised of both government agencies and non-governmental organisations. Moreover, GMM functions as a unifying body in the struggle against violence and extremism (Mujani et al., 2015). The foundation, under the leadership of Tansri Ghazal Ismail (a senior diplomat and Chairman of the United Nations Security Council), has issued an invitation to the international community to assist in the success of the moderation movement and in the counteraction of extremism in its various forms (Zain, 2014).

The internalisation of values among students through Camp Wasatiyyah

The institutionalisation of moderation in Malaysia is also facilitated through student-centred regeneration activities, aimed at inculcating a comprehension and cognisance of the significance of wasatiyyah in quotidian life. This regeneration activity is carried out, for example, through the formation of Wasatiyyah clubs in six state universities, training for students at levels 4, 5, and 6 (high school) in the form of activities Camp Wasatiyyah, and training for prospective mentors. Empirically, the scale of this initiative is substantial, reaching thousands of secondary students and youths nationwide. The activities at Camp Wasatiyyah were conducted over a period

of three days and two nights (Zain, 2014). These activities are designed to engage students directly, as they represent the next generation and the future leaders of the nation. In terms of real implementation, the camp modules move beyond theoretical lectures to include practical team-building exercises, exposure to diverse ethnic cultures, and leadership simulations aimed at resolving inter-communal conflicts. As articulated by Azim Muhammad Yusufdin, the Director of the Wasatiyyah Institute Malaysia, “If they ascend to positions of prominence, they can operationalise wasatiyyah, mitigate the threat of extremism, and transform Malaysia into a *baladatun toyyibatun wa robbun ghafur*” (Zain, 2014).

Cross-Ministerial and State Coordination

The institutionalisation of Wasatiyyah is also carried out through coordination and synergy across ministries (Ministry of Education and Youth, Ministry of Safety, Police, and Defense, and so on) and states (provinces) to implement Wasatiyyah values. In the context of education, Abdullah Muhammad Zain stated that the Ministry of Education and Youth has been tasked with formulating a detailed implementation plan for Wasatiyyah values in education at the primary, middle and high levels (Zain, 2014). The present document constitutes the Strategic Plan for the implementation of Wasatiyyah at all levels, both in ministries and in various states. It has been prepared by the Drafting Team from the Wasatiyyah Institute Malaysia. At the operational scale, the implementation in various states is led directly by the Chief Minister, ensuring that the policy is executed across all 13 states and 3 federal territories in Malaysia (Zain, 2014).

These findings demonstrate that Malaysia’s institutionalisation of Wasatiyyah is a deliberate hegemonic strategy utilising “moderation” as a governing tool. Transitioning from academic discourse to bureaucratic enforcement via the Wasatiyyah Institute and GMM, it serves as both a legitimising ideology and an anti-extremism regulator. Furthermore, targeted youth socialisation ensures long-term ideological reproduction, while robust intergovernmental coordination guarantees systemic compliance. This reliance on structured enforcement aligns with Patrikios’s (Patrikios, 2023) assertion that the formal rules of organised religion are essentially deployed to solve problems of political control. This pattern resonates with findings that education has increasingly become a terrain through which the state advances ideological projects by aligning religious institutions with national political goals (Neumann, 2025)

The following table offers a concise comparison between the institutionalisation of religious moderation in Indonesia and wasatiyyah in Malaysia.

Table 2. Institutionalization of Religious Moderation in Indonesia and Wasatiyyah in Malaysia

Comparison Aspect	Religious Moderation (Indonesia)	Wasatiyyah (Malaysia)
Institutional Basis	Ministry-Led (Religious Affairs): Driven by the Ministry of Religion through the Directorate General of Islamic Education and the Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI) network.	Executive-Led (Prime Minister’s Dept): Centralized under the Prime Minister’s Department via the establishment of the Wasatiyyah Institute and the Global Moderate Movement Foundation (GMM).
Regulatory Framework	Ministerial Regulations: 1. Ministry of Religion Strategic Plan 2020-2024 (PMA No. 18/2020). 2. Guidelines for Implementation in Islamic Education (DirGen Decree 7272/2019). 3. Technical Guidelines for Moderation Houses (DirGen Decree 897/2021).	Strategic Policy & Diplomacy: 1. National Strategic Plans for cross-ministerial and state-level implementation. 2. Wasatiyyah-based distribution policies (political/economic). 3. International diplomacy via Global Conferences (ICGMM).
Educational Strategy	Curriculum Integration and Materials: 1. Development of 4 core moderation modules and 168	Extra-Curricular and Regeneration: 1. Establishment of University Wasatiyyah Clubs.

	textbooks (144 for Madrasah, 24 for PAI).	2. “Camp Wasatiyyah” programs (3 days) for secondary students.
	2. Pilot projects in 4 provinces.	3. Leadership training/mentoring for student regeneration.
	3. Integration into “hidden curriculum” and teacher training.	
Implementation Units	Campus-Based Units: “House of Religious Moderation” (RMB) established in universities to function as centers for research, advocacy, and moderation strengthening.	Cross-Sectoral Coordination: Synergy between Federal Ministries (Education, Defense, Youth) and State Governments (led by Chief Ministers) for program execution.
Community Outreach	Grassroots Extension: Utilization of religious counselors (<i>Penyuluh Agama</i>) to disseminate moderation messages through public lectures and religious services.	Intellectual Engagement: Organization of “Think-Tank” panels, National Seminars, and academic forums involving NGOs to counter extremism globally.

Source: Synthesized by the author from various sources (2026)

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the divergent institutionalisation trajectories of Indonesia and Malaysia are not merely administrative. Rather, they reflect profound philosophical differences regarding religion-state relations and the pedagogical approaches employed to construct the ideal citizen-subject.

The Ontology of Moderation: Between Religious Ethics vs Political Stability

The fundamental question of whether to prioritise “Religious Ethics” or “Political Stability” reveals significant ontological differences in how the two countries define moderation. In Indonesia, the concept is predicated on a clear theological distinction between perfect religion and imperfect religious practices (*tadayyun*) that are prone to extremism (Faturrahman, 2021; RI, 2019). The empirical data shows moderation functioning as an “intersubjective ethic” for managing public diversity, positioning it as a social-ethical contract to safeguard the Republic. Conversely, Malaysia has conceptualised Wasatiyyah as a ‘state philosophy’ intricately interwoven with macroeconomic stability. As evidenced by its integration into the overarching ‘1Malaysia’ blueprint, Wasatiyyah serves as a top-down mechanism against ideologies that could disrupt the distribution of wealth and political power (Asrohah et al., 2025; Ayyubi et al., 2025; Fahrudin et al., 2026; Hasan et al., 2024; Zain, 2014).

This ontological divergence is best analysed through the theoretical lens of post-secularism (Habermas, 2008). Rather than advocating for the strict privatization of religion, the post-secular turn acknowledges religion’s vital ethical contribution to the public sphere. However, the data reveals two distinct operationalizations of this theory. Indonesia reflects a *civil-society-driven post-secularism*, where moderation acts as a communicative rationality bridging religious and constitutional ethics, as evidenced by the mobilization of grassroots extension workers to negotiate these values in public life. In contrast, Malaysia represents a *state-centric post-secularism*, where religious doctrine is instrumentally co-opted as a stabilizing state ideology. This dual model expands the theoretical boundaries of how modern nation-states define the normative utility of religion in the public sphere. Ultimately, these differing applications of post-secularism solidify a humanistic ontology in Indonesia, grounded in socio-ethical engagement, in stark contrast to the structural ontology in Malaysia, which is rigidly anchored in state-enforced stability.

Pedagogical Epistemology: Critical-Reflective Reasoning vs Structured Regeneration

The juxtaposition of educational institutionalisation in both countries yields two distinct pedagogical paradigms that can be evaluated through the framework of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2018). Epistemologically, this framework interrogates whether education serves to emancipate students or domesticate them into passive compliance.

In the Indonesian context, the data reveals a Reflective-Integrative Pedagogy. The establishment of the 'Religious Moderation House' (RMB) in Islamic universities and the integration of a hidden curriculum are designed to foster critical reasoning (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Nomor 897 Tahun 2021 Tentang Petunjuk Teknis Rumah Moderasi Beragama., 2021). This aligns with Freire's emancipatory ideal, where moderation is treated as open knowledge continually reconstructed through dialogue, aiming to cultivate "moderate thinkers" capable of contextual *ijtihad*. Conversely, Malaysia implements a Formative-Instructive Pedagogy. Empirical evidence, such as the "Camp Wasatiyyah" modules and structured youth clubs, demonstrates a standardized, top-down methodology aimed at cultivating "superior individuals" who align with the nation's human capital blueprint (Ma'arif, Sebgag, et al., 2025; Yusdiana et al., 2026; Zain, 2014). This approach exemplifies Freire's "banking concept of education," where moderation is treated as static state doctrine deposited into students to foster "obedient citizens." By applying critical pedagogy to the data, this study proposes a continuum of 'Pedagogical Moderation' ranging from emancipatory civic engagement (Indonesia) to instrumental state indoctrination (Malaysia).

Institutional Axiology: Academic Decentralization vs Bureaucratic Centralization

Axiologically, the value of this institutionalization manifests in its bureaucratic structure, which is best elucidated through governance theory. Generally, modern states manage plurality either through decentralized networks or centralized hierarchies. Aligning with this theoretical framework, empirical studies demonstrate that Indonesia tends to employ a multi-actor, decentralised governance approach, whereas Malaysia relies on more centralised state coordination reflecting broader institutional patterns that extend beyond economic sectors into the governance of religion (Camba et al., 2022).

The Indonesian data is indicative of the *network governance* paradigm. Indonesia adopts academic decentralization, positioning the Ministry of Religion merely as a facilitator while delegating substantive execution to autonomous campuses (RMBs) and localized religious extension workers. This model engenders moderation through horizontal interaction, cultivating it as a fluid, participatory socio-cultural movement. In contrast, Malaysia is characterised by the logic of *hierarchical governance*. The institutionalisation is aggressively centralised under the Prime Minister's Department via the Wasatiyyah Institute, endowed with considerable operational efficacy through inter-ministerial coordination and federal-state endorsement (Zain, 2014).

By evaluating these architectures through governance theory, this study highlights how modern states govern religion not merely by separating it from politics, but by actively institutionalizing its 'moderate' forms. The Indonesian network model exemplifies a civil-society-centric regulation relying on the organic diffusion of values, whereas Malaysia's hierarchical approach epitomizes statist-coercive regulation where the state control apparatus absorbs religious moderation into the bureaucratic machinery. Consequently, the axiological orientation of these governance structures confirms a clear divergence between Indonesia's decentralized, participatory-public model and Malaysia's centralized, bureaucratic-instrumental framework.

CONCLUSION

This study argues that the divergence between Indonesia and Malaysia in mainstreaming Islamic moderation is not merely institutional variation, but reflects two competing paradigms of how religion is mobilized within the modern nation-state to counter extremism. Indonesia exemplifies a civil-society-driven post-secularism. By employing a decentralised network governance framework and an emancipatory-civic pedagogy, Indonesia cultivates moderation as an intersubjective awareness and critical reasoning process, facilitated primarily by educational entities under the Ministry of Religion. Conversely, Malaysia epitomises a state-centric post-secularism. Driven by a hierarchical bureaucracy under the Prime Minister's Department and a formative-instructional pedagogy, *Wasatiyyah* is instrumentalised as a hegemonic state project designed to mandate structural compliance, cadre regeneration, and political-economic stability.

Theoretically, this research transcends normative-descriptive literature by introducing a novel conceptual framework of “Pedagogical Moderation.” It challenges Western-centric assumptions that religious education inherently resists civic integration, demonstrating instead that the state’s pedagogical design ultimately dictates whether religion serves as a catalyst for critical civil engagement or a tool for state hegemonisation. Furthermore, this study expands the global discourse on state-religion regimes beyond classical “twin tolerations,” illuminating how modern states govern religion not merely through separation, but by actively institutionalising its ‘moderate’ forms to shape public rationality. Practically, these findings provide a crucial caveat for policy formulation, highlighting the perpetual tension between bureaucratic control and ethical substance. For Indonesia, this affirms the imperative of safeguarding academic autonomy and spaces for critical reflection to prevent moderation from devolving into an empty administrative slogan. For Malaysia, it invites a critical evaluation of the hyper-bureaucratisation of religious values, which risks neutralizing the ethical-transformative potential of *Wasatiyyah* in favour of state pragmatism.

This study is limited by its scope, encompassing only two countries. It relies on analyzing state-level policies and formal institutional practices. Consequently, it does not deeply explore the lived experiences of students, educators, and communities internalising moderation. Future ethnographic or mixed-method research is therefore needed to assess the institutionalisation’s real impact on attitudes, behaviours, and religious awareness. Moreover, broader comparative studies involving diverse governance models would enhance global understanding of managing moderation while preserving its ethical substance.

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