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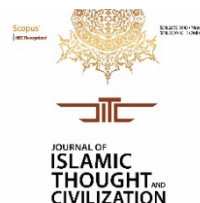|	
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Moderation in Islam: A Comparative Case Study on Perceptions of International Students in Malaysia

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Abstract

Moderation in Islam was defined by Holy Prophet Muhammad *(SAW)* as the 'Way of Islam.' He has emphasized on opening a man's heart to communal welfare and peace by avoiding scepticism. Moderation reifies faith, rejects extremism, and paves all roads to peaceful conflict resolution. Islamic moderation balances democratic social development in the face of restraints and boundaries to purchase sustainable peace. However, some schools of thought that appeal to Middle East and African Muslims hold forth the extremist ideology that has tarnished Islam globally. They ignore fundamental Islamic principles and archetypal Muslim characteristics thus they completely ignore Islam's path of moderation. This study compares thoughts on Islamic moderation from the West Asian students (WAS) with the rest of Asian students (AS) studying in Malaysia. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, we have tried to achieve research objectives and found that WAS understood less of Islamic moderation than did the students from the rest of Asia. The Chi-square statistic was used to critically test the unique results of this study. The overall findings have revealed bigoted and negative WAS opinions towards Islamic moderation as well as towards non-Muslim societies. The Chauvinism appeared to be consequent to Arab permeated cultures and indoctrinations. Such perceptions and ignorance of authentic Islam affects the entire world with deeply negative overtones.

Keywords: Social-religion Insight, Islamic Moderation, Chauvinism, Scepticism, Indoctrinations, Fundamental Islamic principles, Archetypal Muslim Characteristics, Communal Welfare, Sustainable Peace

Introduction

Islamic moderation is a fundamental principle that assures justice for all people. However, so-called "Muslim" countries continually practice injustice by favoring certain classes of Muslim citizens over other residents, which eschews the Islamic context of what defines Muslim society. Putting aside the historic dispute between Sunni and Shiite schools of thoughts (*madhabs*), Al Qaeda, Taliban and Daesh extremists have demonstrated profound ignorance of Islamic values and principles.[1] The far

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greater issue is that people generalize and apply their brutish notions to the global Muslim majority. This matter of accomplished fact accounts for growing 'Islamophobia' because the praxis of extremist terrorism defines and justifies fear.[2] It also seems, at least to these writers, that Islamophobia feeds Western powers with wealth. On the one hand, it wages war against terror,[3] and charges key Muslim countries with bearing the expense. On the other hand, it sells weapons to parties involved in fighting so-called terrorists.[4] All is done in the name of freedom.

The green light given to undefined "freedom" also offends logic. From the Islamic perspective, freedom has limits. Although Daesh wrongly represents Islam and brings disgrace to the true concept of jihad,[5] they are assisted by deliberate provocations that cross Islam's lines in the sand. Standing firm in the path of conflicting ideologies musters cooperation between military intelligence agencies. Hence, if a country changes regulation and allows criticism of the government, many condemn it because it appears to undermine democracy. Yet change is sometimes necessary for security so that a healthy democracy is maintained. At the same time, misinterpretations of actions taken by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) have led terrorist to claim a godly right to heinous brutality. For instance, the Prophet destroyed all idols in and surrounding the Ka'aba.

This research therefore focuses on levels of perception and attitudes for and towards Islamic moderation while tracing Islamic concepts though historical and cultural discourse, matters that are neglected by extremists. A growing number of Muslim students from the Middle East, Africa and Asia have chosen Malaysia for advanced learning.[6] There is extensive research on Islamic radicalism in Malaysia.[7] The authors specifically addressed WAS and AS in Malaysia for a convenient case study, wholly believing in Malaysia's cutting-edge implementation of Islamic moderation.

Regarding Islam's doctrine on moderation (*wasatiyyah*), this study was conducted to achieve the following objectives:

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[1]Naved Bakali, "Challenging Terrorism as a Form of "Otherness": Exploring the Parallels between Far- right and Muslim Religious Extremism," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (2019): 99-115.

[2]John Esposito, and Derya Iner, *Islamophobia and Radicalization: Breeding Intolerance and Violence* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95237-6

[3]Alex J. Bellamy, "Is the War on Terror Just?" *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2005): 275-296, doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117805055407

[4]Gail M. Presbey, "War Against Terrorism," Chatterjee D. K. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* (Dordrecht, Springer, 2011). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_667

[5]"A more accurate interpretation of Jihad refers to the "effort" that a Muslim makes to live and structure his or her personal life, and the wider society, on Islamic principles, a much more benign meaning. Anyone who combats temptations in order to live a righteous life can identify with this." See Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times* (London: Intercultural Press. 2006).

[6]Mansoureh Ebrahimi, and Kamaruzaman Yusoff, "The Regulatory Education Environment in Malaysia and Willingness to Accept Unlimited Numbers of International Students," *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (2020): 63-72.

[7]A. Muhammed Kifli, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, Mansoureh Ebrahimi, and Siti Zubaidah Abu Bakar, "Islamic Radicalism: Twenty-First Century Challenges in Malaysia," *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Civic and Political Studies* Vol. 15, no.1 (2020): 37-51; Mansoureh Ebrahimi, and Kamaruzaman Yusoff, "Socio-Political Islam and Revivalism in Malaysia," *Journal for the Study of Religious and Ideologies* vol. 19, no. 57 (2020): 239-254.

(1) to compare the understanding Islamic moderation among West Asian students (WAS) and the rest of Asian students (AS); and

(2) to establish to what degree WAS and AS understand authentic Islamic teachings and moderation.

We expected similar levels of understanding for both groups as the result of proper Islamic instruction. However, results revealed disparities. The researchers' experiences and observations added to primary survey results revealed bigoted and negative WAS opinions towards Islamic moderation as well as towards non-Muslim societies. The chauvinism appeared to be consequent to Arab permeated cultures and indoctrinations.

2. Literature Review

Abdullah Zin[8] traces the development of *wasatiyyah* (Islamic moderation) from the early days of Islam. Drawing on Madinah's Constitution and peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims based on religious freedom, justice and the protection of minorities, Zin says the community, as reformed by the Prophet (*SAW*), was an excellently balanced and just community. The Holy Qur'ān, Al-Baqarah: 143, agrees that it was a community on the "middle" or "balanced" path.[9]

Citing a *hadith* that states "The best thing always is the most middle," Zin says that Madinah's *ummah* was characterized by moderation (*ummatan wasatan*) because *wasatiyyah* was the approach to socio-political affairs as advocated by nascent Islam, meaning "practicing Islamic teachings in a holistic and perfect manner".[10] The Holy Qur'an provides us with several verses that support this thesis: Al-Furqan 67; Al-Isra' 29; Al-Isra' 110; Al-Baqarah 68; Al-Qasas 77; Al-Baqarah 201.[11]

Similarly, there are several *hadith*s to emphasize prophetic teaching theory. While noting the holy Prophet enjoined his *Sahabah* to adopt Islamic moderation daily, the vast majority of *Tabi'in* scholars (*tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *usul* and *mutakallimim*) also support *wasatiyyah*. The author mentions al-Mawardi, al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, al-Ghazali, Ibn Qudamah, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, and al-Shatibi as vigorous propagators of *wasatiyyah*.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi defined *wasatiyyah* as "a balance that equilibrates two opposite ends, in which neither stands alone and supreme or banishes its counterpart; in which neither end takes more than it deserves or dominates its opponent."[12] If one desires to promote unity and harmony, awareness is prerequisite to strike a balance. This includes knowledge of domestic and international investigations of gestalt developments that affect the quality of life in politics, education, economics, etc. Accordingly, in the practice of both religious and civil living, the Muslims should avoid *al-Ifrat* (excess, extreme intemperance, exceeding limits); *al-Tafrīt* (what is extremely low or small or negligible); *al-Ghulouw* (self-burdening with confidence beyond one's ability, to include exaggeration, hyperbole, overstatement); *al-Isrāf* (extravagance, waste, wasteful use of wealth, squandering); *al-Tabzīr* (wastage, throwing away, unnecessary spending); *al-Tashaddud* (to be over

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[8]Abdullah Md Zin, *Wasatiyyah Approach: The Definition, Conception and Application* (Putrajaya: Institut Wasatiyyah Malaysia, 2013).

[9]Unal Ali, *The Qur'ān: Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (New Jersey: The Light Inc, 2008).

[10]Abdullah Zin, *Wasatiyyah Approach* (Putrajaya: Institut Wasatiyyah Malaysia, 2013).

[11]Unal Ali, *The Qur'ān: Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (New Jersey: The Light Inc, 2008).

[12]Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism* (New York: The Other Press, 2010).

bearing, violent or extremely strict); and al-Tanatta' (extravagant, or overly strict). All these are types of extremism that avoid moderation.

The debate on what constitutes 'Islamic moderation', 'Moderate Muslims', and 'Moderate Islam' steadily expanded after the 1979 revolution in Iran. General postulates compare the Muslims, Islam, Islamists and Islamic State systems to Western democracies. Another dimension pits 'moderate Islam' against hardline Islamists, which gains journalist currency as 'moderates versus radicals' as democratic inclusivity fosters political junkets in the West.13 Kamal Hassan (2011) believes "the essence of Islamic moderation is the attainment of justice and moral excellence, and the avoidance of extremes and injustice."14 Islamic moderation in the Muslim scholarship refers to theology, ethics, belief systems, legal positioning, politics, etc. From the West's secular perspective,15 it connotes a political agenda that is somewhat foreign to the Muslim world because of the democratic emphasis. Moderation in the 'western sense' means pursuance of a democratic process or "adaptation and willingness to cooperate or compromise."16 Jillian Schwedler (2011), asserted: "Moderation—a process rather than a category—entails change that might be described as movement along a continuum from radical to moderate. Moderation is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) tied to liberal notions of individual rights and democratic notions of tolerance, pluralism and cooperation."17

Thus, definitions of wasatiyyah and moderation from the Muslim and the Western perspectives hold different notions. Nonetheless, Rashid Rida has described moderation as "the middle ground between two choices."18 For him this is the 'best option': "Wasat is justice and best option. It is so because any increase over what is exactly expected is excessiveness and any lack is negligence. Both excessiveness and negligence are anti-orthodox and therefore evil and blameworthy. The 'best' option is the middle ground between the two choices."19

Correctly defining extremism is the first step towards formulating a solution. Assumptions and definitions not based on authentic Islam but rather on individual opinion have no value. According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi: "Throughout the history of the Ummah there has always been an ijma referring differences between Muslims to Allah (SWT) and 'to His Messenger', which means referring them to holy Qur'ān and Sunnah."20 Without verification or substantiation based on Sharī'ah, Islam's youths accused of "extremism" pay no attention to fatwas or Islamic scholars and also denies the charge as ignorance or forgery.

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[13]Tazul Islam, and Amina Khatun, "Islamic Moderation in Perspective: A Comparison between Oriental and Occidental Scholarship." *International Journal of Nusantara Islam,* Vol 3, no.1 (2015): 69-78.

[14]Mohd Kamal Hassan, "Voice of Islamic Moderation from the Malaya World," *American Journal of Islam and Society* Vol. 31, no. 4, (2014). [Perak: Malaysia, Emerging Markets Innovative Research, 2011].

[15]Referring to Secular-Secularization-Secularism, see Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Art Printing Works Sdn. Bhd. 1931).

[16]Tazul Islam, "Islamic Moderation in Perspective," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 3, no.1 (2015): 70.

[17]Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63, no. 2, (2011): 347–376.

[18]M. Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manar*, Vol. 2 (Egypt: Al-Hayyah al-Misriyyah al-Ammah li al-Kitab, 1990).

[19]Ibid., 98.

[20]Al-Qaradawi. *Islamic Awakening* (New York: The Other Press, 2010).

It is also important to accurately define terms such as reactionary, rigid, extremist, bigot, etc. It then becomes impossible to discuss vague concepts that are differently interpreted by sectarians, intellectuals or extremists in positions of power. Failure to define and understand religious extremism and place the issue clearly and squarely at the feet of those whose lust for power leads to much discord among the Muslims.[21]

Yusuf al-Qaradawi has made two important observations regarding a person's level of piety and that of the society in which he/she resides. Both affect assumptions or judgments towards others in terms of extremism, negligence and moderation. Religious communities often produce individuals who are typically sensitive to the slightest deviation and neglect. Based on background and practice criteria, such people are surprised to discover the Muslims who do not perform daily prayers or do not fast during Ramadan. Conversely, people who have little knowledge and commitment to Islam or who grew up in an environment that practices things forbidden by Allah and who ignore *Sharī'ah*, consider the slightest adherence to Islam, extremism. They may pretend to be pious and not a few not only question and criticize Islam but also deny the validity of certain practices. They may accuse those committed to Islam and often seek debate about what is forbidden and what is lawful. This attitude depends on estrangement from the basic Islamic tenets.

A number of Muslims are influenced by foreign ideologies and practices. Many think that Islam's positions on eating, drinking, beauty, *Sharī'ah* and the establishment of an Islamic State manifest religious extremism. For them, wearing the veil is extreme. In fact, assuring what is good and banning what is evil are considered forms of extremism because it restricts individual freedom. Although the fundamentals of Islamic faith is to believe that Islam is the true religion and those who do not believe in Islam are in error, there are Muslims who object to calling those who practice religions other than Islam, infidels; they consider this an expression of extremist bigotry, even though this is an issue that has no compromise.

Yet is it unfair to accuse a person of religious extremism simply he practices a "juristic opinion" that does not compromise with a particular *fuqaha*? If one is convinced that his opinion is right and restricts it according to *Shariah*, he is free to do so although others might argue that his evidence is weak. He is responsible for what he thinks and believes. As has been mentioned by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "...in so doing, he overburdens himself, especially since he is not content with only limiting himself to the categorial obligations required of him but seeks Allah's pleasure through supererogatory performances."[22]

Therefore, we cannot condemn the practice of any Muslim or accuse him/her of extremism if he or she adopts an uncompromising opinion based on juridical judgment when seeking the grace of Allah Almighty. We have no right of force and cannot tell him/her to leave an opinion and follow a position contrary to what he/she believes is true. Our task is to appeal with wisdom, present our arguments with patient kindness and try to convince him/her through evidence with the hope that he or she might have a change of mind and accept what we believe is a truth.

By drawing on Western tradition, Jillian Schwedler (2006) sees 'moderation' in the context of democratic praxis.[23] Here, 'moderates' often refer to those who seek gradual changes by working within an existing political system as opposed to radicals who "*seek to overthrow that system in its*

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[21]Mansoureh Ebrahimi, et al. "Understanding Several Characteristics of Islam and Good Muslim: A Study of University Students in Malaysia," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (2021): 22-42.

[22]Al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening* (New York: The Other Press, 2010).

[23]J. Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

entirety."24 Islam and Khatun in (2015) indicated that de-radicalization is embedded with particular reference to 'ideological moderation'.25 C.R. Wickham, who wrote:

[Moderation] is the abandonment, postponement or revision of radical goals that enable an opposition movement to accommodate itself to the give and take of 'normal' competitive politics. It entails a shift toward a substantive commitment to democratic principles, including the peaceful alternation of power, ideological and political pluralism, and citizenship rights.26 In which case, 'moderation' connotes permissiveness or abandoning far too much of Islamic positions and ethics.

In brief, a wide-ranging literature variously emphasizes moderation and Islamic moderation. However, what we have discovered when comparing perceptions of Islamic moderation between WAS and AS studying in Malaysia opens an entirely new avenue of research in line with aforementioned objectives.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Qualitative and quantitative tools handsomely achieved our aims. Sources were libraries and secondary literary resources plus a measured survey of WAS and AS in Malaysia government universities.

3.2. Population and Sampling

We've applied stratified random sampling to recruit 300 respondents. All were actively enrolled in government funded research universities in Malaysia (96 post-graduates, 204 undergraduates) studying Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, Social Sciences and Humanities. Sampling was classified according demographics: West Asian students (WAS) versus South Asia and South East Asian students (AS).
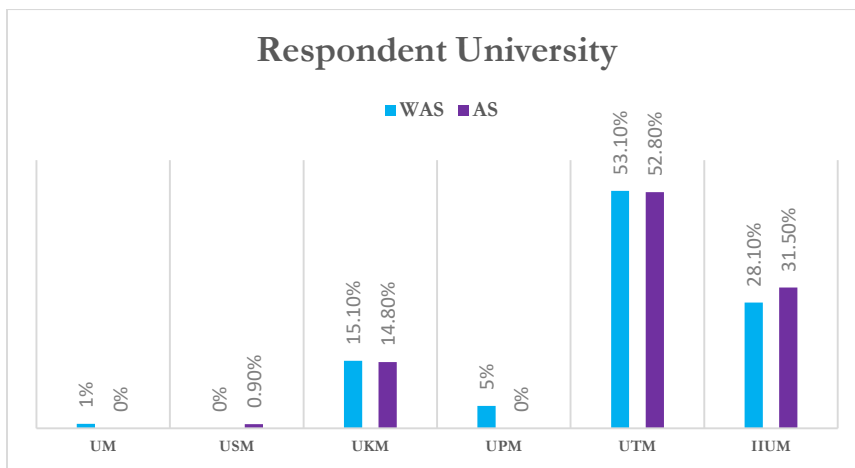

Figure 1: Bar chart of percentage University for WAS and Asia Student

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24Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates?" (2011): 350.

25Tazul Islam, "Islamic Moderation in Perspective," (2015):73.

26C. Rosefsky Wickham, "The Path to Moderation: Strategy and Learning in the Formation of Egypt's Wasat Party," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, no. 2, (2004): 205-228.

3.3. Location

Survey Data Results were analyzed using the SPSS Statistical Package to compare and contrast was versus as outcomes to identify factors causing regional differences.

3.4. Instrument

Our questionnaire covered seven Islamic affiliated aspects (reduced to five categories) including demographics; social life; understanding Islam; understanding the practice of Islam; understanding the characteristics of a good Muslim; understanding of Islamic moderation; and impacts of Islamic moderation on Muslim life.

3.5. Data Collection / Analysis

A pilot study at UTM Skudai involved 194 international students. The purpose was to measure student understanding of the survey instrument. The questionnaire was revised according to pilot study outcomes and review, then it was distributed.

3.6. Reliability to Instrument

Table 1 shows a reliability analysis by Cronbach alpha. All four subscales results were proved strongly reliable with values ranging from 0.60–0.82.

Table 1: Analysis for WAS and Asia Students

Variables	Mean	SD	Cronbach'S Alpha
Understanding Islam (12 items)	3.98	1.07	0.73
Characteristics of good Muslims (19 items)	3.66	0.90	0.62
Understanding Islamic moderation (33 items)	3.86	1.20	0.82
Impact of Islamic moderation (12 items)	3.55	1.10	0.60

4. Empirical Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 shows the majority of the respondents were young adults between 18 to 48 years of age (m = 25 y). Most were male (75%) and single (81%). Some were women (25%), half of whom were married (51%). In terms of country of origin, the majority came from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. More than 70% were undergraduates pursuing degrees in science, technology, IT and engineering.

Table 2: Respondents Origin, Field of Study, Education Level, Previous School, Marital Status, and Age

Demographic variables	Frequencies	Percent (%)
Age		
20 and below	80	27
21-30	163	55
31 and above	57	18
Country of Origin		
Middle East	144	48
African	48	16
Asian	108	36
Gender		
Male	224	75
Female	76	25

Demographic variables	Frequencies	Percent (%)
Marital Status		
Single	243	81
Married	57	51
Universities		
UM	2	0.7
KM	45	15
USM	1	0.3
UTM	159	53
UPM	5	1.7
UIA	88	29.3
Level of Education		
Undergraduate	204	68
Post graduate	96	32
Pervious School		
Religious school	107	36
Non-religious school	193	64
Faculty/School		
Social Science, Arts, Law	48	16
Science, Technology	19	6
Economy,	52	17
Business,Management	131	44
Engineering	50	16
IT, Computer Science		

4.2. Data Analysis and Findings

Table 3 shows univariate analytics for each construct (mean, standard deviation, max/min). Overall scores were below the mean. For example, mean scores for 'understanding Islam' and 'Muslim characteristics' were moderately high whereas 'understanding *wasatiyyah*' and 'impact of *wasatiyyah'* were moderately low. Demographics suggested that culture and country of origin may have had an effect on responses.[27]

Table 3: Univariate Analysis of Subscales

Analysis Scores	Understanding Islam	Characteristics of a Muslim	Understanding *Wasatiyyah*	Impact of *Wasatiyyah*
Mean	43.94	69.28	117.55	39.19
Median	42.00	69.00	116.00	38.00
Mode	40.00	71.00	107.00	36.00
Std. Deviation	7.12	7.95	14.35	5.77
Variance	50.76	63.21	206.15	33.38
Minimum	25.00	40.00	76.00	18.00
Maximum	60.00	95.00	163.00	60.00

An independent t-test (Table 4) showed a significant difference between WAS and AS groups ($t298 = -2.321$; $p < 0.05$), which indicated a better fund of Islamic knowledge among AS (m = 18.33)

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[27]With regard to values and beliefs, recognizing the complexity of culture is inevitable. See Jehad Al-Omari, *Understanding the Arab Culture* (United Kingdom: How to Books Ltd. 2008).

compared to WAS (m = 17.31). Islamic moderation scores were similar (t_{298} = -3.51; $p < 0.05$) for overall AS scores (m = 37.03) versus WAS (m = 34.14). The same held true for 'impact of moderation' (t_{298} = -2.32; $p < 0.05$), AS (21.30) versus WAS (20.42).

Table 4: Independent t-test results: WAS versus Asia Students

Variables	GROUP	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Understanding Islam	WAS	192	17.31	3.64	-2.321
	AS	108	18.33	3.67	
Characteristics of Muslim	WAS	192	15.15	2.08	0.850
	AS	108	14.92	2.39	
Understanding *Wasatiyyah*	WAS	192	34.13	6.77	-3.51
	AS	108	37.02	6.99	
Impact of *Wasatiyyah*	WAS	192	20.41	3.14	-2.32
	AS	108	21.28	3.05	

We examined perceptions of international students towards *wasatiyyah* and how they understood and practiced Islam.[28] The survey instrument held positive and negative items and used a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). We found negative item responses that were contrary to the authentic Muslim doctrines and supposed these might reflect levels of understanding and perception. Further data analysis was performed on 31 negative items. Six in Section B (understanding of Islam: #s 20–25); six in Section C (good Muslim characteristics (#s 31, 32, 37, 42–44); twelve in Section D (perception of Islamic moderation (#s 49, 50, 52, 53, 56, 60, 63, 68, 69, 71, 73, 75); and seven in section E (impact of Islamic moderation (#s 78, 79, 81, 83, 86, 87, 88) (Table 5).

Analysis of negative items in each subscale reflected origin and cultural background. Chi-square results (Table 5) showed that two items concerning 'understanding Islam' (i.e., *Islam allows takfiri thought* and *refusing Syariah Law is permitted*) were significantly associated with the WAS group. 'Core characteristics of a good Muslim' (#42) and 'belief in socialism' were also significantly associated with place of origin. The WAS group thought socialist ideology was acceptable.

Analysis of student perceptions of Islamic moderation showed most items were significantly associated with a cultural background that stigmatized Islam and generated negative perceptions (Islamophobia) by non-Muslims. Blatant chauvinist examples included 'All Muslims must follow Arabs', 'killing non-Muslims is permissible', 'Muslim terrorists represent true Islam', 'Muslims should kill non-Muslims, and 'extremism is good' (Table 5 & 6).

Negative items regarding the impact of Islamic moderation also found three items significantly associated with place of origin. The WAS group were typecast and showed negative perceptions of impacts from Islamic moderation on the *ummah*. For them, moderation divided Muslim society, oppressed Muslims, and allowed no freedom of speech (Table 5 & 6).

[28]"It is as wrong to make generalizations about practices of Islam as it is about Arabs and the Arab world. The roots of Islam are common to all Muslims; but the interpretations differ from area to area, from country to country, from individual to individual." See Gerald Butt, *The Arab World* (London: BBC Books. 1987).

Table 5: Chi-Square Results

Understanding Islam	Chi-Square Test (X2)	Level of Significant
#20 — Islam commands good and forbids bad	3.714, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#21 — Radical Change	0.950, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#22 — Islam is Arab * respondents country of origin	3.197, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#23 — Islam does not emphasize great effort	3.951, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#24 — Islam allow *takfiri* thought	33.302, p < 0.01	Significant
#25 — Islam allow the refusal of *Shariah*	7.931, p < 0.05	Significant
Characteristics of Good Muslim		
#31 — associated with left wing	0.046, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#32 — confrontational attitude	0.772, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#37 — sudden change	4.806, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#42 — belief in socialism	7.092, p < 0.05	Significant
#43 — belief in secularism	0.299, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#44 — belief Salafi thought	16.950, p < 0.01	Significant
Perception of Islamic Moderation		
#49 — killing non-Muslims is permissible	15.487, p < 0.01	Significant
#50 — All Muslims must follow Arabs	11.412, p < 0.05	Significant
#52 — democracy is consistent with Islam	1.208, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#53 — aggression to combat extremists	5.014, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#56 — sustainable development is not part of Islam	6.890, p < 0.05	Significant
#60 — Islam promotes aggression towards non-Muslims	6.482, p < 0.05	Significant
#63 — Islam permits prejudice towards non-Muslims	7.415, p < 0.05	Significant
#68 — Islamic extremism is good	7.964, p < 0.05	Significant
#69 — violence is permissible for Zionism	1.112, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#71 — Rely to USA in ME wars	7.776, p < 0.05	Significant
#73 — Muslim terrorist represent true Islam	11.107, p < 0.01	Significant
#75 — Muslims should kill non-Muslims	12.260, p < 0.01	Significant
Perceptions of the Impact of Islamic Moderation		
#78 — Impact divides society	19.401, p < 0.01	Significant
#79 — a misunderstanding of Islam	4.109, p > 0.05	Insignificant

Understanding Islam	Chi-Square Test (X2)	Level of Significant
#81 — oppresses Muslim	11.104, p < 0.01	Significant
#83 — no freedom of speech	15.199, p < 0.01	Significant
#86 — strong influence of opposition group	1.394, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#87 — cause suspicions among Muslims	2.218, p > 0.05	Insignificant
#31 — causes a misinterpretation of *jihad*	3.444, p > 0.05	Insignificant

Table 6: Independent Sample Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of variance		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Understanding Islam	Equal Variance Assume	.123	.726	-2.321	298	.021	-1.02083	.43986	-1.88647	-.15520
	Equal variance not assume			-2.317	220.782	.021	-1.02083	.44061	-1.88917	-.15250
Characteristics of Muslim	Equal Variance Assume	3.366	.068	.850	298	.396	.22512	.26478	-.29595	.74618
	Equal variance not assume			.817	197.176	.415	.22512	.27541	-.31801	.76824
Understanding of *Wasatiyyah*	Equal Variance Assume	.089	.766	-3.507	-298	.001	-2.89236	.82471	-4.51535	-1.26937
	Equal variance not assume			-3.476	216.107	.001	-2.89236	.83203	-4.53229	-1.25243
Impact of *Wasatiyyah*	Equal Variance Assume	.431	.512	-2.327	298	.021	-.87037	.37411	-1.60660	-.13415
	Equal variance not assume			-2.345	227.162	.020	-.87037	.37116	-1.60174	-.13900

5. Discussion and Conclusion

WAS scored significantly lower for 'knowledge of Islamic moderation' and its 'impacts' compared to the AS group (Table 7). This suggests that place of origin and/or cultural background played an important role in the development of an overall religious perspective that was negative, narrow minded and prone to extremist sentiments.

Table 7: Group Statistics for WAS and AS

Variables	GROUP	No.	Mean	SD
Understanding Islam	WAS	192	17.31	3.64
	AS	108	18.33	3.67

Variables	GROUP	No.	Mean	SD
Characteristics of Muslim	WAS	192	15.15	2.08
	AS	108	14.92	2.39
Understanding of *Wasatiyyah*	WAS	192	34.13	6.77
	AS	108	37.02	6.99
Impact of *Wasatiyyah*	WAS	192	20.41	3.14
	AS	108	21.28	3.05

This research attempts to test the comprehension of Islam among respondents across twelve questions. A five-point-scale arrangement was proposed by the respondent. This statistic is the percentage of respondents who agreed with the proposed claims. Table 8 depicts a statement that contrasts all WAS and Asian students based on five points with the highest degree of information. Understanding Islamic moderation is very important for a Muslim to determine whether can be a *was atiyyah* (moderation) or radical.

Table 8: Group Statistics for WAS and AS

Number of Item	Statements	WAS	AS
B23	Islam does not emphasize on the great effort.	44 (22.9%)	21 (19.4%)
B22	Islam is synonymous with Arab.	36 (18.8%)	21 (19.4%)
B25	Refusing *Shariah Law* is allowed in Islam.	36 (18.8%)	12 (11.1%)
B21	Islam advocates radical change.	31 (16.1%)	14 (13.0%)
B20	Command the good and forbid the bad is not part of religious duty.	28 (14.6%)	15 (13.9%)
B24	Islam does allow *takfiri* thoughts.	24 (12.5%)	9 (8.3%)

Understanding of Islam: Based on aforementioned result, it can be clarified that the majority of respondents from WAS do not fully understand Islam (*shumuliyyah*) as compared to AS. The contradiction is expressed by the fact that the most of the respondents (WAS=22.9%, AS=19.4%) agreed to the statement that 'Islam does not emphasize a great deal of effort', as known Islam teach *ummah* to work hard to achieve what they desire but must follow the *Shariah*. For example, the earliest Muslims took great pride in being able to rely so exactly on their memories instead of writing.[29]

Similarly, the other answer that may be classified as shallow understanding of Islam was to agree on the statement that 'Islam is synonymous with Arab' (WAS=18.8%, AS=19.4%). Islam is for all humankind, not everything that the Arabs do is necessarily related to Islam,[30] for instance war in Iraq that has nothing to do with religion.[31] Also, the respondents (WAS=18.8%, AS=11.1%) agreed to the statement 'refusing *Shariah Law* is allowed in Islam'. According to Islam, the Muslims must follow *Shariah Law* because Islam is not a religion created by human, and its sovereignty is of

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[29]Hayat Amamou, "The Nature of Early Islamic Sources and the Debate over Their Historical Significance," *AlMuntaqa*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2018): 68-79.

[30]John B. Glubb, *A Short History of The Arab Peoples* (London: Quartet Books Limited. 1969).

[31]Bambang Budijanto, "Islam in Indonesia," *Transformation*, Vol. 20, no. 4 (2003): 216-219.

God;[32] whereas the argument that 'Islam does allow *takfiri* thoughts' agreed by (WAS=12.5%, AS=8.3%) is referred to an ideology imbedded in Islamic dogma of *takfiri* thoughts in which one Muslim declaring another Muslim a *kafir* (non-believer/apostate) is strongly rejected in the *Shariah*.

However, the result has highlighted misunderstanding of Islam by the respondent's viewpoints (WAS=16.1%, AS=13%) to agree that 'Islam advocates radical change'. This can be seen that WAS attitude towards radical movements is close to a form of Islamic thoughts largely concerning radical organizations such as Al Qaeda and Daesh extremists in the Middle East.[33] At the same time, another answer revealed that the respondents (WAS=14.6%, AS=13.9%) agreed to the point that 'command good and forbid bad is not a part of religious duty'. According to the holy Qur'an, Al-i 'Imran, 110,[34] Muslim must bring good for humankind, promoting right and forbidding evil.

Understanding of Wasatiyyah: This study attempted to evaluate further view of respondents on understanding of *wasatiyyah*. Perception of respondents as indicated by results show that averagely AS mostly understand what Islam is rather than WAS. It is disappointing that respondents tend towards incomprehension of *wasatiyyah*. Table 9 shows respondents view that (WAS=18.8%, AS=16.7%) agreed to the statement 'it is a must for all the Muslims to follow Arab culture,' as known that culture is not religious thought and some culture that deviated from the teaching of Islam is prohibited.[35] Based on this result, respondents (WAS=18.8%, AS=13.9%) agreed to the statement 'Islam promotes aggression towards Non-Muslim' and (WAS=11.5%, AS=9.3%) to the statement 'it is permissible for the Muslims to kill Non-Muslims', both can be classified as radical or extremism.[36] Misunderstanding of concept *wasatiyyah*, brought about negative approach embracing 'The Muslim terrorist groups are following the Islamic teachings' (WAS=13%, AS=13.9%) such as radical organization, and 'Muslims in the West should kill others for the injustice done by Western leaders' (WAS=14.6%, AS=10.2%).

Table 9: Respondents views due to understanding of *Wasatiyyah*

Number of Item	Statements	WAS	AS
D50	It is a must for all the Muslims to follow Arab culture.	36 (18.8%)	18 (16.7%)
D60	Islam promotes aggression towards non-Muslims.	36 (18.8%)	15 (13.9%)
D75	Muslims in the west should kill others for the justice done by western leaders	28 (14.6%)	11 (10.2%)

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[32]M. K. Masud, "Modernizing Islamic Law in Pakistan: Reform or Reconstruction?" *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, no. 2 (2019): 73-97.

[33]Benjamin K. Smith, Andrea Figueroa-Caballero, Samantha Chan, Robert Kovacs, Erinn Middo, Lauren Nelson, Richard Palacios, Supriya Yelimeli, and Michael Stohl, "Framing Daesh: Failures and Consequences," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10. no. 4 (2016): 40-50.

[34]Unal Ali, *The Qur'ān. Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (New Jersey: The Light Inc, 2008).

[35]Jeanette S Jouili, "Islam and Culture: Dis/junctures in a Modern Conceptual Terrain," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no.1 (2019): 207-37. Referring to D50, D60, and D75, please see Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, and Rozmi Ismail, "Middle East and African Student (MEAS) Perceptions of Islam and Islamic Moderation: A Case Study," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, vol 11, no. 1 (2021): 55-80.

[36]Smith, et.al., "Framing Daesh," *Perspectives on Terrorism,* Vol. 1, no. 4, (2016), 45.

Number of Item	Statements	WAS	AS
D73	Muslim terrorist groups are following the Islamic teachings.	25 (13.0%)	15 (13.9%)
D49	It is permissible for Muslims to kill non-Muslims.	22 (11.5%)	10 (9.3%)

It is interesting to note that the results in Table 10 show respondents are inclined towards the mainstream attempts to maintain good impact towards society. Specifically, the respondents view that the understanding of true Islam could bring the 'spirit of Islamic brotherhood' (WAS=34.4%, AS=34.4%) followed by the 'true image of Islam' (WAS=34.4%, AS=27.8%) because Islam teaches *ummah* to be good not only to people but also to all living things.[37] Stronger religious manner (WAS=29.7%, AS=25.9%), understanding Islam could show higher motivation for the Muslim to practice Islam,[38] and 'the widespread of misunderstanding on Islam' (WAS=22.9%, AS=19.4%) to Non-Muslims could be avoided. Finally, respondents view on impact of *wasatiyyah* could bring 'misinterpretation of *jihad*' (WAS=14.1%, AS=12.0%).

Table 10: Respondents view towards impact of *Wasatiyyah*

Number of Item	Statements	WAS	AS
E84	Spirit of Islamic Brotherhood	66 (34.4%)	37 (34.3%)
E80	The true image of Islam	66 (34.4%)	30 (27.8%)
E89	Stronger Religious practice	57 (29.7%)	28 (25.9%)
E79	The widespread of misunderstanding on Islam	44 (22.9%)	21 (19.4%)
E88	Misinterpretation of *jihad*	27 (14.1%)	13 (12.0%)

This study has analyzed West Asian Students (WAS) and Asian Students perceptions on the phenomenon of understanding of moderation in Islam. A quantitative approach was used to achieve these goals. Achieved results display that WAS have a relatively low understanding of Islamic doctrine of moderation or *wasatiyyah* as compared to AS, who obtained knowledge of Islam and *wasatiyyah* from religious scholars. This is understandable since AS are more knowledgeable about Islam than WAS. In spite of this, the respondents had a significant perception regarding the impact of Islamic moderation that can be considered in future investigation on the current trends in the Muslim World.

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[37]Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman, Mohamed Mihlar Abdul Muthaliff, Muhammad Khairi Mahyuddin, Ahmad Najaa' Mokhtar, Yuseri Ahmad, and Salih Yucel, "A Spiritual Model of Good Deeds according to Imam al-Ghazali," *International Journal of Business and Social Science,* Vol 8, no. 2 (2017): 181-189.

[38]Ghizlane Chemsi, Sadiq Mounir, Mohamed Radid, and Mohammed Talbi, "Study of the Self-Determined Motivation among Students in the Context of Online Pedagogical Activities," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)* [Online] (2020): 17-29.

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