

WASAṬIYYA AND THE URBAN MUSLIM MINORITY STATE: THE NCMF AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ISLAMIC MODERATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Wasaṭiyya And the Urban Muslim Minority State: The NCMF And the Institutionalization of Islamic Moderation in The Philippines Licensed Under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Abstract

This paper argues that the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) plays a vital role in facilitating the inclusion and participation of marginalized Muslim minorities into the Philippine nation-state's development framework. While there have been extensive studies on how *Wasaṭiyya* was adopted by some Southeast Asian countries, little is known about this principle in the Philippines and how the government can utilize its state institutions like NCMF to address inclusion and welfare of its Muslim minority population. This study asks: How does the NCMF embodies and implements *Wasaṭiyya* principles in its mandates and programs for Muslim Filipinos? Specifically, through its diverse government programs and activities across key domains, NCMF substantively actualizes the principles of *Wasaṭiyya* - the Islamic values of moderation, justice, balance, ease, striving for excellence, and public good. The NCMF was chosen as the focus due to its unique position as the primary state body for Muslim affairs, offering a contemporary lens on minority governance. Thereby, it translates the abstract philosophical virtues into practical accommodation policies and arrangements that oblige the state's commitments and responsibilities towards respecting and upholding the identity, rights, welfare, and dignity of Muslim Filipinos. Furthermore, this paper argues that rather than coercive assimilation under a forced 'Filipino' identity construction, the Philippine government's accommodation policies through the NCMF's cultivation of cultural sensitivity allow groups to access equitable progress and development of Muslim Filipino minorities. NCMF's interventions enable vulnerable minorities to transition towards becoming stakeholders shaping an inclusive shared future. Institutionalizing *Wasaṭiyya* through the NCMF is crucial for the Philippines as it provides a culturally sensitive approach to Muslim minority integration, potentially mitigating historical tensions and fostering sustainable peace. Embedding *Wasaṭiyya* principles in responsive governance infrastructure, the NCMF plays an invaluable role in reconciling the Philippines' complex past tensions between state and minorities to effect sustainable conflict transformation through prudent accommodation.

Keywords: Governance; Muslim Filipinos; Muslim Minority; & *Wasatiyya*.

A. Introduction

Kamali (2015) argues that the Quranic verse 2:143 (*wa ja'alnākum ummatan wasatan*) serves as the principal basis for *Wasatiyya*, or moderation, being a defining attribute of the Muslim ummah. This verse portrays the Islamic community as "a justly balanced nation" that acts as witnesses over other peoples (Saheeh International, 2020, Verse 2:143). The verse's context of revelation highlights how it distinguished the nascent Muslim community from the extremes present among Jews, Christians, idolaters, and others. As witnesses over other nations, the ummah must embody the virtues of truth, moderation, and justice. This verse indicates a civilizational self-awareness and objective posturing of Islam among existing traditions (Kamali, 2015, p. 19). Witnessing over others meant affirming what is good while remaining rightly guided. The Quran emphasizes noble character and righteousness as the basis of merit, not race, class, or ethnicity, in line with *Wasatiyya*'s rejection of tribal extremes (Kamali, 2015, p. 20).

Being moderate is also evident in ritual practices, such as the "middle prayer" emphasized in verse 2:238 (Kamali, 2015, p. 26; Saheeh International, 2020, Verse 2:238 (Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allāh, devoutly obedient). Financial moderation is equally essential, avoiding miserliness and extravagance. Verses 17:29 and 25:67 recommend a moderate course in spending and wealth management (Kamali, 2015, p. 27; Saheeh International, 2020, p. 25:67 (And those who, when they spend, do so not excessively or sparingly but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate), 2020, Verse 17:29 (And do not make your hand [as] chained to your neck or extend it completely and [thereby] become blamed and insolvent). Thus, source evidence establishes *Wasatiyya* as a defining code of conduct - of being just witnesses upholding truth and virtue - applied internally and in relation to other communities—moderation, not excess, marked model Muslims' individual and collective lives.

Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905, as cited by Kamali, 2015) observed that Islam is naturally inclined towards moderation as it is a religion of fitrah, or intrinsic human nature (Kamali, 2015, p. 29). As a faith in harmony with upright human dispositions, balance and the middle course permeate its teachings. Yusuf al-Qaradawi (d. 2022) similarly asserted that moderation is the correct path that leads the ummah to material and spiritual success, and deviating from *Wasatiyya* brings harm and loss (Kamali, 2015, p. 29). Wahbah al-Zuhayli (as cited by Kamali, 2015) characterized *Wasatiyya* as signifying balanced attention to rights and duties, material and spiritual realms, forgiveness, and resistance to oppression. It shapes relationships within the ummah and beyond. Ibn Ashur (d. 1973, cited by Kamali, 2015) affirmed that sound human nature (fiṭrah) shuns extremism and leans towards moderation.

Ahmad al-Raysuni (cited by Kamali, 2015) added that moderation is the ideal pursued by Sharia through avoiding excess rigor and laxity in its rulings (Kamali, 2015, p. 30). According to Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi (d. 1986, as cited by Kamali, 2015), the Islamic principle of balance (al-tawāzun) and the "golden mean" represents the midway point between two negative extremes, and at the same time, Islam also recognizes and values other positive traits, seeking to incorporate them all in a balanced way (Kamali, 2015, p. 31). The ummah must avoid the pitfalls of individualism and collectivism, instead striving for balance to achieve happiness and success for both the individual and the group. By rejecting both absolute individualism and absolute tribalism, Islam strikes a

middle ground that values both perspectives while leaving their negative consequences.

Understandings of *Wasatiyya* share commonalities across Muslim communities in Southeast Asia and respond to distinct socio-political landscapes (Rahim, 2013). Analysis of scholarly elucidations in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand reveals *Wasatiyya* as justice and moderation guided by the Shari'a to create harmony, avoid discord, and enable dignified, progressive communities. Indonesia outlined *Wasatiyya* principles where moderation requires balance, tolerance, non-discrimination, and wisdom (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2021). On the other hand, Malaysia's articulation of *Wasatiyya* put emphasis on excellence paralleling Islam's transformative imperatives and civilizational legacy (Ibrahim et al., 2013). While Singapore elucidates a position of principled moderation as affirming revelation while respecting secular governance (Muhidin et al., 2021). Finally, Thailand draws its *Wasatiyya* from traditions embedded within religious and cultural values that avoid conflict and promote diversity (Dorloh & Yusuf, 2015). These elucidations highlight *Wasatiyya* to be in line with the Qur'anic vision of the Islamic community as "a justly balanced nation" (Saheeh International, 2020, Verse 2:143). Differences reflect contextual influences, but the core thrust is shared progress, welfare, and unity.

This paper probed into how *Wasatiyya* was articulated and practiced by different Southeast Asian Muslim communities, this will help to fully grasp the idea of *Wasatiyya*. Through the examination of scholarly understandings in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, we will be able to identify common themes of *Wasatiyya* among these countries; at the same time, we will also uncover their differences in appreciation of *Wasatiyya*.

To better understand the application of *Wasatiyya* principles in Southeast Asia, it's instructive to examine how different countries in the region have implemented these concepts. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, offers a particularly relevant case study. As the world's largest Muslim population nation, Indonesia provides insights into how *Wasatiyya* principles have navigated the complex interaction between religion, politics, and society. Mainstream Indonesian Muslim organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have constructed religious identities and cultures, avoiding ideological extremes and moderating influence on radical fringes (Hassan, Mohd. Kamal, 2015). Their emphasis on *Islam Nusantara* and *Islam Berkemajuan* underscores positive adaptation alongside preserving principles. The state ideology of Pancasila fuses passive secularism with the accommodation of pluralism (Gani 2019, 324), which resulted in a negotiated model that has mainly enabled harmonious socio-religious relations.

Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) and Majelis Ulama (MUI) (Juhri et al., 2023; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2021), outline ten interlinked principles characterizing *Wasatiyya*.

Table 1. Ten interlinked principles characterizing *Wasatiyya*

No	Principles	Description
1	<i>Tawassuť</i>	Steering a middle course to avoid religious excessiveness (ifrāt) or negligence (tafrīt). Seeking principled moderation.
2	<i>Tawāzun</i>	Balance across spiritual-material and public-private aspects of life: equilibrium and proportionality.
3	<i>I'tidāl</i>	Remaining upright and just without resorting to discrimination or injustice.
4	<i>Tasāmuḥ</i>	Respecting diverse opinions and refraining from coercion in

		disagreements. Peaceful co-existence.
5	<i>Musāwāh</i>	Egalitarianism transcending racial, cultural, and social divisions. Opposing prejudice.
6	<i>Shūrā</i>	Prioritizing collective benefit through consensus-building and counsel.
7	<i>Islāh</i>	Accepting positive change aligned with <i>maslahah</i> (public interest) while retaining beneficial traditions.
8	<i>Awlawiyyah</i>	Ordering priorities based on contextual needs and norms to drive communal welfare.
9	<i>Taṭawwur wa ibtikār</i>	Dynamism and innovation to revitalize faith and culture while upholding moral aims.
10	<i>Tahadhur</i>	Embodying civility, nobility, and excellence as heirs of a civilizational legacy.

These guiding principles prioritize tolerance, ethical excellence, and moderation. They advocate for *Wasatiyya*, a comprehensive approach that honors religious doctrine while also promoting contextual advancement to foster harmony amidst differences. Upon studying Indonesia as an example, it is clear that the nation possesses a distinct value proposition and has taken steps to promote moderation on a wide scale. By examining key players, policies, results, and challenges, we can draw valuable insights for Muslim communities seeking to bolster moderation and combat extremism through legal and institutional channels, ethical reforms, and civic engagement.

In a similar vein, Malaysia's approach to *Wasatiyya* offers another instructive example in the region. Malaysia's political and economic policies demonstrate *Wasatiyya* justice by balancing minority rights and native privileges. Although some radical groups sporadically emerge, mainstream Islamic institutions like JAKIM (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*) prioritize diversity, development, and social welfare (Meerangani et al., 2022). Malaysia Global Movement of Moderates and Wasatiyyah Institute explicitly promote *Wasatiyya* principles of moderation and balance.

The establishment of the Institute Wasatiyyah Malaysia (IWM) under the office of the Prime Minister showcased the promotion of *Wasatiyya* by Malaysia. This shows how important the *Wasatiyya* concept is to Malaysia's socio-cultural reality and is the basis for the 1Malaysia concept of the government's formula for ensuring that the country's goals indicated in Vision 2020 are achieved (Mohamad, 2023).

The IWM was established in 2012, and the Global Movement of Moderates (GMMF) was introduced in 2013 by its Prime Minister, Mohamad Najib Abdul Razak, for the purpose of endorsing moderation locally and internationally (M. H. Hassan, 2014). Malaysia *Wasatiyya* is defined by Muslim scholars as just, best, selective, moderate, and balanced. Also means denial of extremism and taking things for granted, as that symbolizes triviality in knowledge and inflexibility in facing issues. Requires a balance of attitude to highlight justice (Ibrahim et al., 2013). The concept should not be interpreted as bringing Muslims backward, left behind, or only achieving minimum in life. It is meant to create a community with non-extreme, non-radical attitudes, actions, and practices (Ibrahim et al., 2013). The Malaysian government launched the GMMF in 2012 and established the IWM in 2013 to promote moderation advocacy worldwide. *Wasatiyya* means "best, just, choicest, moderate," and balance for justice is crucial (Ibrahim et al., 2013).

Moving to another Southeast Asian context, Singapore presents a unique case of implementing *Wasatiyya* principles in a highly diverse and secular setting. Singapore's diverse population, which includes Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, has

created ideological tensions in the secular state despite its economic development. To address this challenge, MUIS has outlined ten attributes that define an "Excellent Muslim": adhering to Islamic principles while adapting to shifting circumstances, appreciating the history and civilization of Islam, being open to other civilizations, having high morals and an integral spiritual nature, being progressive, adapting to modernization, contributing to a multi-religious and secular society, embracing pluralism, believing that good Muslims are good citizens, promoting universal values and principles, and being an inspiration. These adaptable principles promote respect for pluralism, encourage strong morals that can overcome modern challenges, and emphasize progressive practices beyond rituals, resulting in virtuous citizenship that benefits society (K. Hassan, 2011; Muhidin et al., 2021).

Turning our attention to Thailand, we find another unique approach to implementing *Wasatiyya* principles in a Southeast Asian context. The Wasatiyyah Institute for Peace and Development (WIPD), a non-partisan institute that fosters moderation among members of the Muslim community through research, training, workshops, forums, publications, and dialogue, was established at the office of Sheikh Islam in Bangkok in 2014 (Dorloh & Yusuf, 2015). The office of Chularajmontri has been making continuous efforts to introduce the (Thai) Wasatiyyah Institute for Peace and Development (TWIPD). Their aim is to promote moderation, balance, and justice as the essence of the *Wasatiyya* approach to all levels of the community, and their ultimate goal is to establish peace and harmony in the country (Dorloh & Yusuf, 2015, p. 67).

However, its success hinges on high-level patronage for extensive outreach (Dorloh & Yusuf, 2015). WIPD's activities align with *Wasatiyya* scripturally derived sense of justice and moral conscientiousness, entrenched as cultural practices and transmittable social mores among Thais. This Thai elucidation situates *Wasatiyya* as a preserved orthopraxy while dynamically adapting its contemporary implementation to maintain social harmony. This framing of *Wasatiyya* as a continuous contextualization of legal-theological principles to align religion and citizenship makes the Thai experience relevant for Muslim communities facing resurgent puritanism. It fits within broader Southeast Asian traditions, reconciling teachings and pluralism through culture (Mansor et al., 2018).

The application of *Wasatiyya* principles in Southeast Asian Muslim communities displays a consistent emphasis on moderation guided by revelation to achieve balance, justice, and moral excellence while avoiding extremes in belief, character, and governance. This involves alleviating hardships, promoting equality through impartiality, and advocating for positive moral reforms. While the specifics may vary across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand due to differences in secular diversity, democratic contours, and localization needs, the core principles remain unchanged.

B. Methods

This study takes a qualitative approach and is conducted in a library setting. The primary data comes from National Commission on Muslim Filipinos records. The supporting data comes from related Southeast Asia's wasatiyya literature. In the data analysis process, the author employs the descriptive analytical approach to study documents and concepts from the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos as well as other wasatiyya literature in Southeast Asia.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

The Role of The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)

The indigenous Muslims in the Philippines have been subjected to marginalization since the colonization era began in the 1500s. The Spanish waged war against the Moro sultanates, which resulted in the displacement of communities from their ancestral lands. Although they failed to conquer Muslim Mindanao, they succeeded in the Visayas and Luzon, leading to the decimation of the Islamic presence in those regions (C. Abubakar, 2005).

American rule beginning in 1898 brought initial Moro accommodation through the Bates Treaty, affirming autonomy (Harber, 1998, p. 40). However, violations followed, with assertions of sovereignty, land appropriations, the influx of Christian settlers, and coerced integration; hence, Moros became minorities, heightening feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement (Thohir, 2015).

Post-independence, Moro aspirations were unmet by the Christian-centric state. Discriminatory governance, economic exclusion, cultural-educational impositions, and migration programs entrenched their sense of dispossession. Repeated failed peace pacts led to the birth of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), sparking decades of conflict leaving more than 100,000 dead and a million displaced (A. Abubakar & Askandar, 2010; *Philippines/Moro Islamic Liberation Front (1977-Present)*, n.d.).

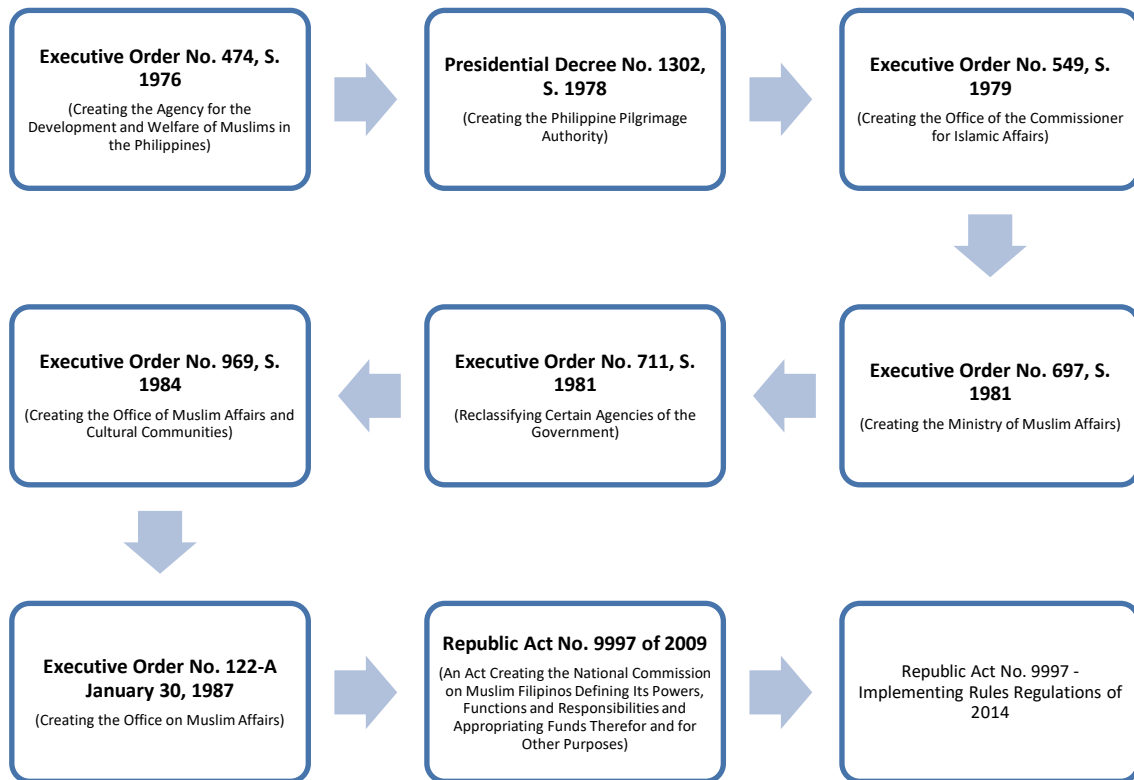
The 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the first Moro autonomy pact, was a watershed despite unimplemented provisions (*Philippines/Moro Islamic Liberation Front (1977-Present)*, n.d.). The 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Philippine government amended and strengthened the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) through a referendum but was not entirely successful as many of its provisions were not completely implemented (A. Abubakar & Askandar, 2010).

The 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) and the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), negotiated by the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), was the most extensive accord, outlining vast powers and rights. These agreements resulted in the Organic Law of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), passed in 2018, with the new entity officially inaugurated after a January 2019 referendum expanding ARMM to BARMM (Muhammadin, 2014; *The 2012 GPH and MILF Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB)*, 2012; *The 2014 GPH and MILF Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB)*, 2014).

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) was created in 2010 through Republic Act 9997 to fulfill the longstanding aspirations of the Moro people. Its core mission is to foster socioeconomic inclusion, cultural awareness, and peacebuilding among Muslim communities by addressing their unique beliefs, norms, and welfare needs. As the successor to the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA), the NCMF is responsible for helping Muslim Filipinos access economic, educational, cultural, and infrastructure programs at the local and national levels (*Profile | | NCMF*, n.d.). The agency is committed to integrating Muslim Filipinos into the country's growth in a manner that is just and unbiased, while also respecting their religious and cultural differences and promoting democratic pluralism (*Republic Act No. 9997*, n.d.). This approach, known as *Wasatiyya*, embodies principled moderation and strives to promote justice, moral excellence, and unity in diversity, representing a significant structural transformation in governance.

2. Discussion

Evolution of the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF)



The government agencies that handle Muslim Filipino affairs have undergone various structural changes over the past few decades. In 1976, President Ferdinand Marcos signed Executive Order No. 474, establishing the Agency for the Development and Welfare of Muslims in the Philippines to utilize assistance from the Islamic Conference to improve the conditions of Muslim Filipinos (Office of the President, 1976) (*Executive Order No. 474, s. 1976*). This was followed in 1978 by Presidential Decree No. 1302 under President Marcos, creating the Philippine Pilgrimage Authority to manage the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (Office of the President, 1978) (*Presidential Decree No. 1302, s. 1978*). Subsequently, in 1979, President Marcos signed Executive Order No. 549, establishing the Office of the Commissioner for Islamic Affairs to oversee policies and programs concerning Islamic affairs (Office of the President, 1979) (*Executive Order No. 549, s. 1979*).

The Ministry of Muslim Affairs was later formed through Executive Order No. 697 in 1981 under President Marcos to implement policies and programs for Muslim Filipinos directly (*Executive Order No. 697, s. 1981*). However, this Ministry was downgraded that same year with Executive Order No. 711 into the Office of Muslim Affairs headed by a Director-General (*Executive Order No. 711, s. 1981*). The Office of Muslim Affairs was merged in 1984 by Executive Order No. 969 with the Office of the Presidential Assistant on National Minorities to establish the Office of Muslim Affairs and Cultural Communities (*Executive Order No. 969, s. 1984*). Subsequently, in 1987, President Corazon Aquino signed Executive Order No. 122-A, forming the Office on Muslim Affairs to preserve and develop Muslim Filipino culture, traditions, and well-being (*E.O. No. 122-A, n.d.*). Finally, in 2009, Republic Act No. 9997 led to the abolition of the Office on Muslim Affairs and the formation of the current National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) with expanded powers and mandate compared to its predecessor agencies (*Republic Act No. 9997, n.d.*).

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) has various mandates that can be classified into four domains: cultural, economic, social services, and political. First, Within the cultural domain, the NCMF plays a crucial role in preserving and enhancing the Muslim Filipino culture, traditions, and institutions. This includes supporting the creation and management of cultural centers and Islamic institutions, arranging Quran reading contests, assisting in the accreditation of madāris schools under the DepEd framework, offering training sessions to enhance madāris administration and teaching, and leading the celebration of Muslim holidays and cultural events (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2014, 2016; *Republic Act No. 9997*, n.d.). Second, in the economic realm, the NCMF strives to promote Islamic business, finance, and trade for the progress of Muslim Filipinos. It provides training and assistance to Muslim entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) through skills programs and microcredit. It drives the development of the halal industry through certifying bodies and awareness building (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2016, 2023a; *Republic Act No. 9997*, n.d.). Third, regarding social services, the NCMF offers legal assistance and facilitates access to the justice system for Muslim Filipinos, develops, maintains, and titles settlements and ancestral lands for Muslims in accordance with laws, promotes relief, rehabilitation, and social welfare for vulnerable communities, and supports the establishment of dedicated Muslim spaces such as cemeteries (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2016, 2023a; *Republic Act No. 9997*, n.d.). Fourth, in the political realm, the NCMF advises on policy formulation, planning, and programs that aim to advance the welfare of Muslim Filipinos, leads annual hajj pilgrimage operations as the coordinating authority, drives conflict resolution, *rido* (family feud) settlement, and peacebuilding with communities, and certifies Muslim membership and population statistics for welfare schemes (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2016; *Republic Act No. 9997*, n.d.).

Specific mandates have been put in place to preserve identity, facilitate practice, and further the welfare of minorities within a national integrative approach. However, to achieve genuine transformation, it is necessary to have robust local outreach, financing, and feedback systems that can sustainably uplift marginalized Moro Muslims. These mandates reflect *Wasatīyya* principles, which seek balance, moral excellence, ease of affairs, and tie state accommodation of minority rights, mores, and aspirations.

NCMF Recent Annual Report and Commission on Audit (COA) Assessment

Over a decade since the inception of NCMF, it has expanded as the institutional conduit for uplifting and empowering marginalized Muslim Filipino communities. With nine (9) Commissioners representing different sectors which is headed by a Commission Chairman together with its current staff strength of eight hundred forty (840) spread across a national office, seven (7) bureaus, and eleven (11) regional offices (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2023a), The NCMF oversees programs spanning cultural promotion, skills-building for economic mobility, legal assistance, housing development, pilgrimage management, and community peacebuilding – essentially traversing key facets of minority welfare and identity preservation uniquely designed for bespoke accommodation.

To evaluate the NCMF's effectiveness in fulfilling its mandate, it is important to consider external assessments. The Commission on Audit (COA), an independent constitutional body responsible for auditing government agencies (*Commission on Audit*, n.d.), provides valuable insights into the NCMF's operations and performance.

In this context, the COA has released its audit assessment report for 2022, which offers a comprehensive analysis of the NCMF's operations and achievements (*National Commission on Muslim Filipinos Annual Audit Report 2022 | Commission on Audit*, n.d.). The report notes that while the NCMF has made quantifiable progress in increasing beneficiary outreach through various events such as Quran memorization competitions, halal ecosystem expansion, enterprise assistance, and emergency relief channeling, control deficiencies pertaining to assets inventory and procedural lapses were noted, requiring priority resolution. These weaker domains include inactive funds monitoring, cash advances settlement, terminal leave calculations, property database management, and disbursement validation documentation. These audit findings provide an important backdrop for understanding the NCMF's operational challenges and areas for improvement as it strives to implement its *Wasatiyya*-aligned programs and services.

Furthermore, funding for the NCMF has considerably increased from PHP345.9M in 2011 to PHP 864.9M in the 2024 fiscal year. However, fund utilization trends indicate that despite implementational gains in activities that cater to communities, budgets remain below optimal levels needed to alleviate deprivation in areas such as education, housing, financial access, justice, and governance participation. Therefore, more excellent financing prioritization along with monitoring efficiency is required (Department of Budget and Management, 2011, 2024).

Nevertheless, the NCMF has demonstrated remarkable progress in its mandate delivery, which includes recognition stretching, cultural transmission, conserving customary practices, and enabling self-development. Its intermediation role between vulnerable Muslims and accommodative state institutions has strengthened over the last decade, despite the persisting deficiencies. The unique positioning of the NCMF offers profound potential for cascading reformist imperatives of principled moderation. With internal strengthening and broadened partnerships, the NCMF can optimize its strengths to elevate participation, trust, and reconciliation, cementing enlightened, citizenship-based pluralism against injustices.

Table 2. NCMF Bureaus and Major Programs

Bureau Name	Description
Bureau of Muslim Cultural Affairs (BMCA) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997</i> , n.d., Section 11, par. b)	The BMCA is dedicated to conducting research and studies on sociocultural development to inform policymaking and program implementation for the betterment of Muslim Filipinos. Its responsibilities include enhancing literacy, providing Arabic instruction, and preserving community knowledge. Additionally, the BMCA conducts Shari'ah Training, assists with madrasa registration, and collaborates with DepEd to establish Islamic school standards. It also manages Quran reading competitions from local to national tiers and leads observances of Muslim festivities.
Bureau of Muslim Economic Affairs (BMEA) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997</i> , n.d., Section 11, par. a)	The BMEA promotes Islamic enterprises, finance, trade, and livelihoods for the economic mobility of Muslims. It assists in the capacity building of MSMEs, cooperatives, and entrepreneurs via skills training and microcredit. The BMEA also expands halal industry infrastructure through certification bodies and supply chain development by leveraging government and private sector synergy.
Bureau of Muslim	The BMS oversees settlement planning, housing assistance,

Settlements (BMS) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997, n.d., Section 11, par. c</i>)	ancestral domain claims, and rehabilitation programs benefitting displaced minorities. It coordinates rehabilitation support for conflict and disaster-affected communities. The BMS also aids legal documentation for land rights and titles.
Bureau of Peace and Conflict Resolutions (BPCR) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997, n.d., Section 11, par. f</i>)	The BPCR initiates community peace-building programs, <i>rido</i> de-escalation mechanisms, local conflict mediation, and mainstream minority perspectives in formal peace negotiations. It coordinates with tribal bodies, religious figures, and security agencies to ensure stability.
Bureau of Pilgrimage and Endowment (BPE) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997, n.d., Section 11, par. e</i>)	The BPE plans, regulates, and assists annual hajj undertakings by Muslim Filipinos in cooperation with Saudi authorities. It protects pilgrim welfare, develops guidance frameworks, and administers "waqf" assets for socio-charitable purposes according to Islamic norms.
Bureau of Legal Affairs (BLA) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997, n.d., Section 11, par. g</i>)	The BLA furnishes legal assistance, aid, advice, advocacy, and remedies to indigent Muslims, especially regarding civil disputes. It remedies rights violations, reviews cultural legislation, and conducts paralegal training. The BLA also produces research on customary laws and assists on Shariah aspects.
Bureau of External Relations (BER) (<i>Republic Act No. 9997, n.d., Section 11, par. d</i>)	The BER is responsible for information dissemination and outreach for NCMF while publicizing minority socioeconomic opportunities in foreign markets and global partnerships.

The 2022 NCMF Annual Report classified its activities into three (3) major programs as follows (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2023a).

Table 3. Three major programs National Commission on Muslim Filipinos

Major Programs	Corresponding Activities
1. Sociocultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hajj Administration and Supervision • Quran Reading Competitions and Memorization Shariah Training and Education • Madrasah Education and Development Cultural Festivities and Holidays
2. Socioeconomic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Promotion and Development of Halal • Support to Islamic Banking and Finance Services • Skills and Livelihood Training • Endowment Services
3. Social Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Paralegal Services • Development of Muslim Settlements • Support to Burial Services • Peace Building Activities • Relief Operations • Disaster Risk Management • Medical and Dental Services • Support the Establishment of Muslim Cemeteries • Educational Assistance and Advocacy

NCMF Programs and Activities Embodying *Wasatiyya* Principles

Analysis of the major programs and interventions of the NCMF reveals significant alignment with *Wasatiyya* principles of moderation, justice, facilitation, and excellence.

Table 4. NCMF Programs and Activities Embodying *Wasatiyya* Principles

Program	Activity	<i>Wasatiyya</i> Principle
Sociocultural	• Hajj Administration and Supervision	• Facilitation (taysir) by easing religious obligations
	• Qur'an Reading Competitions	• Moderation by promoting spiritual development
	• Shariah Training and Education	• Justice and excellence through professional integration
	• Madrasah Education	• Balance between tradition and reform showing dynamism
	• Cultural Festivities	• Facilitation of cultural preservation and celebration of excellence
Socioeconomic	• Domestic Promotion and Development of Halal	• Facilitation and moral good
	• Support to Islamic Banking and Finance Services	• Principled moderation and balance
	• Skills and Livelihood Training	• Facilitation and empowerment
	• Endowment Services	• Financial justice and welfare distribution
Social Protection	• Legal and Paralegal Services	• Justice and conflict resolution
	• Development of Muslim Settlements	• Affirmative action and facilitation
	• Support to Burial Services	• Facilitation of cultural-religious continuity
	• Peace Building Activities	• Principled mediation and healing
	• Relief Operations	• Humanitarian facilitation
	• Disaster Risk Management	• Responsible moderation
	• Medical and Dental Services	• Welfare provision through access
	• Support for the Establishment of Muslim Cemeteries	• Facilitation of religious-cultural rights
	• Educational Assistance and Advocacy	• Facilitation and empowerment

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) exhibits multi-dimensional infusions of *Wasatiyya* principles across its administrative, cultural, economic, and social policy interventions as a government agency promoting Muslim heritage and reforming systemic marginalization facing minorities. The NCMF's mandates ease communal hardships by facilitating religious obligations, promoting

Islamic educational and jurisprudence integration, enabling self-sufficiency through livelihood assistance, fostering settlement rehabilitation, funding access to education, and providing humanitarian relief uniquely tailored to vulnerable groups. Through the principles of *Wasatiyya* and state affirmative accommodation, the NCMF celebrates the rich identities of Muslim Filipinos.

Table 5. Recurring *Wasatiyya* Principles Themes Embodying NCMF Interventions

Recurring Themes	NCMF Interventions
Moderation and Balance	The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) implements its powers and functions with moderation, particularly in peace process initiatives and conflict resolution. The Commission collaborates with relevant agencies, individuals, and institutions in participating in the peace process between Filipino Muslim groups or individuals and the government. The Secretary of the Commission, or someone appointed by him/her, sits as a regular member of the government's peace panel negotiating peace with the Muslim Filipino groups or individuals (<i>Republic Act No. 9997</i> , n.d., Section 8, par. d). The Bureau of Peace and Conflict Resolution (BPCR) is mainly responsible for promoting peace and resolving conflicts among Muslim Filipinos. It participates in the national peace process efforts, particularly for Muslim Mindanao, to prevent, de-escalate, and find peaceful solutions to conflicts. In addition, the BPCR engages in interfaith dialogues and youth engagement in Muslim communities to prevent and counter violent extremism (<i>Republic Act No. 9997</i> , n.d., Section 8, par. f).
Justice and Equity	The NCMF, through the Bureau of Legal Affairs, extends legal assistance to Muslims allegedly illegally detained and Persons deprived of liberty. NCMF conducted Training for community-based Paralegals in General Santos City, Davao City, Cotabato City, Northern Mindanao, Iloilo City, and Metro Manila with the aim of equipping Muslim Filipinos with their constitutional rights to protect them from illegal arrests and achieve a wider base of properly trained community paralegals (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2020).
Ease and Facilitation	Legal Aid given to Muslim Filipinos seeking assistance through the Bureau of Legal Affairs provides ease to needy indigent Muslim Filipinos. NCMF Medical Mission in Northern Mindanao, Dental Mission in Caraga. Feeding programs in Jolo and Relief operations for typhoon victims in Cotabato, Visayas, Metro Manila, North Luzon, and South Luzon to Taal Eruption evacuees are the usual forms of programs extended to Muslim Filipinos to provide ease by addressing their needs (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2021).
Striving Towards Excellence	NCMF is ISO 9001:2025 certified by Bureau Veritas, the NCMF Management System on the provision of Socio-Cultural, Socio-Economic, and Social-Protection Services to Muslim Filipinos (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), n.d.). NCMF conducts the Annual 2020 Strategic Roadmap Review with the theme "Raising the Bar on Governance." The NCMF Roadmap 2022 ensures the sustainability of the projects of the Commission but also the high expectations of the citizenry on public service (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2020, p. 67).

NCMF's Role in Philippine Governance

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) is committed to upholding the constitutional state declaration policy, which aims to protect the rights and well-being of Muslim Filipinos while respecting their beliefs, customs, traditions, and institutions. The commission also strives to promote the participation of Muslim Filipinos in achieving national goals and aspirations and to involve them in nation-building.

The NCMF is one of the Philippine Government's institutional responses to the decade plight of Muslim Filipinos for self-determination. The NCMF is mandated to promote the rights, interests, and welfare of Muslim Filipinos. NCMF mandates on Pilgrimage manifests *Wasatiyya* in balancing state governance by providing government assistance to Muslim Filipinos' pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The NCMF has proven its effectiveness in realizing its role in Philippine governance. *Wasatiyya* concept of moderation is demonstrated in the implementation of the promotion of the culture, traditions, and beliefs of Muslim Filipinos through its programs such as the Madrasah Education, Conduct of the Annual Qur'an Reading Competition, and the conduct of Annual Shari'ah Training, requirement for taking the Shari'ah bar examination.

Based on the 2023 NCMF Quarterly Report, the socio-cultural program of NCMF gained a substantial *"increase of ten percent (10%) in the number of Islamic institutions accessible to Muslim communities while Muslim culture, traditions, and cultural centers are preserved, developed, and strengthened."* A 90% satisfaction rate for all Commission Socio-cultural programs (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2023b). NCMF socio-economic programs on the promotion of the Halal Industry, securing the availability of halal-certified food and non-food products, and Development of Small Business Trade and Cooperatives provide ease to Muslim Filipinos in their daily lives.

Under the same report, the socio-economic program of NCMF, *"access and enjoyment of social services, and economic opportunities for Muslim Filipinos improved and regularized; there is a ten percent (10%) increase in Muslim Filipinos assisted with enhanced economic opportunities"* (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2023b).

Conflict Resolutions applying *Wasatiyya* moderation through Alternative Dispute Resolutions were implemented by its Bureau of Peace and Conflict Resolution (BPCR). Interfaith dialogues, conferences, summits, and workshops on preventing and countering violent extremism were conducted by BPCR. Relief Assistance to Muslim Filipinos in times of calamities and ensuring their settlement, such as shelter, home, and relative assistance thereto, forms part of the *Wasatiyya* concept of providing ease.

NCMF's legal assistance and legal affairs program is mirrored by *Wasatiyya* concept of justice. The Bureau of Legal Affairs provides assistance to Muslim Filipinos deprived of liberty to attain justice through representation in court. NCMF's Social Protection Program boasts a 90% satisfaction rate for its legal assistance, relief operations, settlement services, peace initiatives, conflict resolution assistance, and education and advocacy support for Muslim communities (National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), 2023b). With the above programs, NCMF works for *Wasatiyya* concept of excellence by providing quality service to its Muslim Filipinos and striving for good, as evidenced by its ISO Quality Management System.

On August 16, 2023, NCMF unveiled its Vision 2040 strategy to uplift Muslim communities and boost the national economy through inclusivity and progress. The NCMF has initiated an ambitious plan to develop resilient Muslim communities that are socially, economically, and culturally empowered. In the same strategy, NCMF

reiterated its dedication to improve the Philippine Hajj operations to make it a hassle-free experience for pilgrims. They also aim to boost domestic halal production by developing halal agro-industrial hubs across the country. The NCMF is committed to transforming the lives of disadvantaged Muslim Filipinos by providing them with proper support to succeed in the Shari'ah Bar examinations. This will pave the way for producing Shari'ah professionals, leading to a more inclusive society (*NCMF Unveils Vision 2040 Strategy to Boost Muslim Filipino Communities and the National Economy, Promoting Inclusivity and Progress*, 2023).

D. Conclusion

This study analyzed how the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) actualizes the governance concept of *Wasatiyya* in fostering minority welfare within the Philippines. The NCMF represents the latest evolution in the Philippine government's approach to Muslim affairs, superseding previous bodies such as the Ministry of Muslim Affairs and the Office of Muslim Affairs. Unlike its predecessors, the NCMF has broader powers and a more comprehensive mandate, reflecting a shift towards greater institutionalization of Muslim minority rights and welfare. This progression demonstrates the government's increasing commitment to addressing Muslim Filipino concerns through specialized, empowered bodies within the national governance framework.

Wasatiyya signifies upholding moderation, justice, ease, and moral excellence - principles clearly embodied across NCMF's sociocultural, socioeconomic, and social protection programs catering to Moro Muslims. Facilitating hajj journeys, enabling traditional learning and livelihoods, and providing legal aid, housing, disaster relief, and health access reflect institutionalizing interconnected tenets of principled moderation, empowerment through ease, and building excellence within communities. The NCMF's alignment with *Wasatiyya* is further reinforced by resonances in elucidations across Southeast Asia that similarly emphasize balance, social justice, and reform amidst ethnic and religious diversity.

This study demonstrates how the NCMF, through its alignment with *Wasatiyya* principles, offers a model for institutionalizing religious moderation within a diverse national context. The NCMF's approach goes beyond mere accommodation, actively fostering minority empowerment and national integration simultaneously. This balancing act contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on religious moderation by illustrating how state institutions can operationalize abstract religious principles to address concrete socio-political challenges.

The NCMF case study provides a theoretical framework for understanding how governments can effectively manage religious diversity through institutional design. It suggests that successful integration of religious minorities requires not just legal recognition, but also the creation of specialized bodies that can translate religious principles into practical policies. This approach offers a middle ground between assimilation and exclusion, potentially applicable to other multi-religious societies grappling with minority integration issues.

Further research can assess the NCMF's long-term impacts on intergenerational human development. Comparative studies can also examine institutional approaches for multicultural accommodation and marginality redressal across Southeast Asia. Therefore, the NCMF's implementation of *Wasatiyya* principles offers a theoretical model for how state institutions can foster religious moderation, minority empowerment, and national cohesion simultaneously, providing valuable insights for multicultural governance in diverse societies.

This demonstrates how tailored minority rights institutions founded on scriptural injunctions and communal experiences can substantively remedy inequities actualizing self-determination and cultural liberty without coercion. Further research can assess the NCMF's long-term impacts on intergenerational human development. Comparative studies can also examine institutional approaches for multicultural accommodation and marginality redressal across Southeast Asia. Therefore, policy efforts institutionalizing principles of *Wasatiyya* can nurture consonance through the state's facilitative role and affirmative accommodations in empowering communities to chart progressive, dignified futures within a tapestry of cohesive yet diverse societies.

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F. Author Contributions Statement

The first author, who is the study's lead investigator, is in charge of developing the research concept, gathering and analyzing data, and writing this article. The second author outlines the qualities of religious moderation. After that, a thorough analysis of the relevant literature was done. The framing of research findings and their integration with earlier works fell within the purview of the third author.

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