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Negotiating Intra-Muslim Difference in Indonesian Lived Islam: Religious Authority, Islamic Organizations, and The Sunni–Shia Question

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the Sunni–Shia question in Indonesia as a site for understanding how intra-Muslim difference is negotiated within Indonesian lived Islam. Rather than treating Sunni–Shia tension merely as a theological or sectarian conflict, the study situates it within broader transformations of religious authority, institutional discourse, public morality, and everyday Muslim social life. The article aims to analyze how three major Islamic organizations the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah construct, mediate, and recontextualize religious authority in responding to Sunni–Shia difference. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative documentary case study approach, drawing on official fatwas, organizational statements, institutional publications, human rights reports, and relevant scholarly literature. The data are analyzed through qualitative content analysis and thematic interpretation, guided by the concepts of lived religion, religious authority, and Muslim politics. The findings show that MUI represents a normative-regulative model of authority through fatwa and doctrinal boundary-making; NU represents a cultural-mediative model through *pesantren* networks, kiai authority, and the ethics of *ukhuwah* and *tasāmuḥ*; while Muhammadiyah represents an educational-civic model through religious moderation, Islamic education, public reasoning, and *Islam Berkemajuan*. The article argues that Indonesian Islamic authority is plural, layered, and context-dependent. Its main contribution lies in reframing the Sunni–Shia question not as a marginal sectarian issue, but as a critical lens for understanding how lived Islam is transformed through competing yet interconnected forms of religious authority.

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INTRODUCTION

Intra-Muslim difference has become a crucial problem in contemporary Islamic studies because it exposes how theology, authority, communal belonging, and public legitimacy are negotiated within changing social formations. The Sunni–Shia distinction is often approached as a doctrinal divide within Islamic history, yet its contemporary significance lies not merely in theological divergence but in the ways such divergence becomes socially organized, politically mobilized, and institutionally interpreted. Globally, Sunnis constitute the majority of the Muslim population, while Shia Muslims represent a significant minority tradition with its own legal, devotional, and intellectual genealogies (Center, 2011). Contemporary sectarian tension, however, is rarely reducible to doctrinal disagreement alone. It is produced through the interaction of religious authority, institutional classification, political competition, social boundary-making, and the circulation of religious discourse in public life.

Indonesia offers a particularly important setting for examining this issue because it combines the world's largest Muslim population with a long history of religious plurality, local Islamic accommodation, and influential Islamic civil society organizations. Pew Research Center estimates that approximately 87% of Indonesia's population is Muslim, representing about 242 million Muslims based on official religious-demographic data from 2022 (Center, 2024). Indonesian Islam is predominantly Sunni and historically shaped by *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* traditions associated with Ash'ari and Maturidi theology, Shafi'i jurisprudence, and classical Sufi ethics, a configuration that has often supported moderation, social welfare, and interreligious tolerance in local contexts (Giling et al., 2026). Yet this Sunni-majority landscape is not doctrinally uniform. It is crossed by transnational learning networks, local customary practices, educational reforms, fatwa institutions, *pesantren* authority, and minority Islamic traditions that complicate any simple image of Indonesian Islam as a stable or homogeneous religious field.

The post-Reformasi period has sharpened these complexities. Democratization after 1998 expanded the space for religious expression, but it also intensified competition among religious actors, Islamic movements, fatwa-producing institutions, educational networks, and media-based preachers. Religious authority is no longer located solely in classical texts or traditional scholarly circles; it is continuously produced through organizations, public statements, legal instruments, digital circulation, institutional education, and local religious leadership. Sunier's work on Islamic authority is useful here because it emphasizes that authority is not an inherent property of religious scholars alone, but a persuasive and relational process involving legitimacy, trust, authenticity, ethics, and public recognition (Sunier, 2022, 2025). Recent studies of Indonesian digital Islam also show that religious authority is increasingly shaped by platform visibility, affective communication, audience engagement, and algorithmic legitimacy, not only by formal scholarly credentials or institutional affiliation (Siregar et al., 2025, Ardiansyah et al., 2025)

Sunni–Shia relations in Indonesia provide a productive lens through which to examine the transformation of lived Islam. Historically, elements associated with Shi'i devotion, Ahl al-Bayt veneration, and Karbala memory circulated in the archipelago through trade, migration, Sufi networks, ritual adaptation, and local cultural expression. Zulkifli's study of Indonesian Shi'ism shows that Shi'i communities developed through education, publishing, da'wa networks, and institutional formation, including organizations such as IJABI, while generating varied responses from Indonesia's Sunni-majority environment (Zulkifli, 2013). His later work further highlights the role of Shi'i educational institutions in identity formation and the search for recognition within the broader Indonesian Islamic public sphere (Zulkifli, 2013). Formichi similarly demonstrates that Indonesian Shi'i identities were historically fluid and locally embedded before becoming increasingly marked by sectarian labeling in the post-authoritarian period (Formichi, 2014b, 2014a). These studies indicate that the Sunni–Shia question in Indonesia should not be framed merely as a binary theological opposition, but as a historically layered process of religious classification, institutional negotiation, and public contestation.

The problem becomes more urgent when theological difference is translated into social exclusion, legal vulnerability, or violence. The Sampang case in Madura between 2011 and 2012 remains one of the most visible examples of Sunni–Shia tension in Indonesia, involving accusations of deviance, local religious rivalry, displacement of Shia residents, and contestation over communal legitimacy. Amal shows that anti-Shia mobilization in democratic Indonesia involves alliances among militant groups, religious actors, and exclusionary political agendas rather than spontaneous theological

disagreement alone (Amal, 2020). Hakim further argues that intra-Muslim discrimination reveals the limits of conventional tolerance discourse, since domination by the Muslim majority over Muslim minorities requires a renewed framework of intra-religious dialogue (Hakim, 2021). Rokhmad's analysis of sectarianism and state policy also shows that minority vulnerability is intensified when legal and administrative frameworks fail to protect marginalized religious communities adequately (Rokhmad, 2019). The Sampang case therefore illustrates how religious difference becomes consequential when institutional authority, local politics, state response, and communal anxiety converge.

At the same time, Sunni–Shia relations in Indonesia cannot be understood only through conflict. Recent studies show that coexistence, accommodation, and negotiated intimacy also shape intra-Muslim relations. Maskuri's study of post-conflict Sampang highlights the role of local tradition, social structures, and reconciliation efforts in rebuilding trust after forced relocation. Faiz's research on Sunni–Shia intermarriage in Bondowoso demonstrates that theological difference may be negotiated through mutual respect, economic considerations, family support, and compliance with state legal frameworks (Faiz et al., 2024). Aziz's work on lived Islam and Islamic legal pluralism in rural Indonesia further shows that Muslim communities often resolve legal and ritual matters by combining Shafi'i doctrine, customary norms, public welfare reasoning, and cross-madhhab adaptability (Aziz et al., 2026). These findings complicate conflict-centered narratives by showing that Indonesian Islam is lived through a spectrum of practices ranging from exclusion and displacement to accommodation, kinship, legal pragmatism, and everyday coexistence. The relevance of negotiation and national solidarity is also reflected in Tambunan et al.'s study of Mohammad Natsir's Integral Motion, which emphasizes unity, deliberation, and inclusive dialogue as ethical foundations for responding to political fragmentation and social division in Indonesian democracy (Tambunan et.al, 2026)

Within this wider field, Islamic organizations play a decisive role in shaping how intra-Muslim difference is named, governed, and socially understood. The Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah represent three influential but distinct configurations of Islamic authority. MUI occupies a semi-official position as a fatwa-producing body whose religious opinions often affect public perception, policy discourse, and communal legitimacy. Its 1984 recommendation on Shi'a illustrates how fatwa can function as a mechanism of doctrinal boundary-making in a Sunni-majority society. NU represents a *pesantren*-based and culturally embedded model of authority grounded in kiai networks, classical Islamic scholarship, local traditions, and the ethics of *tasāmuḥ*. Muhammadiyah represents a modernist and educational model of authority that emphasizes *tajdid*, rational religious understanding, institutional education, and civic engagement. These organizations do not merely respond to sectarian tension; they participate in producing the categories through which Muslims understand orthodoxy, deviance, moderation, tolerance, and coexistence.

Existing scholarship on Sunni–Shia relations and Islamic authority in Indonesia can be grouped into four major trends. The first consists of historical and anthropological studies of Indonesian Shi'ism, which have clarified the formation of Shi'i communities, the role of transnational networks, the importance of publishing and education, and the shift from fluid identities to sectarian labels (Formichi, 2014b, 2014a; Zulkifli, 2013). The second focuses on violence, sectarianism, legal vulnerability, and minority rights, especially in relation to Sampang and post-Reformasi anti-Shia mobilization (Amal, 2020; Hakim, 2021; Rokhmad, 2019). The third examines Islamic organizations, moderation, and civic Islam, showing that Islamic organizations operate in diverse, adaptive, and sometimes contradictory environments across local, national, and transnational contexts (Kortmann & Rosenow-Williams, 2013). The fourth addresses Islamic education, democratization, and knowledge transmission, including how religious education shapes political engagement, democratic orientation, and plural legal reasoning in Muslim societies (Aziz et al., 2026; Khaliq, 2026). Together, these studies have substantially advanced the field, but they have not fully explained how different Islamic organizations simultaneously produce, mediate, and transform authority in relation to intra-Muslim difference.

The central gap addressed by this article is therefore conceptual, methodological, and empirical. Conceptually, much of the literature continues to frame Sunni–Shia relations primarily through sectarian conflict, minority rights, or intolerance. This framing is necessary, but it often underexamines how Sunni–Shia relations operate as a site where lived Islam is negotiated across public institutions,

educational spaces, local culture, and everyday social life. Methodologically, existing studies tend to focus either on the Shia minority, a single conflict case, or one organization, while fewer studies compare MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah as distinct but interconnected producers of Islamic authority. Empirically, there remains limited analysis of how fatwa, *pesantren* mediation, Islamic education, civic discourse, and local legal reasoning operate together in shaping Muslim responses to intra-Muslim difference. This article addresses that gap by treating the Sunni–Shia question not merely as a case of sectarian dispute, but as a window into the transformation of Indonesian lived Islam.

This study is guided by three research questions. First, how do MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah construct and negotiate religious authority in responding to the Sunni–Shia question in Indonesia? Second, how do fatwa, *pesantren* networks, Islamic educational discourse, and civic engagement shape public understandings of intra-Muslim difference? Third, how does the Sunni–Shia question illuminate broader transformations of lived Islam in contemporary Indonesian society? Correspondingly, the article aims to analyze the roles of MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah as religious-authority actors; to examine the institutional, cultural, educational, and civic mechanisms through which intra-Muslim difference is negotiated; and to reinterpret Sunni–Shia relations as a case of lived Islamic transformation rather than merely sectarian conflict.

Theoretically, this article brings together lived religion, religious authority, and Muslim politics. McGuire's concept of lived religion emphasizes that religion should be studied not only as official doctrine, but as practice, interpretation, embodiment, and everyday experience (McGuire, 2008). Recent Indonesian scholarship on lived religion similarly shows that religious values are embodied through repeated routines, family practices, educational ecologies, media use, and community participation, so that religion is formed not only through doctrine but also through everyday moral habits (Rahiem et al., 2025). Applied to Indonesian Islam, this approach makes it possible to examine Sunni–Shia relations through practices of coexistence, local mediation, educational formation, public discourse, and communal boundary-making. Asad's concept of religion as a discursive tradition provides a second analytical layer by showing how authority disciplines meaning, defines orthodoxy, and organizes legitimate religious knowledge (Asad, 1993). Eickelman and Piscatori's notion of Muslim politics further explains how Islamic meanings are negotiated in public life through organizations, social institutions, political contexts, and civic actors (Eickelman & Piscatori, 2004). These perspectives are appropriate because the research problem concerns not only belief, but also the institutional and social processes through which belief becomes publicly authoritative.

The article further situates Indonesian lived Islam within broader local-global dynamics. Bano's work on Islamic education and transnational learning shows that global centers such as Al-Azhar and Al-Mustafa University transmit theological and legal ideas that are subsequently adapted within local Muslim contexts (Bano & Sakurai, 2015). This is relevant to Indonesia because Sunni and Shia discourses are not isolated domestic phenomena; they are shaped by transnational circulation, educational authority, and local reinterpretation. Aziz's analysis of rural Islamic legal practice similarly demonstrates that Indonesian Muslims often reinterpret Islamic law through local customs, public welfare, and plural legal reasoning rather than applying doctrine in an abstract or uniform manner (Aziz et al., 2026). These insights support the article's core assumption that Indonesian Islam is neither a passive recipient of global Islamic categories nor a purely local tradition, but a dynamic field in which global ideas, local practices, institutional texts, and everyday negotiations interact.

By combining these perspectives, this article conceptualizes MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah as three different but interconnected models of Islamic authority. MUI represents normative-regulative authority through *fatwa* and public religious guidance. NU represents cultural-mediative authority through *pesantren*, kiai networks, and local Islamic traditions. Muhammadiyah represents educational-civic authority through schools, universities, rational discourse, social institutions, and democratic engagement. This framework allows the study to move beyond the question of whether an organization is tolerant or intolerant. It instead asks how different forms of authority produce different effects in the governance of intra-Muslim difference. In this sense, the Sunni–Shia question becomes an analytical site for studying how Islamic texts, institutions, educational networks, and everyday social practices jointly shape the boundaries of Indonesian Muslim belonging.

The novelty of this article lies in its effort to move beyond a conflict-centered reading of Sunni–Shia relations. Rather than asking only how Islamic organizations respond to sectarian tension, the

article asks how their responses reveal the transformation of lived Islam and religious authority in Indonesia. It contributes to international scholarship by linking the study of Sunni–Shia relations with broader debates on lived religion, Islamic authority, textual interpretation, minority recognition, Islamic education, and Muslim civil society. Its academic significance lies in reframing the Sunni–Shia question not as a marginal sectarian issue, but as a critical site for understanding how Indonesian Muslim institutions manage difference, produce legitimacy, and recontextualize Islamic knowledge in everyday social life.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a documentary case study approach. This design is appropriate because the article seeks to interpret how religious authority, institutional discourse, and intra-Muslim difference are constructed and negotiated in Indonesian lived Islam, rather than to measure the frequency of Sunni–Shia tensions statistically. Following Creswell and Poth, qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to examine meanings, processes, narratives, and social contexts embedded in religious and institutional texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study approach is also relevant because the Sunni–Shia question in Indonesia constitutes a bounded socio-religious phenomenon involving identifiable actors, documents, events, and organizational responses. As Yin argues, case study research is useful for examining contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its wider social setting are not clearly separable (Yin, 2018).

The case analyzed in this article is the negotiation of intra-Muslim difference through the responses of three major Islamic organizations: the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah. These organizations were selected purposively because they represent three distinct but interconnected models of Islamic authority in Indonesia. MUI represents normative-regulative authority through fatwa production and public religious guidance. NU represents cultural-mediative authority through *pesantren* networks, kiai leadership, and the ethics of *tasāmuḥ*. Muhammadiyah represents educational-civic authority through Islamic education, rational discourse, social institutions, and the idea of *Islam Berkemajuan*. This comparative selection enables the study to examine how Islamic authority operates across legal, cultural, educational, and civic domains.

The primary data consist of official documents, fatwas, organizational statements, and institutional publications related to Sunni–Shia relations, religious moderation, Islamic brotherhood, and intra-Muslim difference in Indonesia. The main primary sources include MUI's 1984 document on *Faham Syi'ah*, the 2012 East Java MUI fatwa on Shia teachings, official NU statements on Shia and the Sampang incident, Muhammadiyah's official statements and publications on religious moderation, Islamic unity, and *Islam Berkemajuan*, as well as human rights and institutional reports on the Sampang case. These documents are treated not as neutral records, but as institutional texts that construct public meanings of orthodoxy, deviance, tolerance, authority, and communal belonging. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and research reports on Indonesian Islam, religious authority, lived Islam, Islamic organizations, *pesantren*, anti-Shia discourse, and intra-Muslim tolerance.

Data were collected through documentation and systematic literature review. The documents were identified, selected, and organized according to four analytical themes: fatwa and normative boundary-making; *pesantren*-based cultural mediation; Islamic education and civic religious discourse; and the transformation of Sunni–Shia relations within Indonesian lived Islam. Following Bowen, document analysis is useful for qualitative research because official documents, public statements, fatwas, and institutional reports contain social meanings, organizational positions, and traces of public discourse (Bowen, 2009). In this study, the documents were read critically as texts embedded in institutional authority, socio-religious contestation, and power relations.

The data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was used to examine the language, categories, claims, and normative assumptions contained in fatwas, organizational statements, and institutional documents. This follows Krippendorff's view that content analysis enables researchers to produce valid inferences from texts within their contexts of use (Krippendorff, 2018). Thematic analysis was then applied to identify recurring patterns across the data,

including fatwa authority, religious vigilance, Islamic brotherhood, mediation, moderation, education, public order, and minority protection. These themes were then grouped into three analytical categories: normative-regulative authority, cultural-mediative authority, and educational-civic authority.

The analysis is guided by the concepts of lived religion and religious authority. McGuire's (2008) concept of lived religion is used to examine Islam not only as doctrine, but as practice, discourse, social experience, and everyday negotiation. Asad's concept of religion as a discursive tradition helps explain how religious authority defines orthodoxy, disciplines meaning, and regulates legitimate Islamic knowledge (Asad, 1993). Eickelman and Piscatori's discussion of Muslim politics further supports the analysis of how Islamic authority is negotiated through organizations, public institutions, and civic actors (Eickelman & Piscatori, 2004).

To strengthen credibility, this study applies source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and interpretive consistency. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing fatwas, organizational statements, human rights reports, and scholarly studies. Theoretical triangulation was applied by interpreting the data through lived religion, religious authority, and Muslim politics perspectives. Interpretive consistency was maintained by linking each analytical claim to specific documentary evidence. The study is limited by its reliance on documentary sources and does not include field interviews with members of MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah, or Shia communities. Therefore, its focus is institutional discourse rather than personal narratives. Nevertheless, this method is appropriate for examining how religious authority is textually produced, publicly circulated, and theoretically interpreted in the negotiation of Sunni–Shia difference in Indonesian lived Islam.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fatwa, Boundary-Making, and the Normative-Regulative Authority of MUI

MUI's response to the Sunni–Shia question reveals that fatwa functions not only as a theological opinion but as a normative-regulative instrument through which the boundaries of acceptable Islam are publicly defined, institutionalized, and socially circulated. The most fundamental finding of this study is that MUI's fatwa discourse transforms intra-Muslim difference from a matter of doctrinal plurality into a question of orthodoxy, vigilance, public order, and communal legitimacy. This pattern is already visible in the Indonesian Ulema Council's 1984 document on *Faham Syi'ah*, which described Shia as "one of the understandings found in the Islamic world," yet immediately marked it as doctrinally distant from *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* by emphasizing differences concerning the authority of hadith, the doctrine of imamate, the concept of ijma', and the legitimacy of the first three caliphs (Indonesia, 1984). The document did not classify Shia as an external religion, but it constructed a clear internal boundary within Islam by urging Indonesian Muslims who follow Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah to remain cautious toward the spread of Shia-based teachings (Indonesia, 1984). This textual move is significant: Shia is acknowledged as part of the broader Islamic world, but simultaneously positioned as a doctrinal object requiring surveillance.

The boundary-making function became sharper in the East Java MUI fatwa issued in January 2012. Unlike the 1984 national document, which primarily emphasized theological difference and vigilance, the East Java fatwa translated Shia difference into a regional security and social-order problem. The fatwa stated that reports from various areas in East Java indicated the spread of Shia *Imamiyah Itsna Asyariyah* under the name "*Madzhab Ahlul Bait*" and claimed that its dissemination was conducted massively among Sunni communities, including poor communities allegedly approached through charitable assistance (Timur, 2012). It further claimed that at least 63 foundations, 8 majelis taklim, 9 mass organizations, and 8 schools or *pesantren* were suspected of teaching or spreading Shia thought (Timur, 2012). Most decisively, the fatwa declared Shia *Imamiyah Itsna Asyariyah* and related teachings "*sesat* dan *menyesatkan*" and recommended that the government should not provide space for their dissemination because they were considered capable of generating instability and threatening national integration (Timur, 2012). These claims show that the fatwa did more than evaluate doctrine; it connected doctrine to demography, institutional spread, poverty, state security, and national cohesion.

This finding is best understood through Talal Asad's concept of religion as a discursive tradition, in which religious meanings are authorized, disciplined, and regulated through historically situated institutions (Asad, 1993). From this perspective, MUI's fatwa does not merely describe Shia

doctrine; it produces a public grammar through which Shia is to be read by Sunni communities, state officials, and local religious actors. The terms "difference," "vigilance," "deviance," and "public instability" operate as discursive devices that convert theological classification into social regulation. In this sense, MUI's authority is not only textual but performative: it establishes categories, legitimizes boundaries, and shapes the conditions under which Muslims recognize or reject intra-Muslim plurality. This also extends the lived religion approach, because everyday religious perception is not formed only through personal devotion, family practice, or community ritual, but through institutional texts that move into sermons, local policies, community meetings, media narratives, and ordinary moral judgment.

The MUI case also reflects a broader pattern in which fatwas in Indonesia function as tools for regulating religious practice and defining orthodoxy. Studies on MUI's treatment of groups such as Ahmadiyah show that terms such as "deviant," "apostate," and "misleading" have been used to reinforce the boundary between mainstream Islam and religious outgroups, thereby strengthening MUI's position within Indonesia's hierarchy of religious authority (Alnizar, 2025; Purba et al., 2024). Similar mechanisms are visible in the Sunni–Shia case, although with a distinctive intra-Muslim complexity: Shia is not simply placed outside Islam in the 1984 document, but is marked as doctrinally dangerous within the Islamic field itself (Indonesia, 1984). This internal boundary is analytically important because it shows that orthodoxy is not produced only by distinguishing Islam from non-Islam, but also by ranking and regulating differences inside Islam.

Comparative studies from Malaysia further confirm that fatwas often function as instruments for managing religious diversity under the language of orthodoxy. Shiozaki's study of Malaysian fatwas on groups such as Darul Arqam and Shia communities shows that fatwa-making has historically been used to regulate heterodox groups and maintain officially recognized Sunni authority (Shiozaki, 2015). Ibrahim similarly argues that the institutionalization of fatwa in Malaysia reflects state attempts to centralize religious authority, even though the federal structure complicates uniform implementation across states (Ibrahim et al., 2016). The Indonesian case differs because MUI does not operate as a fully centralized state religious bureaucracy, yet its semi-official moral authority allows its fatwas to influence public perception and policy discourse. This comparison clarifies the distinctive character of MUI's authority: it is not identical to state law, but it often works as a bridge between religious classification, public morality, and governmental response.

The institutional force of MUI fatwas is also evident beyond sectarian issues. In Islamic financial governance, MUI fatwas have become legally consequential through the authority of the National Sharia Council and their integration into regulatory frameworks for Islamic financial institutions (Purba et al., 2024; Suhendar et al., 2023). This demonstrates that MUI fatwas can move from non-binding religious opinion into governance structures with practical legal effects. Suhendar's analysis of the changing relationship between Muslims and the Indonesian state shows that the political position of Islamic authority has shifted from antagonistic to more participatory, enabling fatwas to enter formal and semi-formal domains of governance (Suhendar et al., 2023)In the Sunni–Shia case, this helps explain why MUI discourse cannot be treated as merely symbolic. Even when a fatwa is not formally equivalent to state law, its institutional authority can shape administrative decisions, local policy responses, police attitudes, public campaigns, and community pressure.

At the same time, the regulatory reach of fatwa extends beyond doctrinal matters into broader forms of social control. Studies of fatwas on smoking, environmental conduct, public morality, and social behavior show that fatwa-making often aims to shape individual and collective conduct in accordance with Islamic principles (Elkalmi et al., 2016; Muhamad & Mizerski, 2013; Ramlan, 2020). Sutrisno's study of Aceh illustrates how fatwa can regulate cultural expression, such as music concerts, as a symbolic assertion of religious authority over public life. These studies are relevant because they show that MUI's treatment of Shia belongs to a wider logic of fatwa-based governance: fatwa identifies a perceived problem, authorizes a religious judgment, and seeks to discipline public behavior. The difference is that in the Sunni–Shia question, the object of regulation is not simply a practice such as smoking or a cultural event, but a Muslim minority identity. This makes the social consequences more serious because the fatwa affects belonging, recognition, and security.

This finding supports Formichi's argument that anti-Shia discourse in Indonesia intensified through religious, political, and institutional articulations after the democratic opening of the post-New

Order period (Formichi, 2014b). It also resonates with Amal's analysis of anti-Shia mobilization, which shows that exclusionary narratives become politically effective when religious elites, militant groups, and local actors converge around a discourse of deviance (Amal, 2020). However, the present study extends these arguments by showing that MUI's role is not only an instance of anti-Shia discourse or religious intolerance. It is part of a broader structure of Islamic governance in which doctrinal classification becomes a mechanism for regulating intra-Muslim difference. MUI's authority operates through a chain linking fatwa, public morality, majority identity, state security, and local legitimacy. This chain explains why a textual judgment can have consequences far beyond the text itself.

Yet the MUI case also contains an internal contradiction that must be taken seriously. The East Java MUI fatwa simultaneously delegitimized Shia *Imamiyah Itsna Asyariyah* as "*sesat* dan *menyesatkan*" and warned Muslims not to be provoked into anarchic violence, stating that violence is not justified in Islam and contradicts the effort to maintain a conducive atmosphere for Islamic da'wa (Timur, 2012). This creates a tension between doctrinal exclusion and social restraint. On the one hand, the fatwa establishes a strong negative classification of Shia teachings; on the other, it formally rejects vigilante violence. The problem is that stigmatizing language may circulate in social contexts where the distinction between doctrinal warning and social exclusion becomes unstable. Once a group is publicly marked as deviant and dangerous to social order, grassroots actors may interpret exclusion as a religiously legitimate response even when the fatwa itself discourages anarchic violence.

This contradiction reflects wider critiques of fatwa authority in contemporary Indonesia. Scholars have argued that fatwas may lack methodological consistency and can be shaped by political, ideological, or institutional agendas, raising questions about legitimacy, interpretation, and public impact (Alnizar, 2025). Latief's study of zakat fatwas also shows that the plurality of fatwas in Indonesia may produce fragmented religious practices, reflecting different approaches to orthodoxy, contextualization, and institutional authority (Latief, 2022). These critiques do not mean that fatwas are inherently illegitimate. Rather, they indicate that fatwa-making must be analyzed as a contested field where Islamic legal reasoning, institutional power, social context, and political interest intersect. In the Sunni–Shia case, the issue is not only what MUI says about Shia, but how its classifications are received, amplified, and operationalized by other actors in society.

The theoretical implication of this finding is that MUI represents a normative-regulative model of Islamic authority in Indonesian lived Islam. This model supports Asad's theory of discursive tradition by showing how religious institutions authorize orthodoxy and discipline difference, but it also refines the theory by demonstrating that authority in democratic Indonesia is not exercised only through coercive state power. It works through semi-official moral legitimacy, public recognition, institutional networks, regulatory proximity to the state, and the affective force of Sunni-majority identity. Fatwa therefore operates as a technology of boundary-making: it defines acceptable belief, marks deviance, directs public vigilance, and influences the governance of religious difference. The Sunni–Shia question consequently reveals that MUI's authority is not merely theological; it is a central mechanism through which the limits of intra-Muslim plurality are constructed in Indonesian public Islam.

NU, *Pesantren* Networks, and the Cultural-Mediative Management of Intra-Muslim Difference

The central debate raised by NU's response to the Sunni–Shia question concerns whether Indonesian Islamic civil society should be understood as a coherent force of moderation or as a layered field of authority in which inclusive national discourse may coexist with exclusionary local practices. The findings of this study support neither a celebratory view that treats NU simply as a tolerant organization nor a reductionist view that collapses local intolerance into the identity of the organization as a whole. Instead, they reveal a more complex pattern: NU's national leadership frames intra-Muslim difference through the ethical language of *ukhuwwah*, *tasāmuḥ*, and communal protection, while local religious fields may produce more ambivalent responses when theological anxiety intersects with kinship conflict, *pesantren* rivalry, local politics, and state intervention.

This tension is visible in PBNU's response to the Sunni–Shia issue. In January 2012, PBNU stated that Shia belongs to *al-firaq al-Islāmiyyah*, meaning that it remains within the broader spectrum of Islamic sectarian formations rather than being automatically placed outside Islam (Ulama, 2012). The same statement emphasized that NU does not easily stigmatize another Islamic group as deviant and situated its position within the principles of *ukhuwwah Islāmiyyah*, *ukhuwwah waṭaniyyah*, and

ukhuwwah insāniyyah (Ulama, 2012). PBNU also rejected the simplification of the Sampang incident as merely a Sunni–Shia war, arguing that the conflict involved more complex local dynamics (Ulama, 2012). This national position suggests that NU sought to prevent theological difference from becoming a totalizing explanation for violence. Its discourse did not deny doctrinal distinction, but it resisted transforming distinction into exclusion.

The findings refine a major trend in scholarship that presents NU as a cultural mediator and guardian of Indonesian Islamic moderation. Studies on NU frequently emphasize its role in promoting humanism, interfaith harmony, *tasāmuḥ*, and *Islam raḥmatan li al-ʿālamīn* as a framework for inclusive religious life (Basid et al., 2024; Hasyim & Hasanuddin, 2023; Manzoor et al., 2024). This literature is persuasive insofar as PBNU's public statements on the Sunni–Shia question did in fact articulate a non-exclusionary position. NU's regret over the burning of a Shia pesantren and its framing of the incident as part of a broader pattern of religiously justified violence demonstrate that NU's national discourse operated through moral restraint and social diagnosis rather than sectarian escalation (Ulama, 2011). PBNU's later call for a thorough investigation of the Sampang case, along with its observation that Sunni–Shia relations in other regions such as Central Java and West Java had generally remained peaceful, further confirms its effort to locate conflict in specific social circumstances rather than in immutable doctrinal hostility (Ulama, 2012)

Yet the findings also challenge scholarship that treats NU's moderation as institutionally uniform. Fealy's discussion of NU's pluralistic and reformist influence, and more recent studies that describe NU as a model of democratic, tolerant, and globally relevant Islamic movement, rightly identify the organization's major contribution to Indonesian and international Muslim civil society (Basid et al., 2024; Bush, 2008). However, the Sunni–Shia case shows that this contribution must be interpreted through a more differentiated sociology of religious authority. The East Java MUI fatwa cited a statement from PCNU Sampang concerning the teachings brought by Tajul Muluk as one of the documents considered in the fatwa-making process (Timur, 2012). KontraS Surabaya also recorded meetings involving religious leaders, officials, and local authorities in which the activities of *Tajul Muluk* and his followers were discussed, and in which some local actors pushed for relocation or restriction of Shia religious activity (Surabaya, 2012). These data do not invalidate NU's national discourse of moderation, but they show that NU-linked local authority can become embedded in exclusionary arrangements when local pressures redefine difference as threat.

The debate is therefore not whether NU is tolerant or intolerant, but how cultural authority is produced unevenly across organizational levels and social locations. Hakim's argument that Muslim-majority tolerance must be rethought through intra-religious dialogue is helpful because it shifts the discussion from interreligious harmony to discrimination within the Muslim community itself (Hakim, 2021). Amal and Saat similarly show that local NU actors may become entangled in intolerance politics despite NU's broader reputation as a moderate Islamic organization (Amal & Saat, 2022). The present findings support this scholarship, but they also extend it by distinguishing between national ethical discourse and local embedded authority. The former operates through universalizing vocabularies such as *ukhuwwah*, *tasāmuḥ*, and social harmony; the latter operates through concrete village relations among kiai, *pesantren* communities, local government, security actors, kinship networks, and competing claims to religious legitimacy.

Pesantren networks are central to this layered authority because they function not merely as educational institutions but as cultural hubs where religious knowledge, local identity, moral discipline, and communal belonging are reproduced. Scholarship on *pesantren* shows that they integrate Islamic teachings with local traditions and preserve distinctive forms of religious culture, including mystical, pedagogical, and social practices that bind communities to kiai authority (Firdaus et al., 2025; Pribadi, 2014). This explains why NU's authority cannot be adequately understood by reading organizational statements alone. In many communities, *pesantren* and kiai mediate how doctrinal categories are translated into everyday social relations. When *pesantren* authority is oriented toward reconciliation, it can transform theological difference into a manageable form of Muslim plurality. When it is captured by local anxiety or political competition, however, the same authority can make exclusion appear religiously meaningful.

The role of kiai further sharpens this interpretive problem. Studies of traditional Islamic authority describe kiai as spiritual leaders, moral guides, mediators, and custodians of sacred values

who help integrate Islamic norms into daily life (Ja'far., 2022; Pribadi, 2014). This role gives kiai considerable capacity to shape how communities perceive religious difference. From the perspective of lived religion, their authority is not abstract; it is embodied in teaching, ritual leadership, patronage, advice, dispute resolution, and everyday trust. McGuire's approach to lived religion is useful here because it directs attention to religion as enacted and experienced in ordinary social life rather than confined to official doctrine (McGuire, 2008). The NU case extends this framework by showing that lived Islam is mediated by embodied authority figures whose judgments can either soften or harden communal boundaries.

This analysis also refines the literature on *tasāmuḥ* and cultural mediation. Studies of NU commonly describe tolerance as a core value that supports peaceful coexistence and counters radical ideology (Basid et al., 2024; Hasyim & Hasanuddin, 2023). Other works show that NU and *pesantren* transmit Islamic values through local languages, cultural practices, and community-based forms of communication that resonate with local social worlds (Firdaus et al., 2025). The Sunni–Shia case confirms the importance of this mediating capacity, but it also shows that *tasāmuḥ* is not self-executing. It must be institutionally activated, locally defended, and translated into concrete practices of protection. Without this translation, tolerance may remain a national moral vocabulary while local actors continue to negotiate difference through suspicion, relocation, or restriction.

Compared with MUI's normative-regulative model, NU's authority is more relational, pedagogical, and culturally embedded. MUI tends to define boundaries through fatwa and institutional classification, whereas NU's national discourse negotiates difference through the moral grammar of *ukhuwwah*, *pesantren* ethics, and kiai-based mediation. Nevertheless, the NU case demonstrates that cultural mediation is not immune to fragmentation. Islamic authority within NU operates across multiple scales: national leadership, regional boards, *pesantren* networks, local kiai, village communities, and informal religious publics. Each level may interpret intra-Muslim difference differently depending on social pressure, political alignment, historical memory, and local religious economy. This finding challenges approaches that treat Islamic organizations as unitary actors and supports a more layered account of Indonesian religious authority.

The theoretical implication is that NU represents a cultural-mediative model of Islamic authority, but one whose effectiveness depends on the alignment between national ethical discourse and local religious practice. This finding supports lived religion theory by showing that religious difference is managed through everyday trust, pedagogy, moral authority, and communal habitus, not merely through texts or law. At the same time, it challenges overly institutional readings of Islamic moderation by demonstrating that the same organization may produce inclusive discourse at one level and ambivalent effects at another. The originality of this study lies precisely in showing that NU's contribution to the Sunni–Shia question is not reducible to either moderation or complicity; it lies in the contested cultural field through which intra-Muslim difference is continually mediated, localized, and morally negotiated.

Muhammadiyah and the Educational-Civic Transformation of Religious Authority

The documentary-comparative approach used in this study reveals that Muhammadiyah's contribution to the Sunni–Shia question is less visible in direct conflict intervention than in the long-term educational and civic formation of Muslim public reason. This insight would be difficult to capture through a conflict-event approach focused only on violence, fatwa, or local mediation. By reading Muhammadiyah's official statements, congress documents, public reports, and educational discourse alongside the responses of MUI and NU, this study shows that Muhammadiyah constructs religious authority through a different institutional logic: not primarily through doctrinal classification or *pesantren*-based mediation, but through education, civic ethics, public rationality, moderation discourse, and organizational infrastructure.

The primary data indicate that Muhammadiyah consistently frames intra-Muslim difference through the language of moderation rather than confrontation. In 2021, Abdul Mu'ti, Secretary General of PP Muhammadiyah, stated that Muhammadiyah had long been consistent in using the language of religious moderation and explained *wasaṭiyyah* as a Qur'anic concept associated with justice, balance, wisdom, and non-extremism (Muhammadiyah, 2021)This statement is analytically significant because it shows that Muhammadiyah does not treat moderation as a temporary political slogan or merely as a

state-led policy vocabulary. Instead, moderation is embedded in Muhammadiyah's own interpretive tradition and institutional self-understanding. The documentary method makes this visible by tracing how *wasaṭiyyah* appears not as an isolated statement, but as part of a wider organizational grammar linking religious interpretation, education, civic responsibility, and public ethics.

Muhammadiyah's engagement with Sunni–Shia dialogue becomes clearer when its domestic discourse is read together with its transnational public presence. In 2022, Syafiq Mughni, a chairman of PP Muhammadiyah, attended the 36th International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran and stated that Muhammadiyah's participation was related to its responsibility in international relations and interreligious dialogue (Muhammadiyah, 2022). The same official report noted that the conference theme of Muslim unity and rapprochement among Islamic schools aligned with the mandate of the 47th Muhammadiyah Congress in Makassar, which emphasized Muhammadiyah's role in dialogue with all groups within the Muslim community (Muhammadiyah, 2022). This evidence demonstrates the value of analyzing official organizational documents beyond local conflict archives. It shows that Muhammadiyah positions the Sunni–Shia question not simply as a domestic security issue, but as part of a broader Muslim civilizational dialogue concerning unity, ethics, and the management of difference.

The 2023 *Risalah Islam Berkemajuan* further clarifies the educational-civic orientation revealed by this method. The document situates *Islam Berkemajuan* in the intellectual legacy of Ahmad Dahlan and in Muhammadiyah's long-standing vocabulary of progress, enlightenment, social reform, and civilizational renewal (Muhammadiyah, 2023). This finding aligns with studies that define *Islam Berkemajuan* as a progressive Islamic discourse rooted in rationality, social justice, and the integration of religious and modern knowledge (Arifin et al., 2022; Khoirudin et al., 2020). It also resonates with interpretations of Ahmad Dahlan's engagement with *Sūrat al-ʻAṣr and Sūrat al-Māʻūn* as the theological basis for Muhammadiyah's commitment to education, health services, economic empowerment, and humanitarian action (Arifin et al., 2022; Khoirudin et al., 2020). The methodological contribution of this study lies in showing that these broad theological and institutional orientations matter for intra-Muslim difference even when they do not directly mention Sunni–Shia conflict. Muhammadiyah's response is structurally significant because it forms Muslim subjects who are expected to approach difference through literacy, social responsibility, and public benefit.

This analytical strategy also reveals why Muhammadiyah's authority should not be measured only by its direct involvement in acute conflict situations such as Sampang. A narrow conflict-resolution lens might underestimate Muhammadiyah because its role is not always expressed through immediate mediation between antagonistic groups. However, when the data are read through the organization's educational and civic documents, Muhammadiyah emerges as a producer of preventive religious authority. Its emphasis on *tawassuṭ*, *tawāzun*, and *iʿtidāl* supports the formation of religious moderation in Indonesia's multicultural society (Akil et al., 2024; Hamami, 2021; Qodir et al., 2023). Studies on Muhammadiyah education further show that *wasaṭiyyah* values are incorporated into educational institutions to foster tolerance, inclusivity, critical thinking, and resistance to radicalism (Hamami, 2021; Mustakim et al., 2021). This supports the article's argument that educational authority operates before conflict becomes visible: it shapes the interpretive habits through which Muslims encounter doctrinal difference in public life.

The comparative method also clarifies how Muhammadiyah differs from both MUI and NU without placing these organizations into a simplistic hierarchy of tolerance. MUI's authority is strongest in normative-regulative classification; NU's authority is strongest in culturally embedded mediation; Muhammadiyah's authority is strongest in institutional pedagogy and civic formation. Eickelman and Piscatori's concept of Muslim politics helps explain this distinction because Islamic authority in modern public life is produced not only through state power, parties, or clerical rulings, but also through social organizations, educational systems, publishing networks, professional institutions, and transnational civic engagement (Eickelman & Piscatori, 2004). Muhammadiyah's authority therefore appears less as charismatic mediation or semi-official regulation and more as an infrastructural form of religious legitimacy. It operates through schools, universities, health services, philanthropy, disaster relief, public communication, and organizational cadre formation.

The findings also expand earlier scholarship on the institutional formation of religious identity. Zulkifli's study of Indonesian Shi'ism shows that Shia identity in Indonesia developed partly through education, publishing, da'wa networks, and institutions such as IJABI after 2000 (Zulkifli, 2013). This

study extends that insight by showing that Muhammadiyah's response to Shia difference is shaped by a parallel modern institutional logic. Rather than confronting Shia identity primarily through doctrinal exclusion, Muhammadiyah tends to relocate intra-Muslim difference into the domains of education, dialogue, moderation, and civilizational ethics. This does not mean that Muhammadiyah dissolves theological boundaries. It means that its organizational response places difference within a pedagogical and civic framework rather than within an immediate grammar of threat.

The method also helps distinguish Muhammadiyah's moderation discourse from state-sponsored religious moderation. While state institutions have promoted moderation as a national policy framework, Muhammadiyah's articulation of *wasaṭiyyah* and *Islam Berkemajuan* emerges from its own intellectual genealogy, educational institutions, and social-service history (Muhammadiyah, 2021, 2023). This point is reinforced by studies describing Muhammadiyah as one of the key proponents of Islamic moderation through values of balance, justice, and peaceful coexistence, even though such moderation may face resistance from conservative groups who regard it as a threat to orthodoxy (Akil et al., 2024; Qodir et al., 2023). The analytical value of documentary comparison is that it prevents the researcher from treating moderation as a uniform state discourse. It shows that moderation is also generated by civil Islamic institutions with their own theological vocabulary, organizational memory, and educational practices.

The educational-civic orientation of Muhammadiyah also becomes visible through its wider social infrastructure. Muhammadiyah operates educational institutions across Indonesia and emphasizes the integration of religious and scientific knowledge in forming a progressive and enlightened society (Hamami, 2021; Khoirudin et al., 2020). Its civic engagement extends to health services, philanthropy, disaster relief, and humanitarian programs that are not limited to Muslims alone (Khoirudin et al., 2020). Studies on Muhammadiyah's global humanitarian and peace-oriented activities further show that the organization participates in international civic Islam through humanitarian networks and peacebuilding engagements (Latief & Nashir, 2020; Selamat, 2023). These findings are methodologically important because they show that Muhammadiyah's response to intra-Muslim difference cannot be assessed only by looking for explicit statements on Shia. Its broader civic infrastructure shapes the moral environment in which difference is approached as a problem of education, coexistence, and shared humanity.

The inclusion of digital and communication materials further strengthens the analysis. Muhammadiyah's adaptation to modern communication tools and digital platforms shows that its educational-civic authority is not confined to classrooms, sermons, or printed organizational documents (Sumarlan et al., 2025). Digital communication extends Muhammadiyah's capacity to circulate *Islam Berkemajuan*, moderation, and civic Islamic ethics to wider publics while balancing religious authenticity with contemporary media practices (Sumarlan et al., 2025). This is relevant to the Sunni–Shia question because contemporary sectarian narratives often circulate through digital media. Muhammadiyah's digital transformation therefore provides an additional mechanism for shaping public Islamic reasoning, even though the effectiveness of such communication in preventing local conflict remains uneven and requires further empirical study.

The strength of this methodological approach lies in its capacity to identify indirect but consequential forms of authority. By combining documentary analysis with comparison across Islamic organizations, the study captures forms of influence that are not always visible in event-based conflict studies. It shows that Muhammadiyah's role is preventive and formative rather than primarily reactive. Its authority works by cultivating literate, rational, civically engaged Muslim subjectivities that are less susceptible to sectarian provocation. This analytical framing also avoids overgeneralization: Muhammadiyah's educational-civic model is important, but it may not be sufficient in moments of acute local violence, where kinship tensions, village-level pressure, clerical authority, and state security responses shape the immediate field of action.

This limitation is central to the interpretation. Muhammadiyah's broader discourse of moderation may not directly intervene in local conflicts as quickly as NU's *pesantren*-based mediation or as visibly as MUI's fatwa authority. Its influence is diffuse, institutional, and long-term. This means that the educational-civic model should not be romanticized as a complete solution to sectarian conflict. Rather, it should be understood as one mode of Islamic authority among several, with particular strengths in education, civic formation, public reasoning, and humanitarian outreach. The intersection between *Islam Berkemajuan* and *wasaṭiyyah* is especially important here because both aim to balance

religious principles, modernity, inclusivity, justice, and social peace (Akil et al., 2024; Hamami, 2021). Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy, grounded in *Islam Berkemajuan*, fosters a cosmopolitan and humanitarian ethos that aligns with *wasaṭiyyah* principles in promoting moderation and tolerance (Khoirudin et al., 2020; Mustakim et al., 2021)

Thus, the methodological and analytical contribution of this sub-section is to show that Muhammadiyah's role in the Sunni–Shia question becomes visible only when religious authority is studied beyond immediate conflict events and formal doctrinal statements. Documentary-comparative analysis reveals Muhammadiyah as an educational-civic authority that transforms intra-Muslim difference into a matter of literacy, dialogue, institutional formation, and shared civilizational responsibility. This advances the article's overall contribution by demonstrating that Indonesian lived Islam is negotiated not only through fatwa and local mediation, but also through the slow, infrastructural work of education and civic religious formation.

Recontextualizing the Sunni–Shia Question as Indonesian Lived Islam

The central theoretical implication of this study is that the Sunni–Shia question in Indonesia should be understood not as a fixed sectarian conflict but as a dynamic site where religious authority, local politics, public morality, and everyday Muslim life are continuously recontextualized. This finding shifts the analysis from a narrow concern with doctrinal opposition toward a broader account of how intra-Muslim difference is produced, governed, embodied, and negotiated through institutions, local communities, state responses, and lived social practices. In this sense, the Sunni–Shia question does not simply reveal disagreement between two theological traditions; it exposes the mechanisms through which Indonesian Islam defines belonging, regulates difference, and transforms religious authority in public life.

The Sampang case provides the strongest empirical basis for this theoretical claim because it shows that intra-Muslim difference becomes socially consequential when doctrinal labeling is translated into displacement, insecurity, and state-managed relocation. The monitoring report of the Tim Temuan dan Rekomendasi Sampang, initiated by Komnas HAM, Komnas Perempuan, KPAI, and LPSK, recorded that the attack of 26 August 2012 resulted in one Shia resident being killed, ten people suffering critical injuries, dozens being injured, and more than 350 people being displaced (HAM et al., 2013)The same report stated that after eight months in the Sampang sports hall, the displaced community was forcibly moved on 20 June 2013 to Rusun Puspo Agro in Sidoarjo, where around 151 people remained (HAM et al., 2013). These data indicate that sectarian difference was not confined to discourse; it became embodied in interrupted residence, loss of land-based livelihood, disrupted education, family vulnerability, and the spatial segregation of a religious minority.

This finding complicates interpretations that treat the Sampang conflict primarily as a doctrinal dispute. The TTR report described the case as complex and multi-layered, shaped by local, national, and international political dynamics rather than theology alone (HAM et al., 2013)It also recorded gendered forms of vulnerability, including insecurity experienced by Shia women in displacement and the fact that four women reportedly gave birth without midwife assistance in the shelter (HAM et al., 2013). Amnesty International similarly reported that displaced Shia residents lived in temporary shelters with inadequate access to health care, housing, water, sanitation, education, and livelihood, while many adults who had previously worked as tobacco farmers could no longer cultivate their land (International, 2013). These findings show that sectarian classification produces material consequences. Religious difference becomes lived not only as belief, identity, or stigma, but as bodily insecurity, economic marginalization, gendered vulnerability, and restricted access to basic social rights.

The longer prehistory of the Sampang case further supports the argument that violence was preceded by symbolic delegitimation. The Kontras Surabaya investigation traced the development of *Tajul Muluk's* community from the 1980s and recorded that by the mid-2000s, sermons, public meetings, accusations of deviance, and mobilizations against the community had intensified (Surabaya, 2012). The report also noted that petitions and meetings demanded that Tajul Muluk leave Karang Gayam, stop spreading his teachings, and face forced expulsion if he refused (Surabaya, 2012). This chronology suggests that violence did not erupt suddenly from theological disagreement. It emerged after a gradual process through which religious authority, local fear, public accusation, and communal pressure converged to define who belonged, who deviated, and who could legitimately remain in the

village.

This interpretation supports but also extends existing studies of anti-Shia discourse in Indonesia. Formichi argues that anti-Shia discourse became increasingly articulated through the interaction of religious language, political interests, and social mobilization in the post-authoritarian period (Formichi, 2014b). Amal similarly shows that anti-Shia violence in democratic Indonesia involves alliances between militant groups, religious actors, and exclusionary political agendas (Amal, 2020). Siradj and Hilmy also emphasize that the Sampang conflict cannot be explained by theological difference alone because political and economic factors intensified the dispute, while religious arguments were mobilized to justify socio-political conflict (Hilmy, 2015; Siradj, 2013). The present study refines this literature by placing MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah within a comparative framework of authority. The issue is not only that anti-Shia narratives circulated, but that different Islamic organizations produced different modes of response: MUI regulated boundaries through fatwa, NU mediated difference through cultural and *pesantren*-based authority, and Muhammadiyah reframed difference through education, civic ethics, and moderation discourse.

This comparative framework challenges any model that treats Indonesian Islam as a single coherent field of moderation or intolerance. The findings show that Indonesian lived Islam is a plural arena of overlapping authorities. MUI's authority operates through normative-regulative classification; NU's authority works through cultural mediation, *pesantren* networks, and the moral language of *ukhuwah* and *tasāmuḥ*; Muhammadiyah's authority functions through educational-civic formation, *wasaṭiyyah*, and *Islam Berkemajuan*. These modes of authority are not mutually exclusive, but neither are they identical. They produce different effects in the governance of intra-Muslim difference. Such plurality resembles broader patterns of fragmentation and negotiation in Muslim minority and multi-sectarian contexts, where ideological and sectarian rivalries can divide Muslim communities even when they share wider religious identities (Alak, 2014). The Indonesian case therefore contributes to comparative Islamic studies by showing how intra-Muslim difference is governed through multiple institutions rather than a single theological center.

The findings also revise a simplistic application of lived religion theory. McGuire's concept of lived religion is useful because it shifts attention from official doctrine to the ways religion is practiced, experienced, and interpreted in everyday life (McGuire, 2008). However, the Sunni–Shia case shows that lived religion cannot be understood only as ordinary practice "from below." It is also structured by institutional decisions, fatwas, public statements, state policies, human rights reports, *pesantren* meetings, court processes, media narratives, and educational programs. Recent scholarship on lived Islam similarly emphasizes embodied, emotional, intersecting, and socially situated religious identities rather than rigid binaries between religious and secular life (Marranci, 2013; McGinty, 2023; Sobczyk & Soriano, 2015). The Sampang case sharpens this perspective by showing that lived Islam includes both everyday coexistence and everyday vulnerability. Muslims live religious difference not only through ritual, family, and local custom, but also through fear, relocation, bureaucratic classification, economic loss, and attempts at reconciliation.

At the same time, the study refines Asad's theory of religion as a discursive tradition. Asad's framework helps explain how religious authority defines legitimate knowledge, disciplines meaning, and produces orthodoxy (Asad, 1993). The Indonesian case confirms this insight but complicates it by showing that authority is dispersed rather than centralized. Religious meanings are produced through MUI fatwas, NU statements, Muhammadiyah educational discourse, local kiai authority, state institutions, civil society organizations, courts, media platforms, and displaced communities themselves. This dispersion matters theoretically because it means that religious authority does not operate through a single doctrinal hierarchy. It circulates through multiple institutions, each capable of amplifying, softening, or redirecting sectarian boundaries.

The concept of recontextualization is particularly useful for explaining how Islamic meanings are adapted to changing social and political environments. In Sampang, reconciliation efforts have involved local traditions and social structures as resources for peacebuilding and the restoration of trust. This suggests that the Sunni–Shia question is not permanently locked within the logic of violence; it can be reworked through local norms, social memory, and communal negotiation. Rohayana's discussion of *fiqh al-aqalliyāt* similarly shows how Islamic jurisprudence can be adapted to minority contexts by balancing religious obligations with local realities (Rohayana et al., 2025). Although the

Indonesian case differs from Muslim-minority settings, the analytical point is comparable: Islamic norms are not simply applied mechanically; they are reinterpreted under specific social conditions. Recontextualization therefore names the process by which Islamic values, legal categories, and communal practices are adjusted to new problems of coexistence, citizenship, and recognition.

This process also appears in studies of religious transformation in Sampang and beyond. Wardi argues that efforts to integrate religious moderation into educational and social frameworks can support tolerance and harmony among diverse groups (Wardi et al., 2023). Maskuri's work on reconciliation after forced relocation likewise highlights how local traditions and social structures may foster dialogue and rebuild trust between Sunni and Shia communities. More broadly, scholarship on transformations in Islamic societies suggests that contemporary Muslim debates often move from purely theological frameworks toward sociological concerns with norms, institutions, politics, and social values (Föllmer et al., 2024; Merad, 2013). The present study contributes to this debate by showing that Indonesian lived Islam is transformed through the movement between doctrine and social practice: values such as *ukhuwah*, *tasāmuḥ*, *wasaṭiyyah*, and public benefit become meaningful only when translated into fatwa, mediation, education, legal protection, and community relations.

The broader relevance of the findings lies in their capacity to move beyond both exceptionalist and conflict-centered readings of Indonesian Islam. Indonesia is often represented internationally either as a model of Muslim moderation or as a site of rising intolerance. The Sunni–Shia question suggests that both accounts are incomplete. Indonesian Islam contains strong institutional resources for moderation, mediation, and civic education, but it also contains mechanisms of boundary-making, stigmatization, and exclusion. The originality of this study lies in explaining how these tendencies coexist within the same religious field. Rather than asking whether Indonesian Islam is moderate or intolerant, the article asks how different authorities produce different forms of religious life and how those forms shape the management of intra-Muslim difference.

This synthesis yields three theoretical contributions. First, intra-Muslim difference in Indonesia is governed through plural authority, not single authority. MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah each produce distinct forms of legitimacy: normative-regulative, cultural-mediative, and educational-civic. Second, sectarian tension emerges not simply from doctrine, but from the circulation of doctrinal language through social institutions, local power relations, state practices, and public affect. Third, the transformation of lived Islam occurs when Islamic values are recontextualized across concrete arenas of life: family, village, *pesantren*, school, fatwa council, court, media space, and humanitarian intervention. These contributions show that the Sunni–Shia question is not a marginal sectarian problem but a central analytical site for understanding how Islamic authority is negotiated in contemporary Muslim societies.

The ethical implication of the findings is equally important. When religious authority is exercised through stigmatizing classification, difference may become exclusion; when authority is exercised through mediation, education, and dialogical engagement, difference can be incorporated into a wider horizon of Indonesian Islamic pluralism. The article therefore advances the argument that Indonesian lived Islam is transformed not by eliminating intra-Muslim difference, but by negotiating it through competing and overlapping forms of authority. This recontextualization of the Sunni–Shia question provides the basis for the conclusion: the future of intra-Muslim coexistence in Indonesia depends on whether religious authority is mobilized to harden communal boundaries or to cultivate ethical, civic, and socially grounded forms of Muslim belonging.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the Sunni–Shia question in Indonesia is not merely a theological dispute, but a site where Islamic authority and lived Islam are continuously negotiated. By examining MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah, the study demonstrates that intra-Muslim difference is governed through plural and overlapping forms of authority rather than by a single religious institution. MUI represents a normative-regulative model of authority through fatwa and doctrinal boundary-making. NU represents a cultural-mediative model through *pesantren* networks, kiai authority, and the ethics of *ukhuwwah* and *tasāmuḥ*. Muhammadiyah represents an educational-civic model through religious moderation, Islamic education, public reasoning, and *Islam Berkemajuan*. These three models show that Indonesian Islamic authority operates across legal, cultural, educational, and civic domains. The

theoretical contribution of this study lies in refining the concept of lived Islam. Lived Islam is not only shaped by everyday religious practices, but also by institutional texts, fatwas, organizational statements, educational systems, local mediation, and public discourse. The study also contributes to debates on religious authority by showing that authority in Indonesian Islam is dispersed, negotiated, and context-dependent.

The broader implication is that intra-Muslim difference can lead either to exclusion or coexistence, depending on how religious authority is exercised. When authority relies on stigmatizing classification, difference may become social marginalization. When authority is expressed through mediation, education, and dialogue, difference can be recontextualized within Indonesian Islamic pluralism. Future research may extend this study through fieldwork with Shia communities, local religious leaders, Islamic organizations, and displaced residents. Further studies may also examine how digital media reshapes Sunni–Shia discourse and how younger Muslim generations understand intra-Muslim difference in contemporary Indonesia. This article argues that Indonesian Islam is transformed not by eliminating difference, but by negotiating it through plural, contested, and socially embedded forms of religious authority.

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