



THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TAFSĪR AND TA'WĪL IN QUR'ANIC STUDIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR RADICALISM AND MODERATISM

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Abstract

Contemporary religious radicalism is frequently associated with exclusive interpretations of the Qur'an, particularly when scriptural texts are detached from their historical and interpretive contexts. This phenomenon raises an important epistemological question regarding how different approaches to Qur'anic interpretation shape religious orientations in contemporary Muslim societies. This study examines the epistemological relationship between *tafsir* and *ta'wil* and analyzes its implications for contemporary debates on radicalism and religious moderation. Using a qualitative library-based research design, the study employs content analysis and epistemological discourse analysis to examine classical and contemporary exegetical literature. Particular attention is given to the interpretation of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 as a representative case through which competing interpretive paradigms can be examined. The analysis focuses on sources of interpretive authority, the role of reason, contextualization, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* in the construction of Qur'anic meaning. The findings indicate that radical or moderate religious orientations do not arise directly from the Qur'anic text itself, but are shaped by the epistemological frameworks through which the text is interpreted. While literal-textual approaches may foster exclusivist tendencies when detached from historical and ethical considerations, contextual and *maqāṣid*-oriented approaches provide greater scope for interpretive plurality and ethical engagement. The study argues that *tafsir* and *ta'wil* should be understood as complementary rather than opposing paradigms and proposes an integrative epistemological model based on the interaction of *riwāyah*, *dirāyah*, and *maqāṣid*. This model contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by offering a conceptual framework that supports religious moderation in plural societies.

Keywords: epistemology, tafsir, ta'wil, religious radicalism, religious moderation.

Abstrak

Radikalisme keagamaan kontemporer sering dikaitkan dengan penafsiran al-Qur'an yang eksklusif, terutama ketika teks-teks keagamaan dipahami secara terlepas dari konteks historis dan metodologisnya. Fenomena ini memunculkan pertanyaan epistemologis penting mengenai bagaimana model-model penafsiran al-Qur'an membentuk orientasi keagamaan dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis hubungan epistemologis antara tafsir dan ta'wil serta implikasinya terhadap wacana radikalisme dan moderasi beragama. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan mengombinasikan analisis isi dan analisis wacana epistemologis terhadap literatur tafsir klasik dan kontemporer. Perhatian khusus diberikan pada penafsiran QS. al-Tawbah [9]:5 sebagai studi kasus representatif untuk menelaah bagaimana paradigma penafsiran yang berbeda menghasilkan konsekuensi keagamaan yang berbeda pula. Analisis difokuskan pada sumber otoritas penafsiran, peran akal, kontekstualisasi, serta orientasi maqāṣid al-syarī'ah dalam konstruksi makna al-Qur'an. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orientasi radikal maupun moderat tidak muncul secara langsung dari teks al-Qur'an, melainkan dibentuk oleh kerangka epistemologis yang digunakan dalam proses penafsiran. Pendekatan tekstual yang dilepaskan dari pertimbangan historis dan etis berpotensi melahirkan kecenderungan eksklusif, sedangkan pendekatan kontekstual dan berorientasi maqāṣid membuka ruang yang lebih luas bagi pluralitas makna dan pertimbangan etis. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa tafsir dan ta'wil sebaiknya dipahami sebagai paradigma yang saling melengkapi, bukan saling bertentangan, serta menawarkan model epistemologi integratif berbasis interaksi antara *riwāyah*, *dirāyah*, dan *maqāṣid*. Model ini memberikan kontribusi konseptual bagi pengembangan studi al-Qur'an kontemporer sekaligus menjadi landasan teoritis bagi penguatan moderasi beragama dalam masyarakat yang plural.

Kata kunci: epistemologi, tafsir, ta'wil, radikalisme keagamaan, moderasi beragama.

INTRODUCTION

Religious radicalism associated with Qur'anic interpretation has become one of the most widely debated issues in contemporary Islamic discourse. In many cases, Qur'anic verses are used to justify exclusivism, intolerance, and even violence in the name of religion. The expansion of digital religious media has intensified this phenomenon because scriptural passages are often circulated fragmentarily without adequate historical or methodological explanation.¹ This situation has generated considerable debate regarding how the Qur'ān should be interpreted and whether particular interpretive approaches contribute to radical religious attitudes.

The urgency of this issue lies in the close relationship between Qur'anic interpretation and the formation of Muslim religious orientations. Interpretive approaches that emphasize literal meaning and textual authority may produce different religious orientations depending on how they engage with historical context, ethical objectives, and interpretive plurality. Similarly, contextual approaches may foster more dialogical and moderate understandings, although their outcomes also depend on broader social and intellectual conditions. Accordingly, debates concerning *tafsir* and *ta'wil* extend beyond theoretical discussions within Qur'anic studies and bear directly on contemporary issues of religious coexistence, social harmony, and ideological conflict.²

Global studies on radicalism have extensively examined the relationship between religion and violence, particularly in relation to jihadist movements and digital propaganda. Several studies have shown how verses such as Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5, Q. al-Mā'idah [5]:51, and other passages related to jihad and political authority have been mobilized within extremist narratives. However, most of these studies focus primarily on the sociological, political, or ideological dimensions of radicalism while paying comparatively little attention to the epistemological assumptions underlying competing interpretations of Qur'anic verses.³ Other studies examine the sociological and political causes of radicalism, including identity crises, social marginalization, and transnational ideological networks.⁴ Although these approaches provide important insights, they generally treat Qur'anic interpretation only as a supporting factor rather than as an epistemological system that shapes religious reasoning itself. Consequently, the distinction between *tafsir* and *ta'wil* as distinct paradigms of knowledge production remains insufficiently explored.

¹ Iwan Supena, "Epistemology of Tafsir, Ta'wil, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 1 (2024): 121–136, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.141.08>. Dede Albar, Deni Darmawan, and Siti Solehudin, "Deradicalizing Interpretation of Jihad Verses by Sayyid Qutb," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 1 (202)

² Iwan Supena, "Epistemology of Tafsir, 121–136.

³ Dede Albar, Deni Darmawan, and Siti Solehudin, "Deradicalizing Interpretation of Jihad Verses by Sayyid Qutb," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 1 (2023): 61–70, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v3i1.23798>.

⁴ Laith Omairi, "Glorious Quran Verses," 972–985.

In the Indonesian context, studies on Qur'ānic interpretation have increasingly focused on religious moderation and contextual understandings of Islam. Research on the *Tafsir* of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* demonstrates how Qur'ānic interpretation has been employed to promote *wasatiyyah*, pluralism, and national harmony.⁵ Other studies on thematic *tafsir* and the living Qur'ān approach also emphasize the importance of contextualizing revelation within Indonesia's multicultural society.⁶ However, these studies mainly concentrate on interpretive content and practical implementation. Only a limited number of studies critically examine how differences in interpretive epistemology shape contemporary religious orientations.

Based on this gap, the central problem of this article concerns the epistemological relationship between *tafsir*, *ta'wil*, and contemporary Islamic religious orientations. This study specifically asks: (1) how have the epistemologies of *tafsir* and *ta'wil* developed within the Islamic intellectual tradition, and (2) how do these epistemological paradigms influence the dynamics of radicalism and religious moderation? These questions are important because discussions of radicalism are often dominated by sociological explanations, whereas the interpretive foundations that shape religious reasoning receive less systematic attention. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine radicalism through sociological or political perspectives, this article analyzes the epistemological assumptions underlying competing interpretations of Qur'ānic texts, using Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 as a representative case study to demonstrate how different interpretive frameworks may generate divergent religious and social orientations.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the classical and contemporary debate over the authority of Qur'ānic interpretation. In the classical tradition, the distinction between *tafsir* and *ta'wil* was not always rigid. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, frequently employed the term *ta'wil* in describing exegetical activity, while later scholars increasingly differentiated between transmitted explanation (*tafsir*) and interpretive reasoning (*ta'wil*). Nevertheless, classical and modern exegetical traditions reveal varying emphases on textual authority, rational inquiry, and contextual engagement. By contrast, *ta'wil* developed through rational, philosophical, and mystical approaches represented by scholars such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn 'Arabī.⁷ In contemporary studies, contextual

⁵ Ahmad Farhan and Muhamad Subagio, "Wasathiyah in the Tafsir of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i1/20122>

⁶ Ahmad Awadin and Doli Witro, "Tafsir Tematik Moderasi Islam," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 16, no. 1 (2023): 171–200, <https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v16i1.864>; Nur Rohman and Hasan Ahmad, "New Trajectories of Quranic Studies in Indonesia," *Dinika* 7, no. 1 (2022): 29–54, <https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v7i1.5248>.

⁷ Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Āy al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.); Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1999); Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.).

interpretation and Qur'ānic hermeneutics are increasingly regarded as important approaches for addressing social complexity, pluralism, and extremism.⁸ This article therefore positions the debate between *tafsir* and *ta'wil* as an epistemological issue rather than merely a methodological difference.

This study aims to explain the epistemological constructions of *tafsir* and *ta'wil* and to analyze their implications for contemporary Islamic radicalism and moderation. By integrating classical exegetical traditions, theories of *ta'wil* and hermeneutics, and contemporary studies on radicalism, this research seeks to build a more systematic framework connecting Qur'ānic interpretation with religious orientation.

The contribution of this article lies in its effort to bridge Qur'ānic studies and radicalism studies through an epistemological perspective. Unlike previous research that tends to separate interpretive analysis from socio-religious analysis, this article argues that radicalism and moderation are closely connected to the ways religious knowledge is produced and legitimized. Conceptually, this study contributes to the development of Qur'ānic epistemology by positioning *tafsir* and *ta'wil* as interpretive paradigms with social and ideological consequences. Practically, the study offers a conceptual basis for strengthening religious moderation through contextual, reflective, and inclusive approaches to Qur'ānic interpretation in Indonesia's plural society.

THEORETICAL REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Over the past few decades, studies on Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsir*) have undergone significant transformation, reflecting broader developments in Islamic studies and the growing scholarly concern with issues such as religious radicalism, moderation, and social pluralism. Early studies on *tafsir* primarily focused on philological analysis, textual transmission, and the classification of classical exegetical traditions. More recent research, however, has expanded toward epistemological, hermeneutical, and socio-contextual approaches that examine how interpretations of the al-Qur'ān shape religious discourse and ideological orientations.⁹ Within this evolving landscape, scholars increasingly recognize that Qur'ānic interpretation does not merely function as a textual explanation but also operates as a framework of knowledge production that influences theological positions and social attitudes. Consequently, contemporary studies have begun to explore the relationship between interpretive paradigms and broader socio-religious dynamics,

⁸ Taufik Saumantri and Ahmad Ismail, "Hermeneutic's Ibn Arabi: An Alternative in Understanding Texts for Islamic Moderation," *Refleksi: Jurnal Filsafat dan Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.14421/ref.v25i2.5724>

⁹ Hilda Salsabila, "Spesifikasi Tafsir dari Masa Sahabat hingga Masa Modern," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin* 3, no. 2 (2023): 236–248, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpiu.25476>; Hilda Salsabila et al., "Tafsir Modern-Kontemporer di Indonesia Abad 20 M," *Jurnal Dirosab Islamiyah* 5, no. 1 (2023): 290–305, <https://doi.org/10.47467/jdi.v5i1.2878>.

including the emergence of religious radicalism and the promotion of Islamic moderation.¹⁰ Despite this growing body of literature, the field still lacks systematic analyses that connect the epistemological foundations of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* with their implications for contemporary religious orientations.

One prominent trend in the literature highlights the epistemological factors underlying Qur'ānic interpretation, particularly the dominance of literalist approaches grounded in *riwāyah* traditions and textualism. This orientation is deeply rooted in the tradition of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, which prioritizes transmitted reports from the Prophet, the Companions, and early authorities as the primary sources of interpretation. Classical works such as Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* exemplify this approach, emphasizing textual continuity and the preservation of authoritative meaning. Contemporary studies often regard *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* as an important mechanism for safeguarding the authenticity of the interpretive tradition.¹¹ However, scholars also note that when such approaches are applied without historical contextualization, they may produce rigid interpretations that overlook the evolving realities of Muslim societies. Similar debates appear in research on *tafsīr lughawī*, where linguistic analysis sometimes reinforces textual literalism by prioritizing lexical meaning over social context.¹² In discussions of radicalism, these epistemological factors are frequently identified as underlying conditions that facilitate exclusivist interpretations of the Qur'ān.¹³

A second major trend in contemporary studies focus on the processes of Qur'ānic interpretation, particularly through the development of *ta'wīl*, hermeneutical, and contextual approaches. In classical Islamic intellectual history, *ta'wīl* was understood as an interpretive effort to uncover deeper layers of meaning beyond the apparent sense of the text. Thinkers such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī approached *ta'wīl* through philosophical and rational analysis, while mystical traditions represented by Ibn 'Arabī explored symbolic and spiritual dimensions of the Qur'ān. In modern contexts, interpretive processes have expanded further through the incorporation of contemporary hermeneutics and contextual methodologies. Scholars such as Abdullah Saeed emphasize the importance of contextual interpretation that considers historical circumstances, ethical objectives, and the normative framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.¹⁴ Similarly, approaches such

¹⁰ Alice Marwick, Bridget Clancy, and Katherine Furl, "Far-Right Online Radicalization"

¹¹ Fajar Ditya, "Relevansi Tafsīr Bil Ma'tsūr dalam Konteks Modern," *Maḥatib* 4, no. 2 (2025): 71–86, <https://doi.org/10.24260/mafatih.v4i2.3758>

¹² Edi Edi and M. Fangesty, "Tafsīr Lughawī: Historisitas dan Perdebatannya," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 4 (2024): 675–684, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v3i4.31248>.

¹³ Dede Albar, Deni Darmawan, and Siti Solehudin, "Deradicalizing Interpretation of Jihad"

¹⁴ Fitri Fatmawati, "Tafsīr Kontekstual Surah Al-Maidah 49–50," *Poros Onim* 3, no. 2 (2022): 127–139, <https://doi.org/10.53491/porosonim.v3i2.344>.

as *qirā'ah mubādalah* and gender hermeneutics highlight the role of reciprocity, justice, and social ethics in Qur'ānic interpretation.¹⁵ These developments demonstrate that interpretive processes are dynamic intellectual practices shaped by the interaction between text, interpreter, and social context.

A third trend in the literature examines the impact of Qur'ānic interpretation on socio-religious dynamics, particularly in relation to radicalism, deradicalization, and Islamic moderation. Numerous studies indicate that literalist interpretations of certain Qur'ānic verses, particularly those concerning jihad, authority, and interreligious relations, have been used to legitimize radical ideologies. Research on contemporary jihadist movements shows that Qur'ānic verses are often simplified and transformed into ideological slogans, particularly within digital propaganda networks. Conversely, other scholars emphasize the role of contextual and *maqāṣid*-oriented interpretations in promoting moderate religious narratives.¹⁶ In Indonesia, for instance, thematic interpretations of jihad and state-sponsored *tafsir* initiatives have been employed as epistemic strategies to counter radical discourse and promote the values of moderation (*wasathiyah*).¹⁷ These findings illustrate that Qur'ānic interpretation functions not only as an academic activity but also as a powerful ideological instrument capable of shaping religious identity and social behavior.

The rapid expansion of digital religious media has intensified this phenomenon, as scriptural passages are often circulated in isolation from their historical and methodological contexts. First, many studies treat the methodological dimensions of Qur'ānic interpretation and the sociological study of radicalism as separate domains, resulting in fragmented analyses that fail to capture the epistemological connections between them. Second, research frequently concentrates on specific figures, texts, or thematic issues, thereby overlooking broader patterns in the production of religious knowledge. Third, discussions of interpretive methodologies often remain confined to typological classifications, such as *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr*, *tafsir bi al-ra'y*, or thematic *tafsir*, without examining how these epistemological models shape ideological orientations such as exclusivism, radicalism, or moderation.¹⁸ These methodological gaps underscore the need for a

¹⁵ Ahmad Harahap, "Reinterpreting Āsyirūhunna bil Ma'rūf," *Sirad Pelita Wawasan* (2025): 93–104, <https://doi.org/10.64728/sirad.v1i2.art1>; Winda Ningsih and Rina Susanti, "Perempuan, Tafsir, dan Keadilan Gender," *Jurnal Harkat* 21, no. 1 (2025): 97–126, <https://doi.org/10.15408/harkat.v21i1.49635>; Eni Zulaiha, "Analisa Gender dan Prinsip Penafsiran Husein Muhammad," *Al-Bayan* 3, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v3i1.3125>.

¹⁶ Aksin Wijaya and Syamsul Muzammil, "Maqāṣidi Tafsir," *Al-Jami'ah* 59, no. 2 (2021): 449–478, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.592.449-478>;

¹⁷ Ahmad Farhan and Muhamad Subagio, "Wasathiyah in the Tafsir" (2024); M. Taufik et al., "Tafsir Tematik Jihad dan Moderasi Beragama" (2025).

¹⁸ Iwan Supena, "Epistemology of Tafsir" (2024); Sulkifli Sulkifli and Ahmad Rajab, "Paradigma Baru Ilmu Tafsir," *Pappasang* 5, no. 1 (2023): 142–155, <https://doi.org/10.46870/jiat.v5i1.531>.

more integrative analytical framework that links interpretive epistemology to contemporary socio-religious outcomes.

Based on this critical evaluation, this article proposes a new analytical framework by systematically examining the epistemological relationship between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* within the broader dynamics of Islamic radicalism and moderatism. Rather than treating these interpretive traditions solely as methodological categories. By integrating insights from classical exegetical scholarship, theories of *ta'wīl* and hermeneutics, and contemporary research on radicalism and moderation, this research develops an integrative framework that connects interpretive epistemology with socio-religious dynamics. Through this approach, the study contributes to the theoretical development of Qur'ānic studies while providing an epistemological foundation for strengthening religious moderation and countering radical interpretations of the Qur'ān.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative library research design to examine the epistemological foundations of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* and their implications for contemporary Islamic radicalism and religious moderation. A qualitative library-based approach is appropriate because the primary objects of analysis consist of interpretive texts and scholarly discourses rather than empirical field data. The study combines epistemological analysis with philosophical-hermeneutical discourse analysis to investigate how systems of religious knowledge are constructed through Qur'ānic interpretation. Particular attention is given to contested Qur'ānic verses frequently associated with debates on violence, authority, and coexistence, especially Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5, which serves as the principal case study for comparing literalist and contextual interpretive paradigms. Through this research design, the study explains how different epistemological assumptions generate distinct religious orientations and social consequences.

The unit of analysis comprises the epistemological constructions of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* as reflected in selected classical and contemporary exegetical works. The analysis focuses on five indicators: (1) sources of interpretive authority, (2) the role of reason ('aql) in interpretation, (3) the relationship between text and context, (4) orientation toward maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, and (5) the degree of flexibility or rigidity attributed to textual meaning. These indicators are operationalized through a comparative reading of interpretations of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 and related verses, including Q. al-Baqarah [2]:190, Q. al-Anfāl [8]:61, and Q. al-Mumtaḥanah [60]:8. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr are examined to identify transmission-based and text-centered epistemologies, while Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn 'Āshūr are analyzed to identify

rational, contextual, and maqāṣid-oriented approaches.¹⁹ Through these categories, tafsīr and ta'wīl are understood not merely as interpretive methods but as systems of knowledge that shape religious understanding and socio-religious attitudes.

The study draws on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Jāmi' al-Bayān of al-Ṭabarī, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm of Ibn Kathīr, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr of Ibn 'Āshūr. Contemporary literature on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, Qur'ānic hermeneutics, religious moderation, and radical interpretations of the Qur'ān is also utilized. Secondary sources include scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles discussing tafsīr methodology, epistemology, radicalism, Salafi-jihadi discourse, and contemporary Qur'ānic studies. Literature was collected through academic databases, indexed journals, digital repositories, and bibliographical tracing. The collected sources were then classified into thematic categories, including textual authority, contextual reasoning, *maqāṣid* orientation, interpretations of violence-related verses, and contemporary discourses on radicalism and moderation.²⁰

The discourse analysis was conducted in four stages. First, selected exegetical texts were subjected to close reading in order to identify interpretive assumptions concerning authority, meaning, context, and legal implications. Second, interpretations of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 were compared across exegetical traditions. Third, these interpretations were categorized according to the epistemological indicators established in this study, namely literalist, contextual, and integrative approaches. Fourth, the resulting categories were compared with contemporary radical and moderate religious discourses, including references to Salafi-jihadi narratives that frequently invoke Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 as a justification for exclusivist or militant positions.²¹ This analytical procedure enables the study to examine how interpretive models may influence contemporary religious orientations without reducing radicalism solely to textual factors.

The data were analyzed using content analysis and epistemological synthesis. Content analysis is used to identify recurring concepts, argumentative patterns, and interpretive tendencies within classical and contemporary exegetical literature. Epistemological synthesis is then applied to integrate findings from different interpretive traditions in order to formulate a broader analytical framework concerning the relationship between tafsīr, ta'wīl, radicalism, and moderation. Particular attention is given to how interpretive authority, contextual reasoning, maqāṣid-oriented

¹⁹ Husnul Fajriyah, "Tafsir Sufi: Memahami Pengertian, Genealogi, serta Urgensinya," *Spiritus Relig. Stud. Educ. J.* 2, no. 3 (2024): 122–128, <https://doi.org/10.59923/spiritus.v2i3.279>.

²⁰ Imam Tajul, "Paradigma Tafsir Ilmi dalam Perspektif Mufasssir Klasik dan Modern," *Ahwaluna* 2, no. 1 (2023): 72–84, <https://doi.org/10.70143/ahwalunajurnalhukumkeluargaislam.v2i1.149>.

²¹ Budi Achmadin et al., "Model of Tafsir Bi Al-Ma'tsur Approach Relevance to Islamic Education," *At-Turats* 18, no. 1 (2024): 54–73, <https://doi.org/10.24260/at-turats.v18i1.2789>.

interpretation, and historical contextualization shape different understandings of contested Qur'ānic verses. Through this analytical process, the study proposes an integrative epistemological model of *tafsīr-ta'wīl* that combines textual fidelity, rational reflection, and ethical objectives as a framework for understanding the Qur'ān in contemporary plural societies.²²

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. The Epistemology of Tafsīr: A Descriptive Perspective

The findings reveal that the distinction between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* reflects two distinct epistemological orientations in the production of Qur'ānic meaning. Classical *tafsīr*, particularly *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, is characterized by the centrality of *riwāyah* as the primary source of interpretive authority.²³ Meaning is derived from transmitted explanations rooted in the Qur'ān, the Prophetic traditions, and the opinions of the Companions and Successors. Within this framework, the exegete functions primarily as a transmitter and verifier of inherited meanings rather than as an autonomous producer of interpretation.²⁴ This orientation can be observed in the exegetical treatment of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5, where classical commentators such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr emphasize reports concerning the treaty violations committed by certain Arab polytheist groups and the military circumstances surrounding the revelation of the verse. Their interpretations are grounded primarily in transmitted narrations and historical reports that define both the scope and the meaning of the verse within the framework of early Islamic experience.²⁵

This interpretive pattern demonstrates that classical *tafsīr* was primarily concerned with preserving the continuity and authenticity of revelation through authoritative transmission. Although rational and linguistic reasoning were employed, such reasoning generally operated within the boundaries established by transmitted knowledge. Consequently, textual meaning was regarded as relatively stable and closely connected to the interpretive legacy of earlier generations. In the case of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5, Ibn Kathīr explains the command to fight the polytheists in relation to specific groups who violated peace agreements with the Muslim community rather than as an unrestricted command applicable to all non-Muslims across time and place.²⁶ This finding indicates that classical *tafsīr* itself cannot simply be equated with contemporary forms of religious

²² Huzaifah Huzaifah, Joko Supriyanto, dan Syarif Nur, "Epistemologi Tafsir Nida'ul Qur'an," *Al-Misykah* 2, no. 1 (2021): 85–102, <https://doi.org/10.19109/almisykah.v2i1.9056>

²³ Abdullah Saeed, "Rethinking Revelation and Interpretation in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2006.8.1.1>

²⁴ Ditya, "Relevansi Tafsir Bil Ma'tsur" (2025)

²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 138–145.

²⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm*, 110–115.

extremism. Rather, its primary epistemological concern lies in maintaining fidelity to revelation and preserving the interpretive authority of the early Muslim community.

In contrast, the epistemology of *ta'wil* expands the interpretive horizon by incorporating rational inquiry, ethical objectives, and contextual understanding. This orientation can be observed in the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and later developed in contemporary *maqāṣid*-oriented interpretations. In relation to Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5, contextual interpreters argue that the verse should be read together with other Qur'ānic passages concerning warfare, peace, and coexistence, including Q. al-Baqarah [2]:190, which prohibits transgression in warfare; Q. al-Anfāl [8]:61, which encourages peace when the opposing party inclines toward peace; and Q. al-Mumtaḥanah [60]:8, which affirms justice and kindness toward those who do not engage in hostility against Muslims.²⁷ From this perspective, the meaning of the verse is not determined solely by its lexical formulation but also by its historical circumstances and broader ethical objectives. Accordingly, contemporary *maqāṣid*-based approaches interpret the verse as a context-specific response to armed conflict rather than as a universal mandate for perpetual confrontation. Within this epistemological framework, the Qur'ān functions not only as a source of textual authority but also as a dynamic source of moral guidance capable of addressing changing social realities.²⁸

2. Epistemological Dynamics: A Critical Analysis of Literalism and Contextual Interpretation

The analysis demonstrates that different epistemological orientations produce different interpretive consequences within contemporary Islamic discourse. The distinction lies not merely in the content of interpretation but in the assumptions through which meaning is constructed and authorized. Literalist approaches typically prioritize textual certainty, transmitted authority, and the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the text, whereas contextual approaches emphasize historical circumstances, ethical objectives, and broader Qur'ānic principles.²⁹ The case of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 provides a particularly important illustration of these competing epistemological orientations because the verse frequently appears in debates concerning Islam, violence, and religious extremism. The verse reads as follows:

²⁷ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* (Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984), vol. 10, 145–152.

²⁸ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 45–63.

²⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Text, Authority and Interpretation in Islamic Thought," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 3 (1998): 314–336, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/9.3.314>

فَإِذَا انْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَخْصِرُواهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصَدٍ فَإِنْ تَابُوا
وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“Then, when the sacred months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, establish prayer, and give *ṣakāh*, then let them go their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful” (Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5).

At first glance, the verse appears to command unrestricted violence against polytheists. However, the classical exegetical tradition consistently situates it within a specific historical context. Al-Ṭabarī explains that the command was directed toward particular Arab polytheist tribes that repeatedly violated peace treaties concluded with the Prophet Muhammad after the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah and subsequently engaged in hostilities against the Muslim community.³⁰ Likewise, Ibn Kathīr interprets the verse as addressing those groups that broke their covenants and initiated aggression, thereby limiting its scope to a concrete historical circumstance rather than extending it universally to all non-Muslims.³¹ These interpretations indicate that even within the tradition of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, the meaning of the verse was mediated through *asbāb al-nuṣūl*, historical context, and cross-references to related scriptural passages.

Although both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr relied primarily on transmitted reports (*rimāyah*), their interpretations cannot be reduced to simplistic literalism. Instead, they drew upon historical reports and juristic considerations to define the limits of the command. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī further expanded the interpretive horizon by emphasizing the role of rational inquiry in understanding the objectives of revelation. In his discussion of warfare verses, al-Rāzī argues that Qur'ānic commands must be interpreted in light of justice, public order, and the protection of the Muslim community rather than through isolated textual fragments.³² Similarly, Ibn 'Āshūr situates Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 within the broader objectives (*maqāṣid*) of preserving security and regulating conflict. For him, the verse addresses an exceptional political and military situation and cannot be transformed into a timeless norm governing Muslim relations with all non-Muslims.³³ These interpretations demonstrate that classical exegetical traditions themselves incorporated varying degrees of contextualization, ethical reasoning, and interpretive flexibility.

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 138-145.

³¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm*, 110-117.

³² Al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, 218-223.

³³ Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tamwīr*, 160-168.

The contrast becomes even more apparent when contemporary Salafi-jihadi interpretations are examined. Research on ISIS propaganda shows that Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 is frequently detached from its historical context and presented as a universal command applicable to all non-Muslims regardless of political circumstances or treaty obligations. Through publications such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, ISIS repeatedly cites warfare verses while giving limited attention to classical discussions of *asbab al-nuzūl*, treaty obligations, or the broader Qur'ānic discourse on peace and coexistence.³⁴ This interpretive strategy constructs a binary worldview that divides humanity into believers and enemies, thereby legitimizing violence through claims of exclusive textual authenticity. From an epistemological perspective, the issue lies not in the existence of literal interpretation itself but in the absolutization of a single reading while excluding alternative interpretations preserved within the broader exegetical tradition.

The findings further suggest that contemporary radical movements frequently employ a selective reading of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 by emphasizing its literal wording while neglecting its relationship with other Qur'ānic passages governing warfare and interreligious relations. Contextual interpreters, by contrast, understand the verse through its interaction with Q. al-Baqarah [2]:190, which prohibits aggression in warfare; Q. al-Anfāl [8]:61, which instructs Muslims to accept peace when opponents seek reconciliation; and Q. al-Mumtahānah [60]:8, which commands justice and kindness toward non-Muslims who do not engage in hostility against Muslims.³⁵ Within this broader textual framework, warfare is understood as conditional, defensive, and historically contingent rather than perpetual or universally binding. Consequently, the same verse may generate markedly different conclusions depending on the epistemological assumptions adopted by the interpreter.

From a critical perspective, the central issue concerns the relationship between textual authority and interpretive openness. Contextual approaches grounded in *ta'wil*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and hermeneutical reflection seek to preserve the authority of revelation while acknowledging historical complexity and ethical objectives. A *maqāṣid*-oriented reading considers not only the literal meaning of the text but also the higher objectives that the command seeks to achieve. In the case of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5, the primary objective is understood as the protection of communal security and the restoration of justice after treaty violations rather than the institutionalization of permanent conflict. Such interpretations do not undermine the authority of the text; rather, they

³⁴ Haroro J. Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter, *The ISIS Reader: Milestone Texts of the Islamic State Movement* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2020), 174–182.

³⁵ Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 67–83; Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2015), 7–18.

situate it within the broader moral vision of the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, contextual interpretation also requires methodological discipline in order to avoid excessive subjectivism and arbitrary reinterpretation. Accordingly, the findings suggest that the challenge facing contemporary Qur'ānic studies is not choosing between literalism and contextualism as mutually exclusive options, but developing an epistemological framework capable of integrating textual fidelity, historical awareness, and ethical responsibility. Such a framework provides a more balanced foundation for addressing contemporary debates on radicalism and religious moderation.

3. Toward an Integrative Epistemology of Tafsīr-Ta'wīl: A Transformative Perspective

The comparative analysis of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 demonstrates that the principal challenge in contemporary Qur'ānic interpretation lies not in the existence of different interpretive methods but in the tendency to absolutize a single epistemological approach. Literal readings that isolate the verse from its historical and textual context may lead to exclusivist conclusions, whereas excessively contextual interpretations risk weakening the normative authority of the text. The findings therefore indicate that neither *tafsīr* nor *ta'wīl* should be treated as self-sufficient paradigms. Instead, they represent complementary dimensions of Qur'ānic interpretation and are most effective when understood as operating in a dialogical relationship. This finding also confirms that the debate between textual fidelity and contextual relevance is not a choice between mutually exclusive alternatives, but a question of epistemological balance in the production of religious meaning.³⁶

Building on these findings, the study proposes an integrative epistemological framework consisting of three interrelated components: *riwāyah*, *dirāyah*, and *maqāṣid*. *Riwāyah* functions as the foundation of interpretive authority by grounding interpretation in the Qur'ān, Prophetic traditions, and the exegetical legacy of early Muslim scholars. *Dirāyah* provides analytical reasoning through linguistic analysis, historical contextualization, and critical reflection on the circumstances surrounding revelation. *Maqāṣid al-shari'ah* serves as the ethical horizon that guides interpretation toward the realization of justice, mercy, human dignity, and the public good. The interpretation of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 illustrates this interaction. Classical reports clarify that the verse addressed specific groups who violated peace treaties, contextual analysis situates the verse within a particular historical conflict, and *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning prevents the transformation of a contextual wartime command into a universal doctrine of hostility toward non-Muslims.³⁷

³⁶ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), 115–132.

³⁷ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah*, 45–68

The transformative implication of this framework lies in repositioning religious moderation as an epistemological project rather than merely a political slogan or educational program. The novelty of this study therefore resides in its formulation of a dialogical model of *tafsir-ta'wil* that integrates textual authority, contextual reasoning, and ethical objectives within a single interpretive framework. Through this model, the Qur'ān can be approached neither through rigid textualism nor unrestricted relativism, but through a balanced methodology capable of preserving the normative authority of revelation while remaining responsive to changing social realities. Such an approach contributes to contemporary Qur'ānic studies by providing a conceptual foundation for interpretive literacy that can critically engage exclusivist readings, including those employed in extremist narratives, while maintaining fidelity to the classical tradition of Islamic scholarship.³⁸

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the distinction between *tafsir* and *ta'wil* reflects broader epistemological differences in the production of religious knowledge. The analysis of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 shows that the same Qur'ānic text can generate different interpretive outcomes depending on the epistemological assumptions employed by interpreters. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr generally situated the verse within the historical context of treaty violation by certain Arabian polytheist tribes, while still emphasizing the authority of transmitted reports. Meanwhile, contextual approaches represented by al-Rāzī and later *maqāṣid*-oriented scholars place greater emphasis on the ethical objectives and historical circumstances surrounding the verse. These findings indicate that radical or moderate orientations do not emerge directly from the text itself but from the interpretive frameworks through which the text is understood and applied. Consequently, the relationship between Qur'ānic interpretation and religious orientation should be analyzed as an epistemological process rather than a purely theological or political phenomenon.³⁹

Within the Indonesian context, these findings are particularly relevant because contemporary Islamic discourse is shaped by the interaction between classical scholarship, modern educational institutions, and digital religious media. Interpretations of verses related to *jihad*, political authority, and relations with non-Muslims frequently circulate through social media in fragmentary forms detached from their exegetical context. The case of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5

³⁸ Abdul Mustaqim, *Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), 245–267; Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 87–104.

³⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 139–146

illustrates how selective textual citation can produce very different conclusions from those reached through contextual interpretation. While mainstream Indonesian institutions such as *pesantren*, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah generally approach such verses through broader interpretive traditions, digital religious spaces often privilege simplified and decontextualized readings. This condition strengthens the importance of epistemological literacy, enabling Muslims to distinguish between textual quotation and methodologically grounded interpretation.⁴⁰

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to contemporary discussions on Islamic epistemology by challenging the tendency to construct a rigid dichotomy between literalism and contextualism. The analysis demonstrates that classical *tafsīr* cannot simply be equated with radicalism, nor can *ta'wīl* automatically be identified with moderation. Al-Ṭabarī himself frequently employed the term *ta'wīl* in describing exegetical activity, while many classical exegetes combined transmitted reports, linguistic analysis, and rational reflection within a single interpretive framework. The findings therefore support an understanding of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* as overlapping epistemological modes rather than mutually exclusive categories. Through this perspective, the proposed integrative model contributes to the development of a dialogical epistemology that combines textual authority, rational inquiry, and ethical orientation.⁴¹

An important insight emerging from the study concerns the relationship between interpretive closure and contemporary radicalism. The comparative analysis of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 demonstrates that extremist movements such as ISIS and salafī-jihadi networks frequently universalize commands that classical exegetes understood within specific historical circumstances. While al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpreted the verse in relation to treaty violations and armed hostility committed by particular Arabian polytheist tribes, contemporary jihadist propaganda often abstracts the verse from these historical limitations and presents it as a timeless command governing Muslim relations with non-Muslims. This interpretive strategy is evident in ISIS publications such as *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*, where warfare verses are repeatedly cited without substantial engagement with classical discussions of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, treaty obligations, or the broader Qur'ānic discourse on peace and coexistence.⁴² Consequently, the authority of the text becomes concentrated in a single literalized meaning that is treated as universally binding.

By contrast, *maqāṣid*-oriented interpretation situates Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 within the broader objectives of the Shari'ah and the wider ethical vision of the Qur'ān. Such an approach reads the

⁴⁰ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyah: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019), 55–77; Ahmad Najib Burhani, “Islamic Knowledge, Authority and Digital Media in Indonesia,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 1 (2020): 1–24.

⁴¹ Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37–56

⁴² Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate*, 14–30.

verse alongside Q. al-Baqarah [2]:190, which prohibits transgression in warfare; Q. al-Anfāl [8]:61, which encourages reconciliation when peace is possible; and Q. al-Mumtaḥanah [60]:8, which permits just and benevolent relations with non-hostile non-Muslims.⁴³ Through this framework, warfare is understood as conditional, defensive, and historically contingent rather than normative and perpetual. The differing conclusions produced by these approaches demonstrate that radicalism is not generated by the Qur'ānic text itself but by the epistemological assumptions through which the text is interpreted, authorized, and applied.⁴⁴ This finding suggests that the central challenge of contemporary Qur'ānic interpretation lies not in choosing between textual fidelity and contextual reasoning, but in developing interpretive models capable of integrating both within a coherent epistemological framework.

Compared with previous studies, this research offers a more integrative analytical framework by connecting Qur'ānic studies, Islamic epistemology, and radicalism studies within a single discussion. Earlier studies generally focused either on sociopolitical explanations of radicalism or on methodological debates within *tafsir* studies. By contrast, this study demonstrates how epistemological assumptions concerning authority, context, and meaning influence the construction of religious orientations. The novelty of the study lies not merely in linking *tafsir* and radicalism conceptually, but in showing through the case of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 how different epistemological models produce divergent religious and social consequences. This approach helps bridge the analytical gap between textual interpretation and contemporary ideological phenomena.⁴⁵

The implications of this study extend across theoretical, educational, and policy domains. Theoretically, the findings support the development of an integrative epistemology based on the interaction of *riwāyah*, *dirāyah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Educationally, they highlight the need to strengthen epistemological literacy within Qur'ānic studies curricula so that students understand not only interpretive conclusions but also the processes through which interpretations are constructed. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that programs promoting religious moderation should move beyond reactive counter-radicalization strategies and focus on strengthening contextual reasoning and interpretive competence. Through this approach, religious moderation is understood not merely as a normative slogan but as the outcome of a reflective and methodologically grounded engagement with the Qur'ān.⁴⁶

⁴³ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah*, 1–25.

⁴⁴ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 115–145.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 173–188.

⁴⁶ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah*, 45–68.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the relationship between *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, radicalism, and religious moderation is fundamentally an epistemological issue concerning how Qur'ānic meaning is produced, authorized, and applied. Through the analysis of Q. al-Tawbah [9]:5 and its interpretation across classical and contemporary exegetical traditions, the study finds that different interpretive outcomes emerge not from the text alone but from the epistemological assumptions guiding interpretation. The findings therefore challenge the simplistic assumption that literal interpretation necessarily leads to radicalism or that contextual interpretation automatically produces moderation. Instead, radical and moderate orientations are shaped by the interaction between textual authority, historical contextualization, ethical reasoning, and broader socio-political conditions. The principal scholarly contribution of this article lies in demonstrating that contemporary debates on religious extremism and moderation cannot be adequately understood without examining the epistemological foundations of Qur'ānic interpretation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to contemporary Qur'ānic studies by formulating an integrative epistemology of *tafsīr-ta'wīl* that positions *riwāyah*, *dirāyah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as complementary dimensions of interpretation. Rather than treating *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* as competing paradigms, the proposed model understands them as dialogical mechanisms through which textual fidelity and contextual relevance can be balanced. Methodologically, the integration of qualitative library research, epistemological analysis, and philosophical-hermeneutical discourse analysis enables a systematic reconstruction of interpretive assumptions across different exegetical traditions. The novelty of this study therefore lies not merely in linking Qur'ānic interpretation with religious orientation, but in offering a conceptual framework capable of explaining how interpretive paradigms influence contemporary religious discourse while avoiding reductionist binaries between textualism and contextualism.

Practically, the findings suggest that efforts to strengthen religious moderation should move beyond normative campaigns and address the epistemological foundations of religious understanding. Islamic educational institutions, pesantren, and religious policymakers may benefit from promoting interpretive literacy that combines textual competence, contextual awareness, and ethical reflection. The integrative epistemology of *tafsīr-ta'wīl* proposed in this study provides a conceptual basis for developing Qur'ānic studies that are intellectually rigorous, socially responsive, and resistant to both dogmatic exclusivism and interpretive relativism. Future research may extend this framework through empirical investigations of how interpretive epistemologies are transmitted and negotiated within educational institutions, digital religious platforms, and

contemporary Muslim communities, thereby enriching the study of Qur'ānic interpretation in relation to religious authority, public discourse, and social transformation.

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