

## REGULATING RELIGIOUS HETERODOXIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** *This article delves into a discussion about how the Indonesian government, specifically the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag RI), regulated the handling of problematic religious movements and groups in Indonesia in 2017. It also aims to investigate whether the 2013 fatwa issued by the Indonesia Council of Ulama (MUI), which consists of religious scholars and holds significant influence, played a pivotal role in shaping this regulatory framework. Both of these documents were issued in response to the actions of individuals and groups that were perceived to have crossed the line of acceptability or violated the core beliefs of mainstream religious groups in Indonesia. They both outline key principles aimed at preventing any activities, teachings, or movements that strayed beyond the boundaries of legitimate dissent and encroached upon the sacred aspects of religion. In essence, the primary theme running through both documents is the preservation of mainstream religious orthodoxy. This reflects the government's and the dominant religious group's efforts to control and closely monitor any groups that appear to deviate from mainstream beliefs. The government and the majority religious community are viewed as the protectors of orthodoxy, and they are unhesitant in restricting individuals or groups accused of being "problematic" or "deviant" from participating in the public sphere.*

**Keywords:** *state-religion, heterodoxy, orthodoxy, religious deviance*

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengurai bagaimana pemerintah Indonesia, khususnya Kementerian Agama (Kemenag RI), mengatur penanganan gerakan dan kelompok keagamaan yang bermasalah di Indonesia pada tahun 2017. Artikel ini juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah fatwa yang dikeluarkan oleh Indonesia pada tahun 2013 Majelis Ulama (MUI), yang beranggotakan para ulama dan mempunyai pengaruh signifikan, memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk kerangka peraturan ini. Kedua dokumen ini diterbitkan sebagai respons atas tindakan individu dan kelompok yang dianggap telah melampaui batas akseptabilitas atau melanggar keyakinan utama kelompok agama arus utama di Indonesia. Keduanya menguraikan prinsip-prinsip utama yang bertujuan untuk mencegah segala kegiatan, ajaran, atau gerakan yang menyimpang melampaui batas-batas perbedaan pendapat yang sah dan melanggar aspek suci agama. Intinya, tema utama dalam kedua dokumen tersebut adalah pelestarian ortodoksi agama arus utama. Hal ini mencerminkan upaya pemerintah dan kelompok agama dominan untuk mengontrol dan memantau secara ketat kelompok manapun yang terlihat menyimpang dari keyakinan arus utama. Pemerintah dan komunitas agama mayoritas dipandang sebagai pelindung ortodoksi dan mereka tidak segan-segan membatasi individu atau kelompok yang dituduh “bermasalah” atau “menyimpang” untuk berpartisipasi di ruang publik.

**Kata Kunci:** *agama negara, heterodoksi, ortodoksi, penyimpangan agama*

## Introduction

This article intends to analyse the Indonesian government’s 2017 regulation titled “Guideline to Oversee ‘Problematic’ Religious Sect and Movement in Indonesia,” specifically issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs.<sup>1</sup> The objective is to examine the context and contents of this regulation and explore whether the 2013 fatwa issued by the Indonesia Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI) on 10 criteria for religious deviance played a pivotal role in shaping this regulatory framework.<sup>2</sup> Both of these official documents were released in response to the actions of certain individuals and groups that were perceived as violating the established norms and sacred doctrines of mainstream religious communities in Indonesia. The central principles outlined in both documents are aimed at preventing actions, teachings, or movements that exceed the acceptable boundaries of dissent and encroach upon the sanctity of religion.

This study reveals that the central goal of both documents was to maintain mainstream religious doctrines and orthodoxy. The government and dominant religious group took on major roles in overseeing any groups that diverged from mainstream beliefs. In this context, the government and majority religious community, in this case is Islam, positioned themselves as protectors of orthodoxy, readily excluding those deemed “problematic” or “deviant” from public life.

The theological tradition of accusing groups of unorthodox beliefs or heresy has historically recurred in Islam. Often, true doctrine was established by hostilely defining and excluding others. In this context, ruling regimes' or political powers' endorsement of specific orthodox models was pivotal. Initially, distinctions between mainstream and fringe groups were not well-defined, revolving around varying interpretations of teachings and practices. These differences were part of an ongoing process of shaping religious identity through creative theological discussions addressing contemporary cultural diversity and divergence.<sup>3</sup> However, over time, the increasing categorization of groups reflected the dynamic nature of the tradition itself. Thus, the boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy were not fixed, evolving over time. Despite this, the government and the dominant religious group repeatedly affirmed their control over religious orthodoxy, carefully supervising any organizations seen as straying from accepted tenets.<sup>4</sup>

The documents analysed in this article reveal the efforts of the regime and the dominant religious group to uphold mainstream religious doctrine or orthodoxy by closely monitoring and overseeing any group that strays from it. This approach aligns with the historical Islamic practice of using accusations of heterodoxy or heresy to assert true religious doctrine through hostile definition and exclusion.<sup>5</sup> The political power of the regime is crucial in endorsing a particular model of orthodoxy. Initially, the distinctions between orthodox and heterodox groups were not clear-cut, simply representing different interpretations and practices of religious teachings. These differences reflected the ongoing theological negotiation with local cultural issues of diversity and difference. The increasing classification of various groups reflects the dynamism of the religious tradition itself.<sup>6</sup>

As time passed, the conflict between orthodox and heterodox groups became intertwined with the expanding political bureaucracy, as the state's power became involved. In this religio-political context, heterodoxy was no longer just a theological challenge but also a matter of public safety, since correct belief and worship were seen as crucial for ensuring societal unity and stability. Thus, belonging to an orthodox group or promoting an orthodox viewpoint was important for establishing and maintaining common boundaries, especially with state support. Notably, political power and the regime played a significant role in endorsing a particular orthodox model and addressing heterodoxy by issuing various regulations, rules, restrictions, and policies as a means of control and monitoring.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesia is not unique in attempting to balance religion and social order. Although the regime recognized religion's role in national identity, it

also saw religious activities as potentially disruptive.<sup>8</sup> To maintain stability, the regime justified controlling religious affairs through strict policies and standards. Consequently, specific strategies were implemented to regulate religious activities across the country.<sup>9</sup>

The regime's religious policies and control in Indonesia went beyond simply increasing places of worship or mandating religious education. The regime also standardized religious attitudes and regulated religious communities. It supported public religious festivals but restricted foreign funding and overseas missionaries. The regime allowed publication of holy books from all faiths yet monitored contents and scrutinized incoming religious texts. The regime measured its religious control not just by quantifying places of worship or managing pilgrimages, but by standardizing groups and attitudes. Though publicly supporting festivals, the regime tightly controlled overseas religious funding and severely limited foreign missionaries. While claiming to ensure religious freedom, it also banned or restricted certain groups and merged smaller groups into larger orthodox ones. The regime's impact on religious activism was therefore extensive.

The regime's religious policies were guided by four principles. First, they promoted religious tolerance through interfaith dialogue while prohibiting public expressions of unacceptable views related to ethnicity, religion, race, and class. Second, they encouraged religious devotion by supporting ceremonies and offering guidance for religious activities. Third, they monitored heterodox groups. Fourth, citizens were required to embrace one of the state's officially recognized religions. Through these policies, the regime aimed to foster religious harmony and piety while curtailing social unrest. However, the stringent controls on religious practice and mandatory adherence to authorized faiths also restricted religious freedom and individual rights.

Overall, the Indonesian government extensively regulated and standardized religion to promote stability and order; however, this central and pervasive role also raises concerns about restrictions on religious freedom and the government's potential influence on religious diversity and pluralism.

### ***Aliran Sesat, Aliran Kebatinan and Government Regulation***

The terms *aliran sesat* (deviant sects) and *aliran sempalan* (splinter groups) have been used to describe religious movements whose teachings diverge from Indonesia's mainstream religious groups. These groups have existed since the 1950s but became a focal point for the New Order regime

and established religious communities during the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Their emergence was perceived as a potential threat to societal harmony, national unity, and religious stability, particularly due to allegations of misinterpreting established doctrines and issuing offensive critiques of other faiths.<sup>11</sup>

The fear of social disruption and national disintegration fuelled concerns about these groups. Historical precedents, where religious tensions escalated into violence or contributed to political instability, underscored these apprehensions. However, labelling such groups as “deviant” or “splinter” often implies a singular, correct mode of religious practice, marginalizing minority interpretations and practices. Such exclusivity risks further entrenching religious tensions rather than fostering understanding.

This context highlights the importance of promoting tolerance and respectful dialogue between religious groups. An inclusive approach that acknowledges religious diversity is essential for mitigating tensions and preventing conflict. Rather than treating heterodox groups as threats, fostering interfaith understanding and acceptance can strengthen social cohesion.

The Indonesian government has taken different approaches to managing heterodox groups throughout its history. During Sukarno’s presidency, the Indonesian government adopted a regulatory approach toward *aliran kebatinan* and heterodox groups. This policy aligned with the Pancasila principle of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* (Belief in the One Supreme God), promoting harmonious religious practices while curbing perceived misuses of religion. Presidential Stipulation No. 5/PnPs/1965 aimed to prevent the misuse and defamation of religion, reflecting the socio-political and religious dynamics of the era. *Aliran kebatinan* movements were viewed as potential sources of disorder due to their reinterpretation of religious teachings and criticism of established doctrines.<sup>12</sup>

The regulation was well-received by Muslim communities, who had long felt targeted by religious defamation. Incidents during the colonial period, such as the Ten Berge case (1931) and inflammatory writings by Oei Bee Thay (1934), had deeply hurt Muslims by disparaging Prophet Muhammad, a central figure in Islamic faith.<sup>13</sup> Post-independence, similar challenges persisted, with some *kebatinan* adherents promoting their movement as Indonesia’s true religion, undermining Islam’s societal role.<sup>14</sup> For Muslims, legal measures against such defamation were necessary to uphold their faith’s sanctity.

Under Suharto’s New Order regime, the government transitioned to actively guiding and controlling religious practices to ensure orthodoxy. This shift was institutionalized through MPRS Decree No. XXVI/1966

and the subsequent Blasphemy Law (Statute No. 5/PnPs/1969). The law targeted deviations from mainstream religious traditions, upholding established groups as models of proper religious practice. To enforce this, the government established BAKORPAKEM, an interdepartmental body tasked with monitoring religious activities.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its intentions, the statute faced criticism for its lack of clear criteria to define ‘deviant teachings.’ Enforcement often relied on ambiguous concerns about security and public order, resulting in the prohibition of not only teachings but also printed materials such as calendars and comics (Departemen Agama RI, 1998: 13–18).<sup>16</sup> The regime extended its oversight to fundamental aspects of religious identity, including the perception of God. It mandated adherence to *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* as a unifying element of Indonesian religiosity, requiring citizens to affiliate with one of the recognized religions. Those outside this framework were classified as *belum beragama* (not yet possessing a religion) and targeted for ‘civilization’ efforts to integrate them into mainstream religious traditions.

Thus, the New Order’s policies effectively positioned the state as the arbiter of religious orthodoxy, marginalizing local belief systems and forcing their assimilation into the state’s official religious framework. This approach redefined ancestral deities within the state’s conception of divinity, reshaping the religious landscape to align with the regime’s vision of unity and order. In conclusion, Indonesia’s regulatory approach to heterodox groups has been shaped by historical, social, and political considerations. While intended to foster national unity and religious harmony, these policies often marginalized minority groups and curtailed religious freedoms. Moving forward, a more inclusive framework that values religious diversity and dialogue could better balance societal stability with the principles of pluralism and freedom of belief.

### **Analysis of Context and Content of Controversial Guideline**

In 2013, the Ministry of Religious Affairs Republic of Indonesia issued the Pedoman Penanganan Aliran dan Gerakan Keagamaan Bermasalah di Indonesia/Ministerial Guideline to Oversee ‘Problematic’ Religious Sect and Movement in Indonesia [hereinafter the Guideline] which has since been used to monitor and regulate heterodox groups in the country. The Circular from the General Secretary of MORA No SJ/B.V/2/HK.00/7708/2014 is also based on this Guideline.

The Guideline consists of 6 chapters that cover the rough definition of problematic religious sects and movements, the indicators and typology of heterodox groups, the damage and impact these religious movements

have on society, how to identify them as sects, models for supervising and managing religious sects and movements, and step-by-step procedures for writing reports on heterodox groups (included in the appendices). Since its inception, the Guideline has served as a guide for stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs, responsible for overseeing and monitoring heterodox groups. It has also aided in addressing and resolving various issues faced by victims of these religious sects' activities in society.

The definition of 'problematic' in this regulation warrants further discussion. The guidelines indicate that in this context, 'problematic' does not refer to theological or legal issues. Rather, it relates to social relationships that arise from the existence of certain sects and movements. Moreover, 'problematic' is unrelated to debates over whether a religious sect or movement is considered deviant. The guidelines make clear that the state does not play a determinant role in creating a hegemonic perspective on what is 'acceptable' or 'true' regarding doctrine or religious movements. According to this definition, the state lacks authority to label a person or group as deviant. At this point, it is believed 'problematic' in this context does not pertain to theological or legal matters. Instead, it concerns social relation issues stemming from problematic religious sects and movements.<sup>17</sup>

The context of this regulation is apparent based on the information provided in the Guideline. The new religious sect and movements have emerged dramatically, and one of the causes is rapid social change. Therefore, this new social change has presumably led to the rise of a new model of religious movements. In Indonesia, before and after independence, various new religious sects and movements have been recorded as problematic accordingly. As a country with more than 400 ethnic groups with diverse cultural and character traits, Indonesia often experiences the emergence of new religious movements and beliefs in various regions, which then create problems and social conflicts for the community.

The Guideline recognizes that the impacts of these religious movements have been so far handled partially, ad hoc, situational, shallow, and only on the surface. There has been no joint effort made by various parties to seriously, comprehensively, systematically, and continuously address these issues. On the one hand, law enforcement agencies sometimes appear to be half-hearted in handling cases related to these movements. On the other hand, the unease caused by these groups leads to difficulties in controlling mass anarchism.

The Guideline provides a clear differentiation between what is meant by aliran keagamaan 'bermasalah' ('problematic' religious sects) and gerakan keagamaan bermasalah ('problematic' religious movements). At first blush,

the Guideline describes two types of 'problematic' religious sects. The first type is a religious sect that claims that an individual or group has received a genuine divine revelation from God. This revelation is believed to contain new sacred values and norms that are completely different from the religious scriptures and traditions of the particular society, including their texts, contexts, theology, rituals, genealogies of receiving and accepting the holy book, societal life, morality, the universe, and doctrines related to the beginning and end of life. At this point, the sect claims that the individual or group has received a revelation from God that contains completely new values and sacred norms that differ significantly from the existing religious scriptures of mainstream society.<sup>18</sup>

The second type of 'problematic' religious sect is the one that claims that an individual or group has received a divine revelation or guidance from God regarding a new understanding and interpretation of sacred values and norms within an existing religious scripture or tradition of a particular society (or modification), including their texts, contexts, theology, rituals, genealogies of receiving and accepting the holy book, societal life, morality, the universe and doctrines related to the beginning and end of life. In this case, the sect believes that the individual or group has received divine revelation or guidance from God regarding a new understanding and interpretation of sacred values and norms as part of an existing religious scripture or tradition. The new interpretation of the holy book or existing religious scriptures contains doctrines about theology, rituals, social relations, morality, and the universe, as well as doctrines related to myths about the beginning and end of life. The guideline clearly assumes that most problems related to riots and social conflicts are mostly responses to the second type of this 'problematic' religious sect.

Then the Guideline distinguishes between two types of 'problematic' religious movements. First, any religious movement that contradicts the law and constitution, promotes sedition and conflict and causes social unrest towards anything that they perceive as contrary or obstructive to the sacred values and norms of their religious life. In some cases, their extreme attitudes have sparked social reactions or legal sanctions, resulting in destruction, detention, death, suffering, and extortion.

Second, religious movements that, in their efforts to gather followers and funding, manage and implement their campaigns using manipulative strategies, methods, and tactics such as brainwashing, coercion, threats, and imposing heavy obligations on the shoulders of their victims. Victims of such movements experience false consciousness with symptoms including confusion, the emptiness of the soul, and daydreaming that can be classified



as a result of frustration, conflict, anxiety, or depression, which essentially represents the manifestation of stress that enters the doorway to abnormal psychology, encompassing disorders (adjective mechanisms), disturbances (psychoneuroses), suffering from an illness (psychoses; psychosomatic), as well as specific disorders.

In other words, religious movements that, in their efforts to attract followers and conduct fundraising and management, use manipulative strategies, methods, and tactics such as brainwashing, coercion, threats, and imposing obligations, can be categorized as problematic movements. This is shown by several pathological effects such as some members or victims of such movements experiencing false consciousness with symptoms including confusion, the emptiness of soul, frustration, self-conflict, anxiety, or depression, which essentially indicate mental and psychological disorders.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, according to this Guideline, it is important to have a comprehensive solution in the handling of problematic religious groups and movements. This is mainly focused on providing psychological and religious support to the victims through re-education, guidance and counselling, therapy and treatment, preservation, advocacy, empowerment, and breaking the patron-client chain of victims throughout the patron network of these religious movements. It is hoped that cases related to these new religious movements will be handled in a more humane, fair, and civilized manner, with a perspective of empowering individuals. At this point, the emphasis is on facilitating reconciliation between those who have been involved in these movements and mainstream religious groups through peaceful and calm approaches so that they can return to normal social life and healthy mental conditions.<sup>20</sup>

The Guideline provides criteria to assess whether a religious sect or movement can be considered 'problematic' from two perspectives: the legal perspective and the social-religious perspective. From a legal perspective, based on the 1945 Indonesia Constitution, laws, and regulations, a religious sect or movement can be considered 'problematic' if they: (1) pose a threat to public order, such as by promoting religious teachings that are distorted, misleading, or inciting riots in the community; (2) pose a threat to public safety, such as by teaching followers to harm themselves or others; (3) disrupt public morals, such as by promoting teachings that condone free sex and adultery; (4) pose a threat to public health, such as by promoting the use of illegal drugs; (5) violate the basic rights of others, such as by using coercion, brainwashing, or manipulating fundraising from the community to spread their teachings; (6) spread hatred and hostility

in the community, including promoting physical violence and terror; (7) advocate and teach treason and enmity against a legitimate government, such as by rejecting Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).

From legal and social-religious perspectives, this Guideline identifies indicators for determining if a religious sect or movement is problematic. These factors include: (1) absolute authority held by the leader regarding interpretation; (2) dangerous activities that threaten members and others; (3) claims of receiving revelation; (4) claiming of being a prophet; (5) permitting unlawful acts or forbidding lawful ones; (6) strict mandatory rules and structures; (7) exaggerated practices with little understanding of religious texts; and (8) exclusivity in social and religious activities.<sup>21</sup>

To this vein, the Guideline clearly promotes a narrow view of 'problematic' religious sects by judging them based on the norms of dominant religious groups. This reinforces an implicit standard for legitimate religion, marginalizing groups that don't conform, as Beaman argues.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, the Guideline deliberately adopts the Indonesian Muslim Expert Council/the MUI's perspective, as the norm of dominant religious group on deviant sects as a social-religious perspective in identifying whether a religious sect or movement is 'problematic'. This perspective fully affirms that a sect or movement is considered 'problematic' if it conforms to one or more of the 10 criteria mentioned in MUI's fatwa, which includes: first, disagreeing with the six principles of the Islamic faith; second, believing and acting outside the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith; third, believing in a decree that comes after the Qur'an; fourth, disputing the authenticity of the Qur'an; fifth, interpreting the Qur'an differently from Qur'an principles; sixth, disagreeing with hadith as a source of Islamic teaching; seventh, humiliating, despising or looking down on the Prophets and the Messengers; eighth, disagreeing that the Prophet Muhammad is the last Prophet and Messenger; ninth, changing, adding, or reducing principles concerning religious rituals that have been set down by shariah; and tenth, claiming that other Muslims are infidels without justification by shariah, such as because they do not belong to the same Islamic group.<sup>23</sup>

It seems important in this stance to underline why the MUI formulated the fatwa in 2013 regarding this aliran sesat (deviant group). The issuance of the fatwa against this heterodox group in 2013 was a response to the dramatic rise of new religious movements within the Indonesian Islamic community, particularly since the Reform era. Although opposition to such groups existed since the Suharto era, the campaign against them was strengthened by the 2005 Fourth Indonesian Muslim Congress sponsored

by the MUI. A key aim of this Congress was to address the recent growth of these groups, which many Muslim activists believed were exploiting political changes to attract followers.<sup>24</sup> As Olle notes, the Congress reinforced the 2000 decision to prioritize combatting deviant sects over major issues like corruption and crime. He hints at a link between the Congress and subsequent attacks on some heterodox groups.<sup>25</sup>

As Sajari stated in addition to Olle, within the past three decades, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has issued fourteen fatwas related to creed and religious sects. According to Sajari, seven of these fourteen fatwas explicitly convey misguidance by labelling certain groups as deviant or outside Islam. These groups include Islam Jamaah, Ahmadiyah, those who reject the Sunna/Hadith, Darul Arqam, the Angel Gabriel sect, and Qiyadah Islamiyah. The fatwas use strong language to condemn these groups, declaring them as ‘deviant,’ ‘apostates,’ or ‘forbidden.’ The remaining fatwas use milder terms like ‘damage the purity and stability of religious life’.<sup>26</sup>

There is no doubt that the emergence of heterodox religious movements in Indonesia has frequently evoked strong responses from mainstream groups seeking to uphold religious orthodoxy, groups often backed by the ruling regime. The recent publication of the Guideline reflects not just a reaction to the rise of heterodox groups theologically challenging mainstream ones, but also an effort to preserve and control social order. After all, promoting the “correct” model of belief and worship will presumably foster community cohesion and stability. As Lewis pointed out, this relates to enforcing “true belief” and controlling public space. Therefore, the Guideline for managing heterodox groups partly represents the state’s strategy for maintaining the orthodoxy of established religions.<sup>27</sup>

The Guideline also outlines a step-by-step process for identifying religious sects and movements considered ‘problematic’. It specifies when this identification should occur and mandates gathering detailed information on the sect or movement, such as its origins, networks, and primary teachings. Furthermore, the Guideline establishes a scheme and mechanism for monitoring individuals influenced by the sect or movement in question.<sup>28</sup>

Asad’s argument reveals issues with the government’s Guideline for defining its stance on heterodox religious groups.<sup>29</sup> The Guideline fails to capture the diversity of religious movements; rather than simply distinguishing ‘authentic’ from ‘problematic’ sects, it aims to promote ‘right’ beliefs to increase control. The Guideline has two main goals: first, maintaining religious orthodoxy against internal and external challenges,

and second, achieving the highest possible religious, social, and cultural stability in the country.

One could argue that the primary factor behind the issuance of this Guideline is the significant influence of dominant values from a dominant religious group in Indonesia. This point has been made by scholars such as Beaman and Beyer when examining the similar issue in the context of North America countries. In the United States and Canada, for example, both scholars note that the legal systems tend to reinforce the hegemony of Protestantism, creating an implicit model of what constitutes a legitimate religion and marginalizing other religions that do not fit that model.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Beyer notes that many political efforts to establish hegemony using specific expressions and forms taken from dominant religious groups have occurred worldwide.<sup>31</sup> Beyer also points out that in some extreme cases or during transitional periods, these dominant groups may even serve as quasi-governing institutions, as has occurred in certain East European countries and in Asia, such as Indonesia.

In this context, two factors lead rulers to favour dominant faiths: first, rulers often personally identify with the dominant group, granting it privileges; and second, rulers rely on the group for legitimacy, knowing its support enables stable rule. As the dominant group consistently demands participation and influence, rulers make concessions to maintain positive relations. This dynamic shapes legal regulation, as the state penetrates society while the dominant religious bloc leverages its majority status to shape lawmaking.

Returning back to the topic, it is evident that the purpose of the Guideline is not only to manage society under the government's political objectives, such as maintaining authority and stability, but also to some degree to safeguard the interests and values of the dominant group. As some studies suggest, the struggle for control over law-making primarily serves the interests of the dominant groups, whose values set the standard for legal compliance by the rulers or the state as a political institution, as Gill argues.<sup>32</sup> This may explain why dominant groups prefer higher-level regulations on religious life while minorities prefer lower-level regulations. Although every regulation may potentially interfere with their private domains, for the dominant groups, they can also serve as an effective tool for legal control and restriction in advancing their hegemony and monopolizing 'the truth'.

In practice, despite their rhetorical support for religious freedom, it is evident that these policies actually favour restrictions on minority religious activities. For instance, they require minorities to operate only in designated

areas for proselytizing, which are commonly referred to as 'buffer zones', and limit the dissemination of ideas to select groups. Overseas missionaries also face strict permission requirements and instrumental assistance for religious missions. In extreme cases, when dominant views in the 'free market' of religiosity are threatened, the situation becomes even more concerning. They demand that rulers take heavy-handed measures to prohibit the dissemination of ideas and practices from these minorities, branding them as deviant and incompatible with mainstream religious beliefs.

Undoubtedly, there is a plethora of evidence indicating the adverse effects of the emergence of new religious sects and movements. According to some studies, these groups often utilize tactics such as brainwashing, manipulation, coercion, threats, and indoctrination to maintain the loyalty of their members. Furthermore, these groups have been known to exploit and control their members, leading to long-term psychological trauma. In addition, when members of these groups are ostracized and labelled as heretical or deviant by the mainstream religious community, it can further exacerbate their psychological damage. The negative reactions of the mainstream community may cause emotional harm and potentially result in a loss of social support and isolation, which can have long-lasting effects on the individual's mental health. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the potential harm caused by these groups and implement measures to support individuals who have been adversely affected.<sup>33</sup>

It is likely that the Guideline, which appears to have a noble purpose, may also be utilized as a tool to discriminate against religious minority groups. This approach has become a new trend in Indonesian religiosity, especially after the Reformasi. The persecution of minority groups has often been linked to accusations of blasphemy, defamation, and dissent. However, the root of this issue is not so much about the content of what is being expressed, but rather how it is being expressed in public. It is quite clear that the focus of this Guideline is on maintaining social order and mainstream group sentiment, rather than protecting the freedom of religion, which has become difficult to prove.

In addition to this, it should be anticipated the misuse of the Guideline to target minority groups and the rise of discrimination and persecution against them. The accusations of blasphemy and defamation are often used as a pretext to justify such attacks. Moreover, it suggests that the authorities' focus is not on protecting the freedom of religion but on preventing any disturbance to social order and mainstream group sentiment. This approach raises questions about the legitimacy of the state's interventions in religious

matters and its commitment to ensuring equal rights and protection for all religious groups.

The lack of a clear and definitive definition of what constitutes a 'problematic' religious sect or movement in the Guideline has resulted in the disregard and denial of the rights and dignity of these groups. This is particularly evident in cases where sacrilege occurs, such as the destruction or violation of sacred places of worship like mosques. The issue is not limited to the Ahmadis and Shiah, as other groups have also been targeted, and accused of being 'bermasalah' or deviant.<sup>34</sup> Examples include Yusman Roy in East Java and Lia Aminuddin's Kerajaan Eden in Jakarta. In this context, these groups have become a soft target for a campaign against so-called 'heretical' groups, which has gradually escalated to physical intimidation and violent attacks. This highlights the importance of a clear and precise definition of what constitutes a 'problematic' religious sect or movement in the Guideline to prevent the violation of the rights and dignity of these groups, and to prevent the escalation of violence against them.

To many observers, it appears that the government has failed to maintain a neutral stance in handling religious affairs, as evidenced by numerous incidents of attacks against minority groups. The current government is seen as being susceptible to pressure from conservative groups within the majority community who advocate for the implementation of their specific religious beliefs. This lack of neutrality is indicative of a larger problem in the existing legal framework, which is based on the norms of the majority and implicitly reinforces their dominance. This systematic intolerance towards minority groups causes dissatisfaction and can lead to their disadvantage in legal proceedings.<sup>35</sup>

The government may argue that there are certain limits to religious freedom, both in theory and practice. This includes behaviour that goes against the state's sanctioned way of life. As such, the government may see fit to not only enact laws relating to religion but also regulate them in a way that could limit religious freedom. However, in a mature democracy, the government needs to prioritize policies that protect religious freedoms for all groups, regardless of their beliefs. This is particularly important in a multicultural society where diversity is celebrated and mutual recognition and respect are necessary for a cohesive society.

Despite the government's claim of limiting religious freedom to preserve social order, it can also be argued that existing legislation based on majority norms reflects a systematic intolerance that causes discontent for minority groups. In practice, formal equality, where everyone has the same legal rights and opportunities, may not be enough to ensure true equality and

fairness for all. This is because not all groups have the same level of power and privilege in society. Therefore, a strong liberal multicultural approach is necessary to address power imbalances and ensure that everyone is treated fairly.

One of important aspects in regard with how government handled this issue is its law enforcement. Some studies argue that the weak and inconsistent law enforcement is also a factor that may trigger the emergence of new religious movements. In the case of Indonesia, it is evident that very few cases related to the emergence of these movements are settled through legal means such as courts. Another aspect that needs to be considered is that in some cases, the resolution of these movements does not follow the legal principles applied fairly. Most of these cases end with 'iron fist' decision that directly prohibits without comprehensive analysis to test its formal validity in court or to see how far the movement may harm the public order.<sup>36</sup>

This weakness is also reinforced by the tendency of inconsistency in the application of the law itself, where existing procedures are not legally followed. An administrative decision on religion should only be made by state officials who carefully consider the principle of presumption of innocence, not by pressure from certain groups or organizations that are not supra-structures and have an advantage in influencing or determining legal decisions. With this type of resolution model, the leaders of these movements instead appear as martyrs for the religious struggle, become 'sacrificed martyrs' are treated unfairly in the eyes of society.

Hence, governments need to strike a balance between preserving social order and protecting the rights and dignity of minority groups. In a democracy, the government's role is to protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, and create a society that is inclusive, diverse, and equitable.

The aforementioned principle is grounded on recognizing the presence of both majority and minority groups, and the crucial mediating function of the government between these groups. These are the fundamental tenets of a democratic system where the majority has a say on one hand, but the minority is also safeguarded on the other. Regardless of personal preferences, this is a critical element of nationhood that necessitates an impartial and robust government.

## **Conclusion**

This article has discussed the relationship between the conflict between orthodox and heterodox groups and the expansion of political bureaucracy.

It is evident that state power became involved in the issue of heterodoxy, making it not only a theological challenge but also a matter of public safety. Correct belief and worship were seen as crucial for ensuring the unity and stability of society.

The article has also highlighted the importance of being part of an orthodox group or promoting an orthodox point of view for establishing and maintaining common boundaries, especially with the support of the state. Political power and the regime played a significant role in endorsing a particular model of orthodoxy and addressing heterodoxy, issuing various regulations, rules, restrictions, and policies as a means of control and monitoring.

Overall, the conflict between orthodox and heterodox groups was not only a theological issue but also a matter of politics and public safety. The state became involved in endorsing a particular model of orthodoxy and addressing heterodoxy, making it an issue of control and monitoring. This highlights the complex interplay between religion and politics and the importance of state power in shaping religious discourse and practice.

## Endnotes

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3. J. Rebecca Lyman, "Heresiology: The Invention of 'Heresy' and 'Schism'," in Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 296-314.
4. See Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazbali's Faysal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 25-30.
5. See Bernard Lewis, "Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam," *Studia Islamica* 1 (1959): 51-76; and also, Robert Langer and Udo Simon, "The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: Dealing with Divergence in Muslim Discourses and Islamic Studies," *Die Welt Des Islams* 48 (2008): 273-288.
6. See Ismatu Ropi, "Against All Heterodoxies: Accounts of the Deviant Groups (Aliran-Aliran Sesat) in Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Literature," *The Muslim World* 110, No. 4 (2020): 518-534.
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8. Donald K. Emmerson, *Indonesia's Elite: Political Culture and Cultural Politics* (Cornell University Press, London, 1976), 224.
9. See Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia* (London-Singapore-Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
10. Martin Van Bruinessen, "Gerakan Sempalan di Kalangan Umat Islam Indonesia: Latar Belakang Sosial-Budaya" *Ulumul Qur'an* III, No. 1 (1992): 27-41.



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13. See Howard M. Federspiel in *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Indonesia* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, 1970), 107-108.
14. Muhammad Natsir, "Islam, Katholiek, Pemerintah," *Pembela Islam* 33 (1931): 2-7, and republished in his book, *Islam dan Kristen di Indonesia* [Islam and Christianity in Indonesia] (Bandung: CV Bulan Sabit & CV Peladjar, 1969), 37-43.
15. Ichtijanto, *Pengamanan Negara Melalui Pengendalian Kegiatan Kerochianian* [State Security through Controlling Spiritual Activities] (Jakarta: Departemen Agama RI Direktorat Djenderal Bimbingan Masyarakat Islam Proyek Pengawasan Kegiatan Keagamaan dan Aliran2/Faham2, 1969), 24-26.
16. For more info see also Departemen Agama RI, *Kumpulan Peraturan Perundang-undangan Kerukunan Hidup Umat Beragama* [Compilation of Government Regulations of Religious Harmony among Communities] (Jakarta: Departemen Agama RI, 1998), 13-18.
17. Kementerian Agama RI, *Pedoman Penanganan Aliran*, 4-8.
18. Kementerian Agama RI, *Pedoman Penanganan Aliran*, 22-26.
19. See also Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Aliran dan Paham Sesat di Indonesia* [Deviant Religious Sects and Movement in Indonesia] (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2002).
20. Kementerian Agama RI, *Pedoman Penanganan Aliran*, 26-28.
21. Kementerian Agama RI, *Pedoman Penanganan Aliran*, 30-36.
22. Lori Beaman, "The Myth of Pluralism, Diversity and Vigor: The Constitutional Privileging of Protestantism in the United States and Canada," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, No. 3 (2003): 118-126.
23. Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), *Mengawal Aqidah Umat*, 20-31.
24. See more about MUI in Nadirsyah Hosen, "Behind the Scenes: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975-1998)," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, 2 (2004): 147-179; and Moch. Nur Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, No. 1 (2005), 45-72.
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31. Peter Beyer, "Constitutional Privilege and Constituting Pluralism: Religious Freedom in National, Global, and Legal Context," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42, No. 3

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  33. Kementerian Agama RI, *Pedoman Penanganan Aliran*, 23-26.
  34. Abdul Hamid Ritonga (ed.), *Kajian dan Penelitian Fatwa-Fatwa MUI tentang Aliran Sesat* [Studies and Researches on MUI's Fatwas on Religious Deviance] (Medan: CV Minhaji, 2020).
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  36. See Muchammad Ichsan and Nanik Prasetyoningsih, "Penyelesaian Aliran Sesat di Indonesia dari Perspektif Hukum Islam dan Hukum Positif [Solving the Problem of Religious Deviant Groups Based on Islamic Law and Common Law]," *Jurnal Media Hukum* 19, No. 2 (Dec 2012): 166-180.

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