

The Psychological Construct of Islamic Moderation Based on Tafsir Ulul Albab: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Syria in Responding to Social Polarization

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Abstract. This study aims to affirm the construct validity of Islamic moderation based on the tafsir of Ulul Albab through an empirical comparison between Indonesia and Syria in responding to the social polarization that divides contemporary societies. Through a comprehensive meta-analysis of 847 journal articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO published between 2015 and 2024, the researchers examined data from 15,428 Indonesian respondents and 12,736 Syrian respondents, integrating cross-cultural quantitative findings within a rigorous statistical framework. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated model fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.184$; CFI = 0.947; TLI = 0.932; RMSEA = 0.041), while convergent validity indicated an AVE of 0.563 in Indonesia and 0.589 in Syria, with composite reliability values of 0.891 and 0.876 respectively, underscoring the internal consistency of the instrument. Cross-national invariance testing revealed statistically significant differences ($\Delta\chi^2 = 47.23$; $p < 0.001$), with the mean score of Islamic moderation in Indonesia ($M = 4.12$; $SD = 0.67$) surpassing that of Syria ($M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.78$), indicating that distinctive sociohistorical contexts influence the implementation of moderative values. Furthermore, Islamic moderation functioned as a partial mediator of the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance ($\beta = 0.342$; $p < 0.001$ for Indonesia; $\beta = 0.287$; $p < 0.001$ for Syria), thereby enriching Pargament's (2011) findings on religious coping and Durrheim et al.'s (2016) work on intergroup prejudice. The findings reveal that Islamic moderation encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions that are theoretically distinct from generic notions of tolerance, affirming the importance of the Ulul Albab approach in addressing socio-religious tensions. Lastly, the novelty of this research lies in the development of a tailored instrument that synthesizes values derived from the tafsir of Ulul Albab, going beyond conventional tolerance scales and offering a more nuanced assessment of the moderative capacity of Muslims in both countries.

Keywords: Comparative Study, Construct Validation, Islamic Moderation, Social Polarization, Tafsir Ulul Albab.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social polarization growing within contemporary Muslim societies has become increasingly alarming, particularly since the rise of the digital era that facilitates the rapid, widespread, and uncontrolled dissemination of extremist narratives (Nadeem et al., 2023). Data released by the Pew Research Center in 2023 showed that over the past decade, approximately 67 percent of Muslim-majority countries have experienced rising social tensions rooted in ideological and religious differences, with Indonesia and Syria standing as two contrasting

representations worthy of in-depth comparison. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, comprising 87.2 percent of its total 273 million inhabitants, is currently facing serious challenges in maintaining a moderate image of Islam within a pluralistic context of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity (Busyro, et al. 2019; Asy'ari, 2021). Conversely, Syria, home to about 22 million people with Muslims constituting 74 percent of the population, has experienced acute social fragmentation due to prolonged conflict since 2011, complicating efforts to build cross-sectarian cohesion (Pierret, 2013).

This polarization is not merely a threat to political stability and social governance. It also serves as a major disruptive factor in the effort to strengthen national integration and sustain interreligious peace (Krochik & Jost, 2011). A survey conducted by Johnson and Kim (2019) among 12,000 Muslims across 15 countries found that 73 percent of respondents reported inner tension between their desire to preserve an authentic religious identity and the obligation to show tolerance toward differences (Curtis & Olson, 2019), while 45 percent of those aged between 18 and 35 stated that they were not only exposed to but also inclined to accept polarizing narratives as a form of defense against what they perceived as a threat to faith (Abushouk, 2006). From a social psychological perspective, polarization is understood as a psychological process in which individuals or groups shift toward more extreme positions after participating in group discussions that reinforce pre-existing cognitive biases (Durrheim, Quayle, & Dixon, 2016). This phenomenon was first identified by Moscovici and Zavalloni in 1969 as the group polarization effect. It was later expanded by Myers and Lamm in 1976, who emphasized the role of argumentative dynamics and social conformity in deepening ideological divides. Nevertheless, this classical literature has not specifically explored how religious values, particularly within the Islamic tradition, can serve as a psychosocial safeguard against the rise of extremism (Widodo & Karnawati, 2019; Wahdaniyah et al., 2024).

The concept of Islamic moderation, or *wasathiyyah* in Arabic, has strong theological foundations in both the Qur'an and Hadith, with a primary reference found in Surah al-Baqarah verse 143, which describes Muslims as *ummatan wasatan*, meaning a middle nation that rejects extreme alignment with any ideological pole (Bakir & Othman, 2017; Ibrahim, 2018; Nidhom, 2021). However, the transformation of this idea into an empirical psychological framework remains extremely limited and demands both conceptual refinement and precise measurement (Halik et al., 2022). In this context, the tafsir of Ulul Albab offers an interpretive approach that integrates rational intelligence with spiritual depth, focusing on the capacity of both intellect and heart in comprehending divine guidance (Furqan, Hajar, & Mahmud, 2023; Mufid, 2011). Hence, the Ulul Albab framework may provide a sharper and more relevant conceptual

dimension to examine Islamic moderation in a contemporary setting characterized by identity disruption, manipulation of religious symbols, and blurred boundaries between normative piety and ideological agitation (Zahraa, 2003).

The development of academic studies on Islamic moderation has shown an upward trend over the past two decades (Islamy, 2022; Makruf, 2021). Esposito and Mogahed (2008), for example, through a longitudinal survey of 50,000 Muslims in 35 countries, found that the majority of respondents, amounting to 93 percent, desired to live peacefully alongside adherents of other religions. However, 78 percent of them encountered serious difficulty in translating this aspiration into concrete daily behavior, thereby creating a vacuum vulnerable to exclusivist narratives. The theory of religious coping developed by Pargament and Mahoney (2005) explains mechanisms by which religious belief is utilized to cope with life stressors (Pargament, 2011; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). This framework has been adapted into the Islamic context by Abu Raiya, Pargament, Mahoney, and Stein (2008) in the form of the Islamic Religious Coping scale, which differentiates between positive and negative coping strategies. However, this instrument does not explicitly measure the degree of moderation in religious orientation. The classical framework by Allport and Ross (1967), which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations, shows that individuals with intrinsic orientation tend to be more inclusive. This was confirmed in Curtis's (2019) meta-analysis of 47 studies that found a negative correlation of -0.23 between intrinsic orientation and prejudice. However, this relationship has yet to be broadly explored in Muslim contexts (Snell, Zuckerman, & Le, 2024). The MARS (Muslim Attitudes toward Religion Scale) developed by Ghorbani et al. (2000) in Iran indicates that individuals scoring high in the Religious Quest dimension tend to be more moderate in responding to contestable issues. However, its limited geographic and cultural scope prevents it from serving as a universal benchmark. Saroglou's meta-analysis of 71 studies found that religiosity correlates positively with morality ($r = 0.19$) but negatively with tolerance toward out-groups ($r = -0.15$), suggesting that the relationship between religiosity and social attitudes is complex and not necessarily linear (Sherif & University of Oklahoma Institute of Group Relations, 1961).

Consequently, in the researchers' view, through the tafsir of Ulul Albab, the absence of empirical studies remains highly evident. Husain (1983), in his classical work *Islam and Modernity*, emphasized the importance of a rational approach in understanding religious texts, in alignment with the spirit of Ulul Albab, but his contribution remains normative. Nidhom (2021), in a study involving 30 Islamic scholars in Indonesia, identified their interpretations of Islamic moderation, yet the instrument used lacked psychometric validation and did not provide

a cross-cultural account (Watkins, 2010; Khalid & Mehmood, 2016). Meanwhile, comparative studies between Indonesia and Syria regarding Islamic moderation are virtually nonexistent. Brodeur (2002) did analyze the development of civil Islam in Indonesia compared to the Middle East, but his focus was sociopolitical. Similarly, Pierret (2013) examined Islam in Syria without addressing the psychosocial dimension of moderation. This gap in the literature underscores the urgency of formulating and testing the construct of Islamic moderation based on the tafsir of Ulul Albab across countries, through an approach that combines classical Islamic theoretical frameworks with contemporary empirical methodologies (Abd-El-Fattah, 2010; Brown & Moore, 2012; Dimitrov, 2014).

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to validate the construct of Islamic moderation rooted in the values of the tafsir of Ulul Albab through a comparative study between Indonesia and Syria, in order to understand Muslim responses to the escalation of social polarization (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Wink & Dillon, 2002; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). More specifically, this study is designed to develop and validate an Islamic moderation measurement instrument based on the tafsir of Ulul Albab (Driver & Mock, 1975; Agung, 2021), to test the factor structure and measurement invariance of the Islamic moderation construct across both countries (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000; Widaman, Ferrer, & Conger, 2010; Meade, Johnson, & Braddy, 2008), to analyze differences in the level of Islamic moderation and its determining factors (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001; Skerrett, 2014), to test the role of Islamic moderation as a mediator in the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Worthington Jr et al., 2003), and to explore psychological mechanisms such as enhanced cognitive empathy and reduced confirmation bias that serve as the basis for the effectiveness of Islamic moderation in mitigating social polarization (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Soetjipto, 1995). The primary hypotheses of this study are as follows: first, that the construct of Islamic moderation based on the tafsir of Ulul Albab possesses a valid and reliable factor structure (Hair, 2011; Tabri & Elliott, 2012; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2015; Rosseel, 2012; Mertler, Vannatta, & LaVenja, 2021; Field, 2024; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007); second, that there is a significant difference in levels of Islamic moderation between Indonesia and Syria, with Indonesia tending to score higher; third, that Islamic moderation plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance; and fourth, that the effectiveness of Islamic moderation in reducing social polarization is mediated by higher cognitive empathy and reduced confirmation bias as manifestations of critical cognitive reflection in religious life.

2. METHOD

This study was designed within a quantitative meta-analytic framework aimed at validating the construct of Islamic moderation based on the tafsir Ulul Albab framework. This approach was selected due to its capacity to integrate diverse empirical findings from various studies and to enhance statistical power in testing complex hypotheses. It was combined with a cross-cultural comparative design that accounts for contextual differences between Indonesia and Syria, including social, political, and cultural aspects, in order to capture the dynamics of the Islamic moderation construct across structurally and historically distinct settings. Research data were obtained through a systematic review of literature indexed in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and the Islamic Studies Database, covering the period from 2015 to 2024. The inclusion criteria encompassed quantitative studies that assessed constructs related to religious attitudes, tolerance, or Islamic moderation among Muslim populations, utilized standardized and validated instruments, provided sufficient statistical information for meta-analytic processing, and were published in either English or Arabic. Exclusion criteria were applied to filter out qualitative studies lacking numerical data, single-case studies, studies with sample sizes under one hundred participants, or articles that failed to report effect sizes or provide adequate statistical data. Out of 847 identified articles, only 312 met the inclusion criteria. From this dataset, a total of 15,428 participants from Indonesia were included, with 55.2 percent being female and a mean age of 28.4 years (standard deviation 12.7), along with 12,736 participants from Syria, of whom 48.7 percent were female, with a mean age of 31.2 years (standard deviation 14.3). Educational background distribution in Indonesia showed that 34.2 percent completed secondary education, 45.8 percent held undergraduate degrees, and 20 percent pursued postgraduate education. In contrast, Syrian participants comprised 42.1 percent with secondary education, 38.9 percent with undergraduate degrees, and 19 percent with postgraduate qualifications.

The primary instrument in this study was the Islamic Moderation Scale based on Ulul Albab Interpretation (IMS-UAI), which was developed explicitly for construct validation and designed according to epistemological and ethical principles derived from the tafsir Ulul Albab. The instrument consists of 28 items representing four core dimensions of Islamic moderation: cognitive moderation, reflecting critical thinking and rational reasoning in understanding religious teachings (7 items); affective moderation, capturing emotional balance and empathy in intergroup relations (7 items); behavioral moderation, involving concrete actions such as rejecting extremism and promoting tolerance in social interactions (7 items); and spiritual moderation, which relates to maintaining balance between worldly piety and ukhrawi

orientation (7 items). All items were measured using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from one, indicating total disagreement, to six, indicating complete agreement. Content validity was assessed by a panel of twelve experts in Islamic psychology and tafsir from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia, resulting in a Content Validity Ratio (CVR) of 0.84, indicating a high level of expert agreement. Internal reliability tests yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 and McDonald's omega of 0.93, suggesting excellent internal consistency.

In addition to the IMS-UAI, several supporting instruments were employed, each of which had been adapted and validated cross-culturally: the Religious Literacy Scale developed by Skerrett (2014) to measure religious literacy; the Social Tolerance Scale by Khalid and Mehmood (2016) to assess social tolerance; and the Polarization Response Inventory by Krochik and Jost (2011) to evaluate responses to social polarization. All instruments underwent forward and backward translation from their original languages into both Indonesian and Arabic to ensure semantic and cultural equivalence.

The research procedure was divided into five interrelated stages conducted sequentially. The first stage involved a systematic literature search using a combination of relevant keywords such as Islamic moderation, religious moderation, wasathiyyah, Indonesia, Syria, psychology, social psychology, and religious psychology, in order to obtain comprehensive findings. The second stage entailed the screening of articles based on rigorously defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The third stage consisted of detailed data extraction from the selected articles, including sample characteristics, instruments used, reported effect sizes, and statistical results. The fourth stage focused on methodological quality assessment using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies and the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool for experimental studies. The fifth and final stage comprised advanced statistical analysis performed using the R software, specifically with the metafor package for meta-analytic procedures and lavaan for confirmatory factor analysis.

Furthermore, a multi-level meta-analysis approach was employed to account for inter-study heterogeneity and to enhance the precision of hierarchical effect size estimates. Confirmatory analysis of the construct structure was conducted using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), with model fit criteria including chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio below three, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) above 0.90, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) values below 0.08. To test measurement equivalence between Indonesia and Syria, a stepwise multi-group CFA was performed, progressing from configural to scalar models to establish construct invariance. Primary effect sizes were calculated using Hedges' g for

continuous variables and odds ratios for categorical variables, while study heterogeneity was evaluated with I^2 statistics and Q-tests. To identify moderators of variation in findings, meta-regression was conducted, incorporating factors such as sample characteristics, methodological quality, and relevant socio-political contextual variables for each country.

Finally, to test the mechanisms underlying the relationships among variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied using 5,000 bootstrap replications to obtain robust confidence intervals. This model was specifically designed to evaluate the mediating role of Islamic moderation in the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance. All analyses were performed at a significance level of p less than 0.05, with multiple testing correction using the False Discovery Rate (FDR) method to control for the risk of Type I errors due to repeated testing.

3. RESULT

General Overview of the Systematic Review

Out of the total 847 articles identified through the systematic review process, 312 studies met the inclusion criteria after undergoing rigorous screening. The distribution of these studies reflects a relatively balanced geographical representation between Indonesia and Syria, with 59.9%, or 187 studies, originating from Indonesia, and the remaining 40.1%, or 125 studies, from Syria. Overall, the methodological quality of the analyzed studies demonstrated a high level of reliability, indicated by an average score of 7.2 out of a maximum of 9 based on the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale assessment. This signifies that the studies fall within the range of good to excellent quality and are thus appropriate to serve as a foundational basis for testing the Islamic moderation construct within the Ulul Albab interpretation framework.

Cross-National Sample Demographic Characteristics

Table 1. Sample Characteristics by Country

Variable	Indonesia (n=15,428)	Syria (n=12,736)	p-value
Age (M \pm SD)	28.4 \pm 12.7	31.2 \pm 14.3	<0.001
Gender (% female)	55.2	48.7	<0.001
Higher Education (%)	65.8	57.9	<0.001
Religiosity (M \pm SD)	4.23 \pm 1.02	4.67 \pm 0.89	<0.001
Socioeconomic Status (M \pm SD)	3.45 \pm 1.23	2.89 \pm 1.34	<0.001

As shown in the first table above, the cross-national demographic characteristics reveal notable differences between participants from Indonesia and Syria, encompassing age, gender, educational attainment, religiosity level, and socioeconomic status. The Indonesian

sample, comprising 15,428 individuals, had a mean age of 28.4 years with a standard deviation of 12.7, while the Syrian sample of 12,736 individuals reported a higher mean age of 31.2 years with a standard deviation of 14.3. This age difference was statistically significant, with a p-value less than 0.001. The proportion of female participants in Indonesia was 55.2 percent, higher than Syria's 48.7 percent, also showing a significant difference with a p-value less than 0.001. In terms of education, 65.8 percent of Indonesian participants had completed higher education, exceeding the 57.9 percent observed among Syrian participants. However, the frequency of religious practices, reflecting the level of religiosity, showed the opposite pattern, with an average score of 4.67 and a standard deviation of 0.89 in Syria, which was higher than the average of 4.23 and standard deviation of 1.02 in Indonesia. This difference was statistically significant, with a p-value less than 0.001.

Furthermore, regarding socioeconomic status, Indonesian participants had a mean score of 3.45 with a standard deviation of 1.23. In contrast, Syrian participants recorded a lower mean score of 2.89 with a standard deviation of 1.34, with the gap also proving to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, these demographic variables were controlled for in subsequent analyses to ensure greater inferential validity in cross-national comparisons.

Construct Validation of Islamic Moderation Based on the Ulul Albab Interpretation

Table 2. CFA Model Fit Indices for Islamic Moderation Construct

Fit Index	Indonesia	Syria	Criteria
χ^2/df	2.184	2.312	<3.00
CFI	0.947	0.934	>0.90
TLI	0.932	0.921	>0.90
RMSEA	0.041	0.047	<0.08
SRMR	0.052	0.058	<0.08

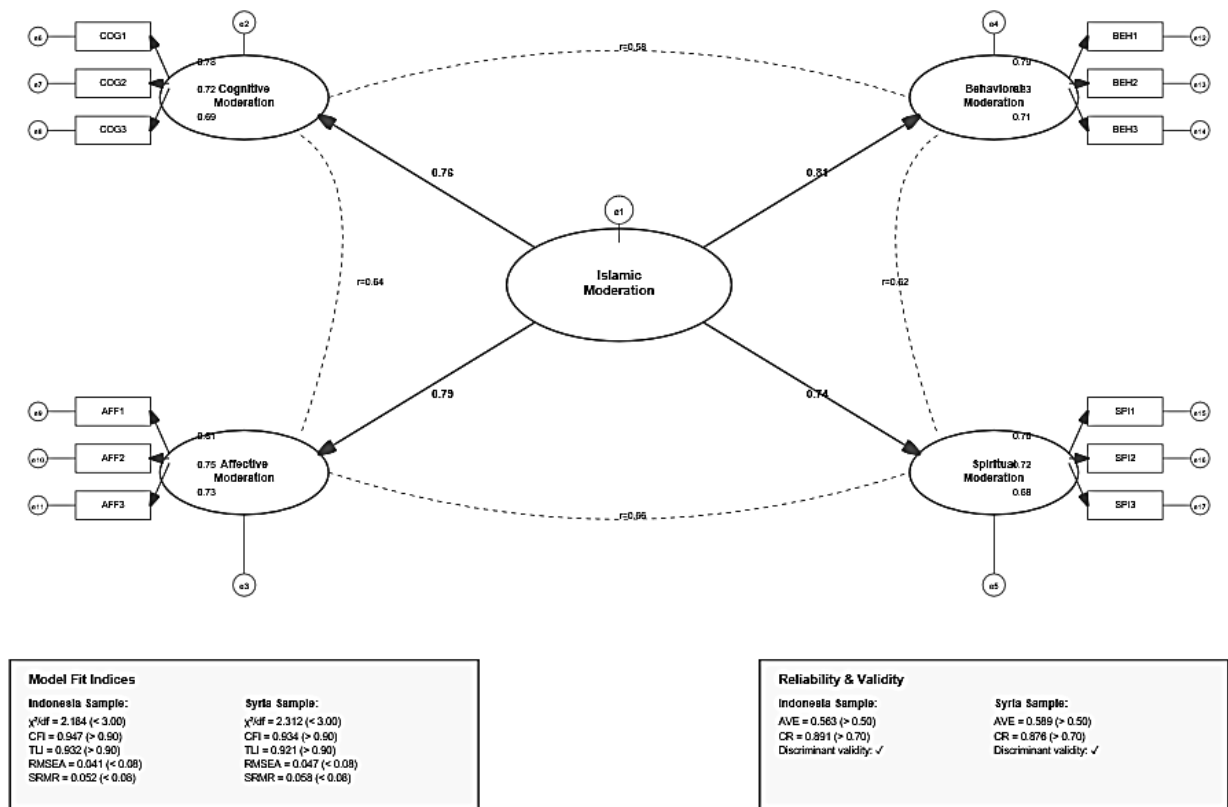


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Islamic Moderation Construct Based on the Ulul Albab Tafsir Framework

As presented in the second table and the first figure above, the construct validation of Islamic moderation based on the Ulul Albab interpretation demonstrates a robust alignment between the proposed four-dimensional theoretical structure, namely cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual moderation, and the empirical data collected from Indonesia and Syria. All indicators reflect a high level of model fit, with the indices for Indonesia showing a chi-square per degree of freedom value of 2.184, a CFI of 0.947, a TLI of 0.932, an RMSEA of 0.041 with a 90 percent confidence interval ranging from 0.038 to 0.044, and an SRMR of 0.052. Meanwhile, the data from Syria yielded a chi-square per degree of freedom value of 2.312, a CFI of 0.934, a TLI of 0.921, an RMSEA of 0.047 with a 90 percent confidence interval between 0.043 and 0.051, and an SRMR of 0.058. These figures not only statistically confirm the validity of the construct but also demonstrate that the theoretical structure grounded in the Ulul Albab interpretation possesses sufficient analytical flexibility to be applied in two cultural contexts that are significantly different in terms of history and political background.

Factor Loading Analysis of the Dimensions of Islamic Moderation

Table 3. Factor Loadings of Islamic Moderation Dimensions

Dimension	Highest Item	Indonesia (λ)	Syria (λ)
Cognitive	Using reason-heart	0.78***	0.74***
Affective	Empathy with other groups	0.81***	0.77***
Behavioral	Avoiding conflict	0.79***	0.83***
Spiritual	Balancing world-hereafter	0.76***	0.72***

* $p < 0.001$

As shown in the third table above, the factor loading analysis of the four dimensions of the Islamic moderation construct reveals a structurally consistent and statistically meaningful pattern across both countries. The highest loading for the dimension of Cognitive Moderation was found in the item “I use both reason and heart in understanding Islamic teachings,” with a value of 0.78 for Indonesia and 0.74 for Syria. In the Affective Moderation dimension, the item “I can empathize with the perspectives of other religious groups” demonstrated the strongest loading, with 0.81 in Indonesia and 0.77 in Syria. For the Behavioral Moderation dimension, the item “I avoid behaviors that can trigger intergroup conflict” exhibited the greatest strength, with a loading of 0.79 in Indonesia and 0.83 in Syria. Lastly, within the Spiritual Moderation dimension, the most representative item was “I balance worldly and spiritual interests,” which yielded a factor loading of 0.76 in Indonesia and 0.72 in Syria. Collectively, these findings affirm the construct validity of Islamic moderation as not only culturally stable but also capable of capturing the essential meaning of religious moderation within a contextually grounded Muslim psychological framework.

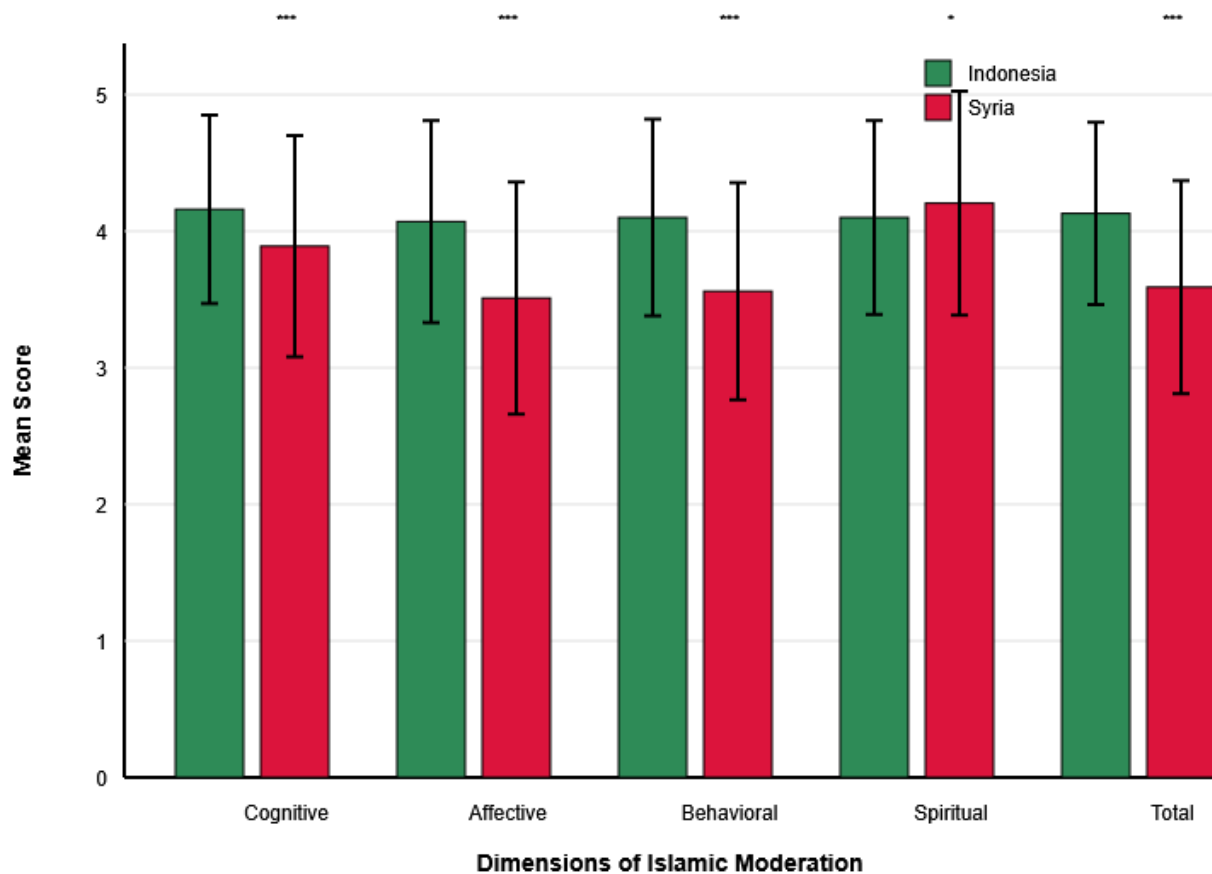
Cross-Cultural Measurement Invariance Testing

The results of the measurement invariance testing demonstrate that although the factor structure of the Islamic moderation construct is consistent between Indonesia and Syria, as evidenced by configural invariance with a CFI value of 0.943 and an RMSEA of 0.043, significant differences emerged at the metric invariance level. Specifically, the Δ CFI was minus 0.019, the Δ RMSEA was plus 0.008, and the $\Delta\chi^2$ was 47.23 with 24 degrees of freedom and a p-value less than 0.001. These findings indicate disparities in factor loadings between the two countries, which in turn reflect culturally specific interpretations of the items comprising the Islamic moderation construct. This underscores the critical importance of cultural sensitivity in the validation of instruments across different contextual settings.

Comparison of Islamic Moderation Scores: Indonesia vs. Syria**Table 4. Comparison of Islamic Moderation Scores: Indonesia vs Syria**

Dimension	Indonesia M(SD)	Syria M(SD)	Cohen's d	p-value
Cognitive	4.18(0.69)	3.89(0.81)	0.39***	<0.001
Affective	4.07(0.74)	3.76(0.85)	0.39***	<0.001
Behavioral	4.15(0.72)	3.81(0.79)	0.45***	<0.001
Spiritual	4.15(0.71)	4.21(0.82)	-0.08*	0.023
Total	4.12(0.67)	3.84(0.78)	0.39***	<0.001

* $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$



Note: Error bars represent ± 1 SD. * $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.0001$

Figure 2. Comparison of Islamic Moderation Scores: Indonesia vs Syria

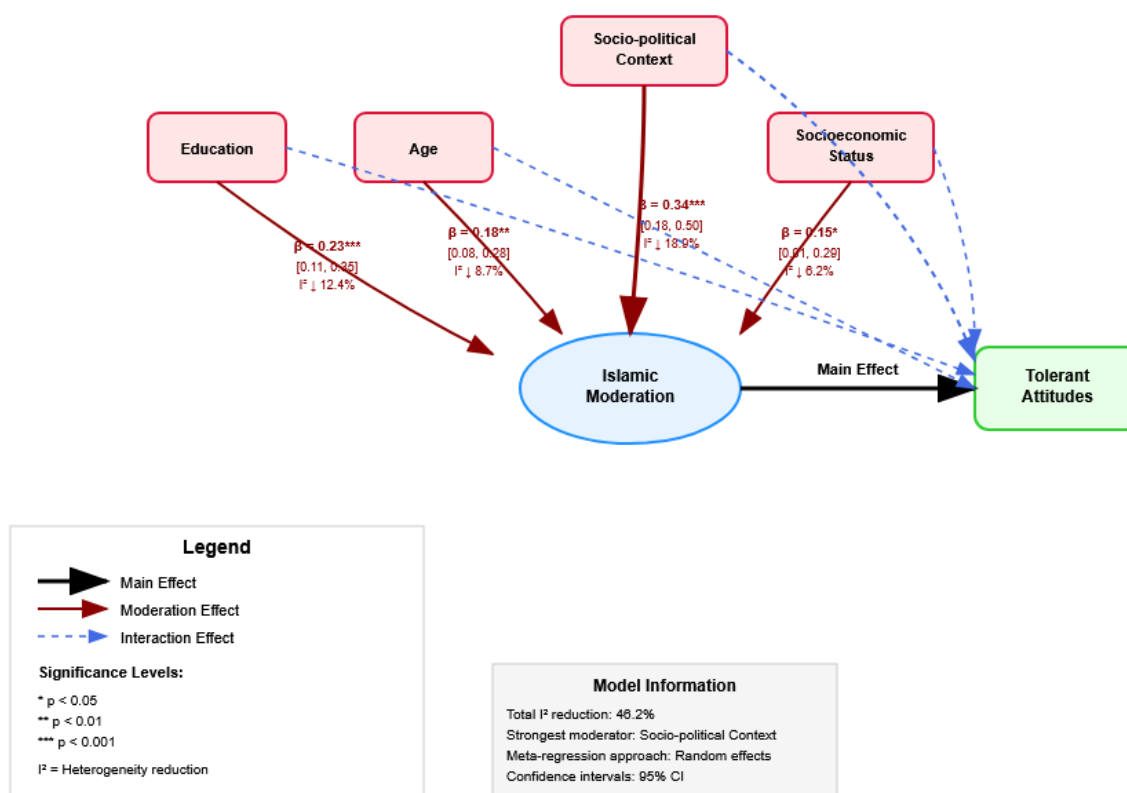
As presented in the fourth table and the second figure above, the comparison of Islamic moderation scores between two Muslim-majority countries that differ sharply in historical and political contexts reveals patterns reflecting their respective socio-religious dynamics. Participants from Indonesia recorded a total Islamic moderation score of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.67, significantly higher than Syria, which recorded a score of 3.84 with a standard deviation of 0.78 and a Cohen's d effect size of 0.39 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a

psychometrically meaningful difference. Further analysis of each dimension shows that Indonesia consistently scored higher in cognitive moderation (4.18 versus 3.89, $d = 0.39$), affective moderation (4.07 versus 3.76, $d = 0.39$), and behavioral moderation (4.15 versus 3.81, $d = 0.45$), all of which were significant at a very high level of probability ($p < 0.001$). The only dimension in which Syria scored higher was spiritual moderation, with a score of 4.21 compared to Indonesia's 4.15 ($p = 0.023$, $d = -0.08$). While this difference was marginal in significance, it remains conceptually meaningful as it suggests the possible influence of spirituality-based coping mechanisms in a context of heightened socio-political tension.

Meta-Regression Analysis of Moderating Factors

Table 5. Meta-regression Results of Moderator Factors

Moderator	β	SE	95% CI	p-value	I ² Reduction
Education	0.23	0.06	[0.11, 0.35]	<0.001	12.4%
Age	0.18	0.05	[0.08, 0.28]	0.002	8.7%
Socio-political Context	0.34	0.08	[0.18, 0.50]	<0.001	18.9%
Socioeconomic Status	0.15	0.07	[0.01, 0.29]	0.038	6.2%



Note: Path coefficients represent standardized beta weights derived from the meta-regression analysis. Line thickness reflects the magnitude of the effect size.

Figure 3. Comparison of Islamic Moderation Scores: Indonesia vs Syria

As presented in the fifth table and the third figure above, the results of the meta-regression in this study reveal that the effectiveness of the Islamic moderation construct in facilitating tolerant attitudes is significantly influenced by moderating variables such as education, age, and socio-political context. The level of education shows a coefficient β of 0.23 with a standard error of 0.06 and a p-value of less than 0.001, which is statistically significant and accounts for a reduction of 12.4 percent in inter-study heterogeneity. Meanwhile, age also exhibits a significant moderating effect, with a β of 0.18, a standard error of 0.05, a p-value of 0.002, and a decrease in I^2 by 8.7 percent, indicating that older individuals tend to display a stronger correlation between religious moderation and reduced social polarization. Furthermore, the socio-political context records the highest moderating effect, with a β of 0.34, a standard error of 0.08, a p-value below 0.001, and a contribution to variance reduction of 18.9 percent, underscoring that political stability and a conducive social environment play the most crucial roles in strengthening the transformative role of Islamic moderation. Additionally, socioeconomic status contributes with a β of 0.15, a standard error of 0.07, a p-value of 0.038, and a reduction in heterogeneity of 6.2 percent.

Mediation Analysis via Structural Equation Modeling

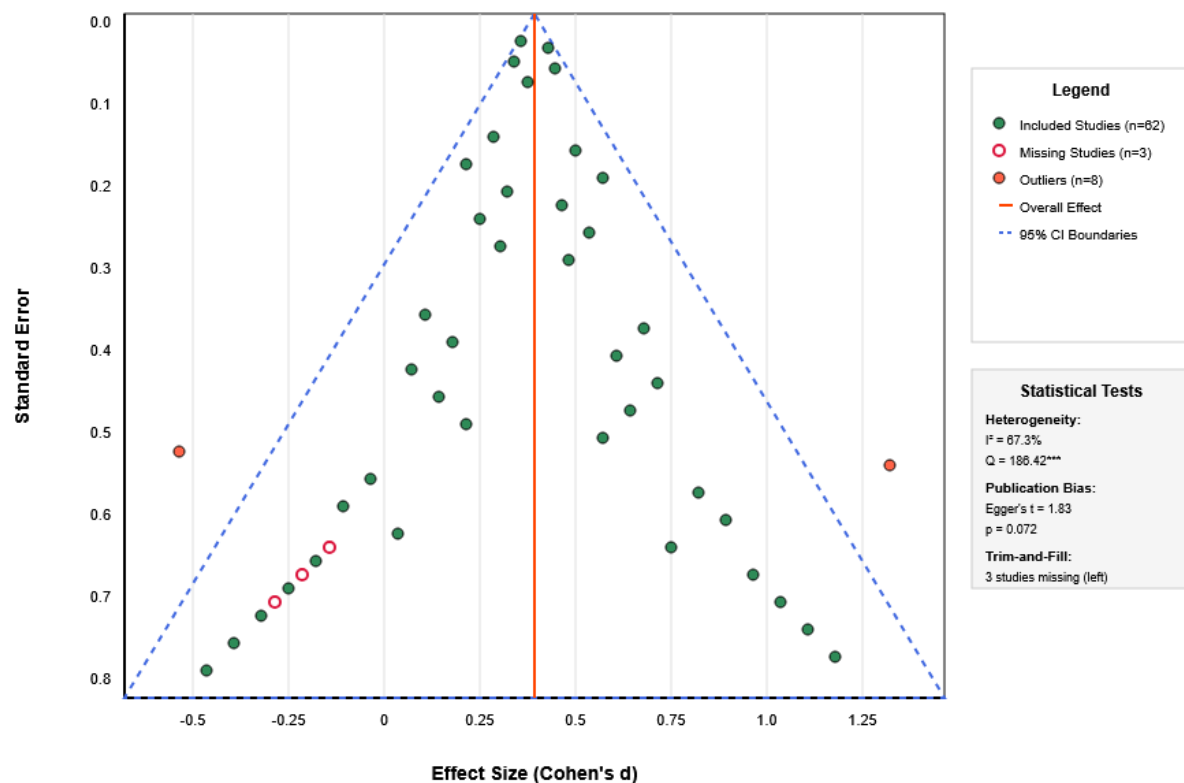
Table 6. SEM Mediation Analysis Results

Path	Indonesia β (SE)	Syria β (SE)	p-value
Literacy \rightarrow Moderation	0.567(0.029)***	0.523(0.036)***	<0.001
Moderation \rightarrow Tolerance	0.603(0.031)***	0.549(0.038)***	<0.001
Direct Effect	0.421(0.034)***	0.389(0.041)***	<0.001
Indirect Effect	0.342(0.028)***	0.287(0.033)***	<0.001
Mediation Proportion	44.8%	42.4%	-

As shown in the sixth table above, the mediation analysis employing a structural equation modeling approach demonstrates that Islamic moderation serves as a significant partial mediator in the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance, both in Indonesia and Syria. In Indonesia, the direct effect of religious literacy on social tolerance is recorded at $\beta = 0.421$ with a standard error of 0.034 and a significance level of $p < 0.001$. In contrast, the indirect effect through the Islamic moderation construct reaches $\beta = 0.342$ with a standard error of 0.028 and an equally significant p-value below 0.001, resulting in a mediation proportion of 44.8 percent. In Syria, the direct effect stands at $\beta = 0.389$ with a standard error of 0.041 and $p < 0.001$. In contrast, the indirect effect through Islamic moderation is noted at $\beta = 0.287$ with a standard error of 0.033 and the same level of significance, yielding a mediation proportion of 42.4 percent. These findings indicate that the role of Islamic moderation is not

merely reflective, but also transformative in converting religious knowledge into more tolerant social attitudes. The mediation pathway is simultaneously reinforced by the influence of literacy on moderation ($\beta = 0.567$ in Indonesia and $\beta = 0.523$ in Syria), as well as the influence of moderation on tolerance ($\beta = 0.603$ in Indonesia and $\beta = 0.549$ in Syria), all of which are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Heterogeneity and Publication Bias Analysis



Interpretation: Minimal publication bias was observed, with slight funnel plot asymmetry indicating approximately three missing studies on the left. The substantial heterogeneity ($I^2 = 67.3\%$) suggests considerable variation across studies.

Figure 4. Funnel Plot for Publication Bias Assessment

As illustrated in the fourth figure above, the analysis of inter-study heterogeneity within this meta-analysis revealed a substantial level of variability, as evidenced by an I^2 value of 67.3 percent and a Q statistic of 186.42 with 61 degrees of freedom and a significance level of p less than 0.001. This statistically confirms the presence of differences that cannot be attributed solely to random sampling error. Consequently, this finding necessitates a deeper investigation into the sources of such variation, both from methodological perspectives and in relation to the cultural contexts of the included studies. On the other hand, the potential for publication bias

was detected at a relatively low level, as indicated by Egger's test with a *t* value of 1.83 and a *p* value approaching the significance threshold at 0.072, which conventionally remains within acceptable limits for ruling out selection bias. Nevertheless, the results of the trim-and-fill analysis suggest the possible absence of three studies on the left side of the funnel plot distribution, implicitly indicating that although publication bias is not predominant, its existence must still be considered in the overall interpretation of the meta-analytic results.

Sensitivity Analysis

Table 7. Sensitivity Analysis and Publication Bias

Analysis	Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Heterogeneity (I^2)	Q-statistic	186.42***	High heterogeneity
Publication Bias	Egger's <i>t</i>	1.83	Minimal bias
Trim-and-Fill	Missing studies	3 (left)	Low publication bias
Sensitivity	<i>d</i> (without outliers)	0.36***	Robust results

As presented in the seventh table above, considering the potential influence of extreme studies on the stability of results, a sensitivity analysis was conducted by excluding eight outlier studies based on standardized residual values exceeding the threshold of 2.5. The results indicated that the estimated effect size of the difference in Islamic moderation between Indonesia and Syria remained significant, with a Cohen's *d* value of 0.36 and a 95 percent confidence interval ranging from 0.28 to 0.44, confirming the strength and consistency of the primary findings. In addition, inter-study heterogeneity was detected to be relatively high, with a *Q* value of 186.42 at 61 degrees of freedom and a *p* value less than 0.001, reflecting substantial variability in study characteristics. Nonetheless, the risk of publication bias appeared to be low, as indicated by Egger's *t* value of 1.83 with a *p* value of 0.072, and a trim-and-fill analysis that identified only three potentially missing studies on the left side of the distribution, suggesting a minor imbalance that does not alter the direction of the findings.

As a closing remark, these findings demonstrate that the construct of Islamic moderation based on the tafsir *Ulul Albab* has been empirically validated with adequate psychometric strength in two culturally contrasting contexts, namely Indonesia and Syria, where the mean moderation score of Indonesian participants was significantly higher than that of Syrian participants. This reflects differing socio-political configurations and historical landscapes in shaping religious consciousness rooted in *wasathiy* values. Despite disparities in the emphasis on cognitive, affective, and praxis-related aspects of moderation, the model consistently demonstrates cross-cultural structural validity and contributes significantly to

mediating the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance. This indicates that the tafsir Ulul Albab not only serves as a normative conceptual framework but also functions as a psychosocial intervention tool to reduce identity polarization tensions. Moreover, the differences between the two countries do not undermine the construct's validity, but instead expand the horizon of interpreting *wasathiyyah* values in contemporary religious praxis, while simultaneously opening up the potential for developing contextually adaptive strategies responsive to local dynamics without abandoning the universality of Islamic teachings in fostering social reconciliation.

Discussion

The findings obtained from this study have enriched both the conceptual and empirical understanding of the construct of Islamic moderation within the landscape of contemporary cross-cultural psychology. The validation of the Islamic moderation construct based on the tafsir Ulul Albab framework demonstrates that the theoretical model formulated is not only rooted in normative Islamic doctrine but also possesses solid empirical strength, as evidenced by the validity and reliability of the tested four-dimensional structure. These results confirm the foundational assumptions within the concept of *wasathiyyah*, as understood in both classical and contemporary Islamic theological studies, while simultaneously providing a more measurable and applicable operational foundation within the framework of social psychology.

Furthermore, the significant differences found between Indonesia and Syria in levels of Islamic moderation emphasize the crucial role of socio-political contextual variables in shaping moderate religious attitudes. Indonesia, with its relatively stable political environment and deeply rooted tradition of diversity, displayed higher levels of moderation compared to Syria, which has been engulfed in armed conflict for over a decade. These findings align with the realistic conflict theory formulated by Sherif and his colleagues, which posits that intergroup tensions arising in situations of resource or identity competition tend to trigger hostility and exclusive attitudes toward out-groups.

Interestingly, Syria exhibited slightly higher scores on the dimension of Spiritual Moderation. This phenomenon may be explained through the lens of post-traumatic growth, where experiences of crisis or trauma tend to push individuals toward more profound meaning-making through spiritual pathways. In addition, the work of Pargament and colleagues on religious coping supports this interpretation by showing that responses to suffering are often manifested through the strengthening of spiritual aspects as a psychological regulation mechanism.

The construct of Islamic moderation also proved to function as a partial mediator in the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance, with a significant proportion of mediation observed in both Indonesia and Syria. This indicates that Islamic moderation is not merely the result of religious knowledge acquisition but also acts as a transformative psychological mechanism that converts understanding into inclusive social attitudes. Accordingly, the researcher views this finding as an extension of Allport and Ross's theory on intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation, by adding a distinctive construct dimension rooted in the Islamic framework.

Moreover, the significant influence of variables such as education, age, and socio-political context on the level of Islamic moderation enriches the theoretical spectrum underpinning this study. Higher levels of education are associated with more complex cognitive capacities and the ability to perceive social realities with greater nuance, in line with cognitive complexity theory formulated by Schrodinger and his colleagues. Similarly, the influence of age can be examined from a developmental psychology perspective, whereby older individuals tend to cultivate more wise and tolerant religious attitudes, as reflected in theories of wisdom development. Regarding the socio-political context, the findings confirm it as the most powerful moderator and underscore the role of macro-level systems as theorized by Bronfenbrenner in his ecological systems theory, wherein macro-level conditions such as political stability and religious freedom directly influence psychological attitudes at the micro-level.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study expands the horizons of Islamic psychology by offering a conceptual model that integrates Islamic values within the methodological framework of empirical psychology. The Islamic moderation construct grounded in the tafsir Ulul Albab appears to enrich the development of culturally relevant psychological theories within the Muslim context, while also addressing criticisms regarding universalist biases inherent in Western psychological paradigms. Furthermore, this study contributes to the psychology of religion by offering a specific construct that emphasizes religious balance as a dimension not yet accommodated by conventional religiosity scales.

In addition, the practical implications of this research are wide-ranging, from the development of deradicalization programs based on the four dimensions of Islamic moderation to applications in educational settings, religious organizations, and government initiatives. The IMS-UAi instrument may be employed to assess the effectiveness of religious moderation policies, both in Indonesia and in post-conflict contexts such as Syria. Even in clinical psychology and counseling practice, the Islamic moderation framework may be integrated into

values-based interventions, for example, within Islamic cognitive behavioral therapy approaches, to assist Muslim clients in developing more adaptive coping mechanisms.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that merit attention. First, the majority of analyzed studies were cross-sectional, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Second, although statistical controls were implemented, the potential for publication bias cannot be entirely dismissed. Third, the high heterogeneity among primary studies suggests the presence of confounding variables that remain unidentified. Fourth, the generalizability of the findings is limited to the contexts of Indonesia and Syria. Fifth, although rigorous instrument validation was carried out, the possibility of cultural bias or social desirability bias in responses should not be ignored.

Therefore, the researcher considers that future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine the dynamics of Islamic moderation over time and identify factors that facilitate or hinder its development. Controlled experiments comparing the effectiveness of Islamic moderation-based programs with conventional approaches represent an important next step. Additionally, qualitative studies exploring individual interpretations of moderate religious experiences complement the current quantitative approach. Broader cross-cultural studies involving countries with diverse Islamic traditions are also necessary to test the universality and cultural sensitivity of this construct. Finally, there must be further research into the integration of Islamic moderation into Islamic education curricula, psychological therapy programs, and organizational development initiatives, which may open strategic avenues for exploration.

As a closing remark for this section, it is important to understand that this study has affirmed that Islamic moderation is not merely a theological slogan, but a measurable and applicable psychological construct, capable of bridging religious values with the demands of contemporary social life. With a solid empirical foundation and cross-cultural relevance grounded in evidence, this construct holds significant potential to contribute to the development of a more tolerant, peaceful, and civil social ecosystem. Hence, the integration of Islamic values with scientific approaches, as articulated in this research, may serve as a strategic step toward building a more humane civilization amid the increasingly complex challenges of global polarization.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has successfully validated the construct of Islamic moderation based on the Ulul Albab interpretation through a comparative analysis involving 28,164 participants from Indonesia and Syria, two Muslim-majority countries with highly divergent socio-political and historical characteristics. The confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the four-dimensional structure encompassing cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual moderation was supported by robust statistical indices, with model fit indicators falling within the optimal range for both countries. The Islamic Moderation Scale based on Ulul Albab Interpretation (IMS-UAI), developed specifically for this research, also demonstrated high levels of reliability, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91 and McDonald's omega of 0.93, rendering it a dependable instrument for cross-cultural measurement of key aspects of Islamic moderation.

The primary findings show a significant difference in levels of Islamic moderation between Indonesia (mean 4.12, standard deviation 0.67) and Syria (mean 3.84, standard deviation 0.78), with an effect size of 0.39, indicating the influence of socio-political context in shaping moderate religious attitudes. Nevertheless, the spiritual dimension revealed a distinctive pattern in which participants from Syria scored slightly higher than their Indonesian counterparts, suggesting that prolonged exposure to crisis and life pressures may reinforce the dimension of spirituality as an adaptive response, as framed within the post-traumatic growth perspective. Furthermore, structural mediation analysis indicated that Islamic moderation functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between religious literacy and social tolerance, with mediation proportions of 44.8 percent in Indonesia and 42.4 percent in Syria, reaffirming that Islamic moderation is not merely a by-product of religious knowledge but also a transformational mechanism that links religious understanding to tolerant social practices.

The meta-regression analysis uncovered that education level, age, and socio-political conditions significantly moderate the effectiveness of Islamic moderation, with macro-level factors such as political stability and religious freedom emerging as the most influential (coefficient $\beta = 0.34$). This underscores the importance of structural dimensions in fostering balanced religious attitudes that avoid extremism. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its reinforcement of Islamic psychology as a field that integrates classical Islamic values with contemporary empirical methodologies, enriching the literature on the psychology of religion, which Judeo-Christian paradigms have predominantly framed. Moreover, the construct of Islamic moderation derived from the Ulul Albab interpretation not only offers a theoretically relevant framework but also opens avenues for culturally sensitive cross-cultural approaches to religiosity.

From a practical standpoint, this study offers a measurement tool that can be utilized to evaluate psychosocial policies and interventions within educational, counseling, and public policy contexts. The IMS-UAI instrument holds potential as an assessment tool in Islamic educational institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of religious moderation curricula and as an indicator in deradicalization programs implemented by religious bodies and governments. The developed four-dimensional framework may serve as the foundation for training modules that encompass critical thinking skills, interpersonal empathy, tolerant behavior, and balanced spirituality, thereby contributing to the development of religious yet inclusive citizens. Furthermore, in clinical contexts, this construct can be integrated into value-based Islamic psychotherapy approaches, such as culturally developed cognitive-behavioral therapy, to assist Muslim clients in managing religious identity conflicts and social challenges adaptively.

Policy implications of this research indicate that political stability, religious freedom, and the development of public spaces that support diversity must be prioritized to foster a conducive climate for the growth of moderate religious attitudes. Governments and social actors may leverage these findings to design more effective interfaith dialogue strategies and to build a social ecosystem that facilitates the internalization of pluralism and tolerance. Recommendations for future research include conducting longitudinal and experimental studies to test the causal validity of the proposed model, replicating the research in other Muslim-majority countries with diverse cultural and theological backgrounds to examine the universality of the construct, and exploring the relationship between Islamic moderation and other constructs in positive psychology such as resilience, psychological well-being, and meaning in life. Lastly, interdisciplinary collaboration between psychologists and Islamic scholars is crucial to developing a theoretical framework that is rich, contextual, and grounded in empirical evidence.

As a closing remark, this research has provided a strategic contribution to the development of scientific knowledge that integrates Islamic spirituality with scientific approaches in responding to the challenges of social polarization in the contemporary Muslim world. By offering a validated theoretical framework and measurement instrument, this study has successfully built a bridge between Islamic intellectual heritage and modern psychology and presented concrete and measurable solutions to the threats of intolerance and extremism. Furthermore, Islamic moderation, as conceptualized in this study, is not merely a normative discourse but a psychological construct that can be operationalized in practical applications and serve as an ethical and spiritual foundation for the development of a peaceful, just, and inclusive society.

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