

State-Sponsored Qur'anic Exegesis and Interreligious Relations: A Comparative Study of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia

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This article explores how three state-sponsored *Qur'anic* exegeses—*al-Muntakhab* (Egypt), *al-Muyassar* (Saudi Arabia), and *al-Wajiz* (Indonesia)—conceptualize the essence of religion and articulate models of interreligious relations. These tafsirs are selected because they are produced by official state institutions and therefore reflect the ideological orientations and religious policies of their respective governments. Employing a qualitative comparative method, this study combines theoretical hermeneutics to reconstruct the historical meanings of the tafsirs with philosophical hermeneutics to assess their relevance for contemporary Indonesian society. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: methodological identity, the conception of religion in terms of unity and diversity, and approaches to interreligious relations encompassing dialogue, social harmony, and cooperation. The findings demonstrate that although the three tafsirs share fundamental theological premises—such as monotheism, prophetic continuity, and moral universality—they differ significantly in interpretive orientation. *Al-Muntakhab* reflects a rational-moderate Azhari tradition, *al-Muyassar* adopts a scripturalist Salafi framework with exclusivist tendencies, while *al-Wajiz* advances an inclusive and accommodative hermeneutic aligned with Indonesia's pluralistic ethos and the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This study argues that state-sponsored tafsir functions not merely as a religious text but as an ideological instrument that shapes public religious discourse. When oriented toward justice, equality, and interreligious cooperation, such tafsir can contribute meaningfully to religious moderation in plural societies.

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Public Interest Statement

This study examines how state-sponsored *Qur'anic* interpretations in Indonesia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia shape public attitudes toward religious diversity and the coexistence of different religions. By comparing *al-Wajiz*, *al-Muntakhab*, and *al-Muyassar*, the study shows that *Qur'anic* interpretation is not only a religious exercise but also reflects each state's vision of social harmony, citizenship, and interreligious relations. The findings highlight that Indonesia's state tafsir promotes inclusive and pluralistic values aligned with the national commitment to religious moderation, while other models emphasize different theological priorities. This study helps readers understand how religious texts influence public life, interfaith relations, and social cohesion. Its insights are relevant to educators, religious leaders, policymakers, and the wider public concerned with fostering peaceful coexistence in religiously diverse societies.



Introduction

The Qur'an, as divine revelation, occupies a central and authoritative place in Islamic thought. However, its meanings are expressed through tafsir, a human interpretive enterprise shaped by the social, historical, ideological, and political contexts in which it is produced. Classical Islamic scholarship has long acknowledged that no exegete approaches the Qur'an as a blank slate; instead, each interpreter brings presuppositions rooted in culture, education, theological

affiliation, and socio-political reality (Samsudin, 2006; Setiawan, 2008, pp. 67–73). The report underlying this article emphasizes that tafsir, even when presented as neutral and simplified, is never free from the interpreter’s worldview and institutional commitments (Wijaya et al., 2022; Balqis, 2025). This insight is fundamental for understanding the contemporary phenomenon of state-sponsored Qur’anic exegesis, where interpretive authority is exercised not by individual scholars alone but by national religious institutions.

In the modern Muslim world, states increasingly participate in shaping religious authority, often by producing standardized religious texts meant to guide the wider public. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia represent three significant examples of this development. Each country has produced an official simplified tafsir for mass consumption: *al-Muntakhab* by the Egyptian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, *al-Muyassar* by the King Fahd Qur’an Printing Complex of Saudi Arabia, and *al-Wajiz* (*Tafsir Ringkas*) by Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs. Although the stated aim of these works is to make the Qur’an more accessible to ordinary readers, their interpretive approaches inevitably reflect the ideological orientations and national priorities of the states that produced them Muchlis Hanafi, “Kata Pengantar” in (Kemenag, 2016a, pp. xxxiii–xlii).

Previous scholarship has devoted considerable attention to Qur’anic perspectives on pluralism, religious diversity, and the status of *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Works such as Malik’s research on interreligious dialogue (Thoha, 2010) and Ahmad Izzan’s analysis of inclusivism in *Tafsir al-Mizān* have enriched the field (Izzan, 2013, pp. 6–8). However, these studies have focused mainly on individual exegetes rather than institutions. Moreover, the literature does not sufficiently address how state ideology shapes Qur’anic interpretation, nor how national identity influences exegetical discussions on interreligious relations. This study identifies this gap, noting that there has been no comparative analysis of *al-Muntakhab*, *al-Muyassar*, and *al-Wajiz*—three tafsirs representing distinct political theologies and state structures.

Addressing this gap is crucial because contemporary states, particularly multi-religious ones, actively manage religious diversity through policies, discourse, and interpretive frameworks. Indonesia, for example, recognizes six official religions and mandates the state to protect religious life across communities. Various belief traditions found in Indonesia can be observed in (Nurdjana, 2009). As a result, the interpretation of *Qur’anic* verses about religious diversity, cooperation, and dialogue is not merely a theological matter but also a civic and political concern. Understanding how each country’s tafsir constructs interreligious relations, therefore, provides insight into broader questions of citizenship, public ethics, and social cohesion.

Methodologically, this study uses two complementary hermeneutical approaches: theoretical hermeneutics, which reconstructs objective meanings in their historical context (Bleicher, 2017, p. 15), and philosophical hermeneutics, which seeks contemporary meaningful understanding through a fusion of horizons (Samsudin, 2006; Setiawan, 2008, pp. 67–73). This dual approach allows the analysis to trace how each tafsir was shaped by its institutional origins while also assessing its relevance to Indonesia’s religiously diverse context.

This article proceeds by presenting a comparative analysis of the tafsirs in terms of their methodological identity, their conception of the essence of religion, and their construction of interreligious relations. The findings demonstrate that while the three tafsirs affirm universal religious principles—unity of divine origin, prophetic continuity, and moral universality—each articulates a distinctive interpretive stance informed by state ideology: Azhari rationalism in Egypt, Salafi scripturalism in Saudi Arabia, and *Wasathiyah* pluralism in Indonesia (Shihab, 2007).

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is not only to describe differences among the tafsirs but also to articulate their implications for religious life in Indonesia. By comparing the three models, the study sheds light on how Qur’anic interpretation can support pluralism, harmony, and citizenship in a multi-religious society. This introduction situates the study within contemporary debates on religion and state authority and prepares the ground for a more detailed discussion in the subsequent section.

Literature Review

The literature on the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ interpretation/translation of the Qur’an—often referred to as the “state interpretation”—can generally be summarized into four lines of inquiry. First, the authority path, which is the debate about who has the most authority in determining the meaning in official products: the state, the drafting team, or the scientific tradition they bring to the table. Second, the moderation/*wasathiyah* path, which sees moderation as a way of reading that is formed through the choice of diction and the framework of verse explanation. Third, the interfaith relations pathway (verses on tolerance, the concept of “kafir,” the meaning of *amlīyā*), which is often the most sensitive point because it concerns both social and theological boundaries. Fourth, the political-ideological pathway, which reads official interpretations/translations as a discourse practice to manage pluralism and respond to issues of extremism, not merely as a product of textual study.

In the category of authority, Dinata (2012) shows how the Ministry of Religious Affairs' thematic interpretation of interfaith relations can be read as a way of formulating the language of tolerance and religious freedom within an official framework through a critical discourse analysis approach. This reading, which emphasizes “official language,” is then challenged by Lukman (2024), who tests the claim of state control over state commission translations. Through a comparison of key verses (including Q5:51), he asserts that the label “state-commissioned” does not automatically equate to total control because the authority of the interpreter and scientific tradition continue to shape the results of translation/interpretation. In the next phase, Rosi et al. (2025) shifted the discussion of authority to the level of translation ideology by comparing the translations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Hilali–Khan, especially on *tawhid*, *awliya'*, and gender, showing that “authority” also works through language choices that favor certain meanings.

In the category of moderation/*wasathiyah*, Cholily (2023) explored the meaning of *ummatan wasatan* by comparing the 1990 and 2019 editions of the Al-Qur'an and its Translation. From this, it appears that the construction of moderation also moves through changes in diction and framing in the ministry's official products. Farhan and Subagio (2024) placed *wasathiyah* not only as a concept but also as an idea that is pushed into the realm of implementation, for example, related to social harmony and the prevention of extremism. This trend was then enriched by Nurrohim et al. (2024), who compared the interpretations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs/MORA and Tafsir An-Nur, so that moderation appears as a negotiated concept-not singular-between official and non-state interpretation traditions.

In the category of interfaith relations, Dinata (2012) is an early reference that maps how tolerance and religious freedom are framed in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' thematic interpretation of interfaith relations. The pattern of “social tolerance but still with theological boundaries” is then seen in Nando et al. (2023), who compare the Ministry of Religious Affairs' interpretation with *Shawkānī (Fath al-Qadīr)* on verses of tolerance (2:256; 6:108; 109:1–6). In the conceptual realm, Hidayatullah et al. (2024) examine the term “kafir” by comparing *Marah Labid* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' interpretation, then highlight the Ministry of Religious Affairs' interpretation's tendency to be more contextual/inclusive in reading Muslim-non-Muslim relations. Meanwhile, Hadi et al. (2024) emphasized how the Ministry of Religious Affairs' thematic interpretation of religious moderation regulates the “limits of tolerance”: recognizing the ritual freedom of others and encouraging good *mu' amalah* while rejecting the mixing of rituals. In a more recent study, Nasution et al. (2025) formulated principles of tolerance from the corpus of tolerance verses in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' thematic interpretation, which reinforced the tendency of theme-based normative mapping of verses.

In the political-ideological category, Mursyid (2021) examines the state's interpretation of *fiqh* verses in the Qur'an and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir, placing it in the context of political policies that can influence the interpretation style. This line is expanded by Mursyid et al. (2024), who use Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to read official exegesis products (including the 1980 edition/product context) as part of the discourse of pluralism and politically oriented interfaith conversations. Finally, Taufik et al. (2025) place the Ministry of Religious Affairs' thematic interpretations within a Foucauldian framework of power relations, focusing on the reframing of the meaning of jihad as a counter-radicalism strategy, as well as the state's efforts to build legitimacy in a pluralistic public sphere.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on the state's interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia, existing studies largely remain fragmented along thematic or national lines. Most studies focus either on internal debates about authority, moderation, or tolerance within the Indonesian context or analyze specific verses and concepts without situating them within a broader comparative state framework. Consequently, the literature has not yet fully addressed how different models of state-sponsored tafsir function as ideological instruments shaped by distinct political theologies and national priorities. In particular, there is a lack of comparative analysis that places Indonesia's *al-Wajiz* in direct dialogue with other state tafsirs, such as Egypt's *al-Muntakhab* and Saudi Arabia's *al-Muyassar*, to examine how state ideology systematically informs the hermeneutical orientation, construction of religious diversity, and models of interreligious relations. This study advances the state of the art by moving beyond verse-level or single-country analyses and offering a cross-national hermeneutic comparison that conceptualizes state-sponsored tafsir as a form of governance-oriented religious discourse, thereby contributing a new analytical lens to contemporary *Qur'anic* and religion–state studies.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach grounded in close textual analysis of *Qur'anic* exegesis. It explores how state-sponsored tafsirs articulate the meaning of religion, negotiate the unity–diversity relationship among religions, and frame the norms of interreligious relations in contemporary society. Each tafsir is approached as an interpretive formation situated within a specific institutional and socio-religious horizon, allowing the analysis

to read exegesis not merely as doctrinal explanation but as a public-facing discourse shaped by authority, pedagogy and governance.

The primary corpus consists of three widely circulated state-sponsored tafsirs: *al-Muntakhab fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* from Egypt, *Tafsir al-Muyassar* from Saudi Arabia, and *Tafsir al-Wajiz* (also known as Tafsir Ringkas Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia) from Indonesia. These works were selected because they function as official or semi-official interpretive references within their respective national contexts and are commonly used in religious education and public discourses. The analysis draws on the most accessible and widely disseminated editions of each tafsir to ensure that the readings reflect the interpretations actively circulating in the public sphere.

The unit of analysis is the tafsir commentary attached to *Qur'anic* verses that address religion, religious differences, and interreligious relations. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the study is oriented toward thematic comparison, focusing on interpretive moments that are central to contemporary discussions of pluralism and coexistence. To maintain analytical coherence, verses and thematic clusters identified as significant in one tafsir were examined in parallel in the other two, enabling a matched and balanced comparison across the three cases.

Analytically, this study is guided by a dual hermeneutic orientation that integrates historical–institutional reconstruction with contemporary contextual engagement. The first orientation draws on theoretical hermeneutics to situate each tafsir within its institutional setting and interpretive horizon, clarifying how authoritative meanings are stabilized and disseminated across time and space. The second orientation draws on philosophical hermeneutics to engage with the text dialogically, examining how these meanings resonate with present social realities, particularly within the Indonesian context. Through this dual movement, interpretation is approached as both historically situated and contemporary.

To clarify the analytical workflow employed in this comparative reading, Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the data sources, analytical focus, and interpretive steps consistently applied across the three tafsirs.

Table 1. Analytical Structure of the Comparative Hermeneutic Method

Analytical Stage	Object of Analysis	Analytical Focus	Analytical Outcome
Corpus identification	State-sponsored tafsirs (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia)	Institutional position and public function of tafsir	Interpretive horizon of each tafsir
Thematic selection	Verses and verse clusters on religion and interreligious relations	Unity–diversity, pluralism, social interaction	Comparable thematic corpus
Hermeneutic reading I	Tafsir texts within their original contexts	Normative emphasis and interpretive orientation	Institutional interpretive patterns
Hermeneutic reading II	Tafsir texts in dialogue with contemporary context	Ethical and social relevance	Contextualized meaning
Cross-tafsir comparison	Egypt–Saudi–Indonesia tafsir readings	Convergences, divergences, and conditional positions	Comparative interpretive typology
Analytical synthesis	Integrated comparative findings	Pattern consolidation and characterization	Final comparative framework

Table 1 presents the analytical structure of the comparative hermeneutic method used in this study. It outlines the sequential relationship between the data sources, the focus of interpretation at each stage, and the analytical outcomes generated through this process. By aligning thematic selection, hermeneutic reading, and cross-tafsir comparison, the table illustrates how interpretive coherence is maintained across the three national cases and how individual readings are integrated into a unified comparative framework.

Results and Discussion

Methodological Identity: The Shape of State Hermeneutics

The methodological identity of *al-Muntakhab* is deeply rooted in the intellectual legacy of al-Azhar, an institution historically associated with moderation, rationality, and a harmonizing approach to Islamic scholarship. The report indicates that the Egyptian exegetical tradition has long emphasized clarity of meaning, balance between textual fidelity and rational explanation, and an overarching concern for presenting Islam in a manner conducive to civic unity (Jansen, 1980; Kulieva, 2022). This results in a tafsir that not only simplifies classical interpretations but also integrates rational arguments when necessary to maintain theological coherence and ensure broad public accessibility. The

linguistic presentation of *al-Muntakhab* is likewise tailored to contemporary readers, with systematic choices in diction designed to deliver the Qur'anic message in clear and communicative Arabic, reflecting Egypt's mission to create a tafsir that is both authoritative and socially stabilizing (Jansen, 1980; Kulieva, 2022).

Furthermore, *al-Muntakhab* is explicitly framed as a national religious project, produced by the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (*al-Majlis al-'Alā li al-Shu'un al-Islāmiyyah*) under the Ministry of Religious Endowments. As noted in the report, its publication aims to disseminate “moderate religious understanding” that aligns with broader state policies focused on combating extremist interpretations and promoting social harmony (Jansen, 1980, p. 11). The ideological undertone, while subtle, reinforces a civic theology that positions Islam as compatible with national unity and contemporary statehood. Rather than engaging in polemic or doctrinal exclusivism, the tafsir promotes a model of religiosity that supports social order, mutual respect, and integration within a pluralistic Egyptian society. This combination of rational explanation, linguistic accessibility, and ideological moderation forms the core of *al-Muntakhab*'s methodological identity (Jansen, 1980, p. 11).

Al-Muyassar embodies a markedly different hermeneutical structure, reflecting Saudi Arabia's scripturalist Salafi theology. The report highlights that while the tafsir officially presents itself as objective and straightforward, its interpretive approach remains deeply rooted in Salafi commitments to literalism, anti-speculative reasoning, and strict adherence to the textual indications of the Qur'an (Nukhbatu min al-'Ulamā,' 1433, p. vi). As a simplified tafsir intended for broad public use, *al-Muyassar* avoids elaborate theological discourse; yet the underlying methodology mirrors Saudi Arabia's broader religious orientation, which prioritizes clarity of doctrine and the purification of belief from perceived innovations. The linguistic style is minimalistic, concise, and focused on direct meaning (*al-ma'nā al-mubāshir*), reflecting an exegetical ethos that seeks to eliminate interpretive ambiguity (“Muqaddimah al-Tafsir” in Nukhbatu min al-'Ulamā,' 1433, pp. viii–ix).

Additionally, the production of *al-Muyassar* by the King Fahd Qur'an Printing Complex underscores the state's involvement in shaping and disseminating authoritative religious knowledge. As the report notes, one of its explicit objectives is to reinforce sound '*aqīdah* among Muslims worldwide, demonstrating how tafsir is simultaneously a pedagogical and ideological instrument (“Muqaddimah al-Tafsir” in Nukhbatu min al-'Ulamā,' 1433, p. vi). Its reliance on classical Salafi-leaning sources and its insistence on doctrinal boundaries illustrate a hermeneutic that is less concerned with socio-political diversity and more focused on reinforcing theological uniformity within the global Muslim community. The result is a tafsir that reflects the Saudi state's prioritization of theological purity, centralized religious authority, and a universalizing Salafi worldview.

Indonesia's *al-Wajiz* represents a hermeneutical orientation shaped by the doctrinal and political framework of *Wasathiyah* (religious moderation) promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The tafsir is explicitly intended to function as a national reference for moderate Islamic understanding, aligning with Indonesia's constitutional commitment to religious diversity and inter-religious harmony (Kemenag, 2016a, p. xl). It uses a linguistic style that is simple, communicative, and accessible to general readers, reflecting the government's aim of providing a tafsir that can be understood across educational and socio-cultural backgrounds (Kemenag, 2016a, p. xl). Furthermore, its methodological structure—combining thematic explanations with verse-by-verse interpretation—serves to integrate Qur'anic messages with the lived reality of Indonesia as a multi-religious nation.

Beyond stylistic accessibility, *al-Wajiz* embeds within its interpretive framework the state's principles of pluralism, tolerance, and Pancasila-based civic ethics. This tafsir consistently interprets Qur'anic verses in a manner that foregrounds social harmony, justice, and peaceful coexistence among Indonesia's officially recognized religions (Wijaya et al., 2022). Its theological posture avoids exclusivist rhetoric and instead emphasizes universal ethical values that can foster mutual respect across religious boundaries. This makes *al-Wajiz* not only a religious commentary but also an ideological articulation of Indonesia's national project of *kerukunan* (harmony). In essence, its *Wasathiyah* approach blends classical Islamic teachings with modern civic responsibilities, producing a tafsir uniquely aligned with the Indonesian socio-political landscape.

When viewed comparatively, the methodological identities of the three tafsirs reflect a spectrum of state-driven hermeneutics shaped by national ideologies. Here, *al-Muntakhab* represents a moderate rationalist approach rooted in the Azhari tradition; *al-Muyassar* embodies scriptural strictness derived from Salafi orthodoxy; while *al-Wajiz* articulates pluralistic *Wasathiyah* values tied to Indonesia's civic principles. This spectrum illustrates that methodological distinctions in tafsir are not merely academic but are embedded in the institutional and political priorities of the states that produce them. The differences in language, thematic emphases, and interpretive strategy across the three tafsirs reflect how each state interprets its religious obligations in relation to national identity and social cohesion.

More importantly, the synthesis reveals that state-sponsored tafsir does not emerge from neutral hermeneutical processes. Rather, these tafsirs are “ideological projects” that encode the state’s vision of religion, society, and national identity within their interpretive frameworks. Whereas Egypt emphasizes civic moderation, Saudi Arabia prioritizes doctrinal purity, and Indonesia promotes pluralistic coexistence. These methodological identities profoundly influence how each tafsir constructs theological concepts and frames interreligious relations. Understanding this methodological spectrum is essential for recognizing the dynamics of contemporary Qur’anic interpretation and the role of state authority in shaping public religious discourse.

Conceptions of the Essence of Religion: Unity and Diversity

All three state-sponsored tafsirs—*al-Muntakhab*, *al-Muyassar*, and *al-Wajiz*—begin their theological frameworks with a shared set of classical Islamic principles concerning the essence of religion. Each tafsir affirms the unity of divine revelation, portraying all prophets as bearers of a single essential message centered on monotheism and moral uprightness. This shared principle reflects the Qur’anic affirmation that religious revelation originates from one divine source, even though the historical expressions of religion vary. Such emphasis on unity serves as a foundational hermeneutical constant across the three tafsirs, grounding their discussions of religious difference in a broader narrative of divine continuity. Their approach underscores that Islam does not emerge as a rupture from earlier revelations but as their confirmation and completion, a view deeply embedded within mainstream Sunni theology.

This shared affirmation of unity extends into their recognition of prophetic continuity. The tafsirs describe the succession of prophets as a chain of moral educators commissioned to guide humanity toward truth and virtue (Majlis al-A‘lā li al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2006, p. 437). By foregrounding ethical universality, such as justice, compassion, and integrity, tafsirs establish that moral values constitute the timeless essence of religion. Although articulated differently, this moral universality serves as the interpretive starting point before the tafsirs diverge in describing how religious diversity should be understood. While the theological core remains consistent across Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia, their subsequent treatments of diversity depend on how each nation interprets its historical, cultural, and political context.

Al-Muntakhab (Egypt) and *al-Wajiz* (Indonesia) adopt an inclusive interpretation of religious diversity. Both tafsirs understand the differences among religious communities not as theological aberrations but as part of divine will (*sunnatullah*) governing human plurality (Kemenag, 2016a, p. 374; Majlis al-A‘lā li al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2006, p. 220). In this view, diversity becomes an opportunity for cooperation, moral competition in good deeds, and social harmony. Egypt’s Azhari tradition lends *al-Muntakhab* a hermeneutic of balance, presenting religious diversity as a natural and historically grounded outcome of humanity’s encounter with revelation. Indonesia’s *al-Wajiz*, shaped by the nation’s pluralistic context, goes further by framing diversity as a civic necessity: coexistence is not merely tolerated, but positively encouraged through an ethic of respectful engagement.

Furthermore, both tafsirs emphasize the enduring value of earlier prophetic communities. While acknowledging instances of doctrinal distortion, they nonetheless present Judaism and Christianity as legitimate religious traditions with shared ethical commitments and scriptural origins (Majlis al-A‘lā li al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2006, p. 141). This theological generosity allows *al-Muntakhab* and *al-Wajiz* to promote models of interreligious respect and cooperation, aligning with their respective national ideologies—Egypt’s civic nationalism and Indonesia’s Pancasila-based pluralism. In both cases, religious diversity is framed as something that enriches society, and the essence of religion is understood to be compatible with peaceful pluralistic coexistence.

In contrast, *al-Muyassar* (Saudi Arabia) takes a markedly exclusivist view of religious diversity. The tafsir repeatedly frames the religious communities that emerged after Islam as having deviated from their original monotheistic teachings. This narrative emphasizes the corruption (*tahrif*) of earlier scriptures and interprets religious plurality largely as a sign of theological decline rather than divine intentionality (Nukhbatu min al-‘Ulamā,’ 1433, p. 107). From the perspective of *al-Muyassar*, Islam represents the restoration of primordial monotheism, and any existing religious differences are symptoms of human error, innovation, or moral failure. This interpretive stance aligns closely with Saudi Arabia’s Salafi theological framework, which seeks to purify belief and avoid any ambiguity in defining religious truth.

Additionally, *al-Muyassar* situates religious diversity within a broader worldview that prioritizes clear doctrinal boundaries. This tafsir frequently categorizes communities based on their theological correctness or deviation, thereby defining religious identity in sharply demarcated terms (Nukhbatu min al-‘Ulamā,’ 1433, p. 52). Unlike the more inclusive approaches of Egypt and Indonesia, *al-Muyassar* does not frame diversity as a morally positive or divinely intended reality; instead, it underscores the necessity of guiding others toward the Islamic truth. Consequently, the

essence of religion is presented as a singular, exclusive path that leaves little room for recognizing theological integrity in other traditions.

These divergent interpretations of unity and diversity reveal the extent to which national ideology shapes the conception of religion within state-sponsored tafsir. The report explicitly states that the three tafsirs “They agree on the core aspects of religion, yet differ sharply in their views on religious diversity,” demonstrating that the political context directly influences theological interpretation (Wijaya et al., 2022). Egypt and Indonesia employ inclusive hermeneutics because their sociopolitical realities demand interreligious coexistence; thus, their tafsirs portray diversity as part of God’s wisdom. Saudi Arabia’s political-religious structure, however, prioritizes safeguarding doctrinal purity, leading *al-Muyassar* to emphasize exclusivist readings and portray diversity as a deviation from the truth.

Table 2. State-Sponsored Tafsir and Conceptions of Religious Unity and Diversity

Tafsir	Unity Emphasis	Diversity View	National Influence
Al-Muntakhab	Prophetic chain, moral ethics	Divine will, cooperation	Azhari balance, civic ethic
Al-Wajiz	Shared revelation, tauhid	Civic necessity, tolerance	Pluralism, Pancasila harmony
Al-Muyassar	Single source, monotheism	Corruption, decline	Salafi purity, exclusivity

As shown in Table 2, the broader hermeneutical implication is that the “essence of religion” is not interpreted in isolation from the social and political structures. Rather, each state embeds its religious priorities within its tafsir: Egypt frames religion as a stabilizing civic ethic, Indonesia as a pluralistic foundation for national harmony, and Saudi Arabia as a site of uncompromising doctrinal clarity. These interpretive orientations influence not only theological discourse but also shape societal attitudes toward religious plurality. Recognizing these hermeneutical patterns helps illuminate how state-sponsored tafsir functions simultaneously as a religious and ideological instrument, crafting distinct visions of what religion is-and what it ought to be-in diverse national contexts.

Interreligious Relations: Dialogue, Harmony, and Boundary-Making

All three state-sponsored tafsirs—*al-Muntakhab*, *al-Muyassar*, and *al-Wajiz*—begin their treatment of interreligious relations with a shared ethical framework grounded in Qur’anic moral universals. Each tafsir affirms principles such as justice, kindness, and respect for human dignity as foundational norms governing Muslim interactions with followers of other religions (Wijaya et al., 2022). These shared values are anchored in Qur’anic injunctions to engage others with wisdom and good counsel, uphold fairness even toward religious outsiders, and avoid hostility except in cases of explicit aggression. By foregrounding these universal ethics, the three tafsirs establish a common theological baseline before diverging in their specific prescriptions and interpretations concerning other religious communities.

Moreover, these shared ethical principles are rooted in the recognition of a common human moral horizon. Regardless of doctrinal divergence, the tafsirs interpret the Qur’an as encouraging peaceful coexistence and cooperation on matters of public good. This shared framing demonstrates that, at their core, the three tafsirs seek to align Muslim conduct with the Qur’anic ethic of balance and moderation. Only after grounding the discussion in these universal values do the tafsirs begin to articulate their distinct models of interreligious boundaries, shaped by the respective political, historical, and cultural contexts of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia.

Al-Muntakhab approaches interreligious relations through a lens of civic moderation shaped by Egypt’s Azhari heritage and its long history of Muslim–Christian coexistence. This tafsir emphasizes ethical relations rooted in fairness, goodwill, and social harmony, drawing on Qur’anic instructions that encourage Muslims to maintain respectful relations with peaceful non-Muslims. It can be seen how *al-Muntakhab* interprets verses concerning interreligious relations, such as Q. 2:85, Q. 2:119, Q. 21:107, and Q. 3:159, among others (Majlis al-A’lā li al-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2006, pp. 13, 18, 19, 331, 71). The tafsir frequently frames these relationships in terms of national unity, implying that constructive intercommunal relations contribute to Egypt’s broader social stability. By doing so, *al-Muntakhab* aligns Islamic teachings with the civic values upheld by the Egyptian state, projecting a model of interreligious relations that privileges coexistence and collaborative citizenship.

A key feature of *al-Muntakhab* is its tendency to balance theological exclusivity with practical inclusivity. While affirming the finality of Islam, it avoids hostile depictions of Jews and Christians and instead stresses shared Abrahamic roots and moral commonalities (Majlis al-A’lā li al-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2006, p. 84). Thus, it offers a model in which theological disagreements do not preclude peaceful engagement—a perspective that resonates with Egypt’s need to preserve harmony within its plural religious landscape. The tafsir thus becomes an instrument of civic ethics, promoting a religious worldview that supports coexistence without compromising Islamic doctrinal identity.

Al-Wajiz reflects Indonesia's *Wasathiyah* paradigm, framing interreligious relations explicitly within the ethical and constitutional context of a multi-religious nation. The report explains that this tafsir emphasizes cooperation (*ta'awun*) across religious boundaries, highlighting Qur'anic calls for working together in righteousness and public welfare (Kemenag, 2016a, pp. 287–288). It underscores that Indonesia's plurality is a sociological and theological reality that must be respected, and aligns Qur'anic interpretation with the principles of Pancasila, particularly unity, social justice, and respect for religious diversity. This orientation reflects a hermeneutic that sees interreligious engagement not as merely permissible but as essential for the flourishing of Indonesian civil society.

Furthermore, *al-Wajiz* adopts an explicitly positive stance toward harmonious relations with followers of other faiths, encouraging dialogue, mutual assistance, and avoidance of hostility. This emphasis is rooted in the lived reality of Indonesia as a nation with recognized religious diversity, and the tafsir intentionally integrates Islamic norms with civic ideals of pluralism (F. Ismail, 2012, pp. 82–84, 111–112, 2014, pp. 126–127). Here, the tafsir steers clear of exclusivist rhetoric and instead highlights universal moral commitments shared by various faith traditions. Through this integrative approach, *al-Wajiz* constructs a distinctly Indonesian model of interreligious relations grounded in cooperation, peaceful coexistence, and shared national identity.

In contrast to the inclusive tone of *al-Muntakhab* and *al-Wajiz*, *al-Muyassar* articulates an interreligious framework rooted in theological exclusivism and doctrinal boundary-making. The report makes clear that this tafsir portrays relations with non-Muslims primarily through a corrective lens, emphasizing the deviation of earlier religious communities from the monotheistic path. It frequently underscores the concept of *tahrif* (scriptural distortion), thereby framing contemporary Judaism and Christianity as theologically corrupt iterations of originally pure traditions (Nukhbatu min al-'Ulamā', 1433, p. 116). Such an interpretation can be traced back to the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr (Ibn Kathīr, 1998, p. 2/65; Ṭabarī (al), 2000, p. 10/378). This hermeneutic aligns with Saudi Arabia's Salafī orientation, which prioritizes protecting Islamic belief from influences deemed incorrect or innovative.

As a result, *al-Muyassar* places stronger emphasis on warning believers against adopting the practices or beliefs of other religious groups. The primary mode of engagement portrayed in the tafsir is *da'wah*-inviting others to Islam rather than fostering mutual cooperation. While not advocating hostility, *al-Muyassar* nonetheless establishes strict boundaries to ensure that interaction with non-Muslims does not compromise doctrinal purity. This approach reflects an exclusivist theological framework that views interreligious relations through the prism of safeguarding faith rather than cultivating civic harmony (Nukhbatu min al-'Ulamā', 1433, p. 10).

The interreligious orientations of these tafsirs cannot be separated from the broader ideological goals of their respective states (Wijaya et al., 2022). In Egypt, the state leverages Azhari authority to promote a moderate religious discourse that supports national stability and curbs extremism. Consequently, *al-Muntakhab* articulates an interreligious ethic that emphasizes coexistence and national cohesion. Indonesia, as a multi-religious democracy, uses *al-Wajiz* to institutionalize *wasathiyah* values, aligning Qur'anic interpretation with the state's mandate to protect all recognized religions and foster interfaith harmony. This produces a tafsir that frames pluralism as both a theological and constitutional imperative.

Saudi Arabia, by contrast, deploys *al-Muyassar* to reinforce its religious identity as the guardian of Islamic orthodoxy. The state's investment in scriptural literalism and Salafī doctrine shapes a tafsir centered on defending theological boundaries rather than promoting interreligious cooperation (Bruckmayr, 2024; Pink, 2010; Piscatori and Saikal, 2019; Yakubovych, 2024). As such, each tafsir is not only a religious text but also a political instrument that communicates the state's expectations regarding interfaith conduct. The differing political structures—pluralist democracy, centralized monarchy, and nationalist republic—thus produce distinct hermeneutical outcomes in Qur'anic interpretation.

Table 3. Models of Interreligious Relations in State-Sponsored Tafsir

Tafsir	Core Ethical Frame	Key Relations Model	State Alignment
Al-Muntakhab	Fairness, harmony	Civic moderation	Azhari stability
Al-Wajiz	Ta'awun, welfare	Pluralistic cooperation	Pancasila pluralisme
Al-Muyassar	Doctrinal purity	Corrective da'wah	Salafi exclusivity

As shown in Table 3, the three tafsirs illustrate three distinct models of Qur'anic interreligious hermeneutics. *Al-Wajiz* represents a pluralistic-cooperative model rooted in Indonesia's diverse sociopolitical context; *al-Muntakhab* embodies a civic-moderate model aimed at fostering stability and ethical coexistence within a shared national identity; and *al-Muyassar* expresses a corrective exclusivist model that prioritizes doctrinal clarity and demarcation. These models illuminate how Qur'anic interpretation becomes a mirror of each state's ideological commitments and social realities.

The differences among the tafsirs show that interreligious relations in state-sponsored Qur'anic interpretation are not purely theological constructs but are shaped by sociopolitical imperatives and national visions. The report concludes that each tafsir “constructs views of other religions that align with the ideological framework of each respective state,” demonstrating the integral role of state ideology in shaping how Muslims are instructed to understand and interact with religious others (Wijaya et al., 2022). Recognizing these patterns helps clarify how contemporary Muslim-majority states appropriate Qur'anic interpretation to cultivate specific models of interreligious engagement, whether inclusive, moderate, or exclusivist.

Implications for Indonesia

The synthesis of *Qur'anic* perspectives on interreligious relations, as reflected in state-sponsored tafsirs-*al-Muntakhab*, *al-Muyassar*, and *al-Wajiz*-has profound implications for Indonesia's pluralistic society. Indonesia, a nation characterized by its rich tapestry of ethnicities and belief systems, houses six officially recognized religions, which together create both opportunities for harmony and risks of conflict. Scholars have noted that interreligious tensions often stem from absolutist theological claims, socioeconomic disparities, historical suppression of local cultures, and competition over resources (Ardi et al., 2021). Conversely, the resilience of moral foundations rooted in local wisdom and the presence of rational, pluralistic community leaders serve as a robust counterbalance, fostering peaceful coexistence in Indonesian society (Kusuma & Susilo, 2020).

The ethical dimensions of the Qur'an, particularly those interpreting cooperation in goodness (Q. 2:148), prohibitions against mockery and suspicion (Q. 49:11–12), and invitations to discourse with wisdom (Q. 16:125), provide valuable insights that can reinforce social cohesion in a diverse landscape. These *Qur'anic* interpretations highlight shared moral values and encourage interreligious dialogue, positioning them as essential theological resources that support Indonesia's aim toward achieving social harmony amidst diversity. Thus, the state-sponsored tafsirs cultivate a narrative that recognizes and embraces this diversity within the framework of Islam, enabling constructive engagement across various belief systems.

To effectively foster interreligious harmony, Indonesia necessitates intentional, state-guided strategies. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama, Kemenag) emerges as a pivotal institution in this endeavor. Significant policies under its purview include revitalizing traditional institutions to enhance community resilience and promoting participatory social engagement that encompasses diverse religious perspectives (Hutabarat, 2023). Furthermore, developing an awareness of multiculturalism through training local leaders and distributing legal frameworks concerning interreligious interactions is pivotal in preventing the exploitation of religion for divisive goals.

The ethical lines drawn by *Qur'anic* interpretations, particularly as encapsulated in the aforementioned tafsirs, move beyond mere theological discourse to serve as foundational ideological resources for Indonesia's ongoing commitment to nurturing a peaceful, pluralistic society rooted in the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. This motto underscores the intrinsic value of diversity, suggesting that the coexistence of various faiths and cultures enriches the social fabric of Indonesia rather than undermines it.

It is critical to acknowledge that while the presence of interreligious tensions reflects historical and socio-political contexts, the *Qur'anic* principles articulated in the tafsirs advocate for understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among different faiths, which can guide Indonesia toward a future of strengthened unity amid diversity (Mujahidin, 2021; Zacharias et al., 2023). The promotion of interfaith discourse and the recognition of shared ethical responsibilities can significantly mitigate conflicts, nurturing a climate where peaceful coexistence is not only a possibility but an enduring aspiration.

The Role of State Tafsir in Moderation

State tafsir occupies a unique position in shaping religious moderation in Indonesia. Unlike individually authored exegeses, state-sponsored tafsirs such as *al-Wajiz* (Indonesia), *al-Muntakhab* (Egypt), and *al-Muyassar* (Saudi Arabia) are collectively produced by councils of scholars operating within governmental institutions. Their interpretations reflect not only scholarly reasoning but also the state's responsibility to protect the rights and well-being of all its citizens, regardless of religion (N. B. Ismail, 2017).

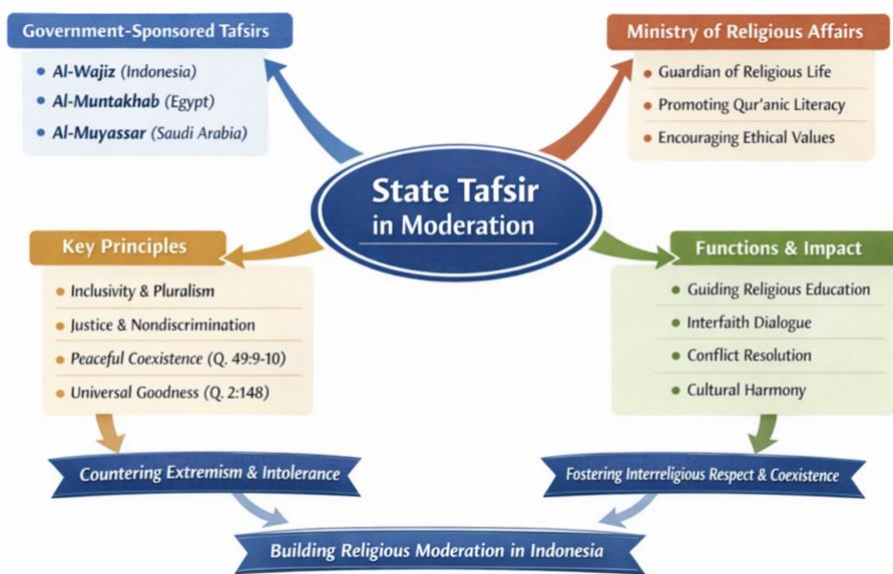


Figure 1. The Role of State Tafsir in Moderation

As shown in Figure 1, in the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Religious Affairs functions as a guardian of religious life and is expected to articulate inclusive interpretations that align with the constitutional commitment to pluralism. The *Tafsir al-Wajiz* illustrates the state's role in providing accessible commentary intended for the general population, motivated by the need to encourage *Qur'anic* literacy and promote ethical values in daily life. This accessibility is part of a broader agenda to prevent the monopolization of religious discourse by exclusive or sectarian interpretations.

The methodological orientation of state tafsir is especially important for building moderation (*wasatiyyah*). The question guiding the comparative analysis is whether these tafsirs adopt inclusive and pluralistic hermeneutical approaches or reinforce exclusivity. This reveals the extent to which state interpretation reflects its obligation to uphold justice and non-discrimination among diverse religious groups.

In Indonesia, where six religions and numerous local belief systems are recognized and protected, state tafsir is expected to embody these principles and reinforce interreligious respect. Moreover, state tafsir contributes to moderation by offering theological justification for coexistence. By foregrounding *Qur'anic* themes such as the diversity of “*qiblahs*” (Q. 2:148) (Kemenag, 2016a, p. 65; Nukhbatu min al-‘Ulamā,’ 1433, p. 23), the ethical imperative of doing good universally, and the command to resolve conflict peacefully (Q. 49:9–10) (Kemenag, 2016b, pp. 652–653). These interpretations help counter radical or intolerant discourses while empowering communities to internalize mutual respect values.

In practice, state tafsir operates as a soft-authoritative framework: not coercive, but normatively influential. It shapes curricula, guides religious counselors, and provides conceptual grounding for state policies such as interreligious dialogue, conflict resolution, and the preservation of local cultural wisdom (Nurrohim, Setiawan, Sweta, et al., 2024). By integrating hermeneutical reflection with Indonesia's sociopolitical realities, state tafsir becomes a vital component of the nation's moderation architecture, merging theological insight with civic responsibility.

Conclusion

This study examined how three state-sponsored *Qur'anic* exegeses—*al-Muntakhab* (Egypt), *al-Muyassar* (Saudi Arabia), and *al-Wajiz* (Indonesia)—construct the essence of religion and frame interreligious relations within their respective ideological contexts. Although all three tafsirs share a common theological foundation grounded in monotheism, prophetic continuity, and moral universality, their interpretive conclusions diverge significantly because of differences in state ideology, political structure, and national religious discourse.

The analysis demonstrates that state ideology functions as the primary interpretative horizon. Egypt's *al-Muntakhab* reflects the Azhari tradition of rational moderation, aligning with civic nationalism that values stability and balanced religious discourse. Saudi Arabia's *al-Muyassar*, shaped by Salafi scripturalism, upholds strict monotheism and sharply delineates theological boundaries, emphasizing doctrinal purity over pluralism. Indonesia's *al-Wajiz*, produced within a *Wasathiyah* (moderate) framework, represents a pluralistic and inclusive hermeneutic aligned with Pancasila and the practical demands of a multireligious society.

Regarding the essence of religion, Egypt and Indonesia conceptualize diversity as a positive and divinely intended reality that enables social harmony and mutual cooperation. However, Saudi Arabia views post-Islamic diversity largely as a deviation, framing religious differences through a corrective theological lens. These differing constructions have direct consequences for interreligious relations: *al-Wajiz* promotes dialogue and cross-religious cooperation; *al-Muntakhab* supports moderate engagement that safeguards civic unity; while *al-Muyassar* restricts interreligious interaction primarily to matters of *da'wah* and moral caution.

The comparative findings reveal that state-sponsored tafsir serves as both a theological and political instrument, reinforcing the state's identity and priorities. This means that tafsir itself does not inherently advance moderation or exclusivism; rather, it amplifies the ideological orientation of the state producing it. The implications for Indonesia are particularly significant. The inclusive and pluralistic approach of *al-Wajiz* demonstrates how *Qur'anic* interpretation can support interreligious harmony and strengthen a shared civic identity in a diverse society.

In conclusion, understanding the relationship between state ideology and Qur'anic interpretation provides important insights into contemporary Qur'anic studies and the cultivation of peaceful interreligious relations. The Indonesian case, when viewed comparatively, affirms the necessity of maintaining inclusive hermeneutics to sustain national unity and uphold the principles of justice, coexistence, and mutual respect within a pluralistic society.

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