



Wasathiyah Islam: The Constellation of Al-Azhar University in Global Geopolitics

Zainal Fanani, Fikri Taufiqur Rohman, Mohammad Fuyudun Niam Imam, Arfan Maskuri
¹²³UIN Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, Indonesia, ⁴Universitas AlAzhar, Mesir
Email: zainalfanani13597@gmail.com, muhammadfikri4477@gmail.com,
Fuyudunniam@gmail.com, Arfan7eljinan@gmail.com

Receive: 11/08/2024

Accepted: 10/09/2024

Published: 01/10/2024

Abstrak

Islam Wasathiyah, sebuah konsep yang menekankan pada moderasi dan keseimbangan dalam pemahaman dan praktik Islam, telah menjadi wacana keagamaan yang semakin penting dalam konteks geopolitik global kontemporer. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran sentral Universitas al-Azhar, institusi pendidikan Islam terkemuka di Mesir, dalam mengembangkan dan mempromosikan Islam Wasathiyah di tengah dinamika sosial-politik yang kompleks. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis dan analitis, tulisan ini mengkaji faktor-faktor internal dan eksternal yang mendorong kemunculan konsep Islam Wasathiyah, serta menganalisis keterlibatan al-Azhar dalam kontestasi politik di Mesir dan dunia Islam secara umum. Lebih lanjut, tulisan ini menguraikan strategi-strategi yang dijalankan oleh al-Azhar, khususnya di bawah kepemimpinan Grand Syekh Ahmed al-Tayeb, dalam mengampanyekan Islam Wasathiyah melalui berbagai inisiatif, seperti konferensi internasional, publikasi ilmiah, kerjasama institusional, dan diplomasi keagamaan. Dengan menganalisis peran al-Azhar dalam menghadapi tantangan ekstremisme dan radikalisme agama, tulisan ini berkontribusi pada diskusi tentang masa depan Islam moderat dan signifikansi institusi keagamaan dalam membentuk wacana dan praktik keislaman yang inklusif dan damai. Temuan dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya peran al-Azhar sebagai aktor kunci dalam lanskap geopolitik global, serta potensinya dalam mempromosikan pemahaman Islam yang seimbang dan kontekstual dalam menghadapi tantangan-tantangan kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Islam Wasathiyah, Universitas al-Azhar, geopolitik global, moderasi, ekstremisme, radikalisme.

Abstract

Islam Wasathiyah, a concept that emphasizes moderation and balance in the understanding and practice of Islam, has become an increasingly important religious discourse in the context of contemporary global geopolitics. This paper aims to explore the central role of al-Azhar University, Egypt's leading Islamic educational institution, in developing and promoting Islam Wasathiyah amidst complex socio-political dynamics. Using historical and analytical approaches, this paper examines the internal and external factors that drive the emergence of the concept of Islam Wasathiyah, and analyzes al-Azhar's involvement in political contestations in Egypt and the Islamic world in general. Furthermore, this paper outlines the strategies implemented by al-Azhar, especially under the leadership of Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, in campaigning for Islam Wasathiyah through various initiatives, such as international conferences, scientific publications, institutional cooperation, and religious diplomacy. By analyzing al-Azhar's role in facing the challenges of religious extremism and radicalism, this paper contributes to the discussion on the future of moderate Islam and the

significance of religious institutions in shaping inclusive and peaceful Islamic discourse and practice. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of al-Azhar's role as a key actor in the global geopolitical landscape, as well as its potential in promoting a balanced and contextual understanding of Islam in facing contemporary challenges.

Keywords: *Islam Wasathiyah, al-Azhar University, global geopolitics, moderation, extremism, radicalism.*

Introduction

Entering the 21st century, the Islamic world faces great socio-religious turbulence. The terrorist bombing tragedy on September 9, 2001 targeting the WTC (*World Trade Center*) is a trigger for a change in the global community's perspective towards Islam for the worse. Periodically, the tragedy then gave birth to transnational extremist Islamic groups that carried out acts of terror targeting a number of global communities with various motives such as the Bali bombing in 2002, the suicide bombing in London in 2005, the Mumbai attack in 2008 until the emergence of the ISIS group that threatened international stability. It does not stop there, the emergence of fundamentalist-extremist groups constructs radical political issues against Islamic countries and even democratic countries with large Muslim populations. (Muhammad Adil Iqbal and Shaikh Abdul Mabud, 2019)

Recent geopolitical developments have given rise to a negative perception of Muslims in Europe, known as Islamophobia. The mass media plays an important role in shaping such negative images through framing and narratives that distort the view of Islam as a religion of peace. In an effort to straighten out and refute accusations that damage the image of Islam, al-Azhar University pioneered the discourse of Wasathiyah Islam. Internally, this discourse aims to counter fundamentalist-radical thinking that is the root of extremist acts, including countering transnational terrorism such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. (Idris, 2016)

Wasathiyah Islamic discourse seeks to promote a moderate, balanced understanding of Islam and reject violence. Meanwhile, externally, the Wasathiyah Islamic narrative aims to improve the image of Islam which is often portrayed as a religion that is synonymous with violence in the international world, especially in Western countries. Through the promotion of the values of moderation, tolerance, and peace, Islam Wasathiyah seeks to change these negative perceptions and show the true face of Islam as a religion full of grace. (Rika Widianita, 2023)

In addition to being known as the oldest Islamic educational institution after al-Qawariyaun, al-Azhar also has a socio-religious influence on the development of religious discourse in the Islamic world. In addition, al-Azhar is an old Islamic authority whose influence is recognized not only in the socio-religious field, but also in the socio-political world of the Islamic world. This can be proven by the labeling of the mecca of Islamic science by other Islamic authorities that are relatively new. This vital position became the capital of al-Azhar to campaign for Wasathiyah Islam as a mainstream religious model followed by the State or other Islamic authorities. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Islam Wasathiyah of al-Azhar University is a religious-political discourse in the face of geopolitical changes that have occurred in recent decades. (Saputra & Kurnia PS, 2020)

Based on the historical context that has been explained earlier, this paper will explore and analyze more deeply the socio-

political conditions behind the emergence of the Wasatiyah Islamic religious discourse, both in Egypt and on a global scale. This discussion will cover the internal and external factors that drove the emergence of the concept of Islam Wasatiyah, as well as the socio-political dynamics that influenced its development. Furthermore, this paper will comprehensively explain al-Azhar University's involvement in political contestation in Egypt and the Islamic world in general. Finally, this article will elaborate in detail on the strategies carried out by al-Azhar University in campaigning for Wasatiyah Islam throughout the Islamic world. The main focus will be on the policies issued by the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, as a central figure in efforts to promote Wasatiyah Islam.

Results and Discussion

A. Global Context: Egyptian and Western Islamic Politics

Islam Wasatiyah as a religious discourse is an accumulation of various teachings contained in the Quran and Sunnah. An understanding of Islam that positions the attitude or angle of the path as a middle way (*wasth*) It is not a completely new doctrine. This can be found in the normative basis in surah al-Baqarah verse 143 which is termed as *Ummatan Wasatan* and later it will also be mentioned in several terms such as Islamic moderation, middle-way Islam, or *the middle path of Islam*. However, the narrative or discourse of Wasatiyah Islam needs to be constructed in a well-established manner and reformulated in the face of the social construct of the international world that was formed at the beginning of the 21st.(Dimiyati, 2017)

The socio-political conditions in the Islamic world in the early 21st century are marked by the emergence of extremist

movements that carry out acts of terror in a number of countries around the world. These eclectic movements cannot be separated from the emergence of the idea of fundamentalism-radicalism in the Islamic world. In this context, fundamentalism is a form of Islamic political expression that has long lost in a number of political contests both in the domestic and global realms. In addition, it can also be understood that the emergence of fundamentalist ideas is a response to the Islamic State's decline against Western hegemony. The defeat of the Arab States in the war against Israel became the starting point for the revival of Islamic extremism with popular jargon that Islam is the solution (*al-Islam wuha al-hillu*).(et al., 2020)

Political instability in a country with a thick Islamic political narrative has become a condition or a place for the growth of fundamentalist-radical ideas such as in Egypt. The condition of Egypt since entering the end of the twentieth century has experienced metamorphosis in Islamic political groups. Although Islamic political groups are under pressure from the Egyptian government, a new Islamic authority has emerged that could threaten the model of moderate religiosity taught by al-Azhar University. The group bases its understanding of the high spirit of Islam by inviting back to the Quran and Sunnah, the group is known as the Salafi movement.(Idris, 2018)

According to Ismail Raihan in "Al-Azhar and The Salafis in Egypt: Contestation of Two Traditions" explains that the emergence of Salafi in Egypt cannot be separated from the role of Rasyid Rida who directed the modernism of Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muahammad Abduh in a more conservative direction. In this context,

it is important to note that the Egyptian Salafi group was not inspired by the modernist ideas of al-Afghani and Abduh, so a number of researchers consider the two figures to be enlightened salafis (*Salafi's enlightened*). It is based on the call of al-Afghani and Abduh to return to the Qur'an and the Sunnah through rational interpretation. In addition to this, Raihan added that the good relationship between Rashid Rida and Ibn Saud paved the way for the spread of salafi in Egypt.(Ismail, 2023)

Therefore, the historical relationship of the emergence of salafis in Egypt became a new chapter in the spread and development of salafism in the Islamic world. The establishment of a salafi social organization in 1912 by Muhammad Khattab as-Subuki explains the mobility of the salafi community in building social networks and attracting the sympathy of Muslims after the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate. Although the organization initially had the principle of not being involved in political activism, gradually this organization began to spread political narratives through the magazines they published, namely al-I'tisham and at-tibyan. This condition emphasizes the threat both ideologically, politically and religiously to the existence of moderate groups represented by the al-Azhar institution.(Ismail, 2023)

In addition to the emergence of a new Salafi power in the socio-political context of Egypt, the Islamic political condition in Egypt remains held by the Islamist group of the Muslim Brotherhood. The two axes of Islamic politics, namely the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi movement, have contributed to the fundamentalist-radicalist religious style that is considered to have given birth to extremist acts. Al-Azhar University, the

Muslim Brotherhood, and Salafi groups are among the political actors involved in Egypt's political upheaval in a power struggle between Islamist groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and military forces backed by official religious institutions such as Al-Azhar in the Arab Spring.(Al, 2020)

Although the Muslim Brotherhood was initially known as a moderate Islamic movement, some believe that their ideology and political tactics shifted in a more radical direction as time went on. Meanwhile, the Salafi movement that emerged later tended to be more aggressive in fighting for the strict implementation of Islamic sharia and rejecting all forms of renewal or reinterpretation of religious teachings. The rivalry between the two camps triggered a deepening polarization in Egyptian society. Each group seeks to compete for influence and power by claiming to be a true representation of Islam. This situation is exacerbated by the involvement of other actors such as the military and official religious institutions that have their own political interests.(Al, 2020)

In the vortex of political upheaval after the Arab Spring, acts of violence and extremism often emerged as a manifestation of this ideological conflict and power struggle. Both Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi groups are often accused of being the actors behind various incidents of terrorism and violence in the name of religion. This condition further worsens the image of Islamic politics in the eyes of the international world and triggers fears of the spread of radical ideas in Egypt. The most striking change in Middle Eastern geopolitics in the 21st century, especially for Egypt, is the wave *arabic Spring* who overthrew authoritarian rulers.(Sani, 2021) The wave of democracy that occurred in

Egypt can be said to have not lasted long. After the ouster of Husni Mubarak, the Justice and Liberation Party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood held an election contest that carried Morsi as President-elect. The party obtained the number of votes and was followed by another Islamic party affiliated with the Salafi group, the Nour party. However, due to the insistence of the opposition from military forces and liberal political elites, the coup d'état of President Morsi was considered incapable of resolving political instability coupled with Egypt's declining economic condition. Since then, the military ruler has issued a rule that parties must not have religious ideologies, so that the IM does not have the same political position as during the previous military rulers. Interestingly, Al-Azhar University, which is an official institution of the State, supports the coup process with the assumption that the Muslim Brotherhood group teaches understanding *Takfiri* which gave birth to acts of terrorism.

Although in principle al-Azhar does not carry out electoral political activism, the co-optation of the Egyptian government to make al-Azhar an official institution of the State requires the support of all government policies. However, a different thing appears in al-Azhar's attitude in the event of a military coup against Morsi's legitimate government. This is understandable, because Morsi is a president promoted by the Brotherhood of the Believers who are notabene the political-ideological rival of al-Azhar. So that we can find al-Azhar's support and criticism of the IM, one of which is the figure of al-Azhar and the former Mufti of Egypt Ali Gommah.(Al, 2020) In addition to Egypt's domestic condition, which is colored by the increasing influence of political Islamic

movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the global context also plays a role in changing the world's perception of the existence of Islamic politics.

Acts of terror attributed to radical Islamic groups in various parts of the world have made many countries feel threatened and view Islamic political movements as a threat to global security stability. Events such as the 9/11 attacks in the United States, acts of terror in Europe, and the spread of militant groups such as ISIS in the Middle East, have been the main factors that have caused Islamic politics to begin to be feared by countries around the world. The negative stereotype that Islam is synonymous with extremism and violence is getting stronger, despite the fact that the majority of Muslims reject acts of terrorism.(Al, 2020) Increasing global vigilance against the threat of terrorism has prompted many countries to take stricter security measures, including limiting the space for Islamic political movements that are considered potential sources of radicalism. This is certainly a challenge for the development of Islamic politics which actually carries peaceful and moderate values.(Ansori et al., 2022)

But on the other hand, this step is also considered an excessive act that can sacrifice freedom of expression and politics for moderate Islamists. Negative stigma against Islamic politics often causes discrimination and unfair treatment of organizations that actually carry the values of peace and tolerance. This is certainly a challenge for the development of Islamic politics which actually carries peaceful and moderate values. Moderate political Islamic movements must seek to break away from negative stereotypes by continuing to promote a friendly, inclusive and non-violent face of Islam. They also need to

build the trust of the global community by distancing themselves from radical ideologies and strongly condemning acts of terrorism. On the other hand, countries are also expected to distinguish between radical and moderate Islamic groups. Providing open voice space for moderate Muslims can actually dampen radical movements and promote Islam as a peace-loving religion. Thus, deradicalization efforts can run more effectively by involving the active role of the moderate Islamic political movement itself.

B. Islam Wasathiyah al-Azhar

Wasathiyah Islam is a concept that refers to the understanding and practice of Islam that is moderate, balanced, and not extreme. The term "Wasathiyah" is taken from the Arabic word "wasath" or "wasath" which consists of the letters waw, sin, and tha. Literally, this word means middle, middle, or place that is at the midpoint at the same distance from both sides. (Ansari & Alzamzami, 2022) In the context of Islam, the concept of Wasathiyah emphasizes balance and moderation in carrying out religious teachings. Islam Wasathiyah encourages Muslims to avoid extreme attitudes, both too loose and too rigid in interpreting and practicing the teachings of Islam. On the contrary, Islam Wasathiyah invites Muslims to take a middle way, namely by understanding and practicing Islamic teachings proportionally, contextually, and in accordance with the basic principles of universal Islam.

Wasathiyah Islam also emphasizes tolerance, openness, and mutual respect in relationships with fellow Muslims and followers of other religions. This concept recognizes the existence of diversity in religious understanding and practice, and encourages dialogue and cooperation between religious communities for the

creation of a peaceful and harmonious life. The discourse of Wasathiyah Islam cannot be separated from the important role played by al-Azhar University, the oldest and most influential Islamic educational institution in the world. al-Azhar University, founded in the 10th century in Cairo, Egypt, has long been known as a center for the teaching and development of moderate and inclusive Islamic thought. Over the centuries, al-Azhar University has produced many prominent Muslim scholars, scholars, and thinkers who promote a balanced and non-extremist understanding of Islam. They teach the importance of interpreting Islamic sacred texts contextually, taking into account historical, social, and cultural aspects. The scholars of al-Azhar also emphasized the values of tolerance, openness, and dialogue in interacting with fellow Muslims as well as with followers of other religions. (Yamit, 2001)

The use of the term "Islam Wasathiyah" was first introduced by scholars and scholars from Al-Azhar University, Egypt, using the phrase "Wasathiyah Al-Islam". However, the concepts and approaches contained in Wasathiyah Islam have actually been referred to from the thoughts and writings of classical Islamic scholars since centuries ago. This shows that the principles of moderation, balance, and tolerance in Islam are not new, but have been an integral part of Islamic teachings since its inception. (As'ad et al., 2021)

The historical process of the development of Wasathiyah Islam in the internal environment of Al-Azhar can be divided into three main phases. The first phase occurred in the 19th century, where Al-Azhar underwent the renewal of the education system and the rationalization of Islamic thought. During this period, Al-Azhar began to open itself to modern

sciences and integrate them with traditional Islamic sciences. This renewal aims to produce Muslim scholars and scholars who are able to answer the challenges of the times with rational and contextual thinking. The second phase took place in the 20th century, where Al-Azhar became increasingly integrated with the Egyptian government and began to be adaptive to contemporary issues, both at the local and global levels. In this phase, Al-Azhar is actively involved in discussions and taking attitudes related to various social, political, and religious issues that arise. Al-Azhar seeks to provide a moderate and balanced view of Islam in responding to these issues, as well as being a bridge between Islamic tradition and modernity. (Idris, 2018)

The third phase began in the 21st century, where Al-Azhar explicitly declared itself the center of the development of Wasatiah Islam. In this phase, Al-Azhar is increasingly intensifying in promoting and implementing the principles of Wasatiah Islam, both through teaching, research, publication, and other activities. Al-Azhar is also active in building networks and cooperation with various Islamic institutions around the world to spread a moderate and inclusive understanding of Islam. (Idris, 2018)

al-Azhar University also plays an important role in spreading the thought of Wasatiah Islam throughout the world. Many students from different countries study at al-Azhar and then return to their home countries to teach and promote moderate and inclusive Islamic principles. Thus, al-Azhar has become a source of inspiration and reference for the Wasatiah Islamic movement in various parts of the world. (Saputra & Kurnia PS, 2020)

In addition, al-Azhar University is also actively involved in various efforts to combat religious extremism and radicalism. Through the fatwas issued by his scholars, al-Azhar seeks to correct the erroneous and misleading understandings of Islam. Al-Azhar also frequently holds international conferences and seminars to discuss contemporary issues facing Muslims and promote solutions that are in line with the principles of Wasatiah Islam.

al-Azhar University, as one of the most influential institutions in developing and disseminating the Wasatiah Islamic discourse, has a very important role in maintaining moderation and balance in the understanding and practice of Islam. The existence of al-Azhar has become a solid fortress in facing the challenges of religious extremism and radicalism in the modern era. This is in line with the concept of Islam Wasatiah which is described as a noble posture extracted from the Qur'an which is rational and not dogmatic.

Conceptually, the general teachings of Islam Wasatiah emphasize balance with tradition and context, gradualism in society, avoiding damage, and facilitating dialogue with a wider scope. However, the emergence of the concept of Islam Wasatiah is also inseparable from global geopolitical conditions, especially in the case of the development of Islamophobia and acts of terrorism in the Middle East. Thus, the factors that prompted the emergence of the concept of Islam Wasatiah can be grouped into two main factors, namely internal factors that stem from the teachings of the Qur'an that emphasize moderation and balance, and external factors related to the global geopolitical situation that requires an appropriate response from Muslims. (Saputra & Kurnia PS, 2020)

First, internal factors from within the body of Muslims themselves. The tendency to practice Islam to the extreme, both in understanding and action, has triggered the need to return Islam to a moderate path in accordance with its original teachings. Wasatiah Islam exists as an effort to suppress religious beliefs that tend to be radical and promote tolerant, open, and civilized Islamic values.

Second, external factors from the global geopolitical situation that trigger concerns about the spread of Islamophobia and negative perceptions of Islam. Acts of terrorism attributed to radical Islamic groups have provoked a backlash from the Western world and tarnished the image of Islam in the eyes of the international community. In this context, Islam Wasatiah emerged as an attempt to improve the image of Islam by showing a peaceful, moderate, and non-violent face of Islam.

By emphasizing principles such as balance, contextuality, gradualism, avoiding damage, and open dialogue, Islam Wasatiah seeks to be a middle ground that bridges the gap between extremist ideologies and provides solutions to the global challenges facing Muslims. This concept not only covers religious aspects, but also touches on the social, political, and cultural fields with the aim of creating a tolerant, peaceful, and advanced Islamic society.

In this context, the role of al-Azhar University has become increasingly important in promoting and implementing the principles of Wasatiah Islam, both in the internal context of Muslims and in relation to the outside world. With the existence of al-Azhar as an institution that maintains moderation and balance in the understanding and practice of Islam, it is hoped that Muslims can better face the challenges of religious extremism and

radicalism, and can contribute positively to creating peace and harmony in the midst of a plural and dynamic global society.

The role of al-Azhar University in promoting Wasatiah Islam is very significant, and this can be seen from the policies taken by Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb. One of the important steps taken is to integrate the concept of Islam Wasatiah into the educational curriculum in al-Azhar which has been going on for a long time. Students are provided with a comprehensive understanding of the principles of moderation, balance, and tolerance in the Quran, Hadith, and *turast of* salaf scholars, as well as how to apply them in the context of modern life.

Through education based on Wasatiah Islamic values, al-Azhar seeks to produce a generation of Muslim scholars and scholars who have a broad, inclusive, and contextual understanding of Islam. They are equipped with the ability to interpret sacred texts proportionately, as well as to face contemporary challenges wisely and wisely. In addition, Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb also emphasized the importance of the role of al-Azhar alumni in spreading Islam Wasatiah to the general public. The alumni are expected to become ambassadors of Islam who promote the values of moderation and peace in the midst of society. They are encouraged to be actively involved in social, educational, and da'wah activities that develop an inclusive and tolerant understanding of Islam.

Through a wide network of alumni spread across various countries, al-Azhar can expand the reach of spreading Wasatiah Islam globally. Alumni are expected to be effective agents of change in combating extremism, radicalism, and a narrow and rigid understanding of Islam. They are also expected to build bridges of

dialogue and cooperation with various communities, both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims, for the sake of creating harmony and mutual understanding. Thus, the policies taken by Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, both in teaching Wasatiyah Islam to students and emphasizing on alumni to disseminate it to the general public, demonstrate al-Azhar University's strong commitment to promoting a moderate, balanced, and relevant understanding of Islam in the context of the times. This is an important contribution of al-Azhar in shaping the face of Islam that is rahmatan lil 'alamin, as well as in facing complex global challenges in the contemporary era.

C. Internationalization of Wasatiyah Islam

In the face of complex global geopolitical developments, al-Azhar University has developed various strategies to introduce and promote the concept of Islam Wasatiyah to the world community. These strategies aim to spread a moderate, balanced, and inclusive understanding of Islam, as well as to confront the challenges of extremism, radicalism, and Islamophobia that are growing in different parts of the world. (Muhammad Adil Iqbal and Shaikh Abdul Mabud, 2019) One of the main strategies carried out by al-Azhar is through teaching and education. The university integrates Wasatiyah Islamic values into its educational curriculum, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Students are provided with a comprehensive understanding of the principles of moderation, tolerance, and peace in Islam, and are equipped with the ability to interpret sacred texts in a contextual and proportionate manner.

In addition, al-Azhar is also active in holding international conferences, seminars,

and dialogues to promote Wasatiyah Islam to a global audience. Through these forums, al-Azhar invites scholars, scholars, and religious leaders from various countries to discuss and exchange ideas on contemporary issues facing Muslims and the world in general. Al-Azhar seeks to convey the message of a peaceful, tolerant, and constructive Islam, and invites all parties to cooperate in building a harmonious and respectful civilization. (Zahri et al., 2024)

Another strategy carried out by al-Azhar is through scientific publications and the media. The university publishes a variety of books, journals, and articles discussing Wasatiyah Islam and related issues. This publication is widely disseminated, both in Arabic and other international languages, to reach a wider audience. Al-Azhar also utilizes social media and digital platforms to spread the messages of Islam Wasatiyah effectively and interactively.

Not only that, al-Azhar also collaborates with various Islamic institutions and international organizations to strengthen the promotion of Wasatiyah Islam at the global level. Through this collaboration, al-Azhar shares experience, knowledge, and resources to develop programs that support the spread of moderate and inclusive Islamic understanding. Al-Azhar is also involved in peace initiatives and interfaith dialogue to build bridges of communication and mutual understanding between Muslims and other religious communities. With these comprehensive and multidimensional strategies, al-Azhar University seeks to play an important role in facing global geopolitical challenges and promoting Wasatiyah Islam as a constructive and sustainable middle ground. Through these efforts, al-Azhar hopes to contribute to

creating a more peaceful, tolerant, and harmonious world, as well as in shaping a positive and authentic image of Islam in the eyes of the world.

In the last decade, Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib, as the supreme leader of al-Azhar University, has made various efforts to introduce and promote Wasatiyah Islam to the world community. One of the strategic steps taken is to travel to various countries to establish cooperation in spreading a moderate and inclusive understanding of Islam. In this series of trips, Indonesia became one of the countries that received special attention from Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib.

As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has an important role in the development of Islam globally. Indonesian Muslim society is known for its moderate Islamic characteristics, tolerance, and harmony with the local culture. This is in line with the principles of Wasatiyah Islam promoted by al-Azhar. Therefore, Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib sees great potential in establishing cooperation with Indonesia to strengthen the spread of Wasatiyah Islam at the regional and international levels. During his visit to Indonesia, Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib met with various religious leaders, governments, and civil society. He conveyed the message of unity, peace, and moderation in Islam, and emphasized the importance of cooperation between al-Azhar and Islamic institutions in Indonesia in promoting these values. Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib also gave public lectures and lectures at various Islamic universities and educational institutions in Indonesia, where he shared insights on Wasatiyah Islam and the challenges faced by Muslims in the contemporary era.

Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib's visit to Indonesia not only aims to strengthen the institutional relationship between al-Azhar and Islamic institutions in Indonesia, but also to expand the network of cooperation in various fields, such as education, research, and intellectual exchange. Through this collaboration, it is hoped that a positive synergy can be created in developing a moderate understanding of Islam and in facing the challenges of religious extremism and radicalism. In addition, Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib's visit to Indonesia also has an important symbolic impact. His presence as a respected and influential religious figure in the Islamic world sends a strong message about the importance of unity and moderation in facing various global problems. It also shows al-Azhar's recognition and appreciation of Indonesia's role in promoting a peaceful and tolerant Islam.

By traveling to Indonesia and establishing cooperation with various parties there, Grand Sheikh Ahmad Tayyib and al-Azhar University demonstrated their commitment to spreading Wasatiyah Islam globally. Through this inclusive and collaborative approach, it is hoped that a better understanding of the true Islam can be created, as well as a joint strength can be formed in facing the challenges of religious extremism and radicalism in the contemporary era.

Conclusion

In the midst of increasing extremism and fundamentalism in the Islamic world, Al-Azhar University has emerged as a beacon of hope by promoting the concept of Wasathiyah Islam. This concept emphasizes moderation, tolerance, and balance in understanding and practicing the teachings of Islam. Al-Azhar, which is the oldest and most influential Islamic educational

institution, has a crucial role in spreading the message of Wasathiyah Islam to all corners of the Muslim world.

With a long history and reputation built over the centuries, Al-Azhar has a strategic position in global geopolitics. The views and fatwas issued by Al-Azhar scholars are often a reference for Muslims in various parts of the world. This gave Al-Azhar the power to shape Islamic discourse and influence the way Muslims understood their religion.

Through the promotion of Wasathiyah Islam, Al-Azhar seeks to counter radical and extreme Islamic understanding. They emphasized the importance of tolerance, moderation, and inter-religious dialogue as key to confronting complex global challenges. By spreading the message of a peaceful and inclusive Islam, Al-Azhar hopes to prevent more Muslims from falling into extremism and fundamentalism.

In addition, Al-Azhar is also actively involved in educational and religious diplomacy. They collaborate with various educational institutions and governments around the world, both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. The goal is to spread a moderate understanding of Islam and build bridges between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Through the exchange of ideas and dialogue, Al-Azhar hopes to reduce misunderstandings and increase mutual understanding between religions.

However, Al-Azhar's efforts in promoting Wasathiyah Islam are not without challenges. They have to compete with other Islamic educational institutions that may have different views. Criticism has also come from more conservative groups, who consider Al-Azhar too moderate. In addition, Egypt's complex domestic political

dynamics can also influence Al-Azhar's moves.

Despite these challenges, the journal highlights the vital role of Al-Azhar University in the global geopolitical landscape, particularly in the context of the Muslim world. By promoting the concept of Wasathiyah Islam, Al-Azhar seeks to provide a counter-narrative to extremism and religious fundamentalism. They offer a moderate, tolerant, and balanced vision of Islam as a path to peace and harmony in the midst of a turbulent world.

Bibliography

- Al, N. W. et. (2020). *Many Faces of Political Islam in The Middle East, First*. LIPI Press.
- Ansari, I., & Alzamzami, M. (2022). Religious Moderation from the Perspective of Buya Hamka in Tafsir Al-Azhar Qs. al-Baqarah: 256. *Al-Wasatiyyah Journal of Religious Moderation, 1(2)*, 106–130. <https://al-wasatiyah.uinjambi.ac.id/index.php/jrm/article/view/11/11>
- Ansori, Manual, U., Brämswig, K., Ploner, F., Martel, A., Bauernhofer, T., Hilbe, W., Kühn, T., Leitgeb, C., Mlineritsch, B., Petzer, A., Seebacher, V., Stöger, H., Girschikofsky, M., Hochreiner, G., Ressler, S., Romeder, F., Wöll, E., Brodowicz, T., ... Baker, D. (2022). IMPLEMENTATION OF QUIZZZ GAMIFICATION APPLICATION LEARNING MEDIA. *Science, 7(1)*, 1–8.
- As'ad, Putra, D. I. A., & Arfan. (2021). Being al-wasatiyah agents: The role of azharite organization in the moderation of Indonesian religious constellation. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 11(2)*, 124–145. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.11.2.07>

- Dimiyati, A. (2017). ISLAM WASATIYAH (Southeast Asian Moderate Islamic Identity and Ideological Challenges). *Islamic Review: Journal of Islamic Research and Studies*, VI(2), 139–168. <http://journal.ipmafa.ac.id/index.php/islamicreview>
- et al, A. A. (2020). *Islam Indonesia 2020, first*. UII Press.
- Idris. (2016). *Hadith Study*. Prenada Media Group.
- Idris, M. (2018). *Al-Azhar University Since the 20th Century*. Multidisciplinary Studies 5, no. 2.
- Ismail, R. (2023). Al-Azhar and the Salafis in Egypt: Contestation of two traditions. *Muslim World*, 113(3), 260–280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12455>
- Muhammad Adil Iqbal and Shaikh Abdul Mabud. (2019). Challenge of Globalisation to the Muslim Ummah: Religious Extremism and the Need for Middle Path (Wasat). *Strategic Studies*, 39(3), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.039.03.00106>
- Rika Widianita, D. (2023). The Role of Al-Azhar University in Promoting the Narrative of Wasatiah Islam in Indonesia in 2011-2020. *AT-TAWASSUTH: Journal of Islamic Economics*, VIII(I), 1–19.
- Sani, A. (2021). "Al-Azhar University of Egypt and Politics," *Al-Kaffah* 9, no. 2.
- Saputra, M. I. R., & Kurnia PS, A. M. B. (2020). Ikhwan al-Safa, Science, Religion. *Al-Ibrah*, 5(1), 143–160.
- Yamit, Z. (2001). *Quality Management of Products and Services*. Improved.
- Zahri, A. F., Nabilah, D., Hudal, M., & Ilmi, H. (2024). INTEGRATION OF MODERATION AND TOLERANCE IN HADITH TO CREATE PEACE : A STUDY OF THE THOUGHT OF AHMAD AL-TAYYIB This principle of moderation and tolerance is reflected in the Medina Charter drafted by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH which guarantees religious. *Hunafa: Journal of Studia Islamika*, 21(1), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.Vol21.Iss1.769>