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Evaluating the Normative Boundaries of Religious Moderation in Tafsir Moderasi Beragama Through Muhammad Shahrur's Theory of Limits

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite increasing scholarly attention to religious moderation in Muslim-majority societies, there remains a lack of studies that systematically evaluate the normative boundaries of state-produced Qur’anic exegesis through an internally Islamic theoretical framework. This study aims to examine how the principles of religious moderation articulated in the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs’ Tafsir Moderasi Beragama can be understood through Muhammad Shahrur’s Theory of Limits (*Nazariyyat al-Hudūd*), and to assess whether the text represents doctrinal flexibility or a coherent theological framework of *wasatiyyah*. **Design/methods/approach** – This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach based on library research. The primary source is the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ Tafsir Moderasi Beragama, while Muhammad Shahrur’s Theory of Limits serves as the analytical framework. Four key principles of religious moderation – justice and balance (*al-‘adālah wa al-tawāzun*), *amar ma’ruf nahi munkar*, ease in religion (*taysīr*), and gradualism (*tadarruj*) – were analyzed to identify their normative upper (*ḥadd al-a’lā*) and lower (*ḥadd al-adnā*) limits. **Findings** – The analysis demonstrates that all four principles operate within clearly defined normative boundaries. Justice and balance are positioned between extremism and negligence, *amar ma’ruf nahi munkar* between moral responsibility and coercion, ease in religion between rigidity and permissiveness, and gradualism between ideal norms and social realities. These findings indicate that the Ministry’s interpretation institutionalizes moderation as a structured theological paradigm rather than as doctrinal leniency. **Research implications/limitations** – The study is limited to a textual analysis of one official Indonesian tafsir and does not examine its reception or implementation in broader social contexts. Consequently, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other state-sponsored interpretations without comparative investigation. **Originality/value** – This study offers a novel application of Shahrur’s Theory of Limits as an evaluative framework for official religious exegesis. It contributes a methodological model for comparative studies of state-produced religious texts and provides insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to promote religious moderation in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Theory of Limits; Justice; Tafsir Moderasi Beragama; Muhammad Shahrur; Wasatiyyah.

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Introduction

The principle of religious moderation initiated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs fundamentally aims to cultivate a balanced, tolerant, and respectful attitude toward diversity within a plural society. However, its implementation has often generated debate some view it as too lenient, while others see it as excessively strict. In essence, religious moderation seeks to maintain social harmony and prevent the emergence of extremism in religious life [1]. One concrete form of this initiative is the publication of *Tafsir Moderasi Beragama* (2022), which serves as a Qur'an-based religious guideline designed to strengthen a balanced and contextual understanding of Islam. In this interpretation, the Ministry formulates the core principles of moderation, including acting justly and fairly, promoting good and preventing evil with wisdom, providing ease in religious practice, and delivering religious teachings gradually in accordance with the community's level of readiness [2].

However, at both the conceptual and practical levels, issues arise concerning the limits of its application. For instance, the principles of justice and balance often provoke debate when confronted with matters of religious freedom and the enforcement of Islamic law. Likewise, the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) can sometimes be misinterpreted as legitimizing coercive actions in the name of religion [3]. Several cases illustrate this complexity for example, the destruction of an Ahmadiyah mosque in Sintang. A religious fatwa labeling Ahmadiyah as heretical provided justification for coercive actions under the guise of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, thereby neglecting constitutional justice for minority groups. Similarly, the implementation of *kaffah* (comprehensive) Islamic law in Aceh often sparks debate concerning the principles of justice and religious freedom. Although the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, in practice, discrimination persists against minority groups such as Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists [4].

Comparable issues are evident in the sealing of the Pentecostal Church of Indonesia (GPdI) in Sleman and the resistance against the demolition of the Mbah Priok Mosque in North Jakarta. The church in Sleman was sealed on administrative grounds, yet underlying the decision was pressure from religious organizations such as the Islamic Jihad Front (FJI), which opposed the church's presence in a Muslim-majority area, while local authorities failed to act fairly and neutrally. Conversely, in the Mbah Priok Mosque case, strong opposition emerged from Muslim groups who viewed the demolition as a desecration of a religious symbol, reflecting the conservative side of Islam and the use of religious identity as a means of resistance against state policy [5].

Furthermore, the principle of ease in religion is sometimes interpreted permissively, while the principle of gradualness (*tadarruj*) faces challenges in the context of rapid social change [6]. This complexity indicates that although religious moderation has become a strategic agenda of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to promote a peaceful, inclusive, and tolerant Islam, deeper studies are still required to clarify its conceptual boundaries, implementation strategies, and effectiveness in fostering harmony and preventing extremism in society [7]. For example, neglecting essential obligations such as purification (*taharah*) or prayer (*salat*) merely because of perceived difficulty – when such difficulties can actually be resolved through permissible alternatives – is a misapplication of the principle of ease [8]. Similarly, the principle of *tadarruj*, which emphasizes a gradual process in applying religious law, raises questions about its relevance and limits in a modern era characterized by speed and instant change [9].

Based on the background described above, there are two main research questions that serve as the focus of this study. First, how can the limits of applying the principles of religious moderation in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Tafsir* be understood through the lens of the theory of limits – specifically, to what extent values such as justice, balance, ease, and gradualness can be implemented without transgressing the core tenets of Islam. This formulation is crucial for assessing whether these principles of moderation remain grounded in normative Islamic arguments or risk shifting into interpretations that are overly flexible toward religious values. Second, how do the applications of these principles of moderation influence the dynamics of religious life in Indonesia, particularly when confronted with concrete cases such as interreligious conflicts, local implementation of Sharia law, and issues of religious freedom within a pluralistic society. Through these two focal points, this study aims to discover a conceptual balance between the spirit of moderation and the steadfastness of faith, ensuring that the principles of moderation formulated by the Ministry can be understood and applied proportionally, critically, and in accordance with Indonesia's socio-religious context.

This research carries the theme “*The Limits of Religious Moderation Principles in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir: An Analysis through the Theory of Limits*”, with the main objective of analyzing the extent to which the principles of moderation can be applied without deviating from the core teachings of Islam. Previous studies – such as those conducted by A. Muqit [10], K. Amri [11], E. Junaedi [12], F. Haitomi [13], and N. Nurnaesih [14], have also explored similar issues concerning the principles of religious moderation from various perspectives. In his hermeneutical study, Christmann critically evaluates Shahrur's Hudud Theory as an attempt at methodological reform in

Qur'anic interpretation that places the text within a framework of flexible yet measurable normative boundaries [15]. Meanwhile, from the perspective of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, Auda argues that a sharia-purpose-based approach can bridge the tension between textualism and contextualism in Islamic law [16]. At the national level, Azra notes that religious moderation in the Indonesian context has strong historical roots and represents a unique contribution of the Nusantara Islamic civilization to the global Islamic discourse [17].

Nevertheless, there remains a gap in the existing literature. Studies such as those conducted by A. Muqit [10], K. Amri [11], E. Junaedi [12], F. Haitomi [13], and N. Nurnaesih [14], tend to focus on the implementation of the value of moderation and strategies for its application in education and *da'wah*, without critically examining its conceptual and theological boundaries. Hashas also notes that studies on the institutionalization of Islamic moderation by state authorities remain analytically limited, particularly in evaluating whether the state's official interpretive products have exceeded or, conversely, remain within the normative boundaries of Islamic teachings [18]. Furthermore, Mir highlights that the application of Shahrur's Hudud Theory to institutionally produced religious texts remains very rare in academic literature [19]. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by offering a critical analysis based on Hudud Theory of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Interpretation of Religious Moderation, while also contributing to the international discourse on the balance between state authority, scriptural normativity, and Muslim religiosity in pluralistic societies.

The study titled "*The Limits of Religious Moderation Principles in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir*" is expected to provide an important contribution to clarifying the conceptual and theological boundaries of religious moderation principles as presented in the Ministry's *Tafsir*. By employing the theory of limits approach, this research aims to demonstrate the extent to which moderation values can be applied proportionally without obscuring the fundamental teachings of Islam [15]. The findings are also expected to contribute to the development of a more directed, critical, and scripturally grounded paradigm of religious moderation—serving as a reference for academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the fields of *da'wah* and education to understand and implement religious moderation in a balanced manner between the spirit of tolerance and the steadfastness of faith [16].

Method

The research method employed in this study, titled “The Limits of Religious Moderation Principles in the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ Tafsir: An Analysis through the Theory of Limits,” is a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach [17]. This method was chosen because the study seeks to conduct an in-depth examination of the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ interpretation of the principles of religious moderation—such as justice, balance, wisdom in da’wah, ease in religious practice, and gradual implementation of teachings—which are then analyzed using Muhammad Shahrur’s *Theory of Limits* framework. Shahrur outlines several types of legal boundaries, including:

1. *Hālat ḥadd al-a’lā* (maximum limit): The law must not exceed the highest limit set by Allah, such as the command to cut off the hand of a thief (Q.S. *al-Mā’idah*: 38).
2. *Hālat ḥadd al-adnā* (minimum limit): The law must not fall below the lowest limit established by Allah, such as the prohibition of marrying one’s close relatives (Q.S. *an-Nisā’*: 22–33).
3. *Hālat ḥadd al-a’lā wa al-adnā ma’an*: There exist both upper and lower limits, and the law can operate within this range—for example, inheritance rules and polygamy (Q.S. *an-Nisā’*: 3, 11–14).
4. *Hālat al-Mustaqīm*: There are no upper or lower limits; the law is fixed without alternatives, such as the punishment for adultery (Q.S. *an-Nūr*: 2).
5. *Hālat ḥadd al-a’lā dūna al-mumās bi al-ḥadd al-adnā abadan*: Only an upper limit exists that must never be violated, such as the prohibition of approaching adultery.
6. *Hālat ḥadd al-a’lā mūjab muḥlaq*: There is a positive upper limit (not to be exceeded) and a negative lower limit (that may be surpassed), as in the cases of *riba* (interest, as the upper limit) and *zakat* (almsgiving, as the lower limit) [18].

Several interpretive frameworks have been applied in contemporary Islamic scholarship to evaluate religious moderation, including maqāṣid al-sharī’ah approaches, classical uṣūl al-fiqh hermeneutics, and sociological-policy frameworks. However, each carries limitations when applied to the specific evaluative task of this study: maqāṣid-based approaches operate at the level of general ethical objectives without providing a structured mechanism for determining precise normative boundaries [16]; classical hermeneutical approaches remain largely descriptive and historically bound [15]; and sociological frameworks lack the theological normativity required to assess scriptural validity [19]. Shahrur’s *Theory of Limits* (*Naẓariyyat al-Ḥudūd*)

addresses all three limitations simultaneously—it is structurally evaluative rather than merely descriptive, providing a binary analytical axis of upper (*ḥadd al-a'lā*) and lower (*ḥadd al-adnā*) limits that positions any given interpretation within the normative spectrum of Islamic law; it is operationally flexible yet normatively bounded, directly mirroring the conceptual structure of moderation itself; and it is particularly effective for analyzing institutionally produced texts such as the Ministry's Tafsir, since it operates on the level of legal categories rather than authorial intention [23]. These features collectively make the Teori Hudud not merely a plausible alternative among competing frameworks, but the most analytically precise instrument available for evaluating the normative boundaries of religious moderation principles in an official state-produced tafsir.

The data selection procedure in this study was conducted using a purposive approach, which involved establishing strict selection criteria for relevant sources. The primary source is the Thematic Exegesis on Religious Moderation published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia [2], with a focus on sections that explicitly discuss the five principles of religious moderation: justice, balance, enjoining good and forbidding evil, ease in religious practice, and gradualism. Secondary sources include the works of Muhammad Shahrur—particularly *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān* [23]—as well as academic literature related to contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics, the theory of hudud, and religious moderation. The selected data consists of texts directly related to the concept of normative boundaries in the application of the principle of moderation, allowing for a focused and systematic analysis.

The analysis in this study was conducted through three sequential interpretive steps. First, the descriptive stage, which involved identifying and describing the content of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir that is relevant to each principle of religious moderation. Second, the categorization stage, which involves classifying each principle into one of the six categories of Shahrur's Hudud Theory—such as *ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an*, *ḥālat al-mustaqīm*, or *ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā dūna al-mumās*—based on the normative characteristics of each principle [18]. Third, the critical interpretation stage, which involves evaluating whether the Ministry of Religious Affairs' interpretation of each principle falls within the range of limits set by Shahrur, or whether it exceeds or falls below those limits. The operational application of Hudud Theory is carried out by mapping each principle of moderation on a spectrum between the lower limit (*ḥadd al-adnā*) and the upper limit (*ḥadd al-a'lā*), so that the ideal position of each principle can be determined proportionally and measurably within the framework of Qur'anic values.

Result and Discussion

Justice and Balance

In the *Thematic Tafsir on Religious Moderation* published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the principle of justice and balance (*al-'adl wa at-tawāzun*) serves as a fundamental foundation for understanding religious moderation. In the context of social life, justice is not merely equality but rather balance – taking into account circumstances, capacities, and the collective good. The Ministry of Religious Affairs cites Allah's command in Q.S. *an-Nisā'*: 58:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ ۗ.....

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, judge with justice..."

According to the Ministry's interpretation, as explained by Ibn 'Āshūr, justice in this verse signifies upholding the principle of equality among all human beings. Every person has the right to receive what is rightfully theirs without delay or obstruction [19]. Moreover, justice demands impartiality – for instance, a judge must be able to make decisions objectively, without favoritism or bias toward any particular party. Thus, justice is not merely a legal concept but also a reflection of moral integrity and social responsibility within religious life.

When mapped onto Shahrur's typology, this principle falls within the category of *ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an*, wherein the upper limit prohibits injustice and discriminatory enforcement of law, while the lower limit forbids moral passivity in the face of wrongdoing. The Prophetic narrative of Fāṭimah's hypothetical theft is analytically significant: it demonstrates that the upper limit is not merely an abstract theological ceiling but a concrete check against the social tendency to exempt the powerful from accountability. The lower limit, conversely, guards against quietism – the abandonment of moral agency under the guise of tolerance [2].

In this context, the upper limit represents the prohibition against injustice or excess in upholding religious teachings, while the lower limit signifies the prohibition against passivity in the face of falsehood and injustice. True justice lies between these two extremes – neither enforcing truth through coercion nor tolerating wrongdoing without admonition. The interpretation by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) emphasizes that justice must remain neutral toward religion, ethnicity, race, and social groups [2]. Several reports are cited to reinforce this idea, including the incident in which the Quraysh requested, through Usāmah ibn Zayd, that a woman from the Makhzūm tribe be pardoned for theft. The Prophet, however, refused and reminded them that previous nations were destroyed because they spared the

noble wrongdoers while punishing the weak. He declared that even if his own daughter Fāṭimah were to steal, the punishment would still be carried out [20].

This principle underscores that justice, according to the Kemenag's interpretation, stands at a point of balance between two extremes: avoiding oppression and rejecting passivity toward injustice. In other words, justice is not merely the midpoint between these poles but a concrete manifestation of allegiance to truth and the enforcement of moral values. The Prophet's refusal to allow Quraysh's intervention to exempt the thief reflects the upper boundary—there must be no injustice in the form of legal discrimination. Meanwhile, his insistence that the law must apply equally, even to Fāṭimah, symbolizes the lower boundary—rejecting moral leniency that negates accountability in justice. Thus, this interpretation practices justice within the middle ground (*manṭiq al-wasat*), where legal principles are upheld proportionally and remain free from the influence of social, racial, or religious interests [21].

The principle of “justice and balance” (*‘adl wa tawāzun*) in Kemenag's concept of religious moderation means positioning every pair—rights and duties, reason and revelation, text and context, worldly life and the hereafter, constants (*ṣawābit*) and variables (*mutaghayyirāt*), the individual and society, religion and state, men and women—in a proportional relationship so that no single pole dominates. Its purpose is to prevent literalist, secular, individualistic, or theocratic extremism, ensuring that religious practice consistently sides with compassion, justice, and the common good [2]. In the context of the principles of justice and balance, a moderate stance means remaining within the range of Islamic values that are constant (*ṣawābit*) while being adaptable to social change (*mutaghayyirāt*) [22].

The principles of justice and balance function to ensure that all aspects of religious life such as the relationship between rights and duties, reason and revelation, the worldly and the spiritual, and men and women remain within those limits without exceeding or falling short of them [2]. For example, in gender relations, this principle rejects all forms of patriarchal domination that violate the value of justice because such domination exceeds the upper limit (*ḥadd al-a'lā*). However, it also does not deny natural differences and social responsibilities recognized by religion, for doing so would mean descending below the lower limit (*ḥadd al-adnā*).

This reading must be critically engaged with competing perspectives. Scholars such as An-Na'im argue that classical Islamic conceptions of justice are structurally limited by their historical context—particularly regarding equal treatment of non-Muslims and women—and that true justice in a pluralistic

society requires more thoroughgoing hermeneutical reform than incremental application of *ḥudūd* categories. This study therefore argues that the Teori Hudud framework is most productive when paired with a *maqāṣid*-based reading that foregrounds human dignity (*karāmah insāniyyah*) as the substantive content of the lower limit, not merely the absence of overt injustice.

Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar

The interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) explains—citing Ibn 'Āshūr and al-Suyūṭī—that the word *minkum* in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:104 means “some of you,” implying that the obligation of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil) is collective (*farḍ kifāyah*), not individual [2].

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ
 “Let there be among you a group of people who call to goodness, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong. They are the ones who will be successful.”

This means that it is sufficient for a portion of the community—those who possess knowledge, authority, or social capacity—to carry out this duty, thereby relieving others from the same obligation. However, if no one performs it, then the entire community bears collective sin. This is in line with the Prophet’s warning that when people tolerate evil without attempting to prevent it, the punishment of Allah will befall them all [24].

The views of Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Ghazālī are analytically complementary rather than redundant: Ibn Taymiyyah identifies the *structural* boundaries (neither total neglect nor reckless enforcement), while al-Ghazālī introduces a *consequentialist* dimension—the prohibition of intervention that generates greater harm than it prevents. This latter position corresponds to Shahrur's *ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā dūna al-mumās*, wherein the upper limit is absolute and may never be breached regardless of intent [2].

The critical tension lies in the operationalization of this framework in concrete social contexts. The cases of the Ahmadiyah mosque destruction in Sintang and the sealing of the GPdI church in Sleman exemplify how *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* can be mobilized to legitimize coercive action that violates the upper limit of Shahrur's framework. What the Ministry's Tafsir does not sufficiently address is the question of *institutional authority*: who has the legitimate standing to determine when the lower limit has been breached, and by what mechanism is the upper limit enforced? This study argues that a complete application of the Teori Hudud must include an explicit theory of legitimate authority (*wilāyah*) as a structural constraint—an element the Tafsir Kemenag addresses only implicitly.

Within these two boundaries, the teaching provides a flexible range of moral action: it must not fall below the lower limit by becoming passive toward evil, nor exceed the upper limit through extreme or coercive behavior. In Syahrur's framework, this principle embodies a balance between individual and collective responsibility, granting the community freedom to act according to its capacities while remaining bound by divine limits that ensure justice and social welfare [25].

The *Tafsir Kemenag* interprets a moderate attitude in *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* as a balance between negligence and excess. Ibn Taymiyyah observed that there are two extreme groups: first, those who completely abandon *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*; and second, those who carry it out without knowledge, patience, or consideration of benefit and capacity. The latter group is considered to have exceeded the limits set by Allah, even though they believe they are fulfilling His command. Al-Ghazālī adds that *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* should only be practiced when it is believed to bring a good result, even if it poses a personal risk. However, if such an act produces no positive outcome or instead causes harm, it becomes prohibited (*haram*), especially if it endangers one's family or others, since in such a case, the prevention of wrongdoing would actually result in a new form of wrongdoing [2].

This means that *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* may be performed in accordance with one's ability, knowledge, and consideration of its benefits. If it is carried out without understanding and patience to the extent that it causes harm, it has exceeded the upper boundary (*ḥadd al-a'lā*); conversely, if it is completely neglected, it falls below the lower boundary (*ḥadd al-adnā*). Meanwhile, al-Ghazālī's view emphasizes the principle of *ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā dūna al-mumās*, namely, the existence of a maximum limit without a minimum limit. Within this framework, a person is free to carry out *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* in various ways as long as they do not exceed the upper limit that is, as long as they do not cause harm, hurt others, or create social discord [26].

Furthermore, the interpretation of *Tafsir Kemenag* regarding *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* is reflected in al-Ghazālī's view of its five levels of implementation. The Kemenag emphasizes the importance of the principle of gradualness (*tadarruj*), as explained by al-Ghazālī, that each level of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* must be applied in accordance with the degree of benefit and potential risk involved [2]. In certain situations such as toward parents or those in authority the *Tafsir Kemenag* demonstrates the application of *ḥālat al-mustaqīm*, a fixed legal condition with no flexibility, in which *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* may only be carried out gently, without the use of force. The Kemenag's interpretation affirms that moderation in *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* represents the practice of balanced *sharī'ah* principles that take into account knowledge, ability, benefit,

and social context, so that its purpose can be achieved without creating new forms of harm.

Facilitating Ease in Religion

The interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding *Facilitating Ease in Religion* emphasizes that Islam demands both social and ritual piety, which often come into conflict with human desires. In this situation, humans are required to choose between following their passions or restraining them in order to fulfill the demands of righteousness. This is affirmed in Surah Şād [38]:26, when Allah warns Prophet David not to follow his desires, as doing so would lead him astray from His path:

يٰدَاوُدُ اِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِى الْاَرْضِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوٰى فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ ۗ اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ يَضِلُّوْنَ
عَنْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيْدٌ يُّمَآ نَسُوْا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ ۙ

“O David, indeed We have made you a successor upon the earth, so judge between the people in truth and do not follow desire, as it will lead you away from the way of Allah. Indeed, those who go astray from the way of Allah will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Reckoning.”

Ibn ‘Ashūr, in his *tafsīr*, explains that human desires tend to gravitate toward what is easy and pleasurable, whereas moral and spiritual perfection requires struggle and sacrifice to abandon such pleasures [19]. According to the interpretation of the Ministry, religious ease does not mean following one’s desires or seeking the easiest path without responsibility. Rather, it signifies establishing a balance between rational obedience and human capability, so that one does not fall into error by succumbing to desires [2].

The Ministry's treatment of *at-Taysīr fī ad-Dīn* operates on two analytically distinct levels that the Tafsir does not always clearly differentiate. The first is the *negative* dimension: the prohibition against following unrestrained desire (*hawā*), classified under *ḥālat al-mustaqīm*—a fixed normative command with no flexibility. The second is the *positive* dimension: the Qur'anic affirmation that Islamic law does not intend hardship, which operates within *ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an*, permitting proportional flexibility within the boundaries of obligatory minimums and prohibitions against excess [27].

The interpretation of Ibn ‘Ashūr, as cited by the Ministry, underscores that controlling desire requires sacrifice and perseverance, whereas indulgence in passion signifies a departure from moral perfection. This dual structure resolves a frequent misunderstanding in both popular and scholarly discourse: that *taysīr* is essentially a license for leniency. The moderate position is not the midpoint between extremes in a purely arithmetic sense, but rather the space within which human capacity (*ṭāqah*) and divine intention (*irādah*) are brought

into alignment – a distinction that has significant implications for how religious authorities communicate ease to diverse Muslim communities [28].

On the other hand, the principle of *at-Taysir fi ad-Din* (ease in religion) represents one of the main characteristics of Islam as a faith of compassion and harmony with human nature. This principle is affirmed in several Qur’anic verses, such as al-Baqarah [2]:185 and 286, al-Mā’idah [5]:6, and al-Ḥajj [22]:78, which emphasize that Islamic law (*sharī’ah*) is not meant to impose hardship but to provide ease in accordance with human ability and circumstances.

...يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ...^ط

“...Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship...” (al-Baqarah [2]:185)

...رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ...

“...Our Lord, do not lay upon us a burden as You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, do not burden us with that which we have no strength to bear...” (al-Baqarah [2]:286)

...وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ...

“...and He has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty...” (al-Ḥajj [22]:78)

In the context of religious moderation, this principle serves as a foundation to prevent the community from falling into two extremes: excessive zeal in practicing religion (*ta’assub*) and negligence in upholding its teachings (*tasāhul*). For example, abandoning prayer or fasting represents an extreme of neglecting obligations, while performing worship without rest – such as praying all night or fasting continuously throughout the year – constitutes the opposite extreme of excessiveness. Similarly, committing adultery is a form of grave transgression, whereas declaring marriage unlawful is also a deviation from the balance taught by Islam [2].

Within this framework, the principle of ease in religion reflects the condition of *ḥālat ḥadd al-a’lā wa al-adnā ma’an* a legal state bounded by both upper and lower limits where believers are granted freedom to act proportionally within these boundaries according to their capacity and the guidance of the *sharī’ah*. Islam offers flexibility so that individuals can fulfill their religious duties within their ability without exceeding the prescribed limits. For instance, prayer and fasting have a minimal boundary represented by the obligatory acts that must not be neglected, and a maximal boundary represented by the prohibition of excessive practices that surpass one’s physical capacity [29].

Therefore, neglecting acts of worship constitutes a violation of the lower limit (*al-ḥadd al-adnā*), while performing them excessively without balance constitutes a violation of the upper limit (*al-ḥadd al-a'lā*). This principle demonstrates that ease in religion does not imply freedom from legal and moral constraints, but rather the pursuit of balance between two extremes ensuring that believers remain on the middle path in accordance with human nature and the objectives of the *sharī'ah* [6].

A critical engagement with competing perspectives is necessary here. Progressive Muslim scholars such as Khaled Abou El Fadl have argued that classical applications of *taysīr* remain insufficiently attentive to gendered and socioeconomic dimensions of religious burden—that what counts as 'ease' is historically constructed from a male, propertied perspective [35]. This critique does not invalidate the Teori Hudud framework, but it highlights that the *content* of both the upper and lower limits requires ongoing *ijtihad* informed by the lived realities of diverse Muslim communities. The Ministry's Tafsir would benefit from more explicitly acknowledging this hermeneutical contingency.

The Principle of Gradualism

The principle of gradualism in Islamic teachings demonstrates that this religion was revealed with profound wisdom, taking into account the human capacity to receive divine guidance. In order to facilitate ease in practicing religion, the Qur'an was not revealed all at once but gradually over the span of 23 years of prophethood [30]. This gradual revelation allowed the divine messages to be received, understood, and implemented progressively according to the readiness of the community. This is evident in the first revealed verses, namely Surah al-'Alaq [96]:1-2, which command to "Read in the name of your Lord" (*bismi rabbik*), rather than "in the name of Allah."

﴿ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۙ ۱ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۚ ۲ ﴾

"Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clinging substance."

According to the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, drawing upon al-Rāzī's view, the use of the word *rabb* (Lord) in the Qur'an was intended to make the teachings of Islam more accessible to the polytheistic society of that time, who had not yet comprehended the full concept of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). It is also explained that most of the verses concerning the laws of what is permissible (*ḥalāl*) and forbidden (*ḥarām*) were revealed during the Madinan period, including the prohibition of *khamr* (intoxicants), which was introduced gradually in line with the community's growing moral and spiritual understanding [2]. For example, the prohibition of *khamr* was not imposed

immediately but through moral and spiritual stages that guided the believers from general awareness of its harm to its final, explicit prohibition. This reflects the wisdom of the *sharī'ah*, which does not compel people to attain perfection instantaneously but guides them gradually within the two established legal boundaries [32].

This principle of gradualism also serves as an essential guideline in carrying out *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sent Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to Yemen, he instructed him to begin his mission by calling people to the testimony of faith (*shahādah*). Once they accepted the message of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God), he was to teach them the obligation of prayer, and only after that, the obligation of *zakāh* (almsgiving). At that time, both of these obligations were already mandatory for Muslims; however, the Prophet still emphasized that the transmission of religious law must be adapted to the people's level of understanding and readiness. This demonstrates that Islamic propagation (*da'wah*) is not coercive but rather a gradual process that guides people toward correct understanding and sincere practice [2].

What distinguishes this analysis from a merely descriptive reading is the recognition that *tadarruj* functions as a *meta-principle* that governs the *mode of application* of all other moderation principles. The Prophet's instruction to Mu'ādh ibn Jabal is analytically significant not because it redefines the lower limit, but because it maps a realistic *trajectory* toward full compliance—demonstrating that Shahrur's framework accommodates temporal progression without compromising the normative endpoint. Thus, the principle of gradualism functions as a moderating mechanism that ensures the application of law remains proportional, effective, and aligned with the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* [33].

Gradualism applies not only to the establishment of obligations but also to the implementation of prohibitions. Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani narrates a story of a man who came to the Prophet and expressed his desire to embrace Islam but admitted his difficulty in giving up bad habits such as drinking wine, committing adultery, stealing, and lying. The Prophet wisely advised him to stop lying first. Once the man followed this advice, he gradually abandoned his other vices and ultimately embraced Islam wholeheartedly. This story illustrates that gradualism in *da'wah* and the enforcement of law reflects the compassion and wisdom of Islam, which guides people toward moral and spiritual perfection without forcing sudden or overwhelming change [2].

Hence, *tadarruj* is not merely a pedagogical method but a built-in mechanism of Islamic law that prevents both premature enforcement (*ḥadd al-*

a'lā violation) and indefinite deferral (*ḥadd al-adnā* violation). The normative destination remains fixed; only the pace of arrival is subject to contextual adjustment [34]. A critical interrogation is warranted regarding the potential misuse of *tadarruj* as a justification for indefinite deferral of justice. In contemporary Indonesian religious discourse, gradualism has sometimes been invoked to justify delayed enforcement of religious minority rights – effectively treating injustice as a transitional condition rather than a violation of the lower limit. This study argues that Shahrur's framework forecloses this misuse: the lower limit is not negotiable, and *tadarruj* governs only the *pace* of movement toward compliance, not the *destination*. Gradualism is a pedagogical method, not a theological escape route. Based on the explanation above, the following is a summary classification of the Principles of Religious Moderation from the Perspective of Muhammad Shahrur's Ḥudūd Theory.

Table 1. Religious Moderation Principles in Shahrur's Hudud Theory

Moderation Principle	Shahrur's Hudud Category	Position within the Moderation Spectrum
Justice & Balance (<i>'Adl wa Tawāzun</i>)	<i>Ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an</i> – possesses both upper and lower limits.	Between: prohibition of discrimination (upper limit) and the obligation to uphold justice (lower limit).
Enjoining Good & Forbidding Evil (<i>Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar</i>)	<i>Ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an</i> + element of <i>Ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā dūna al-mumās</i> .	Between: prohibition of coercion/force (upper limit) and the obligation to prevent wrongdoing (lower limit).
Ease in Religion (<i>At-Taysir fi ad-Dīn</i>)	<i>Ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an</i> + element of <i>Ḥālat al-Mustaqīm</i> (prohibition of following whims/desires).	Between: prohibition of exaggeration/excessiveness (upper limit) and the obligation to fulfill worship (lower limit).
Gradualism (<i>Tadarruj</i>)	<i>Ḥālat ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-adnā ma'an</i> – flexible within the boundary range.	Between: prohibition of forcing instantaneous change (upper limit) and the obligation to convey the teachings (lower limit).

The table demonstrates that the principles of religious moderation can be understood more systematically through Muhammad Shahrur's *ḥudūd* theory, indicating that moderation is not merely a socio-political concept but also possesses a measurable theological foundation. The principle of justice and balance is positioned between the prohibition of discrimination and the obligation to uphold justice, while the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* lies between the prohibition of coercion and the obligation to prevent wrongdoing.

The principle of ease in religion emphasizes the balance between the prohibition of excessiveness and the obligation to perform acts of worship, whereas the principle of gradualism shows that change should be implemented progressively without instant coercion.

Through this mapping, the study expands the application of *Hudud* Theory into the analysis of official state-sponsored tafsir, particularly the moderation tafsir published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. At the same time, this approach offers a new analytical framework that is more systematic, measurable, and replicable for contemporary tafsir studies. Therefore, the contribution of this research is not only theoretical in advancing Qur'anic hermeneutics and Islamic moderation studies, but also methodological by providing an evaluative model for tafsir texts based on the spectrum of *ḥadd al-adnā* and *ḥadd al-a'lā*. Furthermore, the findings of this study carry practical implications for governments, academics, and preachers in applying religious moderation proportionally, so that it does not lead to extremism, religious relativism, or coercive actions carried out in the name of religion.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the principles of religious moderation formulated in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Tafsir Moderasi Beragama* – justice and balance, *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, ease in religion, and gradualism – are theologically grounded within the normative framework of Islamic law through Muhammad Shahrur's Theory of Limits. By mapping these principles onto Shahrur's typology, the study shows that religious moderation operates within a dynamic yet bounded spectrum between the upper (*ḥadd al-a'lā*) and lower (*ḥadd al-adnā*) limits of divine law. This confirms that the Ministry's Tafsir represents a theologically coherent institutionalization of *wasatīyyah* in Indonesia's pluralistic context. More broadly, the study contributes to international discussions on state-sponsored Islamic moderation by offering an Islamic analytical framework for evaluating the normative boundaries of official tafsir, with relevance for comparative studies, policymakers, educators, and efforts to counter extremism in multicultural societies.

However, this study has several limitations. It focuses only on the textual analysis of a single primary source and does not examine how these moderation principles are received or practiced at the community level. In addition, the application of Shahrur's framework remains interpretive, while gender and socioeconomic perspectives are only briefly addressed. Future studies should therefore explore grassroots reception of the Ministry's moderation discourse and conduct comparative research on religious moderation frameworks in other Muslim-majority countries such as Morocco, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia.

Interdisciplinary approaches integrating Qur'anic hermeneutics, legal theory, political science, sociology of religion, and gender-sensitive perspectives would further deepen the analytical contribution initiated by this study.

Author Contributions

Ahmad Mohammad Tidjani: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Ahmad Mahfud & Zulfatul Wasilah:** Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Investigation. **Aufal Muhammad Safii :** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

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Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

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