

Reframing the Prophet's Interactions with Non-Muslims: A Context-Sensitive Model of Religious Moderation from the Sīrah Nabawiyyah

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Abstract

This study examines the Prophet Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims in the Sīrah Nabawiyyah to construct a context-sensitive model of religious moderation applicable to contemporary plural societies. Existing research often highlights his tolerance but rarely provides a systematic classification of his interactions across diverse social and political settings, leaving a gap in developing an operational framework for religious moderation. This study employs qualitative library research using primary hadith data supported by classical and contemporary exegetical and historical sources. The data were analyzed through descriptive, comparative, and contextual interpretation to map patterns of interaction in Mecca and Medina. The findings show, first, that Muhammad's moderation was shaped by context: defensive in Mecca under persecution and protective in Medina as a political leader. Second, his interactions with non-Muslims fall into distinct categories, including adversaries, allies, captives, and family members, each of which demonstrates different ethical responses that range from firmness toward hostile groups to justice and compassion toward peaceful communities. Third, five dimensions of moderation emerge: protection in social authority, justice in law enforcement, synergy in socio-economic relations, empathy in social and environmental engagement, and freedom in religious practice.

These findings offer an empirically grounded framework for strengthening interfaith harmony, informing policy, and enhancing religious education. The study concludes that moderation in Islam is dynamic and adaptable, providing practical guidance for managing diversity in modern societies.

Keywords: *Interactions, Prophet Muhammad, Moderation, Harmony, Sīrah Nabawiyyah.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menelaah interaksi Nabi Muhammad dengan non-Muslim dalam Sīrah Nabawiyyah untuk membangun model moderasi beragama yang peka konteks dan relevan bagi masyarakat plural kontemporer. Penelitian sebelumnya sering menyoroti sikap toleransi beliau, tetapi jarang



menyediakan klasifikasi sistematis atas interaksi beliau dalam berbagai setting sosial dan politik, sehingga menyisakan kesenjangan dalam pengembangan kerangka moderasi beragama yang operasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan data primer berupa hadis, didukung sumber tafsir dan sejarah klasik maupun kontemporer. Data dianalisis melalui pendekatan deskriptif, komparatif, dan interpretasi kontekstual untuk memetakan pola interaksi di Makkah dan Madinah. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan, pertama, bahwa moderasi Muhammad dibentuk oleh konteks: bersifat defensif di Makkah ketika mengalami penindasan dan protektif di Madinah ketika memimpin komunitas politik. Kedua, interaksi beliau dengan non-Muslim terbagi dalam beberapa kategori: musuh, sekutu, tawanan, dan anggota keluarga, yang masing-masing menampilkan respons etis berbeda, mulai dari ketegasan terhadap kelompok bermusuhan hingga keadilan dan kasih sayang terhadap komunitas yang damai. Ketiga, muncul lima dimensi moderasi: perlindungan dalam otoritas sosial, keadilan dalam penegakan hukum, sinergi dalam hubungan sosial-ekonomi, empati dalam relasi sosial dan lingkungan, serta kebebasan dalam praktik keagamaan. Temuan ini menawarkan kerangka empiris untuk memperkuat harmoni antaragama, mendukung perumusan kebijakan, dan meningkatkan pendidikan keagamaan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa moderasi dalam Islam bersifat dinamis dan adaptif, serta memberikan panduan praktis dalam mengelola keberagaman di masyarakat modern.

Kata kunci: Interaksi, Nabi Muhammad (SAW), Moderasi, Harmoni, Sirah Nabi.

INTRODUCTION

Living in plural societies presents challenges in the form of social segregation and social disharmony. (Watters et al., 2020). Social disharmony commonly arises from communal egoism within plural societies that prioritizes shared identity over social cohesion. (Verkuyten et al., 2023). The mismanagement of multicultural social cohesion constitutes the root cause of various forms of social disharmony. (Freeston & Komes, 2023). One of its derivative problems is the emergence of feelings of insecurity, which in turn foster intolerant and discriminatory practices. (Damayanti & Yunanto, 2022). In Indonesia, such social disharmony is manifested in restrictions on religious worship, the narrowing of social access, and both verbal and physical forms of discrimination. Data further indicate that incidents of intolerance in Indonesia have shown an increasing trend, with a total of 477 incidents and 731 discriminatory acts recorded during 2023–2024 (Ashfiya, 2025).

In Islamic history, coexistence within a framework of plurality between Muslims and non-Muslims has been an inevitable reality. Religious plurality has been a historical fact since before Muhammad's prophethood, continued after his passing, and persists in both contemporary and future Indonesia. Muhammad himself experienced religious diversity marked by variations in race, ethnicity, and culture during his lifetime (Ibrahim Zein & Ahmed El-Wakil, 2020). His social interactions with non-Muslims serve as a primary reference for understanding how his followers should apply the principles of tolerance to foster interreligious harmony, positioning him as the central model of pluralism. A comprehensive understanding of Muhammad's efforts to promote interfaith harmony provides a concrete foundation for formulating and implementing *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation), as this concept reflects the essence of *waṣaṭīyah* (Ach. Maimun et al.,

2024), manifested through values of peace, harmony, order, and tranquility (Nasrulloh et al., 2024). Without Muhammad's exemplary model, the very substance of religious moderation would be lost.

Hadith and Sirah studies aimed at distilling the values of religious moderation are therefore essential, as some Muslims have failed to properly comprehend the meaning of religious moderation. This lack of understanding arises not only from the position of being a religious majority. (Long & Çakmak, 2024) But also from two additional factors. First, religious moderation is often suspected of promoting religious liberalism, prompting conservative groups to attach a negative stigma to the term. (Jubba et al., 2022). Such suspicion emerges from a form of religious fundamentalism and excessive fanaticism, which causes new ideas to be frequently misinterpreted as inherently negative. The repeated dissemination of these negative connotations by fundamentalist circles constructs a doctrinal barrier that obstructs the internalization of the values of religious moderation. (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022; Syamsul Kurniawan & Moch Lukluil Maknun, 2023). As a consequence, negative campaigns concerning Muslim-non-Muslim relations tend to incite hatred. (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020) And neglect Islamic teachings that advocate peaceful and harmonious coexistence. (Misrawi, 2020). In fact, the cultivation of social harmony must also be pursued through cultural approaches. (Setinawati et al., 2025). When existing cultural expressions instead propagate hatred, the realization of such harmony becomes increasingly difficult to achieve.

Second, the lack of public literacy regarding the importance and substance of religious moderation is a significant factor. (Shalahuddin et al., 2023). Communities whose daily lives revolve within a single religious environment are at risk of becoming less receptive to differences due to limited social interaction. The influence of both familial and broader social environments often produces negative consequences, including polarization within society. (Zaluchu et al., 2025). Insufficient understanding of tolerance and religious moderation deprives communities of clear guidance for living harmoniously, leading dominant groups to perceive themselves as superior and, consequently, to engage in acts of intolerance, whether verbal or physical. (Jakiyudin, 2023; Wulan & Fajrussalam, 2021; Zulkifli et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, tolerance and religious moderation face significant challenges in Indonesia, where society exists within a pluralistic reality that demands social inclusivity. The problem lies in the fact that such a reality is not accompanied by an equally inclusive mindset. Public thinking often remains confined within exclusive boundaries, creating a paradox that fuels social discord. The imbalance between social reality and collective mindset provides fertile ground for the emergence of negative tendencies within society. (Subchi et al., 2022). The more plural a society becomes, the more complex its challenges grow. This condition has

given rise to attitudes of exclusivism, radicalism, and extremism. (Ainissyifa et al., 2024; Nasir & Khusairi, 2024).

Therefore, fostering religious tolerance and moderation necessitates the enhancement of comprehensive religious literacy. (Ardiansyah et al., 2024). One effective approach is to introduce models of tolerance and religious moderation as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad. (Pureklolon, 2020). This article seeks to offer a new scholarly perspective to address the three aforementioned issues by clarifying negative stigmas surrounding religious moderation, particularly those advanced by fundamentalist groups, by providing a comprehensive analytical basis for the values of moderation exemplified by the Prophet, and by proposing a model that can be implemented within plural societies such as Indonesia.

Exploring Muhammad's Sīrah is essential for constructing a framework of religious moderation, as paradigms of tolerance and moderation in Islam can be traced to the two primary sources of *tashrī'*, the Qur'an and Hadith. (Abu-'Uksa, 2024). The Qur'an presents a normative and dogmatic framework that focuses primarily on textual guidance, whereas the *ḥadīth* provides a more coherent and contextually relevant foundation, as its content was conveyed and practiced directly by Muhammad himself. Consequently, the *ḥadīth* is both more applicable and responsive. It is applicable because it offers a living example through Muhammad's conduct, and responsive because it reflects the socio-historical context of its time. Thus, constructing the concepts of tolerance and religious moderation upon the Qur'anic message, reinforced by the textual evidence of the *ḥadīth* (whether in Muhammad's sayings, actions, or approvals), renders these principles more solid and substantively relevant. Logically, the moral teachings on interreligious harmony exemplified by Muhammad in his era can therefore be meaningfully applied within the framework of modern society.

This study focuses on two primary issues: how Muhammad practiced religious moderation toward non-Muslims, and how values of religious moderation can be derived from his life and implemented in contemporary contexts. The study seeks to classify non-Muslim groups based on their diverse backgrounds in order to generate analytically relevant conclusions that constitute the study's novelty. Through an examination of Muhammad's conduct, this research aims to produce a cascading effect: first, strengthening understanding of the importance of tolerant coexistence, and second, reducing intra-religious conflict by providing empirical-historical evidence that tolerance and religious moderation constitute core principles upheld by Muhammad, applied contextually across diverse social backgrounds.

Studies on religious moderation that place Muhammad as the central object of analysis have been explored in several works, although each differs in focus. Faqihuddin Abdul Qadir, for instance, examines the historical dimension by outlining key events in the life of Muhammad (Abdul Qadir, 2022). Similar research has been conducted by Yani and Abbas Sofwan, whose work focuses more

specifically on the content of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah as a model for fostering religious moderation (Yeni & Fajar, 2022). Habibah Shofiyah investigates the historical impact of religious moderation and its influence on students' perspectives (Assyifa & Rosyidi, 2024). Adiba likewise explores this theme, producing a study closely aligned with Faqihuddin Abdul Qadir's but emphasizing the Constitution of Medina and Muhammad's treaties with various tribes (Adiba, 2023). Budimansyah, on the other hand, examines Muhammad's model of religious moderation in relation to interreligious tolerance in Indonesia (Budimansyah et al., 2023).

The distinguishing feature of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims, addressing a gap in previous research that has not fully explored these dynamics. This study examines interactions classified as adversaries, allies, captives, or family members across both religious and social contexts and under conditions of aggression and non-aggression in Mecca and Medina. By integrating ḥadīth qawli and ḥadīth fi'li with empirical and historical evidence, the research develops a concrete, context-sensitive model of religious moderation. This classification demonstrates how the implementation of moderation varies according to circumstances, highlighting the study's relevance and novel contribution.

The aforementioned articles are limited to asserting that Muhammad demonstrated tolerance, without articulating concrete conclusions regarding his practices of religious moderation that can be systematically implemented in contemporary contexts. This paper intentionally aims to present and conclude that the values of religious moderation are inherently dynamic. At times, they manifest defensively, while at other times, they operate offensively. Similarly, his relationships with non-Muslims may appear synergistic or pragmatic, and may take the form of gentleness or firmness. This elasticity is directly derived from Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims, where his background and position influenced his responses. His multifaceted roles as a messenger of divine revelation, judge, military commander, leader of Medina, and spiritual guide shaped his approach to interfaith relations. (Nasrulloh & Witro, 2022). Therefore, this study combines analytical findings and interpretive discussions to formulate a renewed and insightful model of religious harmony, representing a novel contribution that can serve as a valuable reference.

METHOD

This study employed a library-based research design using a normative-theological approach because the research questions focus on reconstructing the Prophet Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims based on authoritative textual evidence. Such a design is the most appropriate for addressing the research aim, which requires extracting normative principles from hadith and

sīrah materials and interpreting them within their socio-historical contexts. The study relies on textual data rather than human participants, and the population of sources consists of primary hadith collections and classical as well as contemporary exegetical and historical works. Inclusion criteria were limited to hadith with clear chains of transmission and strong authenticity, along with exegetical and historical sources that directly discuss events involving Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims. Materials that lacked contextual clarity or did not contribute to the classification of interaction patterns were excluded.

The primary data set comprised key hadith collections, including Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1794, Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3052, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3166, Musnad Aḥmad 2728, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3014, al-Mu'jam al-Ṭabrānī 977, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3088, Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī 1566, Sunan al-Bayhaqī 2903, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 4136, Sunan al-Bayhaqī 18150, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1356, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2069, Sunan Abī Dāwūd 5152, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1312, Sunan Abī Dāwūd 3052, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2417, and Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 1990. These sources were selected based on their authenticity and reliability to ensure methodological rigor. Secondary data include works of hadith commentary, Qur'anic exegesis, historical literature, and scholarly journals relevant to the topic.

Data analysis proceeded in several stages. First, all textual materials were collected from hadith compilations, commentaries, historical works, Qur'anic exegesis, and academic journals. Second, the materials were classified according to the contexts of Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims, distinguishing events in Mecca and Medina and identifying categories such as adversaries, allies, captives, and family members. Third, a descriptive analytical technique was applied to interpret each event by aligning textual content with its socio-historical background through a sīrah-based historical approach. Fourth, a comparative method was used to examine similarities and differences across events in order to derive logical patterns of moderation. Data validity was strengthened through temporal and thematic triangulation by mapping sources across different periods and analytical themes, followed by an in-depth examination to ensure consistency. The final stage involved synthesizing these analytical results to formulate a conceptual model that explains religious moderation as a dynamic and context-dependent framework shaped by the specific circumstances of each interaction.

RESULT

Differences are the Origin of Tolerance in Islam

Religious moderation constitutes a strategic approach that reflects a moderate and constructive attitude in responding to differences, which are an inherent aspect of human existence. Such differences as a natural condition of life are explicitly affirmed in the verses of the Qur'an: "If your Lord had willed, He

could have made mankind one community, but they will not cease to differ" (Q. Hūd 11:118), and "If your Lord had willed, all those on earth would surely have believed. So will you, O Muhammad, compel people to become believers?" (Q. Yūnus 10:99). Together, these verses convey three key messages. First, the difference is both inevitable and certain. God intentionally created human beings with diversity. Religious differences will persist from the past into the future. Diversity is a fact of life that has been divinely decreed. Humanity cannot defy destiny by forcing uniformity. What truly matters is how individuals respond to differences with wisdom (al-Khāzin, 2014, p. 466).

Second, differences have the potential to give rise to disputes and opposition. This occurs because humans often impose their own will and beliefs while struggling to accept the existence of divergent views. Such a context mirrors what Muhammad experienced in his early mission when he persistently called people to follow his message. His method of preaching was then corrected by God through the revelation of Qur'an 10:99, which reminded him that diversity is divinely ordained. From this reality, difference can lead to two major outcomes: wisdom or conflict. Wisdom emerges only among those who possess profound knowledge and inner purity. (Zāhir Ibrāhīm, 2022). Therefore, guiding differences toward wisdom becomes a demanding task that requires systematic and sustained efforts to minimize the negative consequences of discord. (Anas et al., 2025).

Third, differences must be approached with wisdom. Diversity should be directed toward positive ends such as mutual understanding, assistance, and cooperation. It should not lead to denial, conflict, or indifference. This principle is reflected in the Qur'anic verse: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" (Q. al-Ḥujurāt 49:13). This verse emphasizes that although human beings differ, none should feel superior to others. Superiority arises from arrogance and pride, which yield no positive outcome in responding to differences. (al-Ṣaffār, 2017). Therefore, Islam teaches that a Muslim should take pride in their faith but must never demean or disparage the beliefs of others.

Based on the above facts, religious moderation represents a wise attitude in responding to differences by prioritizing positive and humanitarian values such as exchanging knowledge, cooperating, and showing mutual respect (Setinawati et al., 2025). Tolerance in Islam entails learning to accept differences without imposing one's will, harboring hostility, or engaging in disputes. Diversity is a divine aspect of creation that will endure through time. To deny difference is to deny God Himself, and to reject diversity is to reject divine decree. Therefore, tolerance is a consequence of diversity that fosters a sense of fraternity and mutual friendship among fellow creatures of God (Tinambunan et al., 2025). When

differences are approached with wisdom, they give rise to tolerance; when they are met with hatred, they produce intolerance.

Periodization of Rasulullah PBUH's Interaction with Non-Muslims

Interaction in Makkah

In this situation, Muslims were in a minority position and became victims of persecution. As a new religion emerging within a community of idol worshippers, Islam naturally struggled to gain social acceptance. Muslims endured persecution and various hostile actions that eventually forced them to migrate twice, first to Abyssinia and later to Medina. (al-Malik, 2011). From the events in Mecca, two significant lessons can be drawn regarding religious moderation. First, minority groups are highly vulnerable to acts of violence and extremism. Therefore, defensive measures are necessary to protect minorities from the authoritarianism and feudal superiority often exercised by the majority. Second, there must be an awareness that Islam, in its earliest history, existed as a marginalized minority facing severe hardship. Consequently, Muslims in majority contexts must avoid replicating the oppressive behavior of the Quraysh pagans who persecuted and tormented Muslims in Mecca. Should such attitudes arise, there would be no essential difference between Muslims and the Quraysh idolaters who exalted dominance and attacked those weaker than themselves, namely, minority non-Muslims.

The arrogance of the majority fueled the oppressive behavior of the Quraysh disbelievers. When Muhammad was praying before the Ka'bah, 'Uqbah ibn Abī Mu'īṭ came and threw his shawl around the Prophet's neck, strangling him with great force. Then Abū Bakr intervened, rescuing Muhammad and pushing 'Uqbah away (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 4815). Another distressing incident occurred when the Prophet was praying, and Abū Jahl said to his companions, "Who among you dares to place filth, bones, and decayed flesh on Muhammad's head?" One of them volunteered and placed the filth on Muhammad's head while he was in prostration. The Quraysh men burst into laughter at the sight. Fāṭimah hurried to clean the dirt from her father's head, her heart filled with sorrow (*Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, 1794).

Interaction in Medina

When Muhammad became both a prophet and the leader of Medina, his foremost concern was to establish a peaceful and harmonious society. He initiated a peace treaty with the Jewish tribes residing in Medina, namely Banū Naḍīr, Banū Qurayẓah, and Banū Qaynuqā', each numbering in the hundreds. For instance, the Banū Qurayẓah were estimated to have between 700 and 900 members ('Alī, 1995). Muhammad invited the Muhājirūn, the Anṣār, and the Jewish tribes to enter into a peace agreement. This pact was formally documented in what became known as the Constitution of Medina. The document was extensive, but its essence lay in the

mutual commitments not to engage in killing, looting, or forming alliances with external enemies of Medina. It also established that acts of criminality between groups would be judged and punished with justice (al-Jāmil, 2002).

After the establishment of the Constitution of Medina, Muhammad became, both *de facto* and *de jure*, the leader of a city characterized by religious, ethnic, and tribal diversity. The community consisted of the Muhājirūn, the Anṣār, and several Jewish clans who together formed the social fabric of Medina. Muhammad instituted a unified legal framework that applied equally to all groups without granting special privileges to any particular community. At the same time, he upheld freedom of belief and religious practice for everyone.

The Constitution of Medina was designed to unite these diverse entities under one common identity, the Medinan society (Zahrā, n.d.). Muhammad initiated this charter in response to the long history of civil war between the Anṣār tribes of Aws and Khazraj, conflicts often fueled by alliances with certain Jewish groups. It is important to emphasize that the social cohesion Muhammad built in Medina was not founded on shared ethnicity, religion, or culture. Rather, it was grounded in a shared homeland, as all inhabitants, regardless of background, were bound together as members of the same Medinan community (Islām, 2018).

As the leader of Medina, Muhammad frequently established peace agreements with various tribes. Once a peace treaty had been concluded, he upheld it with the utmost integrity. He firmly warned, "Whoever wrongs a non-Muslim under a peace agreement, diminishes their rights, burdens them beyond their capacity, or takes something from them without consent, I will be his adversary on the Day of Judgment" (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3052) (al-Sahāranfūrī, 1984). On another occasion, he said, "Whoever kills a person who has been granted a peace covenant will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise, though its fragrance can be detected from a distance of forty years" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3166) (al-Qastalanī, n.d.). The term "a person who has been granted a peace covenant" refers to non-Muslims who live peacefully and do not engage in hostilities against Muslims.

Muhammad's Conduct Toward Hostile Non-Muslims

The legal framework of *mu'āmalah* (social interaction) with non-Muslims is mapped according to their status. Non-Muslims are categorized as *ḥarbī*, meaning those who are at war with Muslims, and *dhimmī*, meaning those who live peacefully without engaging in hostilities. When non-Muslims hold *ḥarbī* status, interactions with them are characterized by firmness and strictness, whereas relations with *dhimmī* groups are normal and grounded in mutual goodwill (al-Shinqīṭī, n.d.).

This classification is derived directly from the Qur'anic distinction that permits benevolence toward non-Muslims who do not declare war: "Allah does

not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly" (Q. al-Mumtaḥanah 60:8). This verse explicitly allows fairness and kindness toward non-Muslims who do not engage in conflict; logically, it implies the opposite, that showing goodwill to those who wage war is prohibited (al-Rāzī, n.d.). The notion of fairness here includes acts such as offering gifts and other expressions of goodwill (al-Qurṭubī, 2019).

The Qur'an provides further clarification: "Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion. Whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers" (Q. al-Mumtaḥanah 60:9). This verse establishes a clear ethical boundary between compassion toward peaceful non-Muslims and firmness toward those who are hostile to Islam.

Before War

When Muhammad prepared for combat, he would always counsel: Fight in the name of Allah and for the sake of Allah. Fight those who deny Allah. Do not vie for the spoils of war. Do not mutilate an enemy who has fallen. Do not kill children, women, or the elderly (*Musnad* Ahmad 2728). The Prophet's instruction is clear: although war may take lives, it must not be waged recklessly, for example, by killing children, women, or the elderly. Before engaging over a territory, Muhammad and his forces offered three options. First, the people could embrace Islam, thus making war unnecessary. Second, they could pay the *jizyah*, whereby the Muslims would be obliged to protect them. Third, they could fight, accepting the risks until it became clear who was defeated and who prevailed. (Ibn al-Qayyim, 2008, volume 3, p. 128).

In general, Muhammad consistently demonstrated generosity and compassion toward non-Muslims. However, he maintained firmness toward those who declared war against the Muslim community. As the leader of Medina, Muhammad faced military confrontations with the Quraysh and other hostile groups. These wars were not initiated by him but were acts of defense against threats and aggressions that endangered and oppressed the people of Medina.

Said Ramadan al-Buthi emphasized that Muhammad's wars with the Quraysh and other groups were not motivated by religious aims or intended for Islamization. Rather, they stemmed from enmity between two opposing parties, fueled by a variety of political, social, and economic factors (al-Būthī, 1993).

During War

In times of war, the situation leaves only two choices: to kill or be killed. The Qur'anic verses that address warfare and those that contain stern warnings toward non-Muslims refer specifically to the *ḥarbī* category, meaning non-Muslims

who fought against Muhammad and his companions. (al-Ḥamīd, n.d., volume 10, p. 1583). This is reflected in God's command: "O Prophet, strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be harsh with them. Their abode is Hell, and wretched is the destination" (Q. al-Taḥrīm 66:9). The use of force toward non-Muslims is limited strictly to the context of war.

Therefore, verses and *ḥadīths* that mention fighting or violence must be understood within that framework, as in "Kill them wherever you find them" (Q. al-Baqarah 2:190). The command applies only to those who engage in battle. Consequently, when Muhammad found a non-Muslim woman dead during a conflict, though she had not taken part in the fighting, he became angry and declared that women must never be killed in war (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 3014).

After War

Firmness in fighting the enemies of Islam applied only on the battlefield. Once the enemies were defeated and became captives, Muhammad and his companions treated them with generosity and compassion, sharing food with them and ensuring their dignity. (al-Qurṭubī, 2019, volume 17, p. 94). The Qur'an records this act of kindness: "They give food, despite their love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive" (Q. al-Insān 76:9). Muhammad personally instructed his companions to treat the prisoners of the Battle of Badr well (*al-Mu'jam* al-Ṭabrānī, 977). The companions even refrained from eating until after their captors had eaten (Ibn Kathīr, 2009).

Muhammad once ordered that proper clothing be provided for prisoners who lacked decent garments (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 3088) (al-Bayhaqī, 1988, volume 5, p. 264). On another occasion, he encountered a mother among the captives who was weeping because her child had been sold as a slave. Moved by compassion, he commanded his companions to retrieve the child and reunite them (*Sunan* al-Bayhaqī, 2903) (al-Ḥākim, 1999, volume 3, p. 634). He further emphasized this principle by saying, "Whoever separates a mother from her child will be separated from his loved ones on the Day of Judgment" (*Jāmi'* al-Tirmidhī, 1566) (al-Tirmidhī, 2000).

The most remarkable moment occurred when Muhammad forgave all the inhabitants of Mecca during its conquest. Despite having been humiliated and mistreated during his early mission in Mecca, and despite the Quraysh having been his enemies throughout the years of conflict while he was in Medina, Muhammad showed extraordinary mercy. He forgave their past actions completely and restored the rights of the Meccan people without imposing any penalty or demand (ʿAlī, 1995). The Meccans had expected severe retribution for their previous hostility toward the Prophet, yet he responded with forgiveness and compassion. This act demonstrates that mercy, even toward those who once

caused harm, was a foundational principle in Muhammad's character and leadership.

Muhammad viewed every person through the lens of humanity, even his enemies. His firmness toward non-Muslims applied only within the context of war. Once the enemy was subdued, he returned to his true nature of compassion and mercy. One episode that illustrates this occurred when Muhammad was resting alone, and a man suddenly appeared, brandishing a sword over his head and threatening to kill him. God then caused the man's hand to become paralyzed, and the sword fell, allowing Muhammad to seize it. The man, realizing his helplessness, resigned himself to death. Yet Muhammad did not kill him. Seeing that his opponent was powerless, he chose mercy instead of revenge and let the man go free (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 4136) (al-Dhahabī, n.d.).

Interfaith Relations and Theological Freedom in Muhammad's Leadership

Theological freedom was a principle highly upheld and guaranteed by Muhammad. In the Constitution of Medina, he declared that the Jews have their own religion and the Muslims have theirs. (al-Shāmī, 1993). This statement signifies that neither group has the right to interfere with or disrupt the religious practices of the other. Everyone is entitled and guaranteed the freedom to follow their faith without fear of disturbance or persecution. Theological liberty is the right of every individual. (Al-Karboly, 2023).

Moreover, Muhammad could not compel anyone to embrace Islam, no matter how earnestly he wished to do so, for the authority over one's faith lies solely with God, not with human beings. (al-Ṣābunī, 1981). The Qur'an affirms this principle: "Indeed, you (O Muhammad) do not guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He knows best those who will accept guidance" (Q. al-Qaṣaṣ 28:56).

The right to practice religion was never violated by Muhammad. He did not destroy the synagogues of the Jews in Medina, nor did he send anyone to demolish churches in territories that had pledged allegiance to the Medinan state. (al-Saqar, 2007, p. 17). Abū Bakr followed the same principle when he dispatched his army, warning them not to disturb those engaged in worship in churches, let alone destroy them (Sunan al-Bayhaqī, 18150) (al-Bayhaqī, 1999). Muhammad even permitted the Christians of Najrān to perform their religious rites inside the Prophet's Mosque. (Ibn al-Qayyim, 2008). They stayed in Medina for more than thirty days, and Muhammad received them with kindness and hospitality.

This demonstrates that the Islamic principle of interreligious life is founded on coexistence, peace, and cooperation. Muhammad only engaged in battle against non-Muslims in cases of treachery, broken agreements, or actions that posed genuine threats (Jum'ah, 2018). His benevolence toward non-Muslims implicitly conveys a profound message that sincere faith guides a person to view others as fellow human beings worthy of compassion and love (al-Suwaidī, 2023).

The Qur'anic principle that there is no compulsion in religion implicitly grants everyone the freedom to practice their faith. For this reason, Muhammad never sought to bring people into Islam by force or by threatening them with the sword. Every individual retained freedom over their belief, their acts of worship, and their places of worship. (al-Ḥufī, n.d.). This legacy was faithfully continued by the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn* during the expansion of Muslim territories. Even at a time when Islam was at the height of its power, the caliphs refused to destroy the houses of worship belonging to other faiths. Historical records of early Islam contain no accounts of such destruction. (al-Kāsānī, 2010).

Based on these facts, the demolition of places of worship or obstruction of non-Muslims in performing their religious practices is not permitted in Islam and was never exemplified by Muhammad. On the contrary, such actions contradict his teachings, which emphasize respect for freedom of belief and the right to worship.

Muhammad's Conduct in Social Affairs

The Qur'anic verse al-Mumtaḥanah 60:8, which allows Muslims to interact normally with non-Muslims, was directly demonstrated by Muhammad in his daily life. He had a young servant from a Jewish family who once fell ill. Muhammad visited the boy during his sickness and invited him to embrace Islam. The boy then looked to his father for permission, and his father consented, allowing his son to accept Islam (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 1356). This story illustrates that Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims were close and genuine, extending into his daily activities. He did not discriminate in choosing his helpers based on religion. (al-'Aynī, 2002).

Muhammad also engaged in commercial transactions with the Jews. On one occasion, he purchased thirty *ṣā'* of wheat on credit, leaving his armor as collateral (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 2069) (Ibn Kathīr, n.d.). He maintained politeness and composure even when Jewish individuals posed difficult or provocative questions. (al-Sanūsī, 2008). These examples reflect the Prophet's consistent demonstration of ethical conduct, tolerance, and social harmony with people of different faiths.

Muhammad's attitude conveys the message that although Islam is a noble and exalted religion, this does not mean that followers of other faiths should be regarded as enemies. They are human beings who have not yet been touched by divine guidance. Viewing non-Muslims as rivals or adversaries only distances them further from the path of truth. Therefore, interactions with them must always be grounded in human compassion and ethical consideration.

Ibn 'Umar once slaughtered a goat and was asked whether he would give a portion of it to his Jewish neighbor. He replied that Jibrīl had instructed Muhammad to treat neighbors kindly, to the extent that Muhammad thought

neighbors might even be granted inheritance rights (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 5152). This demonstrates that Muhammad never discriminated in showing kindness, regardless of a neighbor's faith or background (al-Ḥanbalī, 2004).

Muhammad's deep sense of humanity was evident when he stood up as a funeral procession passed by. The companions informed him that the deceased was a Jew, implying that such respect might not be appropriate. Muhammad replied, "Was he not a human being?" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1312). This gesture reflects his profound humanity, showing respect for others as fellow creations of God, not as an acknowledgment of their disbelief.

Muhammad's respect toward the Jewish funeral illustrated a universal moral principle. Honoring human beings, even non-Muslims who have passed away, is essentially an act of reverence toward the Creator, who gives both life and death. To honor humanity is to honor its Creator, while to dehumanize others is to diminish the dignity of the One who created them. (al-Mubārakfūrī, 2018, volume 5, p. 103).

Table 1.

Muhammad's Interactions with Non-Muslim Communities

Domain of Interaction	Description of Interaction
Muhammad's Interactions with Non-Muslims in Mecca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating patience toward the trials and persecutions imposed by the Quraysh on Muhammad and his followers. • Illustrating that communal ego and group fanaticism can lead to intolerant behavior.
Muhammad's Interactions with Non-Muslims in Medina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering unity and mutual respect through peace agreements among various tribes. • Promoting shared responsibility in maintaining security, public order, and social harmony. • Utilizing shared territory as a unifying element among different tribal groups.
Muhammad's Conduct Toward Hostile Non-Muslims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before battle: instructing his forces not to kill children, women, the elderly, or vulnerable groups. • During battle: permitting combat except against those who surrendered, embraced Islam, or agreed to pay the jizya. • After battle: advising companions to treat prisoners of war with kindness and humanity.
Muhammad's Interactions with Non-Muslims in Matters of Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refraining from disturbing non-Muslims' religious practices and prohibiting the destruction of their places of worship. • Upholding theological freedom despite carrying a prophetic mission.

Domain of Interaction	Description of Interaction
Muhammad's Interactions with Non-Muslims in Social Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting social and economic transactions (trade, lending) with non-Muslims. • Showing benevolence, such as providing food and similar acts of kindness. • Maintaining an inclusive social ethic that enables mutual exchange of good deeds.

The patterns presented in Table 1 demonstrate that Muhammad's interactions with non-Muslims were shaped by the socio-political context in which they occurred, ranging from patience and restraint in Mecca to structured cooperation and legal protection in Medina. His conduct toward hostile groups reveals a principled ethic of warfare that balanced firmness with humanitarian restraint, while his approach to matters of worship and social affairs underscores a consistent commitment to theological freedom, social inclusion, and ethical reciprocity. Taken together, these domains illustrate that moderation in Muhammad's practice was neither uniform nor static but dynamically adapted to the nature of each relationship and circumstance. This comprehensive mapping provides the analytical foundation for the subsequent discussion, which interprets these interactional patterns to formulate a context-sensitive model of religious moderation relevant to contemporary plural societies.

DISCUSSION

The Dynamic and Flexible Nature of Religious Moderation

The model of religious moderation exemplified by Muhammad across diverse backgrounds, as outlined above, operated in a dynamic and flexible manner. His approach to religious moderation cannot be reduced to a single interpretation. This is evidenced by the multiple conclusions that can be derived from this framework. These conclusions emerge from his words and actions throughout his lifetime, which can be implemented by his followers in fostering a harmonious social order. A detailed elaboration of these aspects is presented below.

Religious Moderation: Protection

Religious moderation signifies protection when Muslims constitute the majority, in the sense that egoistic domination should not shape Muslim conduct. This principle is derived from the hostile actions of the Quraysh disbelievers of Mecca against Muhammad and his followers, who acted out of a perceived sense of superiority rooted in their dominance over the region. However, the situation differed when Muslims themselves became the dominant group. In such circumstances, Muhammad did not teach or endorse behavior analogous to that practiced by the Quraysh disbelievers.

Muhammad interpreted the concept of dominance as mutual protection and respect. This principle was applied in Medina, where Muslims held the majority. He condemned and firmly warned against all forms of oppression, looting, and murder, declaring that such acts would lead to punishment in Hell (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3052).

Religious Moderation: Social Life Beyond Identity Uniformity

Religious moderation also teaches the principle of “not judging based on differences of identity or ideology” so as to prevent injustice. Muhammad, in his role as a judge, demonstrated absolute fairness when a Muslim disputed land ownership with a Jew. Because the Muslim could not provide evidence, Muhammad ruled in favor of the Jewish party (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2417).

He likewise did not allow religious or social identity to influence his conduct in social or economic interactions. Muhammad employed a young Jewish servant (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1356), purchased goods from Jewish merchants (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1990), and once borrowed grain from a Jew, leaving his armor as collateral (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2069). In matters of *mu‘āmalah* (social and economic relations), he set aside all forms of identity-based ego. Muhammad was only firm and uncompromising when the principles of Islamic integrity and moral dignity were violated (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6786).

Religious Moderation: Mutual Promotion of Goodness

The flexibility of religious moderation also applies when considering the background of non-Muslims. As long as they are not in a state of hostility or confrontation, religious moderation is manifested through mutual acts of kindness. This aligns with the message of Qur’an al-Mumtaḥanah 8–9.

This principle was exemplified by ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar, who once instructed his servant, after slaughtering a goat, to give a portion of the meat to his Jewish neighbor. He did so out of adherence to the Prophet’s command to treat neighbors with kindness (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 5152). Similarly, Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr once asked whether she could visit and assist her polytheist mother, and Muhammad permitted her to do so (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2620).

Thus, religious moderation in non-conflict situations is understood as both inclusive and proactive: inclusive by opening space for interfaith benevolence, and proactive by permitting Muslims to initiate acts of goodness toward others. In peaceful contexts, such moderation requires active rather than passive forms of tolerance, as proactive engagement is essential for cultivating social cohesion. (Nafita Amelia Nur Hanifah, 2023).

Religious Moderation: Deterrence Against Perpetrators of Violence

For non-Muslims who declare war or hostility, religious moderation is expressed through firmness. In this context, moderation functions as exclusive and

defensive: exclusive because its application is limited, and defensive because forming alliances with non-Muslims who wage war is prohibited. This principle was exemplified by Muhammad when he confronted the polytheists of Mecca and certain Jewish tribes that violated their treaties by declaring war.

However, the notion of firmness here must not be understood as arbitrary or excessive. It remains bound by humanitarian principles. In this regard, Muhammad said, "Fight in the name of Allah and for the sake of Allah. Fight those who disbelieve in Allah. Do not compete over the spoils of war. Do not mutilate the bodies of the dead. Do not kill children, women, or the elderly" (*Musnad Aḥmad*, 2728). This teaching underscores that even in warfare, ethical restraint and respect for human dignity are fundamental elements of Islamic conduct.

Religious Moderation: Guaranteeing Freedom of Worship

Religious moderation in matters of worship is described as "allowing followers of other religions to perform their acts of worship without disturbance or interference." This principle was explicitly affirmed by Muhammad when he established Medina through its constitutional charter (Anjum, 2024). It was further reinforced by Abū Bakr when he instructed his troops not to destroy churches or synagogues and not to harm their priests. (al-Suyūṭī, 2016). Similarly, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, upon liberating *Bayt al-Maqdis*, commanded that the churches and synagogues there must not be demolished and that freedom of worship must be guaranteed. (Aṭ-Ṭabarī, 2011). Muhammad also permitted the Christian delegation from Najrān to perform their prayers inside the mosque. (al-Ḥanbalī, 1996). These examples illustrate that religious moderation in Islam is grounded in respect for the sanctity of worship and the freedom of faith for all communities. In this context, religious freedom is interpreted as the liberty to express one's acts of worship without engaging in judgments about which faith is right or wrong. (Junaedi, 2022).

Religious Moderation: Upholding Public Order and Security

Within the framework of Medinan society, Muhammad prioritized the principles of security and public order in building a multicultural city through covenant-based arrangements. (Skovgaard-Petersen, 2024). These included both the Constitution of Medina and other agreements. The message conveyed in these covenants is unequivocal: acts of arrogance or hostility toward followers of other religions are impermissible within a political order that upholds pluralism. Harm inflicted upon fellow citizens based on religious difference constitutes a reprehensible act that is not sanctioned in Islam. The Medinan covenants further affirm that Muhammad called upon the members of the polity to coexist peacefully, to respect one another, and to work collectively in building the civilization of Medina. (Hasrat Efendi Samosir et al., 2025).

The model of religious moderation outlined above is highly relevant to the needs of modern society at the individual, government, and civil society levels. At the individual level, the implementation of religious moderation promotes social synergy among citizens, prioritizes dialogue as a means of conflict resolution, and simultaneously reduces the likelihood of confrontational actions that are highly prone to occur. (Mohammed Hasan et al., 2025). At the governmental level, its implementation positions the state as an initiator of harmonious social relations, particularly through the promotion of proactive policies that support religious moderation (Ajibola, 2024). Meanwhile, for civil society organizations, religious moderation serves as a bridging mechanism that fosters public order and security among citizens while also serving as a platform for disseminating the importance of peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. (Arifin et al., 2024).

Compassion as a Foundational Ethic in Muhammad's Religious Moderation

Muhammad affirmed that he was a person filled with compassion. (al-Munāwī, 2018, volume 2, p. 572). This quality underpinned his remarkable wisdom and dynamic attitude in dealing with various non-Muslim groups under differing circumstances. For this reason, the Qur'an praises him with the verse: "Indeed, you are of a great moral character" (Qur'an al-Qalam 4).

Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī described Muhammad's moral excellence by recounting his attitude toward 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, one of the most hostile individuals in Medina and the leader of the hypocrites. Despite 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy's cruelty toward him, Muhammad still chose to pray for him and perform his funeral prayer. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb even reminded Muhammad of Ibn Ubayy's malice, yet the Prophet insisted on leading the prayer and offered his own garment as the shroud for Ibn Ubayy (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 1300) (al-Nawawī, 2017).

The meaning of compassion conveyed by Muhammad extends beyond familial affection. It encompasses universal compassion toward all human beings and every creation of God, including animals and plants (Bashārah, n.d.). Compassion is also directed toward both the righteous and the wicked. Showing compassion to wrongdoers means striving, through virtuous means, to help them be freed from their misconduct (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 6952) (al-'Asqalānī, 2011).

The internalization of religious moderation into noble ethics is exemplified in an incident when a group of Jews passed by Muhammad's house and distorted the greeting of peace by saying "*as-samū 'alayka*," meaning "death be upon you." 'Ā'ishah, hearing this, became upset and responded harshly. Muhammad then gently reminded her to act with greater patience and wisdom, advising her not to be provoked by the misconduct of others (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 6030) (al-'Asqalānī, 2011). Another remarkable example is when Muhammad was expelled and humiliated by the people of Ṭā'if. When Jibrīl offered to destroy the town in retribution, Muhammad refused and said, "Leave them, for I hope that their

descendants will one day worship Allah alone without associating anything with Him" (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 3231) (Muslim, 2013).

The foregoing *sīrah* underscores that Islamic values must be synergized with concrete action. The ethical and humanistic values of Islam, as directly embodied by Muhammad in his everyday conduct, demonstrably generated positive outcomes in social relations. Conversely, when the internalization of Islamic values fails to materialize in lived practice, Islam risks losing its spiritual essence. Indirectly, inappropriate and unethical behavior on the part of Muslims tarnishes the dignity of Islam and may provoke resentment and hostility toward the religion. (Sutrisno et al., 2024). This underscores that the key to fostering religious moderation lies in cultivating citizens' moral character, fostering emotional sensitivity, thereby facilitating collective awareness and encouraging active engagement in social harmony. (Abdurrazak et al., 2022).

Islam is neither propagated through hatred nor founded upon principles of animosity. The religious moderation embodied in Muhammad's actions essentially represents the internalization of noble ethical values by every Muslim. Practicing Islam by disseminating hatred toward non-Muslims constitutes a grave error, as such attitudes are likely to generate reciprocal hostility toward Muslims themselves.

Muhammad was gentle in demeanor, never harsh or vulgar in speech, and never repaid evil with evil (Abdul Qadir, 2022). Instead, he was forgiving and responded to wrongdoing with kindness (*Jāmi'* al-Tirmidhī, 2016) (al-Jābirī, n.d.,). The essence of religious moderation lies in ethical conduct, as reflected in the Prophet's saying: "Indeed, the best among you are those who possess the best character" (*Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, 3559). This implies that in social life, what matters most is not determining who is right or wrong, but rather who contributes the greatest benefit toward fostering harmony (Fathun et al., 2025).

The overall discussion demonstrates that the Prophet's interactions with non-Muslims were not uniform but strategically adapted to the social, political, and theological conditions of each encounter. This dynamic pattern directly addresses the study's central question: how Muhammad practiced religious moderation and how these values can be operationalized today. The findings show that moderation emerged through a calibrated balance between firmness and compassion, contextualized by the shifting realities of Mecca and Medina. His conduct toward adversaries, allies, captives, and peaceful communities reveals a coherent ethical framework that integrates protection, justice, empathy, and freedom of worship. By synthesizing these patterns, the study establishes that moderation in Islam is inherently situational rather than static, and therefore capable of guiding contemporary societies in managing diversity. This conceptual clarity provides the foundation for the concluding section, which formulates the study's contributions

and outlines practical implications for strengthening interreligious harmony in modern plural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Prophet Muhammad's interactions (as depicted in the *Sirah Nabawiyah*) with non-Muslims demonstrate a dynamic, context-dependent model of religious moderation. The findings directly answer the research questions by showing that moderation in the *Sirah Nabawiyah* was not a fixed moral posture but a calibrated response shaped by social conditions in Mecca and Medina. His conduct ranged from patience under persecution to protective governance to principled firmness toward hostile groups while consistently upholding justice, compassion, and freedom of worship. These patterns form a coherent framework that explains how moderation was practiced and how its values can be meaningfully applied in contemporary plural societies.

Methodologically, this study is limited by its reliance on textual data and the interpretive nature of library-based research. The analysis depends on the availability, authenticity, and contextual clarity of hadith and historical sources, which may restrict the depth of reconstruction for certain events. Future research would benefit from integrating socio-historical, anthropological, or quantitative approaches to examine how these prophetic models are understood, internalized, or contested within modern Muslim communities. Comparative studies across regions or traditions may also enrich the conceptualization of moderation beyond the Medinan context.

The findings open several avenues for further inquiry, including the development of operational indicators of prophetic moderation for use in education, interfaith engagement, and policy design. Theoretically, this study contributes a refined understanding of moderation as an adaptive ethical framework rooted in the Prophet's lived practice. Practically, the model derived from the *Sirah* offers guidance for strengthening social cohesion, preventing intolerance, and cultivating inclusive religious literacy in plural societies.

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