

Principles and Practices of Religious Tolerance According to Islam In The Malaysian Context: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Religious tolerance in Islam is a vital foundation for sustaining social harmony in Malaysia's multireligious context. However, its implementation faces persistent challenges, including the rise of religious conservatism, conceptual misunderstandings between Tasamuh and secular pluralism and the growing influence of polarised narratives on digital media. This study aims to (1) identify the core theological principles of Islamic religious tolerance in the Malaysian context and (2) analyse how these principles are operationalised through education, public policy and everyday social practices. Adopting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study synthesises findings from 45 peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025 using thematic synthesis and critical interpretive synthesis. The findings reveal that values such as Wasatiyyah, Maqasid al-Syariah, Tasamuh and Rahmatan lil 'Alamin serve as the normative foundations for fostering tolerance but remain constrained by gaps between theological ideals and lived realities. Four main thematic dimensions were identified: (1) normative theological principles, (2) institutional policies and frameworks, (3) forms of social practice and (4) implementation challenges. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025) as a conceptual framework that integrates theological foundations, institutional mechanisms and social realities. Practically, it suggests adopting systemic approaches through value-based education, inclusive policymaking and digital media regulation to strengthen Malaysia's multireligious social ecosystem.

Keywords: Islamic Tolerance, Malaysia, Ecological Model

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Religious tolerance is widely recognised as a critical foundation for sustaining social harmony in multireligious societies. In Malaysia, where Islam is the official religion under Article 3 of the Federal Constitution, the country has often been presented as a model Muslim-majority nation that has historically balanced religious diversity through inclusive policies, interfaith initiatives and educational reforms (Ghani & Awang, 2017; Njoku & Hamid, 2014). However, recent developments including the rise of conservative discourse, identity politics and the amplification of polarised narratives through digital media have disrupted Malaysia's traditionally stable interfaith relations. These dynamics underscore that religious tolerance is not a static condition but rather a dynamic construct that requires continuous reassessment and recalibration to respond effectively to evolving social, political and cultural contexts (Meerangani et al., 2022; Roslizawati Mohd Ramly et al., 2020; Fauzi & Ismail, 2014).

From an Islamic perspective, tolerance transcends the secular notion of passive coexistence and reflects principled engagement anchored in five key theological foundations: *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* (non-coercion in religion), Wasatiyyah, Tasamuh, Rahmatan lil 'Alamin and Maqasid al-Syariah (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2023; Mohd Khambali et al., 2017). The Qur'an declares, "*there is no compulsion in religion*" (2:256), establishing the normative foundation of religious freedom within Islam (Kamarzaman et al., 2024; Ghani & Awang, 2020). Wasatiyyah promotes moderation and inclusivity in navigating diversity, while Tasamuh encourages respectful engagement rooted in *ihsan*, *hikmah* and *rahmah*. Rahmatan lil 'Alamin embodies Islam's universal compassion and Maqasid al-Syariah frames tolerance through the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage and property to ensure justice and social harmony (Muda & Mohd Tohar, 2020). Importantly, these five theological foundations provide the conceptual basis for developing an Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025), which connects Islamic principles with institutional mechanisms, everyday social practices and implementation challenges.

Despite these clear principles, conceptual confusion often arises when the Islamic notion of Tasamuh is misinterpreted as equivalent to religious pluralism grounded in Western secular epistemology. Within such frameworks, pluralism is framed as the equal validity of all theological truths, which conflicts with Islam's foundational belief in *tauhid* (Fatima & Tasgheer, 2022; Ghani & Awang, 2020). This misinterpretation risks undermining Islam's narrative of principled tolerance, which advocates justice, empathy and coexistence without endorsing theological relativism. By distinguishing Tasamuh from pluralism, this study positions Islamic tolerance as a value framework grounded in theological integrity and contextualised within Malaysia's multireligious realities.

In Malaysia, various mechanisms have been mobilised to translate these Islamic principles into actionable policies and practices. These include the implementation of Islamic and Asian Civilisation Studies (TITAS), the integration of Islamic and Moral Education into school curricula, interfaith dialogues and the engagement of religious leaders, academics and civil society organisations in promoting mutual understanding (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016; Tuan Mohd Zawawi et al., 2020; Abdul Rahman & Khambali, 2016). Nevertheless, significant challenges persist. These involve ideological tensions arising from religious conservatism and narrow interpretations, inconsistencies in policy implementation, fragmented educational approaches, divergent public perceptions and the amplification of identity-based narratives through social media (Meerangani et al., 2022; Ramly et al., 2020; Abdul Rahman & Shapie, 2023; Fauzi & Ismail, 2014; Ghani & Awang, 2020). These interconnected pressures highlight the persistent gap between normative Islamic principles and lived social realities.

Recognising these gaps, this study systematically examines the principles and practices of Islamic religious tolerance in Malaysia by synthesising findings from 45 scholarly articles published between 2000 and 2025. The study aims to (a) identify the core theological principles of Islamic tolerance within Malaysian scholarly literature, (b) analyse the implementation of these principles across institutional policies, educational frameworks and everyday social practices and (c) propose a comprehensive conceptual framework in the form of an Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025). To achieve these aims, the study is guided by three research questions: RQ1, what are the foundational Islamic principles of religious tolerance highlighted in Malaysian scholarly literature? RQ2, how are these principles operationalised through institutional policies, educational curricula and everyday social practices? RQ3, how does the synthesis of these findings propose the construction of an Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia that bridges theology, governance and social realities?

This study employs a rigorous Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, combining Thematic Synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) and Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006) to formulate the proposed Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025). This integrative framework conceptualises Islamic tolerance as a dynamic, multilayered construct encompassing theological foundations, institutional mechanisms, micro-social practices and structural challenges. Through this approach, the study contributes theoretically by expanding the conceptual understanding of Islamic tolerance and practically by providing evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators and religious leaders seeking to foster sustainable interreligious harmony.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to assess the principles and practices of religious tolerance according to Islam in the Malaysian context. This approach was chosen because it allows the process of literature search, article filtering, quality assessment and outcome analysis to be carried out in a systematic, transparent and comprehensive manner (Booth et al., 2016). This method is implemented based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) as recommended by Page et al. (2021), to ensure that the entire study procedure can be audited, replicated and achieve a high level of academic rigor.

This methodology is built on the combination of several key elements. The selection of articles was made through a multi-layered search strategy implemented using three leading databases, followed by the determination of inclusion and exclusion criteria using the SPIDER framework to ensure the suitability of the study with the research objectives. The article screening process follows the PRISMA approach to ensure transparency at each stage of selection, while the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT 2018) Hong et al., 2018 is used to assess the methodological quality of the selected articles. Finally, data analysis and synthesis were carried out by combining Thematic Synthesis and Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) to allow a more reflective, contextual and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of religious tolerance in Islam.

2.1 Database and Search Strategy

The literature search process was conducted systematically based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to ensure that the methodology of this study is transparent, comprehensive and auditable. The main search was conducted on 19 April 2025 and updated on 31 August 2025 to ensure that the literature coverage is up-to-date and relevant to the study objectives. Three main databases are used, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS) and ProQuest.

The database was chosen for its extensive coverage in the fields of Islamic education, public policy and social studies, in addition to providing highly reputable and expert-reviewed articles. The search process uses a combination of keywords: "religious tolerance" AND Malaysia.

Filtering is done on the title of the article to ensure that the search results obtained are most relevant to the field of study (Fayad et al., 2024). The main search results resulted in 91 initial records, consisting of 22 articles from Scopus (automatic search), 30 articles from the Web of Science and 20 articles from ProQuest. In addition, researchers also carried out additional manual searches through Google Scholar and backward *citation tracking*. This approach involves checking the reference list of articles that have been identified to identify other studies that are relevant but do not appear in automated searches. Through this method, it was successfully identified 10 additional articles from Scopus and 9 other articles from manual search via Google Scholar. The combination of automated and manual search results ensures that the literature coverage is comprehensive and minimizes the risk of missing important resources. The entire process was recorded and visualized through the PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram (Figure 1) to improve the traceability and credibility of the study methodology.

2.2 Study Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection of articles for this systematic literature review was determined through the SPIDER framework (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type) as it is more suitable for studies that focus on social and religious phenomena than the PICO framework which is more commonly used in clinical studies. This approach allows the article selection process to be carried out more specifically, comprehensively and systematically, in line with the objectives of the study (Cooke et al., 2012). The SPIDER framework, as shown in Table 1, was used to guide the selection of articles in this study.

Table 1: SPIDER Framework Table

Component	Description
S (Sample)	A study involving the Malaysian community
PI (Phenomenon of Interest)	Principles and practices of religious tolerance according to Islam
D (Design)	Qualitative studies, document analysis or descriptive quantitative studies
E (Evaluation)	Perspectives, views, experiences or understandings related to religious tolerance
R (Research Type)	Qualitative, quantitative descriptive or mixed-methods studies

This approach is supported by Cooke et al. (2012) who affirm the effectiveness of SPIDER for systematic studies involving social and religious phenomena. Recent methodological studies have also confirmed its suitability for qualitative studies and social phenomena (Amir-Behghadami et al., 2021).

2.2.1. Inclusion criteria

Articles are included in the analysis if they meet the following criteria:

- Scope of Study – An empirical study that discusses the principles or practices of religious tolerance according to Islam in the Malaysian context.
- Study Design – Using qualitative, quantitative descriptive, or mixed methods.
- Publication Period – Articles published between 2000 to 2025 to cover important periods of Islamic policy in Malaysia, including the introduction and implementation of the following frameworks Islam Hudhari (2004), Wasatiyyah (2011) and Rahmatan lil 'Alamin (2018). The selection of this period allows for an analysis of long-term developments and

contemporary practices, in line with changes in policy, educational frameworks and dynamics of interfaith interactions.

- d. Language – Articles published in Bahasa Melayu or English.
- e. Full Text Access – Only articles with full access are considered for analysis.

2.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

An article is excluded from the analysis if:

- a. It does not directly discuss the principles or practices of religious tolerance according to Islam.
- b. Not relevant to the Malaysian context or just focusing on other countries.
- c. In the form of editorials, media reports, readers' letters, general writings without expert review or non-peer-reviewed articles.

It does not provide full text for analysis.

2.3 Screening Process and Study Selection

The article screening process is carried out based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure that the study selection procedure is transparent and auditable. Of the 91 articles identified in the initial stages, a total of 16 duplicate articles were removed, leaving 75 articles to be evaluated. The next screening is done through a review of the title and abstract based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria that have been set.

Of these, 25 articles were excluded for not meeting the scope of the study, including those involving studies related to secular pluralism, topics outside the context of Malaysia, or non-empirical discussions. A further 50 articles were fully reviewed at the eligibility assessment stage, but 5 articles were excluded due to lack of full access. Finally, 45 articles were selected and fully analyzed. This process was visually recorded using the PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram (Figure 1) as proof of methodological transparency and accuracy of the screening process.

2.4 Quality Assessment

Article quality assessment was done using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018). This instrument is used because it is suitable for evaluating various study designs, including qualitative, quantitative descriptive and mixed-methods. The assessment was carried out independently by two researchers and any differences of opinion were resolved through discussion with experts in the field. This approach ensures that the selected articles achieve a high level of credibility and methodological rigor before further analysis.

2.5 Data Synthesis and Analysis

The data analysis process is carried out by combining two approaches, namely Thematic Synthesis and Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS). Thematic Synthesis is used to identify key themes related to Islamic principles and practices of tolerance. This process involves the open coding of related passages, the grouping of the code into subthemes and finally the formation of a master theme based on semantic matching as suggested by Thomas and Harden (2008).

Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) is applied to reflectively assess the gap between Islamic theological principles and the reality of implementation in the field. For example, the CIS is used to examine the difference between the ideal *of the concept of Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* as the basis of

tolerance and the findings on the practice of tolerance in the context of Islamic education in Malaysia. The CIS approach allows for the production of new conceptual interpretations that integrate Islamic principles, national policies and social experience. This method is important to provide a more contextual and in-depth understanding, in line with the Islamic epistemological framework (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006).

2.6 Output Synthesis

Findings from the 45 articles analyzed were synthesized narratively and thematically. Qualitative studies are analyzed through an inductive approach by constructing codes and themes, while descriptive quantitative studies are narratively elaborated by taking into account differences in design and instruments used. No statistical meta-analysis was performed due to the heterogeneity of methodology and context of each study. This approach ensures that the synthesis of findings is transparent, triangulative and auditable, in line with international standards for Systematic Literature Review (SLR) studies.

2.7 Summary of Methodology

In summary, this study adopts a rigorous Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, supported by the SPIDER framework for article selection and assessed through the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT 2018). The integration of Thematic Synthesis and Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) enables a comprehensive and reflective analysis of the principles and practices of religious tolerance according to Islam in the Malaysian context. This structured approach ensures methodological transparency, enhances replicability and provides a strong foundation for presenting the findings in the next section.

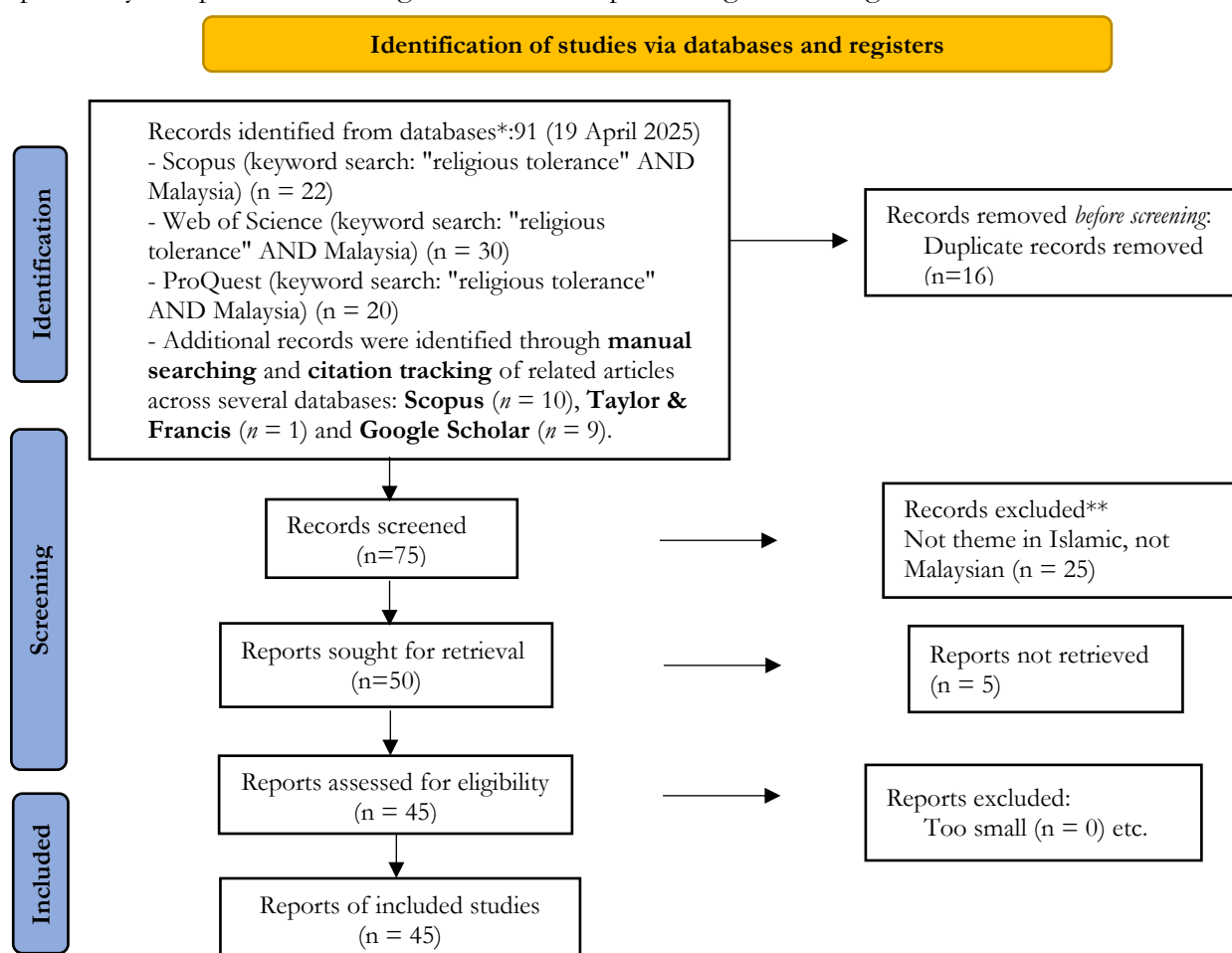


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

3.0 RESULT

This section presents the findings of the study based on thematic analysis of 45 articles related to the principles and practices of religious tolerance according to Islam in the Malaysian context. The analysis found that Islamic tolerance in Malaysia can be understood through four main dimensions, namely Islamic theological principles, the role of social institutions and national policies, the practice of tolerance in daily social interactions and the challenges of implementation in the reality of society. These four dimensions form an interrelated ecology of Islamic tolerance, influencing the basis, social practices and relations between religions.

3.1 Principles of Islamic Tolerance in the Malaysian Context

The findings of the study show that Islamic tolerance in Malaysia is centred on five main theological principles that form the basis of social ethics and practices. The principle of non-coercion in religion based on the verse *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* (Qur'an 2:256) is an important foundation because it affirms that freedom of choice of religion is a fundamental right recognized by Islam. This principle is often a reference in academic discourse, public policy and interfaith dialogue in Malaysia (Yousuf, 2011; Elius et al., 2019; Kamarzaman et al., 2024).

In addition, the concept of Wasatiyyah emphasizes moderation, balance and inclusivity in managing social diversity. In Malaysia, this concept is not only discussed at the theoretical level, but also institutionalized through national policies such as the National Wasatiyyah Policy and the Islamic Hadhari agenda. This approach has been shown to foster social integration and reject extremism and extreme liberalism that can undermine the harmony of society (Mohd Khambali et al., 2017; Saiman, 2023; Meerangani et al., 2022; Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024). Similarly, Ali et al. (2021) highlight that Islamic tolerance principles remain central to managing ethnic and religious diversity in Malaysia, aligning theological ethics with practical frameworks for interethnic harmony.

Tasamuh on the other hand refers to active tolerance based on *ihsan* (excellence), *hikmah* (wisdom) and *rahmah* (compassion), while maintaining the principles of faith. In the Malaysian context, tasamuh is translated through the active involvement of the Muslim community in managing religious diversity ethically without sacrificing the principles of tauhid. Studies have found that tasamuh encourages dialogue, mutual understanding and the practice of mutual respect in interfaith relations (Ghani & Awang, 2020; Awang et al., 2021; Mohd Zawawi et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the concept of Rahmatan lil 'Alamin presents Islam as a religion of universal grace that brings peace and well-being to all mankind regardless of religion or ethnicity. These values are integrated into the country's inclusive development strategy and interfaith dialogue programmes to strengthen understanding of pluralistic societies (Mohd Nazmi et al., 2020; Hijjas, 2023; Elius et al., 2019).

Finally, Maqasid al-Syariah became an important guiding framework in formulating social policies and practices. Maqasid emphasizes the protection of the five basic needs, namely religion, life, intellect, lineage and property. In the context of religious tolerance, maqasid plays a role in aligning religious demands with the needs of a pluralistic society, thus ensuring a balance between Islamic principles and social harmony (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2023; Muda & Mohd Tohar, 2020). Overall, these five principles form the basis of theology and practical ethics that are the cornerstones of Islamic tolerance in Malaysia.

3.2 The Role of Social Institutions and State Policies as Catalysts of Tolerance

The findings of the study show that Islamic tolerance in Malaysia is strengthened through the institutional framework and national policies. Among the key aspects is the Federal Constitution, especially Article 11, which guarantees freedom of religion and is the legal basis in regulating interreligious relations (Mohd Khambali & Khadijah, 2008). National policies such as the National Wasatiyyah Policy and the Islamic Hadhari agenda institutionalize the values of moderation and inclusiveness in the context of a pluralistic society (Fauzi & Ismail, 2014; Saiman, 2023).

In addition, education plays an important role in fostering the value of tolerance. The Islamic Education curriculum, TITAS (Islamic Civilization and Asian Civilization) and Moral Education courses have been formulated to strengthen students' understanding of cultural diversity and the need for mutual respect between religions (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016; Khalli et al., 2022; Wan Husin et al., 2022). The findings also highlight the role of scholars and religious leaders as important agents in institutionalizing the value of tolerance through sermons, academic discourses, forums and interfaith seminars (Abdul Rahman & Shapie, 2023; Ismail & Mahmood, 2022; Mohd Zawawi et al., 2020). Overall, these findings affirm that social institutions, education and religious leadership serve as the main link between Islamic principles and the implementation of social policies and practices, thus fostering interfaith harmony in Malaysia.

3.3 Practice of Tolerance in Daily Social Interactions

The findings of the study show that the practice of Islamic tolerance in Malaysia is more clearly expressed in daily social reality than just policy rhetoric. Shared social spaces such as mixed housing areas, halal restaurants and open-air mosques serve as natural mediums of interaction that foster interfaith understanding and cooperation (Husin et al., 2012; Khalek & Mokhtar, 2022).

Interfaith families, on the other hand, are a practical model of interpersonal tolerance that shows how differences in beliefs can be managed harmoniously in daily life (Mohd Khambali et al., 2017; Khambali et al., 2017). Additionally, social media plays a bilateral role, either as a platform for constructive dialogue or as a source of religious conflict when religious narratives are manipulated (Meerangani et al., 2022; Roslizawati Mohd Ramly et al., 2020).

The younger generation is also the determinant of the future of religious tolerance in Malaysia. While the findings show that youth support for social harmony is high, research also emphasizes the need for continuous value education to strengthen their understanding of Islamic concepts of tolerance (Idris et al., 2019; Damin et al., 2021). Overall, these findings underscore that the daily social space is a real field to assess the effectiveness of Islamic values of tolerance in Malaysia.

3.4 Challenges and Gaps between Principles and Social Reality

Although Malaysia has a strong theological foundation and progressive policies, studies have found that there are some major challenges in effectively operating Islamic tolerance. First, religious conservatism and narrow interpretations of Islamic texts hinder the development of progressive discourse and acceptance of social diversity (Fauzi & Ismail, 2014). Second, identity politics and religious prejudice increase the polarization of society, especially when religion is used as a tool of political mobilization (Peletz, 2009; Kasmoo et al., 2015; Abdul Rahman & Mohd Khambali, 2013).

Third, there is a significant gap between policy rhetoric and implementation due to weaknesses in monitoring and practical application, causing government initiatives to fail to achieve their goals (Abdul Rahman & Mohd Khambali, 2013). Fourth, the social and religious diversity in Malaysia involving various ethnicities, cultures and political ideologies demands a more adaptive and responsive approach to tolerance (Fatima & Tasgheer, 2022; Collste, 2006). Finally,

although Malaysia is often used as a model of Islamic tolerance at the international level, this image has the potential to be compromised if institutional challenges and social pressures are not addressed thoroughly (Talib et al., 2013; Aldiyarova et al., 2023; Njoku & Hamid, 2014).

4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are synthesised within the framework of the Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025), which conceptualises Islamic tolerance as a dynamic, multilayered construct rather than a static theological ideal. This model integrates four interrelated dimensions foundational theological principles, institutional mechanisms, everyday social practices and critical challenges to explain how Islamic values, state policies and lived realities collectively shape interreligious coexistence in Malaysia. By mapping these interconnected layers, the discussion positions the ecological model as both a theoretical lens and a practical framework for understanding the complex interplay between norms, institutions and society in fostering harmony in a multireligious context. The synthesis of findings from the 45 reviewed articles directly informs the development of this ecological model, integrating theological foundations, institutional mechanisms, everyday practices and structural challenges into a single comprehensive framework. The conceptual relationships emerging from the analysis are illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025)

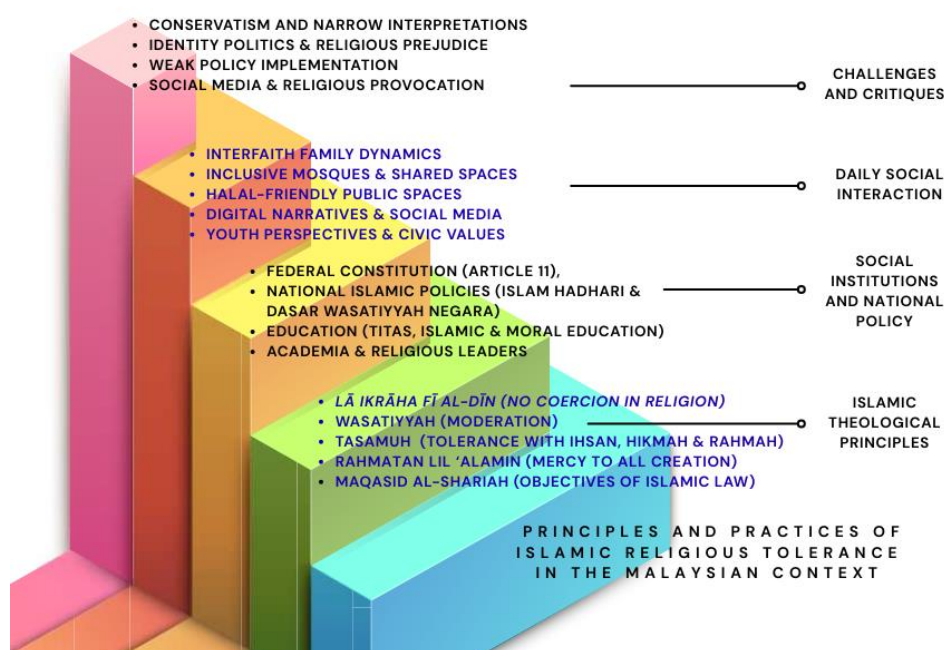


Figure 2 Conceptual Model: The Ecology of Islamic Tolerance Malaysia (2000-2025)

This model divides Islamic tolerance in Malaysia into four multi-layered dimensions that interact with each other. The key dimensions and thematic elements identified from the reviewed articles are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025) Integrated Thematic-Conceptual Framework Based on 45 Articles

i. Basic Dimensions: Principles of Islamic Theology	
Role: Provide a normative foundation for the interpretation and practice of tolerance	
Subtheme	Description
No coercion <i>la ikraba fi al-din</i>	Verse 2:256 as the principle of freedom of religion.
<i>Wasatiyyah</i>	Balance and moderation in social muamalah
<i>Tasamuh</i>	<i>Ihsan</i> , wisdom and <i>rahmah</i> in difference.

<i>Rahmatan lil 'Alamin</i>	Islam as a blessing to all mankind.
<i>Maqasid Syariah</i>	Protection of religion and rights as the main principle.
ii. Intermediate Dimension: Social Institutions and State Policy	
Role: To be a bridge between Islamic principles and implementation in a multi-religious society.	
Elements	Role
Constitution of Malaysia (Art. 11)	Guarantee freedom of religion as a legal right.
The Islamic Policy of Hadhari / <i>Wasatiyyah</i> Negara	Aligning Islam with the needs of a multi-religious society.
Education (TTTAS, Islamic and Moral Education)	Instilling the value of respect and understanding between religions.
Academics & Religious Leaders	To be an agent of tolerance and dialogue.
iii. Micro-Social Dimension: Everyday Practices of Tolerance	
Role: Determine the true reality of acceptance and the limits of tolerance at the grassroots.	
Form	Explanation
Interfaith Family Relations	A practical model of interpersonal tolerance (conversion, great interaction).
Open Mosque & Inclusive Architecture	A physical space that supports religious integration.
Halal Food & Micro Social Space	Opportunities for interaction in a neutral social space.
Social Media	Function as platforms for constructive interfaith dialogue or, conversely, as catalysts for tension depending on narrative framing.
Youth Perspectives & Civic Values	Highlight the role of younger generations in shaping the future of tolerance and the need for continuous value-based education.
iv. Outer Dimension: Challenges and Criticisms	
Role: These factors point to a gap between principle and implementation and should be addressed structurally.	
Issues	Impact on Tolerance
Conservatism and Narrow Interpretation	Hindering Islamic progressive discourse.
Identity Politics & Religious Prejudice	Weakening real tolerance practices.
Disadvantages of Policy Implementation	Rhetoric does not translate into reality.
Social Media & Religious Provocation	Nurturing strife if not controlled wisely.

4.1 Foundational Dimension: Principles of Islamic Theology

At the foundational level, the model identifies five key theological principles *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* (non-coercion in religion), *Wasatiyyah*, *Tasamuh*, *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* and *Maqasid al-Syariah* as the normative anchors of Islamic tolerance in Malaysia. These principles collectively provide a moral and ethical foundation for balancing religious obligations with societal diversity (Mohd Khambali et al., 2017; Abdullah & Ahmad, 2023).

For instance, *Wasatiyyah* promotes moderation and inclusivity, enabling the development of social harmony while avoiding extremes (Saiman, 2023). *Tasamuh*, grounded in *ihsan*, *bikmah* and *rahmah*, encourages active engagement and respectful dialogue without compromising Islamic principles (Ghani & Awang, 2020; Awang et al., 2021). Similarly, *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* emphasises Islam's universal mercy towards all humanity, while *Maqasid al-Syariah* aligns the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage and property with the demands of a diverse society (Muda & Mohd Tohar, 2020).

Within the ecological framework, these five principles act as the roots of tolerance, shaping policy directions, institutional mechanisms and social norms. However, the findings also reveal that their effectiveness depends on contextual interpretation and the commitment of policymakers to apply them inclusively and strategically.

4.2 Intermediate Dimension: Institutions and Policies

The intermediate dimension highlights the role of institutions and national policies as mediators between Islamic principles and practical implementation. The Federal Constitution (Article 11) establishes a legal framework for religious freedom, while *Dasar Wasatiyyah Negara*

and Islam Hadhari institutionalise Islamic values within Malaysia's multireligious context (Fauzi & Ismail, 2014; Saiman, 2023).

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards tolerance. The integration of Islamic Education, TITAS and Moral Studies within school and university curricula embeds values of respect, empathy and coexistence into formal learning environments (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016; Khalli et al., 2022; Wan Husin et al., 2022). Furthermore, religious leaders and academics contribute significantly by shaping discourses on tolerance through forums, interfaith dialogues and collaborative initiatives that strengthen social integration (Abdul Rahman & Shapie, 2023; Mohd Zawawi et al., 2020).

However, the findings also reveal that institutions are not inherently neutral. Depending on the prevailing political narratives and policy frameworks, institutions can either act as inclusive platforms for social cohesion or as mechanisms of ideological dominance (Somasundram et al., 2021; Njoku & Hamid, 2014). As such, continuous evaluation and accountability are necessary to ensure institutional frameworks remain aligned with Malaysia's diverse realities and foster long-term social harmony.

4.3 Micro-Social Dimension: Everyday Practices of Tolerance

The micro-social dimension examines everyday practices of tolerance, which act as a litmus test for the effectiveness of theological ideals and institutional frameworks. The findings reveal that shared social spaces such as mixed housing areas, halal-friendly restaurants and open mosque programmes serve as natural environments for promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation (Husin et al., 2012; Khalek & Mokhtar, 2022).

Interfaith families are identified as practical models of interpersonal tolerance, demonstrating that differences in religious beliefs can coexist harmoniously when guided by principles of respect and compassion (Mohd Khambali et al., 2017). Social media plays a dual role in this dimension: it can be a platform for constructive engagement or a source of interreligious conflict, depending on how narratives are framed and moderated (Meerangani et al., 2022; Roslizawati Mohd Ramly et al., 2020).

Additionally, the study underscores the critical role of youth perspectives in shaping the future of interreligious coexistence in Malaysia. While young Malaysians generally demonstrate strong support for interfaith harmony, findings highlight the necessity of continuous value-based education to strengthen their understanding and application of Islamic tolerance principles (Idris et al., 2019; Damin et al., 2021).

Within the ecological model, this dimension illustrates that tolerance must be lived, experienced and practised within the rhythm of daily life to become meaningful and sustainable.

4.4 Outer Dimension: Challenges and Critiques

The outer dimension addresses the critical challenges and tensions that test the resilience of Islamic tolerance in Malaysia. Findings identify several key factors: the rise of religious conservatism and narrow interpretations (Fauzi & Ismail, 2014), the influence of identity politics (Peletz, 2009), policy implementation gaps (Fatima & Tasgheer, 2022) and the escalation of polarised digital narratives (Roslizawati Mohd Ramly et al., 2020).

These pressures expose a significant gap between theological ideals and practical realities, underscoring the need to reframe dominant discourses on tolerance. The study advocates the

elevation of Tasamuh within contemporary Islamic thought as a more authentic, epistemologically grounded alternative to the Western concept of “tolerance” (Ghani & Awang, 2020).

To further strengthen the ecological framework, the study recommends that future research adopt Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS) to integrate Islamic epistemology with Malaysia’s socio-cultural realities and empirically evaluate the ecological model across diverse contexts, including educational institutions, interfaith communities and digital platforms (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006).

5.0 CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesised findings from 45 scholarly articles to examine the principles and practices of Islamic religious tolerance within the Malaysian context. The study confirms that five key theological principles *lā ikrāha fī al-dīn* (non-coercion in religion), *Wasatiyyah*, *Tasamuh*, *Rahmatan lil ‘Alamin* and *Maqasid al-Syariah* form the normative foundation for fostering interreligious harmony in Malaysia (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2023; Ghani & Awang, 2020; Mohd Khambali et al., 2017). These principles are manifested through multiple social and institutional mechanisms, including education policies, legal frameworks, mosque-based outreach initiatives and interfaith family practices that promote coexistence in Malaysia’s multireligious society (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016; Khalek & Mokhtar, 2022; Idris et al., 2019).

However, the study also reveals a persistent gap between theological ideals and practical implementation. Among the most pressing challenges are the rise of religious conservatism (Fauzi & Ismail, 2014), limited integration of systematic tolerance education (Salleh & Abd Khahar, 2016), the instrumentalisation of religion in identity politics (Damin et al., 2021; Khambali et al., 2013) and the polarising effects of social media on interfaith relations (Meerangani et al., 2022; Roslizawati Mohd Ramly et al., 2020). While Malaysia is often celebrated as a model Muslim-majority nation that successfully manages religious diversity (Ghani & Awang, 2017; Njoku & Hamid, 2014; Talib & Gill, 2012), the findings highlight that this reputation is fragile and contingent upon addressing these multidimensional challenges at both policy and grassroots levels.

To respond to these complexities, this study introduces the Ecological Model of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025), which integrates theological foundations, institutional mechanisms, micro-social practices and structural challenges into a comprehensive conceptual framework. Theoretically, this model reconceptualises Islamic tolerance as a dynamic, multilayered system rather than a static theological construct. Practically, it provides a structured pathway for policymakers, educators, religious leaders and civil society actors to translate Islamic principles into inclusive policies and community-driven initiatives that strengthen interreligious coexistence and social cohesion. Importantly, this model is directly derived from the synthesis of findings across 45 reviewed studies, demonstrating how Islamic values, institutional frameworks, everyday practices and implementation challenges collectively shape the Malaysian experience of religious tolerance.

Furthermore, this study emphasises the importance of elevating *Tasamuh* in contemporary Islamic discourse as a more authentic, value-driven alternative to the Western notion of “tolerance.” Rooted in *ihsan*, *bikmah*, *rahmah* and *tawhid*, *Tasamuh* provides a proactive and inclusive understanding of tolerance that resonates more closely with Malaysia’s socio-cultural realities (Fatima & Tasgheer, 2022; Ghani & Awang, 2020; Khambali et al., 2017).

Finally, the study recommends that future research operationalise this ecological model through empirical investigations in diverse contexts, including educational institutions, interfaith communities and digital platforms. Such research would enable a deeper evaluation of the

effectiveness of policies, curricula and social initiatives while reinforcing Malaysia's aspirations to sustain its position as a global model of Islamic tolerance in navigating religious diversity within a rapidly evolving socio-political landscape (Awang et al., 2021; Abdul Rahman et al., 2020; Idris et al., 2019).

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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APPENDIX A

Integrated Thematic-Conceptual Table: The Ecology of Islamic Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025)

This appendix presents an integrated thematic-conceptual framework that maps the ecology of Islamic tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025). It combines insights from the conceptual model with empirical findings obtained through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) involving 45 scholarly articles.

The framework identifies four major dimensions of Islamic tolerance theological principles, institutional and policy roles, daily social interactions and challenges and criticisms supported by themes, relevant articles and illustrative quotes. This appendix serves as a comprehensive reference that bridges theory, empirical data and analytical discussion.

Theme	Subtheme / Principle	Role & Theoretical Basis	Related Articles	Key Findings / Quotes
I. Foundational Dimension (<i>Principles of Islamic Theology</i>)	1. No Coercion in Religion	Establishes freedom of religion based on Qur'an 2:256; a central principle of Islamic tolerance.	21	"There is no compulsion in religion" (Q2:256); Islam promotes freedom of belief.
	2. Wasatiyyah (Moderation)	Advocates balanced, just and inclusive approaches that reject extremism in social, political and religious contexts.	6,22, 24, 33	"Moderation is the future of the ummah"; "Wasatiyyah promotes racial and religious harmony."
	3. Tasamuh (Tolerance with Ihsan & Hikmah)	Encourages respectful engagement with diversity through ihsan (benevolence), hikmah (wisdom) and rahmah (compassion) without compromising core beliefs. Supported by al-Shahristānī's theoretical perspective, which views religious diversity as a natural phenomenon and promotes dialogue, understanding and justice.	7, 8, 9, 38	"Tasamuh is rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah"; "Mutual understanding without compromising beliefs."
	4. Rahmatan lil 'Alamin	Positions Islam as a mercy to all creation and promotes universal values of coexistence.	15, 23, 39	"Islam is mercy for all mankind."
	5. Maqasid al-Shariah	Highlights the objectives of Islamic law — protecting faith, life, intellect, lineage and property — as the foundation for justice and social harmony.	26, 29	"Protection of religion as a maqasid principle."
II. Intermediate Dimension (<i>Social Institutions & National Policies</i>)	6. Malaysian Constitution	Article 11 guarantees freedom of religion; provides a constitutional basis for interfaith tolerance.	25	"Article 11 guarantees freedom of religion."
	7. National Policies (Islam Hadhari & Wasatiyyah Negara)	Integrates Islamic principles into multi-religious contexts to ensure social cohesion.	4, 30	"Wasatiyyah approach promotes racial and religious harmony."
	8. Religious Education & Literacy	Leverages Islamic Education, TITAS and Moral Studies to foster	12, 13, 16	"Curriculum teaches tolerance"; "Education enhances ethnic unity."

		interfaith respect and understanding.		
	9. Interfaith Dialogue & Collaboration	Promotes forums, seminars and joint activities as platforms for religious engagement and coexistence.	3, 10, 18, 19, 34	“Collaboration with religious organisations”; “Interfaith forums and seminars.”
	10. Leadership & Scholarly Thought	Positions academic scholars and religious leaders as agents of tolerance and dialogue.	7, 14, 28	“Respect, forgiveness and good deeds”; “al-Ghazali: relationships based on humanity and rights.”
III. Dimension of Daily Social Interaction (<i>Practices of Tolerance</i>)	11. Micro-Social Spaces	Neutral spaces such as halal dining areas, inclusive architecture and mixed housing foster natural interfaith interaction.	2, 11	“Halal dining as micro-public spaces”; “Housing planning enables interaction.”
	12. Interfaith Families	Family relations across religions serve as practical models of interpersonal tolerance.	6, 17	“Family planning enables interaction”; examples of lived interfaith coexistence.
	13. Social Media	Functions as both a platform for dialogue and a source of conflict, depending on content moderation.	43, 44	“Social media shapes tolerance attitudes”; “431 reports of religious insult cases.”
	14. Youth Perspectives	Highlights the importance of youth perceptions and attitudes in shaping the future of tolerance.	20, 32	“Youth support tolerance but need more education”; “Image of Islam important to youth.”
	15. Social Reality & Perceptions	Reveals contradictions between policy rhetoric and actual interfaith practices.	5, 31, 36, 41, 42	“Contradictory realities exist”; “Positive perception of inter-religious interaction.”
IV. Dimension of Challenges & Criticisms (<i>Gaps Between Principle & Reality</i>)	16. Conservatism & Narrow Interpretations	Restricts progressive Islamic discourse and resists diversity and openness.	4	“Tasamuh rooted in Qur’an and Sunnah”; contrasts with Western secular tolerance.
	17. Identity Politics & Religious Prejudice	Religion-based politics intensify segregation and weaken integration.	1, 5, 37	“Contradictory realities exist.”
	18. Policy Implementation Gaps	Highlights the gap between policy rhetoric and on-the-ground realities.	37	“Maqasid al-Shariah supports religious freedom,” but implementation remains weak.
	19. Complex Pluralism	Political, ethnic, religious and geographical diversity complicates the practice of tolerance.	27, 41	“Political, educational, geographical and religious pluralism coexist.”
	20. International Comparisons	Positions Malaysia as a model for Islamic tolerance but warns of risks if challenges remain unaddressed.	3, 35, 45	“Malaysia balances Islamic identity and policy openness”; “Compared to Nigeria’s volatility.”

APPENDIX B

List of 45 Selected Articles on Islamic Religious Tolerance in Malaysia (2000–2025)

Article No.	Author(s) & Year	Title
01	Peletz, M. G. (2009)	Islam and the cultural politics of legitimacy: Malaysia in the aftermath of September 11
02	Husin, A., Malek, N. M., & Gapor, S. A. (2012)	Cultural and religious tolerance and acceptance in urban housing: A study of multi-ethnic Malaysia
03	Talib, A. T., Gill, S. S., Kawangit, R. M., & Kunasekaran, P. (2013).	Religious tolerance: The key between one ASEAN one community.
04	Fauzi, A. H., & Ismail, M. T. (2014)	Islamist conservatism and the demise of Islam Hadhari in Malaysia.
05	Kasmo, M. A., Usman, A. H., Taha, M., Salleh, A. R., & Alias, J. (2015).	Religious tolerance in Malaysia: A comparative study between the different religious groups.
06	Mohd Khambali@Hambali, K., Sintang, S., Awang, A., Mat Karim, K. N., Abdul Rahman, N. F., Wan Ramli, W. A., Senin, N., Zainal Abidin, A., Ismail, A. Z., Wan Ali, W. Z. K., & Md. Noor, R. (2017)	al-Wasatiyyah in the practice of religious tolerance among the families of new Muslims in sustaining a well-being society
07	Mohd Zawawi, T. S. N. A. T., Zain, A. D. M., & Embong, R. (2020)	Pragmatic role of academicians in promoting religious tolerance according to al-Shahrastānī's theoretical framework: A Malaysia context
08	Awang, J., Ramli, A. F., & Rahman, Z. A. (2021)	Muslim views on other religions: With special reference to Buddhism
09	Somasundram, S., Habibullah, M. S., Sambasivan, M., & Rasiah, R. (2021)	Antecedents of Religious Tolerance in Southeast Asia
10	Ismail, A. S., & Aziz, N. S. (2022)	MACMA Islamic ideology in Chinese Muslim mosques towards universalizing Islam in Malaysia
11	Khalek, A. A., & Mokhtar, R. A. M. (2022)	Religious Tolerance Through the Lens of Halal Dining Experience in Malaysia
12	Khalli, M. N. M., Sintang, S., & Kamu, A. (2022).	The Framework of Socio-Religious Harmony in Sabah, East Malaysia: An Application of Fuzzy Delphi Method
13	Wan Husin, Wan Norhasniah; Izzati Samsudin, Nur Kamilia; Zainol, Noor Azmi; Hidayah Nordin, Nani Noor; & Mujani, Wan Kamal (2022)	The Influence of Education, Economy and Religion Domains in Enhancing Ethnic Unity among Malaysian Youths
14	Abdul Rahman, Nur Farhana & Shapie, Nur Solehah (2023)	Religious Tolerance Conceptual Framework: Malaysian Religious Leaders and Scholars' Perspective
15	Hijjas, M.(2023)	Is Jawi Islamic?
16	Salleh, K., & Abd Khahar, Y. M. (2016).	Elements of Inter-Religious Understanding in Islamic and Moral Education Curriculum
17	Khambali, K. M., et al. (2017)	Muhajir Interactional Generator and Religious Tolerance among New Muslim-Muslim-Non-Muslim
18	Abdul Rahman, N. F., & Khambali, K. M. (2016)	Readiness of Muslim and Christian Leaders in Forming Religious Harmony: Necessity and Limitation
19	Abdul Rahman, N. F., Shapie, N. S., & Khambali, K. M. (2020).	Understanding Other Religions as Basic of Religious Tolerance: The Aim and the Term from Religious Leaders' Perspective in Malaysia
20	Idris, F., Muda, M. M., & Mastor, K. A. (2019).	The Development of Religious Tolerance Model Among Multiethnic Youth in Malaysia
21	Yousuf, A. F. (2011).	<i>Religious Freedom, Minorities and Islam: An Inquiry into the Malaysian Experience</i> (2nd ed.)
22	Ali, S., Hamzah, M. I., Lubis, M. A., Yusnaldi, E., Lubis, I., & Taib, S. H. (2021).	Prinsip Toleransi Islam dalam Menangani Konflik Kepelbagaian Kaum di Malaysia
23	Mohd Nazmi Mohd Khalli, Sazrinee & Syamsul Azizul Marinsah (2020)	Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin: Kerangka Konsep Keharmonian di Malaysia

24	Meerangani, K. A. B., Kamaruddin, S. A., & Ismail, M. H. (2022).	Application of Wasatiyyah in The Social Interaction of Plural Society in Malaysia / Pendekatan Wasatiyyah Dalam Interaksi Inter-Agama di Malaysia
25	Mohd Khambali @ Hamali, K., & Khadijah. (2008).	Toleransi Beragama dan Amalan di Malaysia: Rujukan kepada Artikel 11 Perlembagaan Persekutuan Malaysia
26	Abdullah, A. S., & Ahmad, N. M. (2023).	Maqasid Al-Syariah dan Hubungkaitannya dengan Hak Kebebasan Beragama Di Malaysia (Maqasid Al-Syariah and its Relation with Freedom of Religion in Malaysia)
27	Fatima, T., & Tasgheer, A. (2022).	Religious Diversity and Islam: An Appraisal of Pluralism in Malaysia
28	Ismail, A. M., & Mahmood, A. M. (2022).	Imam Al-Ghazali's Thoughts on the Relationship Between Muslims with Muslims and Muslims with Non-Muslims.
29	Muda, K., & Mohd Tohar, S. N. A. (2020).	Definition, Concept and Theory of Religious Tolerance: An Analysis.
30	Saiman, M. Z. (2023).	Manhaj <i>Wasatiyyah</i> in Developing National Unity in The Country According to the Balance Sheet of Sunnah Wal Jamaah Members
31	Ghani, R. A., & Awang, J. (2017)	A Review on Writings on Religious Tolerance in Malaysia
32	Damin, Z. A., Abdullah, K., & Omar-Fauzee, M. S. (2021)	Ethnic and Religious Tolerance: Barrier Factors and Improvement Measures Based on Malay Youth Perspectives in Malaysia
33	Muhajarah, K., & Soebahar, M. E. (2024)	Fiqh of Tolerance and Religious Moderation: A Study towards Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand
34	Awang, J., Abdul Rahman, N. F., & Khambali, K. M. (2022).	Muslim and Buddhist Encounters: Between Conflict and Harmony
35	Aldiyarova, Z., et al. (2023).	Peculiarities of Kazakhstan and Malaysia in View of the Relationship between State and Religion
36	Awang, J., Abd Halim, M. N., & Idris, M. R. (2021)	Perception on Inter-Religious Interaction among Muslim and Non-Muslim: A Case Study in Kedah and Selangor
37	Abdul Rahman, N. F., & Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, K. (2013).	Religious Tolerance in Malaysia: Problems and Challenges
38	Ghani, R. A., & Awang, J. (2020).	Tasamuh Versus Tolerance as Practical Approach to Encounter the Conflicting Issue
39	Elius, M., Khan, I., Mohd Nor, M. R. B., Mohd Yusoff, M. Y. Z. B., & Bin Noordin, K. (2019).	Islam as a Religion of Tolerance and Dialogue: A Critical Appraisal
40	Talib, A. T., & Gill, S. S. (2012)	Socio-Religious Tolerance: Exploring the Malaysian Experience
41	Collste, G. (Ed.). (2006).	Religious and Ethnic Pluralism in Malaysia
42	Kamarzaman, S. A., Abdullah, A., & Ismail, M. H. (2024).	Religious practices among Malaysias diverse society
43	Meerangani, K. A. B., et al. (2022).	Effect Of Social Media On The Tolerance Of Multicultural Society In Malaysia
44	Roslizawati Mohd Ramly, Eizan Azrin Mat Sharif, Mariani Munir Abd Mutalib, Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman, Wan Mohd Faurul Azdi Wan Mohd Razali, & Rosidayu Sabran. (2020).	Tema Penghinaan Agama Islam Di Media Sosial
45	Njoku, C. C., & Abd. Hamid, H. (2014).	Religion in a Secular State and State Religion in Practice: Assessing Religious Influence, Tolerance and National Stability in Nigeria and Malaysia