

FOSTERING CAMPUS HARMONY AND RELIGIOUS GOVERNANCE IN MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES THROUGH THE VALUES OF AHL AL-SUNNAH WA AL-JAMA'AH

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Abstract: Religious diversity and ideological tensions are increasingly evident within Malaysian universities as higher education institutions become microcosms of a pluralistic society. Managing these challenges requires a balanced and contextually grounded governance approach that promotes social cohesion while preserving institutional stability. This study proposes a conceptual framework based on the leadership values of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ) to strengthen campus harmony and religious governance in Malaysian universities. Using a qualitative conceptual approach, the study conducted an integrative literature review of scholarship on Islamic leadership, religious governance, and higher education, followed by thematic analysis. The synthesis identified four contextually relevant ASWJ values, namely wasatiyyah (moderation), tawazun (balance), tasāmuh (tolerance), and i'tidal (justice), which were selected as analytical dimensions for managing religious and ideological diversity in universities. These values are operationalized through leadership dimensions that emphasize ethical governance and inclusive student engagement. The

framework also promotes dialogical conflict management, leadership capacity development, and collaboration with religious authorities. The proposed framework contributes to the discourse on Islamic leadership in higher education by offering a practical, value-based governance model to sustain campus harmony. The study also provides policy guidance for university administrators seeking to address ideological tensions, strengthen institutional resilience, and cultivate a more inclusive academic environment in increasingly diverse societies.

Keyword: *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ), Campus Harmony, Higher Education, Islamic Leadership, Religious Governance*

Introduction

Religious diversity and ideological tensions are increasingly evident in the landscape of higher education institutions in Malaysia, as universities develop into social spaces that bring together students and staff from diverse ethnic, religious, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. In Malaysia's diverse society, universities serve as microcosms of the country's complex social reality, making the management of religious and ideological diversity a significant challenge in the administration of higher education institutions (Yaacob et al., 2019). Interactions between campus residents from different backgrounds have the potential to strengthen social integration and inter-religious tolerance, but they can also create space for identity conflicts, thought polarization, and ideological tensions if not managed systematically and prudently (Ramlee et al., 2009).

In facing these challenges, universities are no longer seen merely as centers of academic excellence but also as institutions for character formation, ethical development, and the promotion of social harmony or campus harmony (Min & Mai, 2024). Campus harmony is an important element in ensuring institutional stability, the well-being of university residents, and the effectiveness of the educational process. Therefore, a balanced, contextual, and proactive leadership approach is needed to manage religious diversity and address potential ideological tensions in the campus community. Such an approach must be grounded in values that promote dialogue, tolerance, and justice, without ignoring the identity and religious traditions of the majority community in Malaysia.

In the context of Islamic administration in Malaysia, Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ) is recognized as the mainstream movement that underpins the framework of faith, thought, and religious governance at the federal and state levels (Zulkifli & Shuhari, 2025). The ASWJ approach emphasizes the principles of *wasatiyyah* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice), which are considered relevant to addressing the challenges posed by social and ideological diversity in higher education institutions. These values not only reject extremism and fanaticism but also encourage a dialogic, inclusive, and ethical approach in conflict management and inter-community relations (Min & Mai, 2024). Therefore, ASWJ-based leadership has great potential to serve as a basis for a more harmonious and stable university governance model.

Despite numerous studies on educational leadership and social integration in higher education institutions, discussions on developing an ASWJ-based Islamic leadership framework to manage religious and ideological diversity in universities remain limited. Most previous studies have focused on aspects of social integration, racial unity, or organizational leadership in

general, without specifically examining how ASWJ principles can be operationalized within university governance structures to strengthen campus harmony. This gap underscores the need for a systematic, practical conceptual framework to help higher education institutions better manage the challenges of religious and ideological pluralism.

In this regard, this study aims to propose a conceptual leadership framework grounded in ASWJ values to strengthen campus harmony and religious governance in Malaysian universities. Through a qualitative approach grounded in a literature review, this study identifies four contextually relevant ASWJ values as analytical foundations for managing religious and ideological diversity in higher education institutions. The proposed framework operationalizes the principles of *wasatiyyah*, *tawazun*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *i'tidal* through leadership dimensions that emphasize ethical integrity, inclusive student involvement, dialogical conflict resolution, and strengthened institutional governance mechanisms. In addition, this framework integrates elements of institutional policy alignment, leadership capacity development for university administrators, and strategic collaboration with state religious authorities to ensure its effective implementation. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of theoretical discourse on Islamic leadership in higher education and provide practical policy guidance for institutions striving to maintain campus harmony in an increasingly pluralistic societal environment.

Methodology

Review Design and Scope

This study employed a qualitative conceptual design supported by an integrative literature review. The review design was informed by Whitemore and Knafl's (2005) integrative review methodology, which supports the synthesis of diverse forms of evidence for conceptual and theory-building purposes. The integrative approach was selected because the purpose was theory development and the synthesis of diverse forms of scholarship, rather than estimating statistical effects. The unit of analysis was the scholarly argument concerning campus diversity, religious governance, ASWJ values, Islamic leadership, and higher education governance.

Search and Selection Procedure

The review drew on publications identified through multidisciplinary academic databases and university library discovery services. The search strategy combined terms such as "Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah" OR "ASWJ", "wasatiyyah", "tasamuh", "Islamic leadership", "religious governance", "campus harmony", "religious moderation", and "Malaysian higher education". Sources published between 2009 and 2025 in English or Malay were considered. Sources were included if they were directly relevant to at least one of four domains: ideological tensions or religious diversity, university governance, Islamic leadership values, or mechanisms for social harmony. Sources lacking a clear connection to any of these four domains, as well as duplicates and journalistic commentary, were excluded. Screening was conducted first by title and abstract, then by full-text relevance. The final interpretive corpus comprised 21 substantive publications. Methodological references used to inform the review design, including Whitemore and Knafl (2005), were cited separately and were not counted as part of this corpus. As an integrative review, the corpus supports conceptual synthesis but does not claim exhaustive systematic coverage.

Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

A structured review matrix was used to record publication year, study context, central concept, governance problem, leadership value, proposed mechanism, anticipated outcome, and stated limitation. Analysis combined deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding organized evidence under *wasatiyyah*, *tawazun*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *i'tidal*. Inductive coding identified recurring challenges and practices, including fragmented governance, reactive intervention, policy alignment, student engagement, leadership capacity, dialogue, mediation, and institutional accountability. Comparative reading was then used to identify convergence, disagreement, and unaddressed issues across social-integration, religious-moderation, Maqasid-oriented, and organizational leadership literature.

Framework Construction and Analytical Boundaries

The conceptual framework was constructed by mapping each recurring governance problem to an ASWJ value, an institutional mechanism, a responsible actor, an indicative measure, and an intended outcome. This sequence creates a traceable problem-value-mechanism-indicator-outcome logic. The resulting relationships are theoretical propositions, not empirically verified causal claims. No interviews, surveys, or institutional case data were collected; therefore, contextual feasibility and effectiveness require subsequent validation.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized into three interrelated themes: the challenges of ideological tensions and campus harmony in higher education institutions, the current status of religious governance in universities, and the role of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ) leadership values as a practical paradigm for fostering sustainable campus harmony and institutional stability.

Navigating Ideological Tensions and Campus Harmony

Higher education institutions are increasingly facing the challenge of complex ideological and religious diversity as universities become microcosms of pluralistic societies. In the context of Malaysia, universities bring together students from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and thought orientations, thus making the campus a dynamic space for social interaction but also vulnerable to identity conflicts and ideological polarization (Kasmo et al., 2015). This diversity has the potential to strengthen social integration and tolerance among communities, but without systematic governance, it also opens up space for ideological tensions that can undermine the stability of higher education institutions.

Recent literature suggests that concerns surrounding campus harmony are not confined solely to religious radicalism. Drawing on broader Malaysian ideological developments, this study conceptualizes campus tensions as potentially emerging from competing ideological orientations, including conservative and liberal positions (Ahmad Fauzi & Takiyuddin, 2014). This issue is particularly sensitive in Malaysia, where Islam is the religion of the Federation while society operates within a pluralistic and democratic structure. Studies of inter-religious relations indicate that religious tolerance is often shaped by the intersection of religious, political, and cultural identities. Abdul Rahman and Mohd Khambali @ Hambali (2013) emphasize that although Malaysia is frequently regarded as a model of social harmony, inter-religious relations continue to face challenges stemming from religious sensitivities, misunderstandings of pluralism, and divergent perceptions among community groups.

In university settings, these challenges may become more complex as students encounter diverse global ideological narratives through social media and other digital platforms. Communication technologies can facilitate education and interfaith dialogue, but they may also accelerate the circulation of radical narratives, religious stereotypes, hostility, and identity polarization. Meerangani et al. (2022) reported that social media significantly influences perceptions of tolerance within Malaysia's multicultural society. Consequently, digital platforms may function both as spaces for constructive engagement and as channels through which ideological tensions and social instability are intensified.

At the same time, contemporary literature also shows an increasing focus on religious moderation as a mechanism for addressing identity conflicts and religious politics. Comparative research involving Indonesia and Malaysia further demonstrates that religious moderation can be cultivated through faith-based educational approaches that emphasize balance, tolerance, dialogue, and respect for diversity (Bahri et al., 2025). Sulistyoko et al. (2024) explain that the narrative of *wasatiyyah* in Malaysia and Indonesia is increasingly used as an institutional approach to curb extremism and maintain social harmony. However, they also criticize the concept of religious moderation for being often politicized and not fully translated into the governance structures of higher education institutions. Although many studies discuss social integration and religious tolerance, most research still focuses on the general dimension of interfaith relations and pays less attention to managing ideological tensions in the university context. Furthermore, a significant portion of the research places greater emphasis on the threat of religious radicalism without equally examining how competing ideological positions may also affect social cohesion and institutional stability on campus. This situation indicates a gap in the literature on higher education leadership models that can manage diverse ideological tensions in a balanced, context-specific manner.

Status of Religious Governance in Higher Education

Religious governance in higher education institutions refers to the administrative mechanisms, policies, and approaches used to manage religious life, community relations, and ideological conflicts within the campus environment. In Malaysian universities, this aspect is usually managed by the university's Islamic center, the student affairs unit, counseling, and the institution's disciplinary committee. However, the reviewed literature suggests that governance responses may remain fragmented and reactive in the absence of a comprehensive value-based framework. Kasmoo et al. (2015) emphasize that the approach to managing religious relations in Malaysia heavily relies on the principles of social tolerance and institutional control to avoid open conflicts between communities. Although this approach has successfully maintained the basic stability of society, it tends to be administrative in nature and places less emphasis on developing a sense of values and on continuous dialogue. In universities, this situation often leads campus harmony management to focus on resolving issues after conflicts occur rather than on systematic preventive strategies.

Some governance approaches that prioritize institutional neutrality may not fully account for Malaysia's local religious and sociocultural context. Abdullah and Ahmad (2023) explain that, in the Malaysian context, religious freedom must be understood alongside the principles of Maqasid al-Shariah and societal stability. However, university administrative approaches may not always integrate spiritual dimensions and Islamic values strategically into campus policy formulation. A further gap identified in the literature is the limited availability of leadership models that translate religious values into organizational governance mechanisms. Most studies on higher education leadership focus on management effectiveness, organizational innovation,

and institutional achievement, while discussions of how spiritual values can underpin a harmonious and inclusive university culture remain limited. Consequently, student development programs related to tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and moral development may be implemented on an ad hoc basis rather than integrated into the university's broader governance strategy.

In this context, Ghani and Awang (2017) assert that the concept of *tasāmuh* in Islam differs from liberal conceptions of tolerance because it maintains a balance between respect for differences and the preservation of religious principles. However, the reviewed literature provides limited evidence of the systematic operationalization of this principle in university policy development and campus management. This suggests that existing religious governance models may lack an explicit value-based orientation for addressing ideological tensions and religious pluralism in universities.

Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ) Leadership Values as a Governance Paradigm

Discussions regarding Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ) have traditionally focused on the dimensions of creed, theology, and normative Islamic thought. However, contemporary research indicates that ASWJ values also have significant potential as a paradigm for social leadership and practical institutional governance, particularly in the context of pluralistic societies and higher education institutions. In the context of Malaysia, a pluralistic society with Islam as the religion of the Federation, the ASWJ approach offers a leadership framework that emphasizes moderation, balance, tolerance, and justice in managing social and ideological diversity. The four values were selected as the framework's principal analytical dimensions based on their recurrent prominence across the reviewed literature on ASWJ, *wasatiyyah*, religious tolerance, and Islamic governance. They were subsequently used as deductive categories to organize and interpret the evidence. These values are not presented as an exhaustive classification of ASWJ principles, but rather as contextually relevant dimensions for addressing diversity and governance challenges in higher education.

Among the main principles of ASWJ is *wasatiyyah*, an approach to moderation and balance in thought and action. This concept is increasingly highlighted in contemporary literature as an important mechanism for addressing religious extremism, ideological polarization, and competing ideological orientations. Sulistyoko et al. (2024) explain that the narrative of *wasatiyyah* in Malaysia and Indonesia is used as an institutional instrument to promote religious moderation and curb exclusive identity politics. Similarly, Saiman (2023) argues that, according to Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, the concept of *wasatiyyah* contributes significantly to strengthening national unity and social cohesion in plural societies. In the context of universities, the principle of *wasatiyyah* offers an approach to avoiding ideological extremes while maintaining institutional identity, academic responsibility, and social cohesion. Therefore, *wasatiyyah* can serve as a foundation for a more stable, inclusive, and harmonious campus culture. In addition, Zulkifli and Shuhari (2025) emphasize that *wasatiyyah* and *tasāmuh* within the ASWJ methodology are essential for sustaining harmony in Muslim societies through balanced and ethical social interaction.

Besides *wasatiyyah*, the principle of *tawazun*, or balance, is also an important element in the framework of ASWJ leadership. The concept of *tawazun* refers to the ability to balance individual rights and collective interests, intellectual freedom and social responsibility, and academic development and moral formation. In the context of university governance, this

principle is important to ensure that higher education institutions do not fall into either ideological authoritarianism or unrestricted freedom that could undermine campus social stability. The balance approach is also relevant to the university policy-making process because it allows institutions to manage student diversity fairly without neglecting the religious and cultural sensitivities of the majority society. Syihab and Muhamad (2017) emphasize that the value of balance within the framework of *wasatiyyah* can strengthen interfaith harmony by promoting social peace, respect for differences, and societal stability. Likewise, Kamali (2015) explains that moderation and balance in Islam are foundational principles for preserving justice, social order, and harmonious coexistence in plural communities.

In addition, the value of *tasāmuḥ*, or tolerance, is seen as an important instrument for managing student diversity and relationships within the campus community. In the ASWJ framework, tolerance does not mean accepting religious relativism in its entirety or erasing religious identity, but rather entails respecting differences in views and beliefs while maintaining the integrity of religious principles. Abd Khahar et al. (2025) emphasize that the concept of *tasāmuḥ* in Islam emphasizes social interactions grounded in respect, justice, and moral responsibility. This approach is highly significant in universities, where campus life requires intensive interactions among individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Through the principle of *tasāmuḥ*, the university can create a more constructive space for dialogue, reduce ideological polarization, and strengthen a culture of mutual respect within the academic community. Ghani and Awang (2017) further argue that Islamic tolerance differs from liberal tolerance in that it upholds ethical boundaries while encouraging peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among diverse communities.

Meanwhile, the principle of *i'tidal* emphasizes elements of justice, firmness, and integrity in leadership and decision-making processes. In the context of university governance, it is important to ensure that every institutional policy is implemented consistently, transparently, and free from ideological pressures. This principle allows university leadership to balance freedom of speech with the responsibility of collectively maintaining campus harmony. The *i'tidal* approach is also intended to discourage populist or overly permissive institutional responses to issues involving religious sensitivity and identity. In a pluralistic society, the principle of justice contained in *i'tidal* serves as an important foundation for ensuring that all campus members are treated fairly without compromising the institution's identity and core values. Mohd Yasin and Ghazali (2025) highlight that good governance among university administrators requires ethical leadership, accountability, and balanced decision-making to sustain institutional harmony in Malaysian higher education institutions.

Although ASWJ values such as *wasatiyyah*, *tawazun*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *i'tidal* are increasingly discussed in social discourse and Islamic leadership, the existing literature still lacks a practical connection between these principles and university governance mechanisms. A recent bibliometric review of the religious moderation literature in higher education also highlights the growing scholarly attention to this field while indicating the need for broader, more institutionally grounded research directions (Ulum et al., 2025). Most previous studies have focused more on the normative dimensions and philosophy of ASWJ without explaining how these values can be operationalized in institutional policy development, ideological conflict management, student leadership development, and the formation of contemporary campus culture. Moreover, recent discussions on Islamic governance and religious moderation have yet to provide a comprehensive governance framework that systematically integrates ASWJ values

into university leadership structures and institutional practices (Sulistiyoko et al., 2024; Mohd Yasin & Ghazali, 2025).

Proposed ASWJ Leadership Conceptual Framework

The synthesis indicates that campus harmony requires more than isolated programs or post-conflict disciplinary action. It requires a governance architecture that connects ethical orientation to policy, participation, leadership behavior, conflict management, and institutional learning. The proposed framework therefore treats ASWJ values as ethical inputs, governance mechanisms as mediating processes, and campus harmony, trust, and institutional resilience as intended outcomes. The framework follows a problem-value-mechanism-indicator-outcome logic. *Wasatiyyah* guides proportionate responses and discourages both coercive overreaction and passive non-intervention. *Tawazun* requires a reasoned balance among academic freedom, individual rights, institutional identity, and collective responsibility. *Tasāmuh* supports structured engagement across differences, while *i’tidal* requires consistency, transparency, accountability, and access to review. These values become operational only when assigned to specific units, procedures, competencies, and indicators. Figure 1 summarizes the framework as an input-process-output model. The input consists of the four ASWJ values. The process comprises policy alignment, inclusive engagement, leadership development, dialogical conflict management, and collaboration with recognized religious authorities. The intended outputs are stronger campus harmony, reduced ideological friction, improved procedural trust, and greater institutional capacity to address disputes before they escalate.



Figure 1: ASWJ Leadership Conceptual Framework for Higher Education Governance

Source: Developed by the authors

Operational Explanation of the Conceptual Framework

The framework operates at three interrelated levels. At the normative level, the four ASWJ values define the ethical quality expected of university decisions. At the organizational level, they shape policies, roles, training, consultation, mediation, and accountability. At the outcome level, they are expected to influence perceptions of fairness, participation, trust, conflict

prevention, and social cohesion. The model therefore does not assume that values automatically produce harmony; outcomes depend on the quality and consistency of the intervening governance mechanisms, university leadership, and institutional practices. The framework positions four contextually relevant ASWJ values, namely *wasatiyyah* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice), as analytical and ethical foundations for managing religious diversity, ideological tensions, and campus harmony within higher education institutions (Kamali, 2015; Sulistyoko et al., 2024). These principles serve not only as theological values but also as practical governance instruments that guide institutional decision-making, leadership conduct, student engagement, and conflict management.

Wasatiyyah is operationalized through proportional policy review, balanced guidance for campus programs, preventive education, and responses calibrated to the seriousness of an incident. Evidence of implementation may include documented reasons for decisions, consistency across comparable cases, lower recurrence of conflict, and stakeholder perceptions that university responses are neither punitive by default nor indifferent to genuine risk (Saiman, 2023; Zulkifli & Shuhari, 2025).

Tawazun is operationalized through multi-stakeholder consultation, proportionality assessment, and periodic review of policies affecting expression, religious activity, student welfare, and institutional identity. Relevant indicators include representation in consultation, clarity of policy rationales, the use of appeal mechanisms, and evidence that rights are considered alongside responsibilities and the foreseeable effects on the campus community (Kamali, 2015; Syihab & Muhamad, 2017).

Tasāmuḥ is operationalized through facilitated dialogue, inclusive student participation, intergroup collaboration, peer-led learning, and mediation. These mechanisms can be strengthened by integrating moderation values into structured educational activities. Evidence from Islamic religious education contexts suggests that such approaches may cultivate respectful, socially responsible, and tolerant attitudes among students (Sutrisno et al., 2024). Indicative measures include diversity of participation, dialogue quality, intergroup trust, mediation success, and reduced use of hostile stereotypes (Abd Khahar et al., 2025; Ghani & Awang, 2017; Ma'arif et al., 2022).

I'tidal is operationalized through published procedures, transparent decision criteria, conflict-of-interest controls, equal access to support, recorded reasons, and an impartial review or appeal channel. These safeguards are especially important when disputes involve religion, identity, or speech. Indicators include response time, consistency of outcomes, accessibility of appeals, satisfaction with procedural fairness, and the completion of post-incident reviews (Hamzah et al., 2016; Mohd Yasin & Ghazali, 2025).

Table 1 consolidates the operational mapping. The responsible actors are not limited to Islamic centers; senior management, the senate or academic bodies, student affairs, counseling units, disciplinary or ethics committees, student representatives, and recognized religious authorities each have distinct roles. This distribution reduces over-centralization and makes the framework part of whole-institution governance.

Table 1: Operationalization of ASWJ Values in University Governance

Value	Operational meaning	Core mechanisms and actors	Indicative evidence
<i>Wasatiyyah</i>	Proportionate, non-extreme response	Policy impact review; calibrated guidance and sanctions; preventive education. Actors: management, legal or governance units, student affairs.	Decision rationales; consistency across cases; recurrence rate; perceived proportionality.
<i>Tawazun</i>	Balance rights, responsibilities, identity, and welfare	Stakeholder consultation; proportionality assessment; periodic policy review. Actors: Senate, management, student representatives.	Breadth of consultation; policy clarity; use and outcome of appeals.
<i>Tasāmuḥ</i>	Respectful engagement without erasing principled difference	Facilitated dialogue; intergroup projects; peer learning; mediation. Actors: student affairs, counseling, student leaders, Islamic center.	Participation diversity; dialogue quality; trust; mediation success.
<i>I'tidal</i>	Fairness, consistency, integrity, and accountability	Published procedures; reasons for decisions; conflict-of-interest controls; impartial review. Actors: ethics or disciplinary bodies, ombuds function, management.	Response time; procedural fairness; comparable outcomes; post-incident review.

Source: Developed by the authors

Implementation can proceed through a four-stage cycle. First, universities conduct a policy and incident diagnostic to identify recurrent tensions, procedural gaps, and affected stakeholders. Second, leadership and front-line officers receive training in moderation, proportionality, facilitation, mediation, and procedural fairness. Third, selected mechanisms are piloted in student affairs, religious programming, or dispute management. Fourth, indicators are reviewed periodically, and policies are revised based on stakeholder feedback and lessons from actual cases. Collaboration with religious authorities should provide expertise and alignment, while final university decisions remain transparent, institutionally accountable, and subject to applicable law and policy.

The framework advances three propositions for future testing. First, ASWJ values are more likely to strengthen campus harmony when embedded in routine procedures rather than delivered only through occasional programs. Second, dialogue contributes to trust when it is paired with fair decision-making and credible follow-up. Third, collaboration with religious authorities supports legitimacy only when accompanied by consultation, transparent reasons, and safeguards for equal treatment. These propositions specify conditions under which the framework may produce institutional benefits.

Discussion: Critical Comparison with Existing Governance Approaches

Administrative-control approaches provide clear rules, formal authority, and disciplinary consistency. Their limitation is not the existence of control, but the tendency for control to be activated after conflict and to remain disconnected from preventive education, participation, and ethical reflection. The proposed framework retains formal procedures while adding value-

based criteria for policy design, early intervention, explanation, and institutional learning. It therefore complements rather than replaces legally grounded university governance.

Social integration and interfaith tolerance approaches emphasize contact, dialogue, and mutual understanding (Ramlee et al., 2009; Kasmu et al., 2015). These approaches are important but can remain program-based and dependent on individual champions. The ASWJ framework embeds engagement within governance by assigning roles, linking dialogue to mediation and policy review, and requiring measurable follow-up. Its conception of *tasāmuḥ* also allows respectful coexistence without demanding theological relativism. At the same time, *i'tidal* requires that ethical boundaries not be applied selectively or without due process.

Religious moderation models offer a strong normative response to extremism and polarization, yet critics note the risk of politicization and limited operational detail (Sulistiyoko et al., 2024). The present framework extends this literature by specifying mechanisms, actors, indicators, and implementation stages. Maqasid-oriented and ethical leadership models similarly emphasize the public interest, justice, accountability, and moral responsibility (Abdullah & Ahmad, 2023; Hamzah et al., 2016). ASWJ contributes a locally resonant four-value architecture, but it should be treated as complementary to constitutional obligations, human-rights safeguards, academic freedom, and professional governance standards, not as a substitute for them.

The framework's main contribution is therefore analytical and operational. It explains how values may travel from doctrine to institutional practice through a transparent chain of responsibility and evidence. Its main risk is selective or symbolic adoption, in which ASWJ terminology is used without consultation, consistent procedures, or outcome review. The safeguards built into *tawazun* and *i'tidal*, especially proportionality, equal treatment, recorded reasons, and appeal, are necessary to prevent such misuse and to maintain legitimacy in a plural university environment.

Conclusion

This study highlights the growing need for a more structured, value-based approach to managing religious diversity, ideological tensions, and campus harmony in Malaysian universities. As institutions of higher learning increasingly function as microcosms of a pluralistic society, university governance cannot rely solely on administrative control or context-neutral approaches that may overlook local religious and sociocultural considerations. The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that contemporary challenges such as religious extremism, ideological polarization, identity politics, and competing ideological orientations require a balanced governance paradigm that preserves institutional stability while maintaining inclusivity and social cohesion.

In this regard, the values of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (ASWJ), particularly *wasatiyyah* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice), offer a potentially relevant value-based framework for contemporary higher education governance. These principles collectively provide ethical and practical foundations for managing diversity, strengthening intercommunal relationships, promoting responsible intellectual engagement, and ensuring fairness in institutional decision-making. Rather than functioning merely as theological concepts, the study argues that ASWJ values can be operationalized as governance instruments that shape university policies, leadership practices, conflict management approaches, and student development initiatives. Furthermore, this paper identifies a significant gap in existing literature concerning the practical integration of ASWJ leadership values into

university governance mechanisms. Most previous studies have focused on the philosophical and normative dimensions of ASWJ, without adequately addressing its applicability within institutional governance structures. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing discourse on Islamic leadership by proposing a conceptual framework that systematically integrates ASWJ values into religious governance and campus management practices in Malaysian universities.

The proposed framework theoretically positions ASWJ values as foundational inputs that are operationalized through structured governance mechanisms, including policy alignment, inclusive student engagement, leadership capacity development, intergroup dialogue, and collaboration with religious authorities. Through these processes, universities are expected to cultivate a more harmonious, resilient, and ethically grounded campus environment that can address contemporary ideological challenges without compromising institutional identity and core societal values. In conclusion, embedding ASWJ leadership values into university governance has the potential to strengthen campus harmony, reduce ideological friction, and promote sustainable social stability within higher education institutions. This study not only contributes to the theoretical development of Islamic leadership and governance literature but also offers practical implications for policymakers, university administrators, and higher education stakeholders seeking to foster inclusive and balanced academic environments in increasingly pluralistic societies.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited by its conceptual and integrative design, the relatively small corpus of publications, and the absence of empirical data from Malaysian universities. The proposed relationships should therefore be treated as propositions. Future research should use expert Delphi validation, comparative case studies across public and private universities, interviews with administrators and students, and survey-based construct testing. Longitudinal evaluation is also needed to determine whether the proposed mechanisms improve trust, procedural fairness, conflict prevention, and campus harmony over time.

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