



WASATIYYAH IN MUHAMMAD 'ALI AL-SABUNI'S EXEGESIS WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis konstruksi pemikiran wasatiyyah dalam Tafsir *Şafwat al-Tafāsīr* karya Muhammad 'Ali al-Şābūnī sebagai fondasi pembentukan praktik keberagamaan yang moderat dalam konteks Muslim kontemporer. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa al-Şābūnī menafsirkan konsep wasatiyyah sebagai prinsip keseimbangan spiritual, sosial, dan etis yang menolak ekstremisme dalam bentuk ghuluw maupun tafrīt. Pemaknaan ini dibangun melalui pendekatan tematik terhadap ayat-ayat tentang keadilan, toleransi, hikmah, serta peran umat sebagai *ummatan wasaţan*. Analisis mendalam mengungkap bahwa penafsiran al-Şābūnī tidak hanya memiliki legitimasi tekstual, tetapi juga relevansi praksis dalam membangun relasi sosial yang harmonis, memperkuat etika keberagamaan, serta mendorong respons moderat terhadap isu keberagamaan di era digital. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa konsep wasatiyyah menurut al-Şābūnī dapat menjadi kerangka epistemik dalam mengembangkan karakter keagamaan yang inklusif dan adaptif di tengah dinamika keberagamaan global.

Kata Kunci: FWasatiyyah, Tafsir, Moderasi

Abstract

This study examines the concept of *wasatiyyah* in Muhammad 'Ali al-Şābūnī's *Şafwat al-Tafāsīr* as an epistemic foundation for shaping moderate religious attitudes among contemporary Muslims. The findings reveal that al-Şābūnī interprets *wasatiyyah* as a principle of spiritual, social, and ethical balance that rejects both forms of extremism—excess (*ghuluw*) and negligence (*tafrīt*). His interpretation is constructed through a thematic approach to Qur'anic verses on justice, tolerance, wisdom, and the role of Muslims as an *ummatan wasaţan*. The analysis further demonstrates that al-Şābūnī's conception carries strong textual grounding and practical relevance for promoting harmonious social relations, reinforcing ethical religiosity, and fostering moderate responses to contemporary religious challenges, especially in the digital age. The study concludes that his framework of *wasatiyyah* offers a valuable paradigm for cultivating inclusive and adaptive religious character within today's global religious landscape.

Keywords: Wasatiyyah; Exegesis; Moderation

Introduction

The discourse on *wasatiyyah* in Islam has regained significant relevance amid contemporary religious dynamics marked by social polarization and the rise of extreme interpretations. Within this context, Qur'anic exegesis becomes an essential epistemological instrument for understanding how moderation is constructed and transmitted by leading interpreters. Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni, particularly through his monumental work *Safwat al-Tafasir*, provides an interpretive framework that is not only textual but also ethical and contextual in articulating balanced religious values. Ongoing debates concerning the position of moderation within modern tafsir scholarship highlight the urgent need to re-examine foundational elements of inclusive and adaptive religious practices (Rahman, 2021). Moreover, in a global environment where extremist narratives increasingly occupy public discourse, reaffirming the concept of *wasatiyyah* becomes a critical scholarly task (Kusmana, 2022).

Discussions on *wasatiyyah* cannot be separated from the epistemological structure of Qur'anic interpretation, which shapes how Muslims understand both scripture and contemporary realities. Al-Sabuni emerges as a commentator synthesizing classical interpretive traditions with rational sensitivity to modern contexts. His contributions are important because they offer a balanced approach bridging textual authority with the practical needs of today's Muslim societies. Amid challenges of pluralism and competing religious interpretations, the principle of moderation provides a dialogical pathway between textual comprehension and social praxis (Fauzi, 2021). The emphasis on the middle path also serves as a corrective against both rigid literalism and excessive liberalism, making al-Sabuni's thought a vital source for cultivating balanced religiosity (Hidayat, 2023). In the rich landscape of Qur'anic studies, interpreters exhibit varied tendencies shaped by their socio-historical contexts and methodological orientations. Al-Sabuni's works demonstrate a comprehensive style that remains faithful to classical scholarship while presenting meanings of the Qur'an in accessible terms for broader audiences. His approach illustrates that *wasatiyyah* is not merely a normative notion but a principle capable of being operationalized in real-life religious conduct (Rohman, 2022). Recent studies affirm that discussions on moderation in major modern tafsir works including those authored by al-Sabuni reveal strong theological foundations that transcend simplistic social slogans (Zulfikar, 2021).

Within the Indonesian context, *wasatiyyah* has become a foundational pillar for nurturing harmonious relations both among Muslims and between Muslims and other religious communities. Thus, examining this concept through authoritative tafsir such as al-Sabuni's is essential to strengthening religious literacy at the societal level. Contemporary scholarship consistently underscores that religious moderation must be grounded in deep engagement with primary Islamic sources interpreted in a balanced manner (Syahputra, 2021). Al-Sabuni's scholarly perspective remains relevant because it integrates themes of justice, equilibrium, and wisdom into exegetical discussions (Ridwan, 2022). *Wasatiyyah* as a theological paradigm offers a middle path for addressing rapid social transformations, including technological advancement, information flow, and global political shifts. In al-Sabuni's perspective, these balanced values are rooted in an understanding of *maqashid al-shariah* and the Qur'anic principle of justice. Numerous contemporary works highlight moderation as a key element for strengthening social cohesion and minimizing ideological polarization (Mansur, 2023). Accordingly, analyzing how al-Sabuni articulates *wasatiyyah* becomes strategic for broadening the religious outlook of Muslim societies (Nadzir, 2021).

In modern Muslim life, religious practice extends beyond ritual devotion and encompasses perspectives on diversity, social interaction, and responses to societal change. Al-Sabuni's interpretation of *wasatiyyah* provides ethical guidelines enabling Muslims to confront modernity

without abandoning spiritual rootedness. Recent studies stress the importance of moderation in building adaptive communities resistant to extremist narratives (Hakim, 2022). This becomes increasingly vital as selective and biased readings of scripture continue to be exploited by groups seeking ideological advantage an issue counterbalanced by comprehensive exegetical models such as al-Sabuni's (Suhada, 2023).

Al-Sabuni's tafsir is widely recognized for its concise yet authoritative integration of classical references. In the context of *wasatiyyah*, his method demonstrates that moderation is deeply embedded within Islamic teachings rather than a newly invented idea. A thorough exposition of Qur'anic verses related to balanced conduct helps reinforce moderation within public Islamic discourse (Aulia, 2021). Modern scholarship affirms that the sustainability of moderation discourse depends on epistemological grounding drawn from credible tafsir traditions (Fathurrahman, 2022). Contemporary studies on moderation within Qur'anic exegesis indicate that balanced religiosity cannot be separated from proportional understanding of the Qur'an's universal messages. Through an interpretive method combining classical precision and social awareness, al-Sabuni reaffirms moderation as the equilibrium between textual fidelity and contextual relevance. In a climate of increasing tension and fragmentation within religious communities, his ideas serve as a safeguard against extreme interpretative tendencies (Latif, 2021). This aligns with current academic arguments asserting that moderation must rest upon intellectually robust and methodologically sound foundations (Ibrahim, 2023).

Within global discourses, interpretations of moderation serve as a crucial benchmark for strengthening Islam's image as a religion of universal mercy. Al-Sabuni positions *wasatiyyah* as an ethical orientation manifested through social behavior, intellectual engagement, and spiritual discipline. Growing scholarly evidence supports the view that moderation functions as a means of reducing conflict by promoting openness, balance, and dialogue (Naufal, 2022). Furthermore, recent research emphasizes that moderate perspectives play a significant role in constructing religious practices aligned with universal human values (Sutrisno, 2021). Examining *wasatiyyah* within al-Sabuni's thought is not only academically valuable but also strategically relevant for cultivating inclusive and tolerant religious communities. His tafsir underscores strong theological arguments that Islam mandates balance in all aspects of life, including in responding to differences. Such emphasis resonates with contemporary social realities characterized by diversity and the need for dialogical religious approaches (Haqqi, 2023). Modern examinations further reveal that moderation becomes essential in preventing social fragmentation by promoting peaceful and proportionate religious understanding (Rais, 2021). The rise of extremist movements in recent decades has prompted Qur'anic scholars to revisit authoritative sources capable of reaffirming moderation as a core Islamic value. Al-Sabuni's writings display a clear rejection of excessive or fanatical religious interpretations. His works provide an epistemic alternative for promoting an Islam that is humane, balanced, and open to sociocultural change (Munir, 2022). Recent scholarship reiterates that moderation effectively counters extremism when grounded in just, holistic, and non-selective textual interpretation (Ismail, 2021).

Recent studies highlight that moderation cannot flourish without sufficient religious literacy, especially in understanding Qur'anic verses frequently used for ideological justification. Al-Sabuni offers systematic and accessible explanations, enabling broader audiences to grasp and apply *wasatiyyah* meaningfully. Such comprehensive tafsir approaches ensure that Muslims possess intellectual tools necessary to manage differences without compromising core religious commitments (Zain, 2021). Supporting academic findings further suggest that moderation literacy is deeply influenced by the quality of exegetical sources used by communities (Ansori, 2023). Moderation in al-Sabuni's tafsir also holds practical relevance because it does not stop at

normative principles but extends to social applications of Islamic values. Recent literature stresses that moderation must be reflected in broader social spheres, ranging from intergroup relations to public policy frameworks (Mahfudz, 2022). In this regard, al-Sabuni's interpretations of verses related to justice, balance, and public welfare serve as essential references for constructing constructive and harmonious religious discourse (Amin, 2023).

Research on moderation within modern tafsir scholarship asserts that *wasatiyyah* is not merely a theological statement but a manifestation of Islam's commitment to organizing human life. Through his inclusive exegetical style, al-Sabuni reinforces the view that Muslims must cultivate harmonious interactions both socially and spiritually. Such interpretive perspectives are considered highly relevant by contemporary researchers because they lay conceptual foundations for building tolerant societies resistant to ideological provocation (Kamal, 2021). This is corroborated by academic studies arguing that the middle path reflects stability and equilibrium within religious life (Jauhari, 2022). Overall, exploring the concept of *wasatiyyah* in the tafsir of Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni is essential for strengthening religious discourse that is balanced, rational, and oriented toward the common good. By placing moderation as a central principle of Qur'anic understanding, Muslims can develop scholarly traditions that are open, dialogical, and non-exclusive. Contemporary scholars emphasize the necessity of moderation as a foundational response to increasingly complex global challenges (Harun, 2023). As demonstrated in various academic studies, credible and balanced tafsir plays a crucial role in preserving harmony within religious life (Yasin, 2021).

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design that focuses on the textual interpretation of Muhammad 'Ali al-Sabuni's *Safwat al-Tafasir*. This approach allows the researcher to explore the exegetical patterns, conceptual formulations, and theological orientations embedded within his understanding of *wasatiyyah*. Qualitative textual analysis is particularly relevant because contemporary Qur'anic studies emphasize interpretive depth and the dynamic relationship between text and socio-religious context. Hasyim (2021) notes that modern Qur'anic interpretation requires sensitivity to both linguistic structure and evolving contexts. Mansur (2022) highlights that a qualitative hermeneutic approach is essential for identifying how classical methods interact with contemporary intellectual developments. Saeed (2022) further stresses the importance of analyzing interpretive frameworks to understand how exegetes construct meaning. Through this layered method, the study identifies the specific hermeneutical reasoning through which al-Sabuni articulates the principle of moderation.

To strengthen analytical robustness, this research also applies a comparative hermeneutical strategy. This involves comparing al-Sabuni's interpretation with broader scholarly discussions on Islamic moderation developed by leading thinkers such as Kamali, Auda, and Abdullah. Kamali (2021) explains that moderation is not only a theological ideal but also a Qur'anic ethical imperative. Auda (2021) argues that moderation must be understood through a systems-based reading of *maqasid al-shariah*. Abdullah (2021) adds that contemporary Islamic thought increasingly relies on moderation as a corrective framework to counter polarization. Ibrahim (2023) shows that comparative analysis is crucial for mapping doctrinal convergences and divergences across Islamic scholarship. Aziz (2023) emphasizes that examining multiple interpretive voices deepens the reliability of conclusions. Yusuf (2022) affirms that triangulating interpretive models enhances the credibility of Qur'anic research. Through these methodological steps, the study ensures that the analysis of *wasatiyyah* in al-Sabuni's tafsir is both academically rigorous and contextually grounded.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study show that Muhammad 'Ali as-Sabuni constructs the idea of *wasatiyyah* primarily through a Qur'anic moral framework that emphasizes balance, justice, and ethical stability. His interpretation is firmly rooted in classical exegetical traditions, yet demonstrates a clear awareness of the socioreligious needs of Muslim communities. Kamali (2021) explains that moderation in Islam is fundamentally grounded in the Qur'an's ethical worldview. Saeed (2022) notes that exegetes who emphasize moderation typically employ a contextual understanding of revelation. Hasyim (2021) asserts that such interpretations represent a bridge between classical thought and contemporary Muslim realities. Through this lens, as-Sabuni presents *wasatiyyah* as an ideal that ensures harmony between divine guidance and human experience. The research further reveals that as-Sabuni consistently interprets verses on justice and balance as theological anchors for understanding moderation. His approach highlights moderation as a divine mandate rather than a sociopolitical construct. Abdullah (2021) identifies that modern Islamic scholarship increasingly returns to Qur'anic ethics as a source of moral recalibration. Mansur (2022) asserts that exegetical efforts which rest on ethical equilibrium demonstrate the continuity of classical reasoning. Rahman (2021) supports this by showing that Qur'anic themes of justice and harmony constitute the core of Islamic moral structure. With this foundation, as-Sabuni situates moderation as an inherent Qur'anic principle rather than an externally imposed norm. The study also finds that as-Sabuni places significant emphasis on the linguistic nuance of key Qur'anic terms associated with moderation. His explanation of words such as *wasat*, *qist*, and *'adl* reflects a meticulous engagement with classical Arabic semantics. Yusuf (2022) states that linguistic precision is essential for ensuring interpretive accuracy. Syafii (2021) adds that contemporary tafsir scholarship relies heavily on lexical clarity to avoid exegetical ambiguity. Auda (2021) argues that linguistic grounding is inseparable from ethical interpretations within Islamic thought. These findings indicate that as-Sabuni's hermeneutic style embodies both textual fidelity and moral intentionality.

Another significant finding is that as-Sabuni frequently aligns his interpretation of *wasatiyyah* with the prophetic model of balanced religious conduct. His tafsir references the Prophet's moderation in worship, ethics, and social interaction as exemplary embodiments of Qur'anic principles. Ibrahim (2023) highlights that moderation is best understood through the lived example of the Prophet. Aziz (2023) notes that prophetic conduct provides a practical expression of Qur'anic values. Abdullah (2021) emphasizes that the Prophetic model remains central in shaping Muslim ethical discourse. Through this alignment, as-Sabuni situates moderation not only as a doctrinal concept but also as a practical religious lifestyle. The findings indicate that as-Sabuni considers *wasatiyyah* a necessary safeguard against both religious extremism and moral laxity. His interpretations consistently portray moderation as the middle point between excess and deficiency. Kamali (2021) argues that Islamic moderation represents a structural balance that rejects polarization. Faris (2022) indicates that extremism emerges when religious values are detached from Qur'anic ethical guidance. Sulaiman (2022) asserts that moderation plays a corrective role in contemporary religious discourse. These insights demonstrate that as-Sabuni's tafsir positions *wasatiyyah* as a stabilizing principle that counters religious deviation.

The study further shows that as-Sabuni integrates classical Sunni theological perspectives in interpreting moderation, especially those rooted in Ash'ari discourse. His reliance on classical scholars reinforces his commitment to doctrinal continuity. Rahman (2021) notes that classical theology has long emphasized moderation as a defining characteristic of the Muslim community. Saeed (2022) asserts that maintaining intellectual continuity strengthens interpretive legitimacy.

Mansur (2022) adds that classical frameworks provide crucial stability within the evolving landscape of Qur'anic interpretation. These findings confirm that as-Sabuni's work is deeply connected to traditional Sunni intellectual heritage. A prominent finding is that as-Sabuni's use of narrations (athar) enhances the moral depth of his interpretation of *wasatiyyah*. He frequently cites sayings of early Muslims to demonstrate how moderation was embodied by the first generations. Abdullah (2021) emphasizes the importance of historical exemplars in reinforcing ethical teachings. Aziz (2023) notes that linking past moral experiences with Qur'anic directives strengthens interpretive coherence. Ibrahim (2023) argues that early Muslim intellectuals provide an ethical reference point for contemporary moderation. The findings suggest that such narrative integration enriches the moral authority of his tafsir.

The research reveals that as-Sabuni's interpretation contributes significantly to contemporary discussions on Islamic religious identity. His emphasis on moderation aligns with current scholarly attempts to articulate a balanced Muslim identity in the modern world. Hosen (2021) asserts that identity formation today requires engagement with both classical sources and modern realities. Berglund (2021) notes that contemporary Muslim intellectuals increasingly promote moderation as a defining identity marker. Wahyudi (2021) argues that renewed expressions of Islamic thought must prioritize ethical balance. As-Sabuni's work contributes to this intellectual trajectory by offering a scriptural foundation for religious identity rooted in moderation.

The study also finds that as-Sabuni views moderation as an essential ethical principle for maintaining social harmony within diverse societies. His exegetical reflections frequently emphasize cooperation, fairness, and respect for differences. Kamali (2021) highlights that moderation provides the ethical scaffolding for coexistence. Hassan (2022) notes that Qur'anic ethics on harmony are essential for addressing contemporary social tensions. Sulaiman (2022) asserts that moderation supports peaceful engagement in multicultural environments. The findings indicate that as-Sabuni's tafsir presents *wasatiyyah* as a framework for fostering ethical social relationships. The findings suggest that as-Sabuni's approach demonstrates a rejection of literalist tendencies that restrict the interpretive flexibility of Qur'anic texts. His reliance on contextual meaning challenges rigid interpretations that often contribute to polarization. Saeed (2022) explains that contextual hermeneutics are crucial for preventing textual misuse. Auda (2021) argues that systems-based reasoning is necessary for ensuring interpretive accuracy. Hasyim (2021) emphasizes that modern tafsir must engage beyond surface-level readings. Through this approach, as-Sabuni's interpretation maintains both fidelity to the text and openness to contextual reasoning.

The research demonstrates that *wasatiyyah* in as-Sabuni's interpretation serves as an ethical foundation for religious decision-making. His tafsir suggests that moderation informs how Muslims engage with worship, social issues, and legal matters. Mansur (2022) notes that ethical interpretation is essential for translating Qur'anic ideas into practical guidance. Abdullah (2021) highlights that ethical balance plays a key role in shaping religious judgments. Kamali (2021) asserts that moderation provides a consistent framework for resolving contemporary moral challenges. This finding reinforces the practical significance of as-Sabuni's approach. The findings indicate that as-Sabuni frequently employs a theme-based approach (tafsir mawdhu'i) when discussing moderation. He organizes concepts thematically to highlight consistency and coherence across multiple Qur'anic passages. Yusuf (2022) explains that thematic analysis strengthens conceptual clarity. Rahman (2021) notes that major Qur'anic themes often interconnect to produce unified ethical messages. Syafii (2021) emphasizes that thematic

approaches are vital for addressing contemporary ethical debates. This demonstrates that as-Sabuni's tafsir is not merely verse-by-verse but conceptually integrated.

The study shows that as-Sabuni situates *wasatiyyah* within broader humanistic concerns, such as justice, compassion, and communal wellbeing. His interpretation reflects the Qur'anic vision of humanity as a moral community. Aziz (2023) notes that modern Islamic thought increasingly frames moderation within humanistic ethics. Abdullah (2021) asserts that moral universality is integral to Islamic values. Hassan (2021) emphasizes that reconciling divine commandments with human dignity is a core objective of Qur'anic interpretation. This finding highlights the human-centered nature of as-Sabuni's theological reasoning. The findings reveal that *wasatiyyah* in as-Sabuni's tafsir also operates as a corrective lens against ideological manipulation of religious texts. His interpretive approach prevents the exploitation of scripture for political or sectarian purposes. Faris (2022) observes that extremist narratives often arise from selective textual usage. Ibrahim (2023) stresses that interpretive moderation is essential for countering ideological distortion. Sulaiman (2022) highlights the need for theological frameworks that resist manipulation. Through this lens, as-Sabuni's tafsir strengthens the integrity of Islamic teachings.

The study finds that as-Sabuni positions moderation as an ethical discipline that shapes personal piety. His interpretation portrays *wasatiyyah* as a spiritual training that cultivates balance in worship, character, and daily behavior. Kamali (2021) explains that moderation reflects the Qur'anic vision of spiritual equilibrium. Abdullah (2021) highlights that balanced piety fosters inner stability. Hasan (2022) notes that Qur'anic ethics encourage spiritual refinement based on moderation. These findings show that *wasatiyyah* is central to personal moral formation. Another key finding is that as-Sabuni's interpretation integrates moderation with the principle of *tawazun* (balance). He frequently explains that a balanced worldview prevents individuals from adopting extreme positions. Saeed (2022) argues that balance is a central hermeneutical requirement. Rahman (2021) emphasizes that the Qur'an consistently warns against excess. Auda (2021) stresses the interconnectedness of ethical balance and the objectives of sharia. Thus, *tawazun* emerges as a complementary concept that sustains *wasatiyyah*. The findings show that as-Sabuni views moderation as a model for religious discourse that encourages civility and constructive disagreement. His tafsir discourages hostility and calls for reasoned engagement. Sulaiman (2022) argues that moderation is essential for improving religious dialogue. Ibrahim (2023) notes that balanced discourse reduces tension in religious communities. Aziz (2023) highlights that scholarly moderation creates healthier interpretive environments. This perspective reflects the communicative dimension of *wasatiyyah*.

The study reveals that as-Sabuni's work contributes to strengthening resilience in Muslim communities by promoting moderation as a collective ethos. His interpretation underscores the role of *wasatiyyah* in safeguarding communal unity. Abdullah (2021) asserts that ethical moderation strengthens social cohesion. Wahyudi (2021) notes that contemporary Islamic thought increasingly relies on moderation to sustain community resilience. Hassan (2022) highlights that Qur'anic ethics provide a foundation for strong communal bonds. These findings show how as-Sabuni's tafsir shapes collective religious identity. The findings indicate that moderation, as interpreted by as-Sabuni, provides moral guidance that remains relevant for addressing global religious challenges. His insights on justice, balance, and ethical restraint offer universal principles applicable across diverse cultural contexts. Kamali (2021) observes that Qur'anic moderation possesses global applicability. Saeed (2022) emphasizes that contemporary interpretation must consider global realities. Hassan (2021) argues that Islamic ethics can

contribute meaningfully to global discourse. These findings confirm the global resonance of as-Sabuni's interpretation.

Finally, the study concludes that as-Sabuni's interpretation of *wasatiyyah* integrates classical Qur'anic scholarship with contemporary ethical needs, producing a holistic understanding that enriches Islamic thought. His approach demonstrates a harmonization of text, context, and moral vision. Rahman (2021) highlights the importance of connecting classical themes to modern concerns. Mansur (2022) argues that such integrative interpretation strengthens the relevance of tafsir today. Yusuf (2022) affirms that contemporary scholarship benefits from approaches that maintain both tradition and adaptability. This study therefore positions as-Sabuni's understanding of *wasatiyyah* as a significant contribution to modern Islamic religious discourse.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Muhammad 'Ali al-Ṣābūnī's articulation of *wasatiyyah* in *Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr* provides a strong theological and ethical foundation for shaping a balanced and socially responsible form of Islamic religiosity. His interpretation emphasizes justice, wisdom, and equilibrium as central pillars that guide Muslims away from both rigidity and laxity in religious practice. By grounding moderation in Qur'anic principles and presenting it as an integrated moral framework, al-Ṣābūnī offers a relevant paradigm for navigating contemporary religious dynamics, resisting extremism, and cultivating an inclusive and constructive engagement within plural societies.

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