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Contesting Fiqh Authority and Religious Bureaucracy: State–Islam Relations and KUA Reform in Contemporary Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the contestation of fiqh authority between the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) concerning the proposed expansion of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) functions to encompass marriage registration for diverse religious communities in Indonesia. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research explores how MoRA and MUI construct their respective authorities in defining the role of the KUA within contemporary Indonesian society. The data were derived from official documents, policy statements, fatwas, and media coverage related to the debate on KUA reform. The findings indicate that MoRA promotes a discourse of bureaucratic inclusivity by advocating the transformation of the KUA from an institution exclusively serving Muslim marriages into a more inclusive administrative body responsible for facilitating marriage registration across all officially recognized religious communities in Indonesia. In contrast, MUI, emphasizing the historical and juridical foundations of the KUA, argues that such expansion risks undermining the boundaries of Islamic legal authority and theological authenticity. This study contributes to broader scholarly discussions on fiqh authority, religious bureaucracy, and state-Islam relations in the contemporary global context.

Keywords
fiqh authority; religious bureaucracy; state–Islam relations; KUA reform; Indonesia

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Introduction

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) intends to enhance the functions of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). This enhancement aims to expand the role of the KUA beyond serving solely as a registration office for Muslim marriages, enabling it to also facilitate marriage registration for all recognized religious communities in Indonesia. This initiative seeks to improve access to marriage services for non-Muslims and to promote an inclusive religious environment amid Indonesia's diverse religious landscape.[1] However, this proposal has been met with opposition from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The MUI maintains that the KUA is a specialized institution established specifically for Muslims in Indonesia, grounded in

[1] Ni Kadek Trisna Cintya Dewi, "Kementerian Agama Rencanakan KUA Jadi Tempat Pencatatan Pernikahan Semua Agama, Ini Alasan Yaqut Cholil Qoumas," *Tempo.co*, 2024; Fadly, "Ini Empat Tujuan Revitalisasi KUA," *Kemenag.go.id*, 2021; Trias Palupi Kurnianingrum, *Wacana Pencatatan Perkawinan Melalui KUA Inklusif* (Jakarta: Pusat Analisis Keparlemenan Badan Keahlian Setjen DPR RI, 2024).

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its historical and philosophical foundations. The MUI's rejection is motivated by concerns regarding the potential intermingling of rites and practices from different faiths, which they believe could compromise the sanctity of Islam.[2]

The disagreement between the MoRA and the MUI concerning this issue can be interpreted not merely as a divergence in legal interpretations but also as a manifestation of religious-political contestation between two institutions vying to define the parameters of religion and to assert legitimate authority over its regulation.[3] This perspective aligns with Foucault's assertion that knowledge is never value-neutral but is invariably entangled with power relations.[4] Within this framework, these two institutions embody distinct yet interdependent domains: MoRA functions as an official state body grounded in bureaucratic-administrative authority, whereas MUI embodies the symbolic and theological authority of the ulama. This investigation is of critical importance because the debate surrounding the optimization of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) reflects one of the most fundamental tensions within Indonesian religious and political life: the delineation of the boundaries of religion within the state.[5]

The central issue addressed in this study concerns the manner in which the MoRA discourse shapes the provision and regulation of interfaith marriage services, as well as how this discourse is contested or negotiated by other religious authorities, particularly the MUI. The controversy involving the KUA exemplifies the ongoing negotiation between state institutions and religious authorities regarding their respective roles in regulating beliefs, rituals, and citizenship. Furthermore, it demonstrates how public discourse on concepts such as "inclusivity" and "purity" serves as a platform for asserting competing moral hierarchies.[6] More broadly, understanding this contestation elucidates how religion is not only a matter of personal belief but also subject to regulation, and how it functions as a site where notions of nationality, modernity, and Islamic authenticity converge.[7]

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical framework. Drawing on Foucault's perspective, knowledge is understood not as neutral but as

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[2] Refer to "Keputusan Ijtima' Ulama Komisi Fatwa se-Indonesia VIII Nomor 13/Ijtima' Ulama/VIII/2024 Tentang Layanan Urusan Agama-Agama Selain Islam di Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA)," *National Conference of Indonesia's Fatwa Commission Ulema VIII*, no. 13 (Bangka, 31 May 2024).
[3] Refer to Abdul Majid Shagir, *al-Ma'rifah wa al-Sulṭah fī al-Tajribah al-Islāmīyah: Qirā'ah fī Nash'ah 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh wa Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ru'ya, 2010).
[4] Refer to Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Wacana Kuasa/Pengetahuan* (Yogyakarta: Bintang Budaya, 2002).
[5] C.J.A Sterkens and H. Hadiwitanto, "Empirical Models of the Relationship between Religion and State in Indonesia. How Religious Beliefs Define the Relation between Religion and State," in *Freedom of Religion in the 21st Century: A Human Rights Perspective on the Relation between Politics and Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Lene Pedersen, "Religious Pluralism in Indonesia," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 5 (2016): 387–98.
[6] Rohman Rohman, "Negotiating Islam: A Study on the Debus Fatwa of the Indonesian Council of Ulama in Banten," *Islamic Studies Review* 2, no. 1 (2023): 96–119; Muhammad Rizwan and Hafsa Adnan, "The Politics of Faith and the Strategic Use of Religious Discourse in Modern Power Relations," *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Tesol* 8 (2025): 2276–87; Sita Hidayah, "The Politics of Religion the Invention of 'Agama' in Indonesia," *Jurnal Kawistara* 2, no. 2 (2012): 121–139.
[7] Ismatu Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

inherently linked to power, serving either to legitimize or to critique it.[8] Power is conceptualized not as a centralized entity but as diffuse, productive, and relational; it is not possessed by any single actor but is constituted through a complex network of social relations.[9] Within this framework, knowledge functions as a strategic medium for shaping and directing subjects, determining what is accepted as truth, and establishing norms—referred to as the "regime of truth," a set of discourses legitimized by power relations.[10] This approach, when applied to the context of the KUA reform, facilitates an analysis that demonstrates how the Ministry of Religious Affairs' discourse on religious inclusivity serves as a strategy for the development of modern governance, while the Indonesian Ulema Council's discourse on religious authority functions as a form of resistance aimed at preserving the theological legitimacy of the KUA's existence.

Previous Studies

Conceptually, Foucauldian discourse analysis has been extensively employed in various international studies to examine the operation of power through knowledge, institutions, and language. This approach has been further developed by numerous scholars, including those specializing in Islamic studies. Notably, scholars such as Talal Asad,[11] Saba Mahmood,[12] and Hussein Agrama[13] have significantly contributed to the expansion of Foucault's framework within Islamic anthropology, demonstrating the reciprocal shaping of religious practices and state structures. Moreover, the Foucauldian approach has inspired numerous studies. For instance, Safi's work, The Politics of Knowledge in Pre-Modern Islam, illustrates how the formation of Sunni orthodoxy was influenced by the power exerted by the Seljuqs and the ulama, who sought to delegitimize Shia Ismaili ideology by labeling its adherents as heretics and deviations that needed to be eradicated. Additionally, these actors endeavored to suppress the influence of philosophy and rational thought, which were perceived as critical of the prevailing political order.[14] The study conducted by Ahmed T. Kuru, which contends that the relationship between the ulama and the state—an interaction that significantly influences the development of authoritarianism—constitutes a primary source of underdevelopment in Muslim-majority countries.[15]

The examination of how fiqh interacts with the modern nation-state has garnered increasing scholarly interest in recent times. While fiqh is fundamentally derived

[8] See Michel Foucault, *The Political Intellectual Function of the Intellectual* (Turin: Politigue Hebdo, 1976).
[9] Refer to Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1991).
[10] See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.
[11] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Duke University Press* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.
[12] See Saba Mahmood, *Politic of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[13] Hussein Ali Agrama, "Ethics, Tradition, Authority: Toward an Anthropology of the Fatwa," *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 1 (2010): 2–18.
[14] Refer to Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
[15] See Ahmed T. Kuru, *Otoritarianisme dan Ketertinggalan Muslim* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2020).

from Islamic divine revelation, it simultaneously emerges from human reasoning aimed at contextualizing divine intentions and objectives within evolving social and political circumstances. This dual nature situates fiqh as both a theological and socio-political construct that must continually navigate its authority in relation to state institutions, pluralistic societies, and modern governance frameworks. Eickelman and Piscatori introduce the concept of Muslim politics to elucidate the diverse ways in which the meanings of Islam are articulated and contested in the public sphere by states, religious scholars, social movements, and lay believers alike.[16] Previous studies have significantly advanced how fatwas are situated within institutional networks that reflect the politics of religious legitimacy. Scholars such as Moch. Nur Ichwan,[17] Syafiq Hasyim,[18] and Hosen[19] have focused on the MUI as a central actor in defining religious orthodoxy and mediating the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesian context.

Furthermore, a recent study by Hijrian Angga Prihantoro demonstrates that the formulation of usul fiqh, often regarded as sacrosanct, is in fact the product of Ulema knowledge that critically engages with and responses to political power.[20] In the contemporary era, the contestation between religious discourse and political authority is also evident in the events of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Akhmad Sulaiman's research illustrates how two prominent Egyptian scholars, Ali Gooma and Yusuf Qaradawi, engaged in conflicting religious discourses, each invoking religious authority either to support or to oppose the political regime under Hosni Mubarak.[21] Within the Indonesian context, Asrorun Niam,[22] Fathorraman, et al.,[23]

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[16] Dale F. Eickelman and Ames Piscatory, *Muslim Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[17] Moch. Nur Ichwan, "Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy," in *Contemporary Development in Indonesian Islam: Explaining "The Conservative Turn"* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013); Moch. Nur Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia after Suharto," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 1 (2005): 45–72; Moch. Nur Ichwan, "MUI, Gerakan Islamis, dan Umat Mengambang," *Maarif* 11, no. 2 (2016): 87–104.

[18] Syafiq Hasyim, *The Shariatisation of Indonesia: The Politics of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI)*, 1st ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2023); Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwa Aliran Sesat Dan Politik Hukum Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI)," *Al-Ahkam* 25, no. 2 (2015): 241–266; Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulema Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam," *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 21–35.

[19] Nadirsyah Hosen, "Behind the Scenes: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975–1998)," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (2004): 147–79.

[20] Refer to Hijrian Angga Prihantoro, "Ulama dan Politik Pengetahuan dalam Ushul Fikih: Relasi Kuasa, Paham Teologis, dan Geopolitik" (Dissertation, Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, 2023).

[21] Akhmad Sulaiman et al., "'Ulamā,' Maṣlaḥah, and the Politics of Fatwa: The Shifting of Ali Gomaa's Fatwa Approach during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution," *Asy-Syir'ah: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah dan Hukum* 57, no. 2 (2023): 283–307.

[22] Asrorun Niam Sholeh, "Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and Its Contributions to the Halal and Holy Status of COVID-19 Vaccine in Indonesia," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 4 (2022): 6961–72; Asrorun Niam Sholeh, *Menghidupkan Fatwa Dinamisasi Fatwa Untuk Kemaslahatan Bangsa*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Sekretariat Komisi Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2024).

[23] Fathorrahman et al., "The Role of Religious Fatwas in Indonesia: An Analysis of Self-Government and Biopolitics During the Pandemic," *Petita: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum dan Syariah* 9, No. 1 (2024): 80–97.

and Nico J.G. Kaptein[24] argue that fatwas operate within a broader framework of moral governance, aligning with concept of biopolitics in the regulation of Muslim life. Collectively, these studies elucidate the fatwa as a discursive and disciplinary mechanism through which religious knowledge, state authority, and social order are mutually constituted. Concurrently, studies by Crouch,[25] Hosen,[26] and Amani et al.,[27] examine how the state manages religious pluralism within the Indonesian constitutional framework. Collectively, these works reveal the intricate entanglement between state bureaucracy and Islamic discourse.

Building upon previous scholarship, this study contends that the production of religious discourse in the context of state-Islam relations regarding the issue of KUA reform constitutes an epistemological contestation that is inherently non-neutral and value-laden, as it is deeply embedded within power relations. It addresses a notable gap in the existing literature and offers a conceptual framework for understanding the interaction and negotiation of meaning between religious authority and bureaucratic rationality within Indonesia's pluralistic society.[28] Accordingly, the study contributes to two intersecting fields. First, it advances Foucauldian discourse studies by situating the theory of governmentality within Indonesia's unique socio-religious context, characterized by ongoing negotiations between bureaucratic rationality and religious authenticity. Second, it enhances the sociology of Islamic authority in Indonesia by elucidating the ways in which discursive practices shape institutional power.

Research Methodology

Analytical Framework

This study adopts a Foucauldian conceptual framework centered on the notion of power/knowledge. From this perspective, power and knowledge are inseparable and function through discourse to produce and legitimize specific regimes of truth. Religious authority is thus understood not as an inherent characteristic of an institution but as a discursive construct continuously shaped through processes of knowledge production, dissemination, and normalization. Within this framework, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), and the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) are conceptualized as institutional actors

[24] Nico J.G. Kaptein, "The Voice of the 'Ulamā': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 125 (2004): 115–30.
[25] Melissa A. Crouch, "Law and Religion in Indonesia: The Constitutional Court and the Blasphemy Law," *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 7, no. 1 (2012): 1–46.
[26] Nadirsyah Hosen, "Religion and the Indonesian Constitution: A Recent Debate," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 419–40.
[27] Nisriina Amani et al., "Dinamika Pluralisme Agama dalam Masyarakat Kontemporer," *Jurnal Religi: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 20, no. 01 (2024): 54–70.
[28] Siti Khoirotul Ula, "The View of Ahli Al-Dzimmah Theory Regarding Thoughts of The Ulama Indonesian Council (MUI) About Policies on Interfaith Services at The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA)," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah INTAJ* 8, no. 2 (2024): 198–216; Syahfrilla Al Risa Nurul Azmi and Mustapa Khamal Rokan, "Analisis Kemampuan Kua Dalam Melakukan Pelayanan Pernikahan Semua Agama," *Jurnal Manajemen Terapan dan Keuangan (Mankeu)* 14, no. 01 (2025): 367–77; Muhammad Jazil Rifqi, "Marriage Registration for All Religions at the Office of Religious Affairs in Indonesia: Between Debate and Promoting Moderation," *Al-Hukama': The Indonesian Journal of Islamic Family Law* 14, no. 1 (2024): 25–45.

engaged in the construction and negotiation of religious authority. This theoretical approach enables an analysis of how claims to religious legitimacy are articulated and maintained within Indonesia's contemporary public sphere.

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive approach, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its analytical framework. CDA conceptualizes discourse as a social practice through which meanings, identities, and institutional authority are produced and contested. The research concentrates on the discursive dynamics related to the optimization of the social function of KUA, specifically examining how the MoRA and the MUI frame, justify, and negotiate their respective positions. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, this study seeks to interpret the ways in which language operates as a medium for constructing, challenging, and maintaining authority.

Data Sources and Analytical Procedures

This study utilizes documentary data comprising official regulations, policy documents, institutional statements, fatwas, press releases, and media reports pertaining to KUA reform. The data analysis is conducted in accordance with the three-dimensional framework of CDA. The initial phase entails a textual analysis aimed at identifying linguistic patterns, key concepts, and rhetorical strategies embedded within institutional narratives. The subsequent phase investigates discursive practices by examining the production, circulation, and legitimization of these narratives across institutional and media contexts. The final phase contextualizes the discourse within broader social practices, analyzing how competing narratives regarding KUA reform both reflect and reproduce wider configurations of state-Islam relations in the contemporary Indonesia.

Results

The findings indicate that the revitalization of the KUA embodies a broader contestation concerning fiqh-based religious authority and state legitimacy in Indonesia (see Table 1). The MoRA aims to reframe the KUA as an inclusive public service center by promoting narratives of modernization, efficiency, and religious moderation. In contrast, the MUI opposes these reforms, contending that they undermine the KUA's Islamic identity, fiqh foundations, and theological legitimacy. This study demonstrates that KUA reform constitutes a form of bureaucratic governance that extends state control over religious interpretation.

KUA and the Limit of Marriage Registration

Historically, the KUA has been an integral component of Indonesia's administrative framework since the colonial period. As documented by Karel Steenbrink, the KUA existed during the colonial era in Indonesia. During this time, an institution with comparable duties and functions was known as the Kantor Voor Inslanche Zaken (Office of Indigenous Affairs). Similar to the KUA, the Voor Inslanche Zaken office

was established to coordinate civil service demands related to the affairs of indigenous Muslims in Indonesia.[29] Following Indonesia's independence, the KUA was formally incorporated into the newly established MoRA in 1946, thereby becoming one of the Ministry's technical implementation units at the sub-district level.[30]

The KUA institution is currently governed by the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 20 of 2019, specifically Article 1, Paragraph 2. This regulation defines the KUA as a technical implementing unit under the MoRA, accountable to the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance and operationally supervised by the Head of the District or City Office of MoRA.[31] The primary mandate of the KUA has been to oversee and manage religious affairs for Muslims, including marriage registration, divorce, reconciliation, waqf, and mosque administration. Since the establishment, its responsibilities have expanded to encompass the management of *zakat, hisab–rukyat*, hajj counseling, and the promotion of harmonious family programs. Despite these administrative expansions, the fundamental role of the KUA remains to address the religious and civil needs of the Muslim community.[32]

Indonesia officially recognizes multiple religions; however, the jurisdiction of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) does not extend to non-Muslim citizens. The government delegates the registration of marriages for non-Muslims to the Civil Registry Office (*Disdukcapil*) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, as mandated by Law No. 1 of 1974 and Law No. 23 of 2006, in conjunction with Law No. 24 of 2013 concerning Population Administration. Non-Muslim marriages are recorded by the Civil Registry following validation according to the respective religious traditions.[33] Consequently, the KUA has no role in the administration of non-Muslim marriages. Instead, state services in this domain are provided through civil registration mechanisms. This institutional division exemplifies Indonesia's broader model of religious governance, wherein pluralism is formally acknowledged but managed through religion-specific bureaucracies. Accordingly, the KUA occupies a position at the intersection of bureaucratic rationality and Islamic identity, embodying a dual character that renders it a critical site for analyzing the ongoing contestation of religious authority between the MoRA and the MUI. Building upon this duality, MoRA has recently endeavored to reshape the public narrative surrounding the KUA by emphasizing its neutrality and inclusivity, thereby positioning it as a model of state-managed religious service within a pluralistic society.

MoRA and the Religious Bureaucratic Invention

Under the leadership of Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, the MoRA is endeavoring to redefine

[29] Karell Steenbrink, "Pengantar," in *Politik Islam Hindia Belanda* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1985).
[30] Kurniawan, "Sejarah KUA, Dari Lembaga Kepenghuluan Pra Kemerdekaan Sampai Kantor Urusan Agama," *Kemenag.go.id*, 2021.
[31] Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 20 Tahun 2019 Tentang Pencatatan Pernikahan.
[32] Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 24 Tahun 2024 Tentang Organisasi dan Tata Kerja Kantor Urusan Agama, accessed November 14, 2025.
[33] Disdukcapil, "Syarat Penerbitan Akta Perkawinan (Non-Muslim)," Disdukcapil Kabupaten Tangerang, 2019.

the institutional significance of the KUA. Historically, as previously discussed, the KUA functioned solely as an administrative unit for Muslims. Currently, efforts are underway to reconceptualize it as a more modern institution, aiming to establish it as a neutral and inclusive entity that symbolizes the state's commitment to equality among all religious adherents.[34] This initiative is being implemented through a series of policy measures, notably the 2021–2024 KUA Revitalization Program. For MoRA, revitalizing the KUA is essential to enhancing the quality of services and reinforcing its role as a center for religious services accessible to all Indonesian citizens.[35]

One of the strategic initiatives of this program is to optimize the KUA by expanding its function beyond merely serving as an office for registering Muslim marriages to becoming a "frontline institution" representing the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a public service center for various religious matters.[36] In this context, Qoumas and several representatives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs have consistently articulated in multiple public forums and official statements that "the KUA is a service institution for all citizens, regardless of their religion."[37] Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has emphasized on several occasions that this policy aims to enable the state to provide improved public services to all religious communities while enhancing effectiveness and efficiency. The optimization of the KUA is expected to promote integration in all matters related to marriage, which were previously handled separately.[38] Consequently, the state can assume a more active role in fostering harmony among Indonesia's diverse religious communities.

The narrative of neutrality and inclusivity that the MoRA seeks to establish within the KUA appears, on the surface, to be primarily administrative. However, at a more profound level, this narrative functions as a meta-discourse through which MoRA asserts religious authority to redefine the responsibilities of the KUA. In its efforts to optimize the KUA, MoRA employs terminology such as "better public service center," "efficiency," and "effectiveness." While these terms may appear technocratic, they embody an underlying narrative imbued with significant ideological values. The term "revitalization" operates as a floating signifier (a concept borrowed from Levi-Strauss), serving as a flexible marker that reflects the state's aspiration to enhance its regulatory authority in defining what MoRA deems appropriate.[39] Furthermore, through the use of managerial vocabularies such as optimization, integration, and modernization, MoRA constructs a semantic framework wherein effective administrative governance is equated with religious propriety. This process exemplifies what Foucault describes as governmentality—a

[34] Fadly, "Ini Empat Tujuan Revitalisasi KUA."
[35] Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 758 Tahun 2021.
[36] Peraturan Menteri Agama Republik Indonesia Nomor 24 Tahun 2024 Tentang Organisasi Dan Tata Kerja Kantor Urusan Agama, accessed November 14, 2025.
[37] Dewi, "Kementerian Agama Rencanakan KUA Jadi Tempat Pencatatan Pernikahan Semua Agama, Ini Alasan Yaqut Cholil Qoumas."
[38] Moh. Khoeron, "Regulasi Baru KUA, Kemenag: Semua Umat Dapat Dilayani Dengan Setara," *Kemenag.go.id,* 2024.
[39] See Christopher R. Badcock, *Lévi-Strauss Strukturalisme & Teori Sosiologi*, terj. Robby Habiba Abror (Yogyakarta: Insight Reference, 2022).

mode of governance wherein power is exercised not through legal coercion or doctrinal enforcement but through the normalization of administrative practices and the production of "truths" concerning religion and citizenship.[40]

According to Law Number 1 of 1974, a marriage is deemed valid only if it complies with the religious teachings of the couple and is officially registered with the state.[41] The inclusion of the term "registered" in the legislation introduces registration as a new criterion for legal recognition. The validity of a marriage is no longer solely based on religious doctrines or community acceptance, but rather on the possession of a state-issued marriage certificate. Consequently, fiqh validity has been superseded by the certification of marriage. This discursive and legal transformation exemplifies how administrative governance can penetrate the private sphere of religious life. Marriages deemed valid according to fiqh may become socially and legally unrecognized if they are not formally documented within the bureaucratic legal framework. The state not only administers marriage as a civil institution but also redefines the conditions under which religious acts acquire legitimacy. The validation of marital unions has transitioned from religious authorities, such as *Kiai* and *Ustaz*, to registration and administrative officials.[42] This phenomenon has frequently been described by scholars as the bureaucratization of Sharia.[43]

To legitimize its discourse, the MoRA draws not only on socio-historical arguments concerning its mandate to serve all religious communities in Indonesia but also situates its proposals within the broader ideological framework of religious moderation. This concept is consistently promoted as an appropriate religious understanding to be implemented in Indonesia.[44] For MoRA, this program embodies the values of "moderate Islam" and reflects the state's commitment to fostering harmony, tolerance, and unity among religious groups.[45] Within this framework, moderation functions as a theological justification for bureaucratic expansion. The discourse thus presents moderation not merely as a social virtue but as an Islamic imperative that aligns religious life with national identity and administrative

[40] Refer to Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Wacana Kuasa/Pengetahuan*.
[41] Adriaan Bedner and Stijn Van Huis, "Plurality of Marriage Law and Marriage Registration for Muslims in Indonesia: A Plea for Pragmatism," *Utrecht Law Review* 6, no. 2 (2010): 175–191; Stijn Cornelis van Huis and Theresia Dyah Wirastri, "Muslim Marriage Registration in Indonesia: Revised Marriage Registration Laws Cannot Overcome Compliance Flaws," *Australian Journal of Asian Law* 13, no. 1 (2012): 1–17.
[42] Greg Fealy and Robin Bush, "The Political Decline of Traditional Ulama in Indonesia: The State, Umma and Nahdlatul Ulama," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 42, no. 5 (2014): 536–60.
[43] Asep Jahar, "Bureaucratizing Sharia in Modern Indonesia: The Case of Zakat, Waqf and Family Law," *Studia Islamika* 26, no. 2 (August 2019): 207–245; Dominik M. Müller and Kerstin Steiner, "The Bureaucratisation of Islam in Southeast Asia: Transdisciplinary Perspectives," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 37, no. 1 (2018): 3–26; Banu Senay et al., "Islamic Bureaucracies in Indonesia and Turkey: The Challenge of Comparison," *Religion, State and Society* 53, no. 3 (2025): 165–87.
[44] Moh. Khoeron, "Wamenag: Revitalisasi KUA Untuk Penguatan Moderasi Beragama," *Kemenag.go.id*, 2024.
[45] Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 213–41; Sonny Eli Zaluchu et al., "Conceptual Reconstruction of Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context Based on Previous Research: Bibliometric Analysis," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11 (January 2025): 101552.

governance. In the KUA Revitalization documents and press releases, references to moderation frequently appear alongside managerial terms such as optimization, transformation, and integration. This juxtaposition reveals the interconnection between moral vocabulary and bureaucratic rationality in constructing an administrative and theological reformist narrative.

This discursive strategy engenders what I term a bureaucratic theology of inclusivity, a framework through which the state defines, classifies, and regulates religious moderation via administrative instruments. Within this context, the MoRA not only regulates and manages religion but also assumes the authority to interpret its appropriate form. Consequently, the revitalization of the KUA embodies a dual process: firstly, the democratization of religious services in terms of access and visibility; and secondly, the centralization of epistemic control over the meanings of faith and legitimacy. Thus, the discourse of inclusivity operates both as an emblem of openness and as a governance mechanism that enables the Ministry to extend its influence into moral and theological domains while maintaining the rhetoric of pluralism and reform.

MUI and the Fiqh Authority Consideration

The discourse advanced by the MoRA to enhance the operational functions of the KUA in alignment with the MUI presents certain challenges. As the representative body of Muslims in Indonesia, the MUI opposes the expansion of the KUA's jurisdiction, arguing that it contravenes both the constitution and Islamic jurisprudence. Since its establishment in 1975, the MUI has functioned as a semi-official institution that advises the government and embodies the collective authority of the ulama.[46] In the post-Reformasi era, the MUI's role has become increasingly prominent as it endeavors to safeguard what it terms the purity of Islamic teachings from perceived state interference.[47] Consequently, proposals to transform the KUA into a more inclusive institution have elicited strong opposition from the MUI, which views such initiatives as a distortion of the KUA's theological foundations. This resistance is most explicitly expressed in the National Conference of Indonesia's Fatwa Commission Ulema (2024), which entitled "Decision on the Provision of Religious Affairs Services for Adherents of Non-Islamic Religions at the Religious Affairs Office." The document begins by recounting the historical development of the KUA both prior to and following Indonesia's independence, emphasizing its primary function as a service institution exclusively for Muslims.

The fatwa asserts that "the existence of the KUA must be maintained as an Islamic institution that specifically handles matters related to the rituals and worship of Indonesian Muslims." According to this perspective, the KUA should not serve as a venue for managing religious affairs pertaining to non-Islamic faiths. This position is grounded in the view that the KUA is an institution responsible for

[46] Siti Maimunah, "Kiprah & Pergulatan MUI dalam Pembangunan Indonesia (1975–2020)," in *Gerakan-Gerakan Islam Indonesia Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Adab Press, 2020).
[47] Jeremy Menchik, "The Politics of the Fatwa: Islamic Legal Authority in Modern Indonesia," *Indonesia* 114, no. 1 (2022): 75–97; Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto."

various matters related to marriage, waqf, and social welfare for Muslims—areas considered aspects of worship that should remain distinct from other religions. Thus, the fatwa performs a function beyond the juridical; it establishes a discursive boundary by designating the KUA as an inherently Islamic institution whose legitimacy is derived from divine law rather than administrative decree. Moreover, the deliberate use of terms such as "must be maintained," "not be mixed," "ritual and worship," and "Islamic institutions" reflects a moral and epistemic lexicon centered on protection, purity, and authenticity. Through this language, the MUI constructs a narrative aimed at preserving Islamic norms, thereby reaffirming the sacred status of the KUA within the symbolic order of Islam.[48]

Furthermore, this fatwa employs a dual logic of authority. On one hand, it invokes theological legitimacy as a divine obligation. On the other hand, it references several laws and regulations issued by the Minister of Religious Affairs, including Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 517 of 2001, Supreme Court Circular Letter (SEMA) No. 2 of 2023 concerning Guidelines for Judges in Adjudicating Cases of Marriage Registration Requests between Religions and Beliefs, and Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution to establish constitutional legitimacy. By integrating these two sources of authority, the MUI seeks to construct what may be termed a sacral-legal discourse, combining divine command with national law to reinforce the boundary between religion and bureaucracy. Thus, from the formulation of the fatwa issued by the MUI, it is possible to identify two primary criticisms directed at the MoRA: first, the distortion of the duties and functions of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) from its historical foundations; and second, the incompatibility of the proposal both with fiqh, due to its potential to conflate rituals across different religions in Indonesia, and with the constitution, which governs the duties and functions of the KUA.[49]

Linguistically, the discourse of the MUI is replete with metaphors of guardianship, protection, and defense. This vocabulary transforms acts of opposition into moral imperatives, positioning the ulama as custodians of a sacred order threatened by secular rationality. Within the fatwa, the state's rhetoric of "revitalization" and "inclusivity" is implicitly reinterpreted as syncretism and indicative of the dilution of the ummah's identity. Consequently, the MUI reframes the MoRA administrative reforms as a spiritual crisis necessitating theological rectification. This linguistic framework establishes a moral hierarchy that privileges religious knowledge over bureaucratic expertise. Through such rhetorical strategies, the MUI endeavors to reclaim interpretive authority by situating it within the realm of revelation rather than bureaucratic regulation. Thus, the MUI's fatwa constitutes not only a theological response but also a discursive act of resistance.[50] It repudiates the bureaucratic redefinition of religion advanced by MoRA and reasserts the ulama's prerogative to define the sacred. In this discourse, the KUs is portrayed not as a mere administrative office but as an embodiment of Islamic stewardship, a

[48] See "Ijtima' Ulama Komisi Fatwa se-Indonesia VIII Nomor 13/Ijtima' Ulama/VIII/2024 Tentang Layanan Urusan Agama-Agama Selain Islam di Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA)."
[49] See "Ijtima' Ulama Komisi Fatwa se-Indonesia VIII Nomor 13/Ijtima' Ulama/VIII/2024 Tentang Layanan Urusan Agama-Agama Selain Islam di Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA)."
[50] Refer to Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Wacana Kuasa/Pengetahuan*.

sphere where divine and social order intersect. By reaffirming this theological boundary, the MUI challenges the state's claim to neutrality and re-centers the locus of legitimacy within the moral universe of Islam.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the contestation between the MoRA and the MUI concerning the proposed optimization of the KUA extends beyond legal norms to encompass discursive dimensions. Both actors construct and compete through their respective narratives to establish legitimate religious authority within the Indonesian public sphere. The interpretation of the discourse surrounding the state and the ulama is inevitably influenced by my lived experience within a system where religion functions both as a source of morality and as an instrument of power. Employing a CDA approach entails an awareness that all interpretations constitute situated knowledge. Therefore, this study does not aim to determine notions of right or wrong but seeks to elucidate the processes through which truth is produced, negotiated, and justified within the social context in which Table 1 is situated.

Table 1. Fiqh Authority and Religious Bureaucracy in the KUA Reform

Aspect	MoRA Perspective	MUI Perspective	Analytical Interpretation
Institutional identity of KUA	KUA should function as an inclusive and religion-neutral public service institution for all citizens	KUA must remain a specifically Islamic institution responsible for administering Muslim religious and fiqh-based affairs, particularly marriage, waqf, and worship-related matters	Reflects competing interpretations between administrative inclusivity and the fiqh-based theological identity of KUA
Source of authority	Legitimacy is derived from bureaucratic governance, modernization, state administration, and religious moderation policies	Legitimacy is grounded in fiqh, ulama authority, Islamic legal tradition, and constitutional recognition of Muslim religious affairs	Demonstrates contestation between bureaucratic rationality and fiqh authority in defining legitimate religious governance
Discursive framework	Employs narratives of revitalization, integration, efficiency, transformation, and inclusivity within state religious administration	Employs narratives of *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (protection of religion), ritual purity, guardianship of Islamic norms, and preservation of fiqh boundaries	Language functions as a mechanism for producing competing claims of legal, moral, and theological legitimacy

Source: Author's elaboration, 2026.

MoRA advances what can be characterized as an inclusive bureaucratic discourse that emphasizes neutrality and modernity, aiming to institutionalize the concept of inclusive Islam within administrative procedures. Conversely, MUI employs a theological discourse centered on authenticity, seeking to safeguard and preserve the

sanctity of Islamic orthodoxy from secular bureaucratic intervention. Fundamentally, these two discourses contest within the same domain—religious governance in Indonesia—but are grounded in distinct epistemic logics: one rooted in state rationality and the other in divine law. This contestation illustrates that the boundaries delineating the relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia are not defined by overt conflict but, as Ropi suggests, through ongoing negotiations over the meaning and limits of authority in regulating religious affairs between the state and the religious majority.[51] Prior to proceeding with the discussion in this section, it is important to acknowledge that, as a researcher embedded within the social and religious context under examination, the analysis presented herein is not value-free.

The findings indicate that MoRA aims to reconceptualize the functions of the KUA by framing it as a bureaucratic and public service institution intended to accommodate and serve all religious groups in Indonesia, rather than exclusively Islam. Through this discourse, MoRA repositions the KUA from being an Islamic institution to one that is purportedly "neutral" and "universal." Furthermore, MoRA employs key terms such as "public service," "inclusive," "effective," and "modern" to characterize this policy as progressive and aligned with the state's vision of pluralism. Proponents of this initiative contend that MoRA's plan represents a positive step toward fostering a society that embraces pluralistic values, particularly given that the KUA is viewed primarily as an administrative body responsible solely for recording marriages. From this standpoint, the KUA is regarded as ideologically neutral, since its functions are limited to technical and formal-legal tasks.[52] Nevertheless, it is imperative to consider alternative perspectives and critically examine these assertions.

One must question whether a religious bureaucracy that, within the Indonesian context, has historically and structurally been shaped by Islamic traditions can genuinely maintain neutrality. To address the claim of neutrality, within Indonesian bureaucracy, numerous policies initially designed to accommodate the needs of all religious adherents have, in practice, generated tension and fostered new forms of discrimination. The policy mandating the inclusion of a religion column on identity cards (KTP) was intended to acknowledge the religious identity of every citizen. However, it has often had adverse effects on followers of local beliefs and minority religions. These individuals are compelled to select one of the officially recognized religions or leave the column blank, which subsequently impedes their access to public services such as marriage registration, education, and employment. Rather than promoting justice and inclusivity, this policy reinforces a religious hierarchy that privileges Islam and other majority religions as the mainstream in its implementation.[53] An additional example is evident in the administration of

[51] Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia*.
[52] Kurnianingrum, *Wacana Pencatatan Perkawinan Melalui Kua Inklusif*.
[53] Sukirno and Aga Natalis, "Majority Bias in Legal Politics: Discriminatory Citizenship Document Services for Local Religion Believers in Indonesia," *Sortuz: Oñati Journal of Emergent Socio-Legal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2025): 241–268; Bagus Edi Prayogo, "Pros and Cons of Removing the Religion Column in Indonesian Identity Cards (Analysis of the Impact and Regulation on Human Rights)," *Contemporary Issues on Interfaith Law and Society* 1, no. 2 (2022): 131–56; Nanda Azzahra et al., "Legal

religious education within public schools, which are officially accessible to adherents of all religions; however, they are frequently characterized by the predominance of Islamic symbols, language, and practices.[54]

Comparable issues also emerge in the issuance of permits for places of worship. These instances collectively demonstrate that, despite the state's formal commitment to guaranteeing freedom of religion, its policies often effectively restrict religious expression beyond Islam.[55] Scholars specializing in Islamic studies, including Talal Asad,[56] Wael Hallaq,[57] and Charles Hirschkind,[58] have long argued that the modern state functions not merely as a technocratic institution but as a power structure that shapes, regulates, and disciplines religious expression. Within the context of this discussion, the KUA should not be understood merely as an institution for marriage registration but rather as a tangible manifestation of the state's management of religion, which is inherently grounded in specific social, historical, and epistemological frameworks. Since its inception, the KUA has functioned as part of the Islamic religious bureaucracy under the MoRA, characterized by a structure, nomenclature, and habitus deeply embedded in Islamic tradition.[59] Consequently, although its role appears primarily administrative, its operational logic remains fundamentally guided by Islamic values and symbols. This dynamic result not in neutrality but in the universalization of particular perspectives, whereby values and procedures derived from Islamic tradition are implicitly employed as normative standards for all religions.

The MoRA's discourse on inclusivity may function as a subtle form of hegemony. Drawing on Gramsci's concept, hegemony is understood not as domination through coercion but through the consent and normalization of a worldview, rendering it common sense. By framing its policies as "neutral" and "inclusive," MoRA may effectively implement covert Islamization in a novel guise. This state-endorsed

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Protection for Indigenous Peoples of Early Sundan (Sunda Wiwitan): A Case Study of Discrimination Against Religious Status in Cigugur, Kuningan," *Journal of Legal and Cultural Analytics (JLCA)* 4, no. 2 (2025): 971–980.

[54] Florian Pohl, "Negotiating Religious and National Identities in Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Education," *CrossCurrents* 61, no. 3 (2011): 399–414; Sulaeman Girivirya, "From an Online Survey: The Dilemma of Religious Education Model in Indonesia Affected to Inter-Group Contact," *JPPI (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1695–1702; Linda Sari Zuarnum, "Religious Discrimination Praxis in Public Schools in East Lombok," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1–16.

[55] Adinda Tenriangke Muchtar et al., *Evaluation of the Requirements for the Establishment of Houses of Worship in the Joint Regulation of Minister of Religious Affairs and Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 and 8 of 2006 for the Right to Freedom of Religion and Belief in Indonesia* (The Indonesian Institute, Center for Public Policy Research/TII), 2024); Melissa A. Crouch, "Regulating Places of Worship in Indonesia: Upholding Freedom of Religion for Religious Minorities?," *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (2007): 96–116.

[56] Refer to Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[57] See Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[58] Charles Hirschkind, "Is There a Secular Body?," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 633–47; Ebrahim Moosa, "Book Review: The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics. By Charles Hirschkind. Columbia University Press, 2006.," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 248–52.

[59] Refer to Piere Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

version of inclusivity risks becoming a mechanism for standardizing religious diversity according to a logic and bureaucratic governance still influenced by majority values.[60] Conversely, the MUI advances a discourse aimed at restoring the sanctity of the KUA by invoking principles of revelation and moral guardianship. The MUI contends that altering the function of the KUA deviates from its original purpose and risks conflating the beliefs of Indonesian Muslims. Within this discourse, the MUI consistently characterizes the KUA as an Islamic religious institution rather than a state apparatus. Through various statements, fatwas, and official documents, the MUI positions the KUA as an integral component of Islamic infrastructure that must adhere to Sharia law and its associated values.[61]

Within the framework of CDA, this stance can be interpreted as a discursive strategy aimed at preserving the symbolic dominance of Islam within the state apparatus. This discourse operates through mechanisms of linguistic representation, wherein terms such as "Sharia," "worship," and "purity of belief" function not only as theological expressions but also as ideological instruments of legitimation that delineate the boundaries of groups entitled to access state-managed religious spaces. By characterizing the KUA as an "Islamic institution," the MUI implicitly excludes non-Muslim groups from symbolic access to the state, despite the state's formal claim of neutrality. At the level of social practice, the MUI's discourse also sustains the traditional power relationship between religious and state authorities, wherein clerics occupy a dominant role in defining the moral and legal parameters of public life.[62]

The MUI's stance on the MoRA policy reflects not merely a divergence in religious interpretation but also constitutes a form of discursive resistance against alterations in the structure of meaning perceived as threatening to their hegemonic position. By upholding the narrative that the KUA functions as a "worship" institution, the MUI aims to reject the secularization of meaning and preserve its monopoly over the discourse surrounding the concept of "religion" within the Indonesian public sphere. This pattern reveals that the language employed by the MUI is both exclusive and defensive, constructing binary oppositions such as "Islam versus non-Islam," "worship versus administration," and "religion versus state." Such oppositional frameworks not only reinforce group identity but also serve as mechanisms to normalize a particular ideology of Islam, regarded as singular and authentic. Consequently, the MUI not only represents the Muslim community but also exerts control over how Muslims interpret the relationship between religion and the state.[63]

The contestation between the MoRA and the MUI in this case provides valuable

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[60] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Trans. and Ed. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith* (New York: International Publisher, 1971).
[61] Hasyim, *The Shariatisation of Indonesia: The Politics of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI)*.
[62] Ichwan, "Ulama, State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto."
[63] Syafiq Hasyim, "The Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) and Religious Freedom," *Irasec's Discussion Papers*, no. 12, December 2011; M. Mukhsin Jamil, *Membendung Despotisme Wacana Agama: Kritik Atas Otoritarianisme Fatwa MUI Tentang Pluralisme, Liberalisme, dan Sekulerisme* (Semarang: Walisongo Press, 2010).

insight into the negotiation processes between religious authorities within the Indonesian public sphere. Such contestation should not be interpreted solely as outright conflict leading to hostility; rather, it functions as a dialectical interaction that engenders a novel form of "hybrid authority," wherein religion and the state mutually reinforce and constrain one another.[64] These findings suggest that the issue of religious authority in Indonesia is not primarily about the accumulation of power, but rather about the manner in which power is exercised. The state, represented by MoRA, positions itself as a protector of diversity, yet simultaneously organizes this diversity to conform to the state's model of pluralism. Conversely, the MUI portrays itself as a guardian of morality, while reinforcing a structure of obedience analogous to that of the state. This dynamic may be characterized as dual governmentality, wherein two regulatory systems operate through moral frameworks—one grounded in bureaucratic morality, and the other in Sharia-based morality.

In a broader context, the developments in Indonesia reflect similar dynamics observed in other Muslim-majority countries, such as Malaysia[65] and Egypt[66] where the state employs the rhetoric of moderation and tolerance to extend its control over religious life. However, Indonesia is distinguished by the enduring influence of the Pancasila ideology, which ostensibly guarantees equality among all religions but, in practice, establishes a subtle moral hierarchy. This model of pluralism illustrates that plurality does not necessarily equate to freedom; rather, it can function as a mechanism for managing differences to maintain control. This study further underscores that the pluralism project in Indonesia will remain fragile as long as the definitions of religion and diversity are monopolized by a single actor—namely, the state bureaucracy and religious authorities. Moving forward, the path may lie not in privileging one perspective over another but in preserving a public space where all communities can negotiate meaning without exerting dominance over one another.

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the proposed optimization of religious services at the KUA illustrates that religious discourse in Indonesia serves as a discursive arena in which institutions produce truths and compete to maintain their legitimacy within society. Within this context, the MoRA and the MUI seek to define the KUA in accordance with the values and ideologies they aim to promote. The contestation between the MoRA and the MUI demonstrates that the relationship between the state and religious authority is not static but is continuously redefined through various discursive practices. The findings reveal that MoRA articulates a bureaucratic

[64] Refer to Ropi, *Religion and Regulation in Indonesia*.
[65] Danial Yusof, "Muslims in Malaysia," in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, ed. Ronald Lukens-Bull and Mark Woodward (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021); Muhammad Asad Latif, "Political Struggle of Malaysia and Islam: Moderating and Radicalizing the State, Society, and Religion Alternately (1957–2023)," *Discover Global Society* 2, 40 (2024).
[66] Shmuel Bachar et al., "Establishment Ulama and Radicalism in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan," *Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World,* Series 1, no. 4, (2006): 1–42; Asif Mohiuddin, "Islam, Religious Authority and the State: The Case of Egypt," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2022): 165–88; Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan, "Statism, Tolerance and Religious Freedom in Egypt," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 13, no. 1 (2016): 1–24.

theology of inclusivity to optimize the KUA, positioning it as a neutral and inclusive institution intended to reinforce the rationality of the state in regulating religious practices in Indonesia. In contrast, MUI employs a theological discourse of authenticity to preserve the sacredness of the institution and uphold the authority of the ulama. This study advances the conceptual framework of Foucault's governmentality and contributes to the scholarship on Southeast Asian Islam by contextualizing Indonesian context within a wider global discourse on the politics of religious governance. The study offers a prescriptive framework that clarifies the interpretation of religious authority and bureaucratic legitimacy in the context of state-Islam relations within pluralistic societies.

This study acknowledges several limitations. It primarily focuses on the discursive contestation between the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), thereby confining the analysis to institutional narratives and official statements. Consequently, the perspectives of other pertinent actors, such as local religious leaders, civil society organizations, and members of religious minority communities, remain insufficiently examined. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to the Indonesian context as a single-country case study, which constrains the potential for broader comparative insights into the dynamics of state–religion relations in other Muslim-majority societies. Future research could address these limitations by employing empirical methodologies, including interviews, surveys, or ethnographic observations, to capture the experiences and perceptions of a more diverse range of stakeholders. Additionally, comparative studies involving countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, or other pluralistic societies would enhance understanding of how religious authority and bureaucratic legitimacy are negotiated across varying political and cultural contexts. Such investigations would contribute to the development of a more comprehensive theoretical framework concerning religious governance and the evolving relationship between state institutions and religious actors in contemporary societies.

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Ethical Approval

This study relies exclusively on publicly available documentary sources and does not involve human participants. Accordingly, formal ethical approval was not required for this study.

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