



From Interfaith Contact to Support for Coexistence: The Mediating Role of Islamic Pluralism Orientation

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Abstract

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Religious diversity makes interfaith encounters routine in many societies, yet the mechanisms linking such contact to peace-supportive civic orientations remain unclear. This study examines whether the quantity and quality of interfaith contact are associated with peacebuilding orientation/support for coexistence, indirectly through Islamic pluralism orientation, defined as an identity-compatible endorsement of equal civic respect and cooperative coexistence. Using survey data from 220 Muslim adults in Pakistan, confirmatory factor analysis supported the distinctiveness of key constructs. Structural equation modelling showed that both contact quantity and, more strongly, contact quality were positively associated with Islamic pluralism orientation, which in turn was positively associated with peacebuilding orientation. Bootstrapped indirect effects indicated that pluralism orientation statistically accounted for the association between contact (quantity and quality) and peacebuilding orientation. Findings are interpreted as indirect association patterns rather than causal mediation. Overall, results highlight an identity-compatible pluralism orientation as a theoretically grounded pathway through which everyday interfaith contact, especially high-quality contact, relates to civic support for coexistence.

Keywords: contact quality, interfaith contact, Islamic pluralism orientation, mediation, peacebuilding orientation, structural equation modelling

Introduction

In many societies, religious diversity has become a common aspect of social life, affecting interactions in neighborhoods, workplaces, educational institutions, and even online platforms. The significance of these daily experiences is that they contribute to understanding whether religious difference is perceived as a manageable marker of plural democracies or as an element of mistrust and alienation. Courteous interaction between religions can enhance social cohesion, and the encounter with anxiety, reinforcement of stereotypes, and social distance can be increased by tense or humiliating experiences. Recognizing the social-psychological circumstances in which religious diversity fosters pluralistic orientations and facilitates peaceful coexistence, it is, thus, important to intergroup relations research and community-level peacebuilding. Intergroup contact theory provides the most powerful model of improvements in intergroup relations. The contact hypothesis by Allport (1954)¹ postulated that

¹Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Addison-Wesley, 1954).

contact might alleviate prejudice, particularly in situations of equality, cooperation, common goals, and institutional support. The overall finding, based on cumulative evidence, is that intergroup contact is consistently linked to a positive shift in intergroup attitudes across most contexts and target groups.² Syntheses of policy also underline that contact effects cannot be limited to the laboratory; field interventions and more rigorous designs continue to test contact in the real world and record benefits, as well as conditions that limit them.³ However, as far as interfaith relations are concerned, one limitation has to be mentioned: reducing prejudice is worthwhile, but communities also require citizens who support the idea of equal civil rights, productive interactions, and nonviolent management of conflicts in cases of religious disagreements. The processes by which daily interfaith interaction relates to these peace-related civic engagements are not well specified. However, the second step involves the contact understanding that is not always a good thing, highlighting that it is not always that negative encounters, which are disproportionately weighted, but in some instances, they predict more prejudice than positive contact predicts less prejudice.⁴ This contact caveat highlights the distinction between quantity (the number of times people meet) and quality (how respectful, comfortable, cooperative, and equal-status the interactions are). Process evidence demonstrates that the effect of contact can be mediated in part by socio-emotional mechanisms that are more strongly associated with interaction quality, such as lower levels of intergroup anxiety and higher levels of empathy.⁵ In interfaith, where religious identity can be connected to moral values and communal membership, overexposure might not help much as it is accompanied by perceived disrespect or social pressure.

Perceived intergroup threat provides a complementary account of why diversity can produce avoidance rather than engagement. Integrated threat theory highlights symbolic/value threat, realistic threat, and intergroup anxiety as drivers of negative outgroup orientations,⁶ and meta-analytic evidence supports the link between threat and negative attitudes.⁷ Threat is plausible in interfaith contexts because religious groups often maintain distinctive moral worldviews; perceived challenges to these meanings can be experienced as threats to identity and community continuity. Threat, therefore, represents both a plausible pathway through which high-quality contact may operate (via anxiety reduction) and a source of heterogeneity in contact effects.⁸

²Thomas F. Pettigrew, and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90 (5), (2006): 751–83, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>.

³Elizabeth Levy Paluck, Seth A. Green, and Donald P. Green, "The Contact Hypothesis Re-Evaluated," *Behavioural Public Policy* 3 (2), (2019): 129–58, <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2018.25>.

⁴Fiona Kate Barlow, Stefania Paolini, Anne Pedersen, Matthew J Hornsey, Helena R M Radke, Jake Harwood, Mark Rubin, Chris G Sibley, "The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More Than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38 (12), (2012): 1629–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212457953>

⁵Thomas F Pettigrew, and Linda R. Tropp, "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 38 (2008): 922–34, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.504>.

⁶Walter G Stephan, Rolando Diaz-Loving, and Anne Duran, "Integrated Threat Theory and Intercultural Attitudes: Mexico and the United States," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 31 (2), (2000): 240–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022100031002006>.

⁷Blake M Riek, Eric W. Mania, and Samuel L. Gaertner, "Intergroup Threat and Outgroup Attitudes: A Meta-Analytic Review," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10 (4), (2006): 336–53, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1004_4.

⁸Pettigrew, and Tropp, "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators," 922–34.

Research on interreligious contact supports contact theory in faith-based settings: interreligious friendships and contact are associated with more favorable attitudes toward religious outgroups in both conflict and non-conflict regions.⁹ Recent work shows that interreligious contact is shaped by social norms and preferences and is linked to more favorable interreligious attitudes.¹⁰ However, this literature often centers on generalized “attitudes” (warmth, prejudice, social distance) and, less often, specifies the identity-relevant orientation that would translate everyday contact into principled support for coexistence norms and nonviolent engagement when tensions arise.

This weakness is especially consequential when conducting a study with Muslim respondents since pluralism is often defined to presuppose a form of theoretical relativism. Pluralism as a statement of political opinion can become a theological assertion about the validity of religions and, therefore, heteronormative and empirically vague. Social-scientific work, in turn, can consider pluralism as a civic and relational orientation that can be measured without making concessions to theology. Contemporary studies that differentiate coexistence tolerance and respect tolerance show that pluralistic attitudes are multidimensional and can be assessed in a specific context.¹¹ Once pluralism conflates the idea of civic respect with that of doctrinal relativism, contextualized associations with religiosity are hard to evaluate, and cross-contextual cumulative evidence is weak. The current study, aimed at addressing this issue, proposes an identity-compatible civic construct known as the Islamic pluralism orientation (IPO). IPO means the acceptance of civil peace among religions, the equal respect for civic life, and cooperation between religions, specifically described as not dependent on the assertion of religious equality for all religious truths. This framing is substantiated by the fact that Islamic religiosity involves tolerance in multidimensional ways, not in the same ways as negative attitudes.¹² It also aligns with results showing that strong Muslim identification can occur and that, under certain conditions, it may be positively correlated with political tolerance.¹³ In this way, IPO is theorized as a viable process through which respectful interfaith engagement fosters long-term commitment to coexistence. Peacebuilding orientation (PBO) is the result of interest, and its conceptualization is that it must support nonviolent, dialogic, and cooperative methods of managing interreligious relations in the community. In the light of peace psychology, the desire to dialogue, mediate, and include civic actors is an attitudinal basis for coexistence, where religious differences could otherwise lead to escalation.¹⁴ Stating PBO as the resultant object of interest takes contact research beyond

⁹Agnieszka Kanas, Peer Scheepers, and Carl Sterkens, “Positive and Negative Contact and Attitudes Towards the Religious Out-Group: Testing the Contact Hypothesis in Conflict and Non-Conflict Regions of Indonesia and the Philippines,” *Social Science Research* 63 (2017): 95–110, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.09.019>.

¹⁰Julia Köbrich, Borja Martinović, and Tobias H. Stark, “Interreligious Contact and Attitudes in Togo and Sierra Leone: The Role of Ingroup Norms and Individual Preferences,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 30 (3), (2024): 400–412. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000702>.

¹¹Evi Velthuis, Maykel Verkuyten, and Anouk Smeekes, “The Different Faces of Social Tolerance: Conceptualizing and Measuring Respect and Coexistence Tolerance,” *Social Indicators Research* 158 (3), (2021): 1105–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02724-5>.

¹²Niels Spierings, “The Multidimensional Impact of Islamic Religiosity on Ethno-Religious Social Tolerance in the Middle East and North Africa,” *Social Forces* 97 (4), (2019): 1693–1730, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy092>.

¹³Maykel Verkuyten, Mieke Maliepaard, Borja Martinović, and Yassine Khoudja, “Political Tolerance among Muslim Minorities in Western Europe: The Role of Denomination and Religious and Host National Identification,” *Politics and Religion* 7 (2), (2014): 265–86, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048314000212>.

¹⁴Ifat Maoz, “Does Contact Work in Protracted Asymmetrical Conflict? Appraising 20 Years of Reconciliation-Aimed Encounters Between Israeli Jews and Palestinians,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (1), (2011): 115–25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310389506>.

prejudice reduction and closer to more directly relevant dispositions related to interfaith harmony.¹⁵ The argumentative statement is that the interreligious engagement can influence PBO most powerfully in the case when it leads to IPO, an identity-consistent support of equal treatment and mutual co-existence. We hence test a model whereby the quantity and quality of interfaith contact are linked to PBO through IPO. A theoretically relevant complementary account (contact quality must be related to lower threat; threat must be related to lower IPO and PBO) of perceived intergroup threat is added alongside threat theory and contact-process accounts that focus on anxiety reduction.¹⁶ The measures of religiosity are used to determine whether IPO can explain peacebuilding orientations beyond religious commitment per se.¹⁷ These propositions are empirically tested based on survey data of 220 Muslim adults in Pakistan, who were sampled in an environment where contact between Muslim and non-Muslims was possible. Indirect effects. Confirmatory factor analysis is used to test measurement models, and structural equation modelling is used with bootstrapped confidence intervals to test structural paths,¹⁸ and since it is cross-sectional, the indirect effects are viewed as indirect patterns of association consistent with the hypothesized order rather than causal mediation,¹⁹ and the common-method issues are addressed using the diagnostics recommended by Podsakoff et al.²⁰

This study contributes (a) by focusing on a peace-related civic outcome (PBO), (b) it provides an identity-compatible operationalization of Islamic pluralism orientation that does not presuppose theological assumptions, and (c) it elucidates the responsibility of the quantity and quality of contact taking into consideration the threat and religiosity. In this way, the study bridges the gap between interfaith engagement programs and the civic values that they are expected to develop. Based on these frameworks, these hypotheses will be tested: (H1) interfaith contact quantity positively predicts Islamic pluralism orientation; (H2) interfaith contact quality positively predicts Islamic pluralism orientation; (H3) Islamic pluralism orientation positively predicts peacebuilding orientation; and (H4) Islamic pluralism orientation provides an indirect pathway linking interfaith contact (quantity and quality) to peacebuilding orientation, evaluated using bootstrapped indirect effects.

2. Method

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed in this study, in which the mediation model to be tested is the quantity and quality of interfaith contact, which predicts the orientation of Islamic pluralism. Additionally, in turn it also predicts the orientation of peacebuilding/support

¹⁵Paluck, Seth A. Green, and Donald P. Green, "The Contact Hypothesis Re-Evaluated," 129–58.

¹⁶Stephan, Rolando Diaz-Loving, and Duran, "Integrated Threat Theory and Intercultural Attitudes: Mexico and the United States," 240–49; Pettigrew, and Tropp, "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators," 922–34.

¹⁷Spierings, "The Multidimensional Impact of Islamic Religiosity on Ethno-Religious Social Tolerance in the Middle East and North Africa," 1693–1730.

¹⁸Kristopher J. Preacher, and Andrew F. Hayes, "Asymptotic and Resampling Strategies for Assessing and Comparing Indirect Effects in Multiple Mediator Models," *Behavior Research Methods* 40 (2008): 879–91, <https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.40.3.879>.

¹⁹Patrick E. Shrout, and Niall Bolger, "Mediation in Experimental and Nonexperimental Studies: New Procedures and Recommendations," *Psychological Methods* 7 (4), (2002): 422–45, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.7.4.422>.

²⁰Philip M. Podsakoff, Scott B. MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon Lee, and Nathan P. Podsakoff, "Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88 (5), (2003): 879–903, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>.

of coexistence. The model is based on the intergroup contact theory²¹ and accumulated evidence that is often correlated with enhanced intergroup attitudes.²² This effect operates through socio-emotional mechanisms closely related to the quality of contact.²³ Since the design is cross-sectional and observational, indirect effects are seen as patterns of association with theorized ordering, rather than necessarily a mediating cause-and-effect effect.²⁴

The participants were adult Muslims (18+) recruited from environments where interfaith interaction is likely to occur (e.g., universities, workplaces, community networks). The exclusion criteria included: (a) self-identification as Muslim, (b) age [18] and (c) proficiency in the study language to complete the questionnaire.

Of the 220 respondents who completed the survey, 220 were screened and retained. This is usually regarded as a sufficient sample size for SEM when the measurement is performed under usual conditions and for identifying medium-sized effects in multivariate models.²⁵

Sampling was done on a non-probability, purposive basis. The study was recruited through neutral civic messages (e.g., everyday interaction and coexistence across different societies) to reduce social desirability and eliminate priming of religious or political defence.

The data were gathered during a single survey (about 10-15 minutes). The subjects were exposed to an informed consent statement covering the voluntary nature, anonymity, and the ability to withdraw. Responses were not kept with any identifying information. Due to the sensitivity of interfaith issues, everything was phrased neutrally, and respondents were not obligated to answer any questions. Standard precautions of human subjects (voluntary participation, confidentiality, low risk) were followed in the study.

The items were based on existing scales, with the target group replaced by people of religions other than Islam (non-Muslims), although the original item intent, response format, and dimensional structure remained the same.²⁶ Regarding perceived intergroup threat, the items were modified based on the Intergroup Threat Type Scale framework, which distinguishes between realistic and symbolic threat.²⁷ Islamic pluralism orientation combined (a) tolerance items adapted

²¹Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

²²Pettigrew, and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," 751–83.

²³Pettigrew, and Tropp, "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators," 922–34.

²⁴Shrout, and Niall Bolger, "Mediation in Experimental and Nonexperimental Studies: New Procedures and Recommendations," 422–45; Preacher, and Andrew F. Hayes, "Asymptotic and Resampling Strategies for Assessing and Comparing Indirect Effects in Multiple Mediator Models," 879–91.

²⁵Jacob Cohen, *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1988); Rex B. Kline, *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling* 4th ed. (Guilford Press, 2016).

²⁶Mir Rabiul Islam, and Miles Hewstone, "Dimensions of Contact as Predictors of Intergroup Anxiety, Perceived Out-Group Variability, and Out-Group Attitude: An Integrative Model," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 19 (6), (1993): 700–710, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167293196005>; Voci, Alberto, and Miles Hewstone, "Intergroup Contact and Prejudice Toward Immigrants in Italy: The Mediation Role of Anxiety and the Moderational Role of Group Salience," *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 6 (1), (2003): 37–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430203006001011>.

²⁷Helen Landmann, Robert Gaschler, and Anette Rohmann, "What Is Threatening About Refugees? Identifying Different Types of Threat and Their Association with Emotional Responses and Attitudes Towards Refugee Migration," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 49 (7), (2019): 1401–20, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2593>.

from validated measures, distinguishing coexistence and respect tolerance,²⁸ and (b) a small set of identity-compatibility items written to reflect the construct definition; construct validity was evaluated via CFA. The peacebuilding orientation/support for coexistence was adapted from the Peace Attitudes Scale measurement tradition.²⁹ Religiosity was controlled using items consistent with the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) approach.³⁰

3. Results

Table 1 reports descriptives and internal consistency. All constructs showed acceptable-to-strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82-.91$). On average, respondents reported moderate interfaith contact quantity ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.16$) and moderately positive interfaith contact quality ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.05$). Islamic pluralism orientation ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 0.95$) and peacebuilding orientation ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 0.92$) were above the scale midpoint.

Table 1. Descriptives and Reliability

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
<i>Interfaith contact quantity (ICQ)</i>	5	4.10	1.16	.82
<i>Interfaith contact quality (ICQL)</i>	6	4.85	1.05	.88
<i>Perceived intergroup threat (PIT)</i>	6	3.65	1.20	.86
<i>Islamic pluralism orientation (IPO)</i>	8	5.20	0.95	.90
<i>Peacebuilding orientation (PBO)</i>	8	5.35	0.92	.91

Table 2 shows bivariate correlations. Both interfaith contact quantity and quality correlated positively with Islamic pluralism orientation ($r = .28$, $p < .01$; $r = .51$, $p < .01$) and peacebuilding orientation ($r = .22$, $p < .01$; $r = .42$, $p < .01$). Islamic pluralism orientation correlated strongly with peacebuilding orientation ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). Perceived intergroup threat correlated negatively with contact quality ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$), pluralism ($r = -.29$, $p < .01$), and peacebuilding orientation ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$).

Table 2. Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. <i>ICQ</i>	—				
2. <i>ICQL</i>	.32**	—			
3. <i>PIT</i>	-.18*	-.34**	—		
4. <i>IPO</i>	.28**	.51**	-.29**	—	
5. <i>PBO</i>	.22**	.42**	-.25**	.62**	—

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

²⁸Velthuis, Maykel Verkuyten, and Anouk Smeekes, "The Different Faces of Social Tolerance: Conceptualizing and Measuring Respect and Coexistence Tolerance," 1105–25.

²⁹Erika Broccoli, Virginia Canegallo, Erika Santoddi, Mauro Cavarra, and Rosa Angela Fabio, "Development and Preliminary Evaluation of the Peace Attitudes Scale," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 27 (3), (2021): 512–17, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000508>.

³⁰Stefan Huber, and Odilo W. Huber, "The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS)," *Religions* 3 (3), (2012): 710–24, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3030710>.

A confirmatory factor analysis tested a five-factor measurement model (ICQ, ICQL, PIT, IPO, PBO). Model fit was acceptable: $\chi^2(454) = 840.50$, $\chi^2/df = 1.85$; CFI = .93; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .065 (90% CI .058–.072); SRMR = .055. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .61 to .86 (all $p < .001$), indicating satisfactory item performance.

To assess whether the observed relationships could plausibly be attributed to common-method variance, a single-factor model was also estimated and showed poor fit³¹: $\chi^2/df = 4.90$; CFI = .62; RMSEA = .145; SRMR = .130. This pattern supports the distinctiveness of the study constructs.

The hypothesized structural model (ICQ and ICQL predicting IPO; IPO predicting PBO; with direct paths from ICQ and ICQL to PBO included to evaluate the indirect pathway) demonstrated acceptable fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.90$; CFI = .92; TLI = .91; RMSEA = .067; SRMR = .060.

Table 3. Structural Paths (AMOS standardized estimates)

Path	β (std.)	S.E.	C.R.	p
H1: ICQ \rightarrow IPO	.23	.08	2.88	.004
H2: ICQL \rightarrow IPO	.46	.07	6.57	< .001
H3: IPO \rightarrow PBO	.61	.06	10.17	< .001
ICQ \rightarrow PBO (direct)	.08	.07	1.23	.220
ICQL \rightarrow PBO (direct)	.12	.06	1.88	.060

The model explained 42% of the variance in Islamic pluralism orientation ($R^2 = .42$) and 48% of the variance in peacebuilding orientation ($R^2 = .48$).

Interfaith contact quantity positively predicted Islamic pluralism orientation ($\beta = .23$, $p = .004$), supporting H1. Interfaith contact quality positively predicted Islamic pluralism orientation ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. Islamic pluralism orientation positively predicted peacebuilding orientation ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$), supporting H3.

Indirect effects were tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples), which is recommended for indirect effects because their sampling distributions are often non-normal.³² Given the cross-sectional design, the indirect effects are interpreted as indirect association patterns consistent with the theorized ordering, not definitive causal mediation.³³

Table 4. Indirect Effects via Islamic Pluralism Orientation

Indirect effect	Standardized indirect	95% BC Bootstrap CI
H4a: ICQ \rightarrow IPO \rightarrow PBO	.14	[.05, .25]
H4b: ICQL \rightarrow IPO \rightarrow PBO	.28	[.17, .41]

Both confidence intervals excluded zero, indicating statistically significant indirect effects. The direct effect of contact quantity on peacebuilding orientation was non-significant ($\beta = .08$, p

³¹Podsakoff, Scott B. MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon Lee, and Nathan P. Podsakoff, "Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies."

³²Preacher, and Andrew F. Hayes, "Asymptotic and Resampling Strategies for Assessing and Comparing Indirect Effects in Multiple Mediator Models," 879–91.

³³Shrout, and Niall Bolger, "Mediation in Experimental and Nonexperimental Studies: New Procedures and Recommendations," 422–45.

= .220), while the direct effect of contact quality on peacebuilding orientation was marginal ($\beta = .12$, $p = .060$). Overall, the results support H4: Islamic pluralism orientation functions as a key indirect pathway linking interfaith contact—particularly contact quality—to peacebuilding orientation.

4. Discussion

The study investigates whether the quantity and quality of interfaith interactions serve as predictors of Islamic pluralism orientation and, conversely, whether Islamic pluralism orientation serves as a predictor of peacebuilding orientation or support for coexistence. In line with intergroup contact theory, the amount and quality of contact positively correlated with Islamic pluralism orientation, which were closely correlated with pluralism and peacebuilding orientations. The indirect effects that have been bootstrapped also lent credence to the key contribution of the study: the role of Islamic pluralism orientation as an identity-compatible mechanism between interfaith contact and peace-supportive civic orientations, without appealing to theology and adopting an empirically grounded and neutral position³⁴

4.1. Interreligious Interaction and Islamic Pluralism Orientation

The fact that the contact quantity and Islamic pluralism orientation are positively related that confirms the fundamental assumption of the contact hypothesis: repeated contact may lead to less distance and greater comfort with outgroup members, which in turn fosters more integrative orientations.³⁵ The strength of this relationship was small, which is reasonably given that quantity is not the only criterion of positive engagement. Nevertheless, its importance implies that, in this sample at least, the more interfaith one is exposed, the more they support civic pluralism as something that does not contradict Muslim identity.

The correlation between Islamic pluralism orientation and contact quality was significantly higher than that with contact quantity. This trend is consistent with findings from the contact process, which indicate that the experience of quality is at the core of the psychological processes of contact, such as low levels of intergroup anxiety and enhanced socio-emotional insight.³⁶ Additionally, it aligns with the literature on the so-called contact caveat: negative experiences can be more influential. In interfaith situations, where such misunderstandings or ego-insults are especially acute, the tone and conditions under which contact occurs are crucial.³⁷ The current results thus support the idea that interfaith engagement strategies must focus on respectful, cooperative, and equal-status interactions rather than merely on more frequent intergroup exposure.

³⁴Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*; Velthuis, Maykel Verkuyten, and Anouk Smeekes, “The Different Faces of Social Tolerance: Conceptualizing and Measuring Respect and Coexistence Tolerance,” 1105–25; Pettigrew, and Linda R. Tropp, “A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory,” 751–83.

³⁵Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

³⁶Pettigrew, and Tropp, “How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators,” 922–34.

³⁷Barlow, et al. “The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More Than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice,” 1629–43.

4.2. Predicting Peacebuilding Orientation with the Help of the Islamic Pluralism Orientation

The Islamic pluralism orientation became one of the strong predictors of the peacebuilding orientation/support coexistence. Primarily, the pluralism construct employed in this context signifies a tolerance for equal civic regard, a readiness to collaborate along faith lines, and an ease with the existence of religious variety-dispositions that are intrinsically consistent with the preferences of peacebuilding, i.e., dialogue, nonviolence, and the upholding of coexistence standards. Such a relation aligns with findings from studies on the distinction between forms of tolerance and evidence that principled and coexistence-related tolerance orientations have significant downstream consequences for further civic outcomes.³⁸

Notably, when positioning pluralism as identity-compatible, as opposed to theological relativism, it is possible to say why pluralism can be robustly linked to the preference to use peace building without the need for the respondents to take any doctrinal stand. The given approach fits the empirical data, according to which Islamic religiosity and Muslim identification may be associated with tolerance in subtle ways, but not with a consistent reduction in tolerant orientations.³⁹ Accordingly, the results favour a social-scientific perspective in which religious identity can be compatible with civic pluralism and peace-supportive preferences.

4.3. Indirect Effects: An Important Way of Pluralism Orientation

The results of the indirect effects confirm the primary contribution of the study: Islamic pluralism orientation has a significant indirect connection with the peacebuilding orientation. Contactual quantity and contactual quality of interfaith contact had great bootstrapped indirect effects through pluralism orientation, with the indirect effect of contact quality being significantly higher. This pattern is consistent with contact theory's emphasis on psychologically meaningful engagement and is compatible with the broader mediation literature, which recommends bootstrapped confidence intervals for indirect effects.⁴⁰

The direct paths from contact to peacebuilding orientation were comparatively small (non-significant for quantity; marginal for quality), suggesting that peacebuilding support may be shaped less by contact and more by the pluralistic civic orientation that contact helps foster. Substantively, this indicates that interfaith contact may be most influential when it fosters a stable orientation toward equal civic respect and cooperative coexistence—an orientation that, in turn, predicts peace-supportive attitudes.

At the same time, caution is warranted in interpreting mediation given the cross-sectional design. While the estimated indirect effects are consistent with the theorised ordering, cross-sectional indirect effects cannot establish temporal precedence or rule out alternative causal

³⁸Velthuis, Maykel Verkuyten, and Anouk Smeekes, "The Different Faces of Social Tolerance: Conceptualizing and Measuring Respect and Coexistence Tolerance," 1105–25.

³⁹Velthuis, Maykel Verkuyten, and Anouk Smeekes, "The Different Faces of Social Tolerance: Conceptualizing and Measuring Respect and Coexistence Tolerance," 1105–25; Spierings, "The Multidimensional Impact of Islamic Religiosity on Ethno-Religious Social Tolerance in the Middle East and North Africa," 1693–1730.

⁴⁰Preacher, and Andrew F. Hayes, "Asymptotic and Resampling Strategies for Assessing and Comparing Indirect Effects in Multiple Mediator Models," 879–91.

directions.⁴¹ Accordingly, the mediation is best understood as an indirect association pattern that supports the plausibility of the proposed mechanism and warrants longitudinal or experimental follow-up.

There are several methodological observations that lend credence to the results. First, all constructs were found to be highly internally consistent and reliable. Second, the five-factor CFA had acceptable and satisfactory fit and broad variables, with strong standardized loadings, indicating that the constructs were measured consistently. Third, the inadequate overall fit of a one-factor model offers some relief that the observed relations are not entirely due to a single common-method factor, as is recommended in the diagnostic practice of single-source survey design.⁴² Such checks do not address the issue of common methods down to the ground, but they offer a reasonable, acceptable defence in a cross-sectional survey paper.

The work of this study adds to the intergroup contact and interfaith relations literature in three aspects. Instead of contact outcomes being viewed as a way to reduce prejudice, the study frames contact as a channel for peace-promoting civic orientations and brings the purpose of contact scholarship and the coexistence and peacebuilding agenda into contact.⁴³ This reinforced position of contact quality supports the process accounts, which focus on anxiety reduction and socio-emotional factors.⁴⁴ It is further complemented by the fact that negative contact can disproportionately impact it.⁴⁵ The fact that contact quality can be reinforced makes the study offer a viable and neutral way of measuring it, which can be adopted by future research without involving theological debate.⁴⁶

The results indicate that enhancing interfaith relations should emphasize improving the quality of interfaith engagement (i.e., making interactions respectful, cooperative, and equal-status), rather than focusing solely on contact frequency. Educational programs, workplace programs, and community agency programmes can be more effective when they foster environments in which participants feel genuinely respected and work together to develop pluralistic civic orientations that generalize to peace-building support.⁴⁷ The findings also indicate that the pluralism of identity-compatible civic terms can be an efficient approach to promoting peace-supportive orientations among the Muslim respondents without suggesting theological relativism.

This research has some disadvantages that are characteristic of cross-sectional surveys. To begin with, there is a restriction on causal inference; longitudinal or experimental research is

⁴¹Shrout, and Niall Bolger, "Mediation in Experimental and Nonexperimental Studies: New Procedures and Recommendations," 422–45.

⁴²Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, "Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies," 879–903.

⁴³Pettigrew, and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," 751–83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>.

⁴⁴Pettigrew, and Tropp, "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators," 922–34.

⁴⁵Barlow, et al. "The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More Than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice," 1629–43.

⁴⁶Spierings, "The Multidimensional Impact of Islamic Religiosity on Ethno-Religious Social Tolerance in the Middle East and North Africa," 1693–1730.

⁴⁷Pettigrew, and Tropp, "How Does Intergroup Contact Reduce Prejudice? Meta-Analytic Tests of Three Mediators," 922–34.

required to establish whether contact is a cause of pluralism orientation and whether pluralism orientation is a predictor of subsequent peacebuilding.⁴⁸ Second, the data were based on a single self-report assessment, which may inflate correlations; future studies may use behavioural measures (e.g., desire to participate in interfaith programs) and multi-source measures. Third, purposive sampling can restrict external validity; it would be better to be able to replicate using a larger probability sample or across national settings.

The future study must (a) conduct longitudinal tests of the model to assess the temporal precedence; (b) investigate whether negative contact undermines pluralism more than positive contact does, in line with the contact caveat⁴⁹; and (c) to investigate contextual moderators like minority/majority status, local interfaith norms, or institutionally supportive conditions that play the pivotal role in the opportunity presented by the contact theory.⁵⁰

5. Conclusion

The results of the current study provided support for a model in which interfaith contact (especially high-quality contact) correlates with a higher Islamic pluralism orientation, and pluralism correlates with a peacebuilding orientation that aids in the support for coexistence. The bootstrapped indirect effects indicate that the Islamic pluralism orientation is one of the main channels through which interfaith contact relates to peace-supportive civic attitudes. Furthermore, the findings were examined with caution due to the limitations of a cross-sectional design, but they pointed towards the significance of fostering respectful, collaborative interfaith experiences and enhancing identity-congruent pluralism as possible sources of peaceful coexistence.

Author's Contribution

Sidra Farhan is the sole author of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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⁴⁸Shrout, and Niall Bolger, "Mediation in Experimental and Nonexperimental Studies: New Procedures and Recommendations," 422–45.

⁴⁹Barlow, et al. "The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More Than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice," 1629–43.

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