

Certification Model of Islamic Preachers in Muslim-Majority Countries: Experience from Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract

In the context of the escalating threat of global radicalism, the regulation of religious discourse has emerged as a pivotal concern for Muslim-majority nations. The present article endeavors to undertake a comparative analysis of Islamic preacher certification policies in Indonesia and Malaysia. The present study aims to elucidate the fundamental discrepancies in objectives, mechanisms, and implementing authorities. An exploratory qualitative study was conducted using a literature review. A comprehensive data set was meticulously gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources encompassed government policies, fatwas, and regulations, while the secondary sources included journals, books, and think tank reports. These data were then subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis and comparative scrutiny through a comparative matrix. The findings indicate that Islamic preacher certification in Indonesia is driven by a national security agenda to counter radicalism and represents a compromise between the state and civil society organizations. In contrast, Malaysia's mandatory tauliah (Islamic preacher certification) system prioritizes the preservation of doctrinal orthodoxy and is legally enforced by religious authorities at the state level. These disparate models reflect the distinct political landscapes and state-religion relations in both countries. Implications are both models encounter substantial challenges in regulating digital da'wah that is not bound by jurisdiction, underscoring the need for further research on religious governance in the digital age. Future studies should explore the impact of preacher certification on radicalism prevention.

Keywords: Certification of Islamic Preachers, Religious Governance, Deradicalization, Indonesia, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Islam is a religion that upholds the principle of peace (rahmatan lil'alamin). However, it is important to note that countries with the largest Muslim populations have become the epicenter of global conflict and terrorism (Henne, 2021; Ilyas, 2025; Zhirkov et al., 2012). This phenomenon frequently does not originate from religious teachings; rather, it is often attributable to the accumulation of various interrelated non-religious factors. The legacy of colonialism, which left behind artificial borders; prolonged foreign geopolitical intervention; political instability caused by authoritarian regimes; and acute socio-economic disparities have created fertile ground for radicalism (Gerges, 2016). This vulnerable condition is exploited by extremist minority groups who manipulate religious doctrines for their political agendas. According to the Global Terrorism Index (2024), Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria—all countries with significant Muslim populations—are among the most affected by global terrorism. Consequently, the conflicts that ensue are more indicative of political failure and socio-economic crises, wherein religion is erroneously employed as a means of justification by a diminutive faction, rather than as an articulation of the convictions of the preponderance of the global Muslim community.

Radicalism emerges from intricate interplay among structural factors, including social injustice, and cultural factors, with religious narratives disseminated by authoritative figures serving a pivotal role. The propagation of this ideology occurs in a multifaceted manner, commencing with the integration of intolerant content within educational materials and

culminating in the reinforcement of rigid narratives by certain religious leaders. A body of research has indicated that mosques situated within institutional environments, such as government offices and university campuses, have a propensity to function as venues for the propagation of exclusionary narratives that employ hateful rhetoric (PPIM, 2019). Solahudin (2013) expounds on the exacerbating factors of this predicament, namely the pervasive radical propaganda disseminated on the internet, which strategically targets the youth demographic in their quest for identity. This phenomenon, as elucidated by Solahudin, ensnares these individuals in a digital echo chamber, thereby intensifying the severity of the issue. The pervasive exposure to rigid doctrines, disseminated through physical and virtual platforms, has been shown to normalize intolerant perspectives and erode the threshold for justifying violence in the name of religion. This phenomenon fosters an environment conducive to the proliferation of extremist ideologies.

In response to the threat of radicalism, several Islamic countries have adopted standardization and certification for preachers as a measure to regulate religious discourse and ensure the authenticity of religious teachings. In Indonesia, the standardization and certification of preachers is carried out by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). The objective of this program is to ensure that preachers possess the necessary competencies to effectively convey Islamic teachings to the public. In Malaysia, the certification of religious leaders is referred to as "tauliah," a policy that is administered by the jurisdiction of each state. The authority in question is exercised by Majlis Agama Islam Negeri (MAIN) or Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri (JAIN) in each state (Shahrulnizam, 2023). Concurrently, in Brunei Darussalam, dai certification constitutes an integral component of the Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB) policy, thereby establishing a nexus between the content of da'wah and national identity. The accreditation mechanism entails a thorough evaluation of an individual's educational background, comprehension of pluralistic fiqh, and proficiency in multicultural communication skills. Certified dai are registered in a national registry and are required to undergo regular training. This approach is indicative of the adaptation of transnationalism in the management of religious discourse, wherein the state utilizes formal institutions to consolidate religious authority and counter the infiltration of extremist ideologies.

The present article aims to examine the standardization and certification policies for da'i in Indonesia through an analysis of three aspects: (1) the state policy framework as a response to radical transnationalism; (2) the accreditation mechanism and its implementation; and (3) differences among the three countries. The article's significance lies in its attempt to address an academic lacuna in the study of Southeast Asian radicalism. Previous research in this field has predominantly focused on legal and security approaches (Ariyani, 2023; Rasmanto et al., 2023). Concurrently, the linguistic, transnational, and religious governance aspects have received scant attention. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a model solution for other Muslim countries, particularly those with Muslim majorities that face vulnerabilities to educational radicalism.

METHOD

This study uses an interpretive and exploratory qualitative research design. The main source of data for this study is a literature review. This method involves collecting, synthesizing, and systematically analyzing information from various existing documents and publications. The secondary data is classified into two main categories. The first category consists of primary official documents, including government policy documents, laws, and legal regulations (e.g., fatwas from the Indonesian Ulama Council and state-level regulations in Malaysia), as well as official circulars from religious institutions, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), and the Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS). The second category consists of academic and public secondary sources, including scientific journal articles, reference books on politics and Islam in Southeast Asia, reports from think tanks: ISEAS and PPIM, and archives from leading news media. We collected data systematically using specific keywords, such as "dai certification," "tauliah," "deradikalisasi," and "religious governance," in academic databases and

institutional repositories to gather all relevant material from the three countries that were the focus of the study.

This study's data analysis procedure adopts a thematic and comparative analysis framework. The analysis process begins with data reduction, in which all collected documents are organized, simplified, and coded to identify recurring themes, concepts, and arguments. Next, a comparative analysis is conducted by systematically comparing data from Indonesia and Malaysia. An analysis matrix is created to facilitate this comparison by mapping the differences and similarities in policy objectives, implementation strategies, and institutional actors involved in each country in detail. This structured, comparative approach provides a deep, nuanced understanding of how different political systems—decentralized democracy, federal monarchy, and absolute monarchy—shape religious policy.

The validity and reliability of this research are ensured through several strategic steps. One key pillar is data triangulation, whereby findings from one source (e.g., government documents) are verified and enriched with information from other sources (e.g., academic analyses and media reports) to ensure a comprehensive, balanced, and accurate perspective (Creswell, 2013; Sugiyono, 2015; Yin, 2011). This methodology is highly relevant to the article's objectives because comparative literature-based studies are the most effective way to analyze and compare established national policies without requiring new fieldwork. This approach can produce valid and reliable findings by systematically analyzing various authoritative documents, providing deep insights into the complex interactions between state security, religious authority, and public discourse in Southeast Asia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Certification for Islamic Preachers in Indonesia

The Indonesian government has asserted that the primary rationale for its preacher standardization or certification program is to address the pressing need to curtail the proliferation of radicalism, intolerance, and terrorism (Haetami, 2020; Hasanah & Tawang, 2022; Kemenag, 2016). The Ministry of Religious Affairs, in collaboration with state security agencies such as the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), identifies unregulated spaces for preaching as areas susceptible to infiltration by extremist narratives. The role of preachers is considered to be of significant and urgent importance in the effort to minimize radical ideas that have the potential to lead to acts of terrorism. Within this framework, the standardization program is positioned as an instrument of deradicalization and counter-radicalization. The objective is to augment the number of preachers who are capable of disseminating the message of peaceful Islam and rahmatan lil alamin (mercy for all creation). The program's participants, referred to as Da'i, are expected to assume a role of paramount importance in the identification of radicalism's nascent manifestations within the societal landscape.

Furthermore, a crucial objective is to ensure that preachers possess a robust national identity. In 2020, the Minister of Religion, Fachrul Razi, stated that this program is expected to integrate religious and nationalistic inputs into a single breath of preaching (Kemenag, 2016). This encompasses a comprehensive comprehension and dedication to the prevailing state ideology, encompassing the 5 principles of *pancasialis*, the 1945 Constitution, the doctrine of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, and the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Consequently, this policy is not merely religious in nature; it is also explicitly part of the broader national security and development agenda.

1. Policy and Procedure for Certification for Islamic Preachers

In Indonesia, the discourse on certification has been in existence since 2012. This concept was initially put forward by Irfan Idris, who at the time served as Director of Deradicalization at the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), and Nia Elvina, a sociologist (Hasanah & Tawang, 2022). The objective of standardizing or certifying preachers is to mitigate and forestall the

propagation of radicalism. This policy has gained significant traction due to the rise of preachers or da'i to positions of prominence within society, as well as the emergence of individuals who disseminate content that fosters division and discord within Indonesia's heterogeneous population (Adnan et al., 2023; Medistiara & Sari, 2022; Sari, 2022).

This phenomenon has prompted the Ministry of Religious Affairs to introduce certification and standardization for preachers. In 2020, the Ministry of Religious Affairs initiated a certified preacher program, with an initial target of reaching 8,200 preachers throughout Indonesia. This target included 8,000 participants in 34 provinces and 200 participants at the central level (Kemenag, 2020). According to the Ministry of Religion, as of October 2024, the Technical Guidance Program for Strengthening the Competence of Islamic Preachers had been attended by 9,843 male and female preachers (Kemenag, 2024). The names of preachers who have completed this program are then recorded in a digital application managed by the Ministry of Religion. This application is called "Ustadz Kita."

The program's crux lies in the implementation of Technical Guidance sessions, which are extended training sessions spanning multiple days. The curriculum has been meticulously designed to strike a harmonious balance between religious competencies and national commitment. Participants who successfully complete the Bimtek program and pass the post-test will be awarded a competency certificate attesting to their participation. The main materials covered in the Technical Guidance include:

- a) Islamic Perspective: This material focuses on strengthening understanding of Wasathiyah Islam (Moderate Islam), which is often defined as being in line with the beliefs of Ahlus-Sunnah wal Jama'ah. The aim is to equip speakers with theological arguments to counter extreme interpretations, both right-wing (radical) and left-wing (liberal);
- b) National Perspective: Participants are provided with an understanding that the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is the final form of the state and is in line with Islamic teachings (mitsaqan ghalizha), as well as the importance of instilling a spirit of patriotism (hubbul wathon minal iman) in the community;
- c) Da'wah Methods: This training also covers technical aspects, such as contemporary da'wah strategies, the use of digital media and media literacy, effective public communication techniques, and how to reach millennial audiences.

However, this discourse has encountered opposition from various Islamic organizations, including the MUI, Nahdatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and the Front Pembela Islam (FPI). On September 8, 2020, the MUI officially issued a Statement of Position No. Kep-1626/DP MUI/IX/2020, firmly rejecting the Ministry of Religious Affairs' planned program for certified preachers. The underlying rationale for the rejection of the program is its potential to incite unrest and be perceived as a means for government intervention and oversight of religious activities. MUI lodged a formal protest when the Ministry of Religious Affairs used its logo in promotional materials for a program without authorization.

The certification of da'i has been the subject of considerable controversy, and as a result, state authorities in Indonesia have refrained from facilitating this process. Consequently, each institution possesses the prerogative to administer certification programs in accordance with its own methodologies. For instance, the ADDAI (Asosiasi Dai-Daiyah Indonesia) has been authorized to administer da'i certification. The mechanisms, technical guidance, competency testing, and awarding of professional titles fall under ADDAI's purview. The primary objective of this independent institution is to serve as a platform for preachers across various organizations (such as NU and Muhammadiyah), methodologies, and professions, to enhance the quality of preachers through competency standardization and religious moderation, and to establish a database of moderate preachers across Indonesia to facilitate public access to qualified speakers. The

certification process commences with the registration phase. Completion of an online registration form on the ADDAI website is required.

Obtaining a recommendation from a relevant institution, mosque, or agency is also necessary. Payment of a registration fee amounting to Rp 250,000 is required. The certification process commences with the following steps: The training and technical guidance encompass explanations of moderate preaching, solution-oriented and integrative communication methods, and the strengthening of national awareness. The principle of *wasathiyah* (moderation) must be prioritized, alongside tolerance toward non-principal differences and firmness on principles. The assessment of competency is conducted through mastery of Islamic knowledge, effective preaching, and a comprehensive understanding of moderation. Upon successful completion of these assessments, the certificate and title of CDAI (Certified Dai) are bestowed.

2. Controversy of Islamic Preacher Certification

The policy of certifying preachers, or *da'i*, has given rise to contentious debates within both the public sphere and Islamic organizations. Hasanah and Tawang (2022) posit that the discourse on standardizing and certifying preachers has been in existence since early 2012, manifesting as concepts pertaining to the necessity of certifying Islamic scholars with the objective of curtailing and forestalling the propagation of radicalism. This concept was initially put forth by Irfan Idris, who at the time served as Director of Deradicalization at the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), and Nia Elvina, a sociologist. Upon the issue's emergence into the public domain, numerous organizations, including the MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah, FPI, and others, have expressed their rejection of the issue. The MUI (2019) has stated that the qualification for someone to become a preacher is derived from the Quran, specifically Surat Ali Imran, verse 104. The decision letter, numbered Kep-1626/DP MUI/IX/2020, constitutes the MUI's formal position on the Ministry of Religion's proposed certification program for preachers. The certification process in place does not determine a preacher's eligibility to deliver sermons; rather, it is a standard program intended to enhance the quality of preaching.

Meanwhile, the rejection of *da'wah* by the organization known as Muhammadiyah is rooted in a principled stance on the nature of *da'wah*. The aforementioned parties posit that preachers should not be regarded as civil servants; rather, they should be regarded as volunteers responding to a religious calling. Consequently, the state lacks the prerogative to regulate them (Cnn, 2020; Rini, 2020; Zaenal, 2019). Muhammadiyah has expressed concerns that this initiative may result in the emergence of a divide between certified and non-certified preachers, thereby impeding the fundamental imperative to disseminate religious teachings. NU has been identified as an organization with a particularly nuanced position on the matter. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not take a position against the enhancement of the aptitude of its clergy. However, the organizations maintain that this process must be managed autonomously, rather than being subject to state oversight (Rochim, 2020). The rationale provided is that religious authority and the chain of religious knowledge (*sanad*) are the domain of religious organizations, and the institutions issuing certificates must be accountable for the credentials they grant. The government's role, as articulated by these scholars, is not to interfere with the substance of religious understanding but rather to facilitate it (Handayani & Yusuf, 2021).

A thorough examination discloses that this discord is not inherently about the principle of standardization itself, but rather about the location of authority. The existence of internal standardization programs at MUI and NU indicates a commitment to quality control. Their pronounced disapproval of the state program indicates a struggle for authority regarding the definition and certification of religious competence. This is a paradigmatic confrontation between the state and religious civil society over the allocation of institutional authority.

Table 1. Authority Argument for Certification Management

Stakeholders	Key Stance	Key Rationale	Proposed Model
Ministry of Religious Affairs/National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT)	Pro-Certification	Counter-radicalism, religious moderation, and competency improvement	Voluntary program facilitated by the state with the involvement of security agencies
MUI	Reject	Concerns about state control, which should be the role of the MUI, have caused unrest	Standardization led by MUI
Muhammadiyah	Reject	Da'wah is a voluntary religious duty, not a profession regulated by the state; risk of discrimination	No program from the state
Nahdlatul Ulama	Conditionally Support	Support competency improvement, but it must be carried out by mass organizations; the state is only a facilitator	Certification led by each mass organization

Sources: Processed from various online media, 2025

The standardization of da'i in Indonesia is actually still ongoing by changing the term to 'certified preacher' and making it voluntary. This term is similar to professional certification, which can strengthen a person's status or position. For example, there is a professional certification in the field of Human Resource Management issued by BNSP (National Professional Certification Agency). After completing training, standardization, and competency exams, participants who pass receive the CHRМ (Certified Human Resource Manager) designation. While such certificates or designations may have an impact at a particular time, they do not necessarily carry weight in other contexts. The voluntary nature of the certification means that each speaker is free to choose whether or not to participate in the certification program offered by an institution.

Certification for Islamic Preachers in Malaysia

Malaysia, as a country with Islam as the official religion of the federation, implements a strict monitoring system over the dissemination of Islamic teachings. One of the main instruments in this monitoring is through a certification policy for preachers, locally known as "tauliah" (Anas et al., 2024; Khalil & Harun, 2024). This policy is designed to ensure that the teachings of Islam conveyed to the public align with the beliefs of the Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, while also preventing the spread of ideas deemed deviant or extremist.

1. Tauliah Policy

Preachers, lecturers, and educators who teach Islam must have a tauliah license. The main purpose of this policy is to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings based on the Shafi'i school of thought and the Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah creed, which are the official guidelines for the majority of Muslims in Malaysia. Furthermore, this policy serves as a government control mechanism to screen preachers and ensure they do not convey content that could incite division, threaten national security, or spread ideologies deemed deviant and extremist (Anas et al., 2024; Khalil & Harun, 2024).

The tauliah policy has unique characteristics because it is not centrally regulated at the federal level by the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM). Instead, Islamic religious affairs, including the issuance of tauliah, fall under the jurisdiction of each state. This authority is exercised by the Majlis Agama Islam Negeri (MAIN) or Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri (JAIN) in each state

(Shahrulnizam, 2023). Although the primary authority lies at the state level, JAKIM functions as a federal coordinator to harmonize doctrinal standards and filter doctrinal deviations. JAKIM has developed Guidelines for Preaching Ethics to ensure that sermon content aligns with the Shafi'i school of thought and the beliefs of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. Key challenges to this policy include complex bureaucracy and inconsistencies in procedures across states, such as the requirement to submit a "Tauliah Special" 14 days in advance for foreign preachers in the Federal Territory (Mufti, 2025). The Minister of Religious Affairs, Datuk Mohd Na'im Mokhtar (2024), emphasized that the tauliah can also be revoked if the preacher disseminates misleading content or incites division.

The constitutional basis for this policy is the Federal Constitution, which places matters related to Islam under the authority of the Sultan or King as the head of Islam in their respective states (Dimon et al., 2022). The primary legal basis for this policy is the Enakmen (state-level law) or Islamic religious administration act in effect in each jurisdiction. For example, in the state of Selangor, there is the "Islamic Religious Administration Enakmen (Negeri Selangor) 2003" along with its subsidiary regulations such as the "Tauliah Regulations (Negeri Selangor) 2008" (and its amendments). These regulations explicitly require every individual who wishes to teach or preach about Islam to hold a valid tauliah (Selangor, 2020).

Teaching without a tauliah is classified as an offense under the Sharia Criminal Ordinance in each state and may be subject to legal sanctions, including fines and imprisonment (Melaka, 2022). The penalties for violators are severe. Under the Sharia Criminal Offenses Act (Federal Territories) of 1997, teaching without a tauliah may be subject to a fine of up to RM3,000 or a maximum prison sentence of three years, or both (Mufti, 2025). However, there is an important exception under Section 14(2), which states that this provision does not apply to someone who teaches Islam in their private residence and only to their own family members.

A case of law enforcement occurred in February 2023 when a lecture by Ustaz Azhar Idrus was canceled in Selangor due to the absence of a tauliah. Ustaz Azhar's team confirmed the cancellation through his official Facebook page and moved the event to the Ar-Rahimah Mosque in Kuala Lumpur (federal territory), which did not require a tauliah from the Selangor authorities. The case of Ustaz Azhar reinforced the decentralized authority of MAIN/JAIN in the enforcement of religious law (Razak, 2023). The cancellation of the lecture demonstrates that administrative compliance (obtaining a permit) is prioritized over the popularity of the speaker. However, this policy has drawn criticism for allegedly hindering the spread of religious teachings. In response, some speakers have shifted to digital platforms (such as TikTok and YouTube) or held lectures outside mosques (e.g., restaurants, community centers) that do not require a permit.

2. Tauliah Procedure

The process of obtaining a teaching license for Islamic studies in Malaysia involves a series of administrative procedures and rigorous evaluations. Although there are slight variations in implementation in each state, the general framework of the mechanism tends to be similar. An analysis of the process in Selangor and Melaka provides a clear picture of how this bureaucracy works in practice. The first step is the eligibility requirements and application procedures. The first step in the process is to meet the basic eligibility requirements set by the state religious authorities. Although there are slight differences between states, the requirements are generally similar. In Selangor, based on the application form, applicants must be Malaysian citizens, Muslim, aged 18 years or above, physically and mentally healthy, ethical, domiciled in Selangor, and have passed an examination. In terms of academic qualifications, the minimum requirement is the Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia (STAM) or an equivalent qualification recognized by the Tauliah Committee (Borang Permohonan Tauliah Mengajar Negeri Selangor, 2025).

The application process itself has been modernized in some states. Selangor, for example, has transitioned to a digital system via the e-Tauliah portal, where applicants must register an account

and complete an online application form. However, the document requirements remain the same (Mais, 2023). Applicants are required to upload or submit supporting documents: copies of identity cards, official copies of academic and religious certificates, passport-sized photos, and sometimes a letter of permission from the employer or a letter of support from local authorities such as the head of the mosque. The formalization of the application process, which requires standard academic credentials and organized documentation, effectively transforms religious education from a role previously recognized only by the community into a profession regulated and certified by the state. This shifts the center of authority for recognition from the community to the state bureaucracy, reflecting a broader trend of modernization in which governments seek to regulate and standardize all professions, including those related to religion, to ensure that they are aligned with national goals and quality control.

The second is the screening and credentialing process. Once applications are submitted and reviewed, applicants undergo a more in-depth screening stage. This is the most important qualitative stage in the entire process. In most states, it involves written tests and interviews before a Tauliah Committee (Borang Permohonan Tauliah Mengajar Negeri Selangor, 2025). These interviews allow the committee to assess not only the applicants' knowledge but also more subjective aspects such as personality, teaching methodology, and most importantly, their level of adherence to the official ideology and approach of the state: Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah according to the Shafi'i school of thought.

In Melaka, for example, applicants are required to list the books they intend to teach, providing the committee with a clear ideological screening tool from the outset. In Selangor, applicants who wish to teach using textbooks are required to bring them to the interview. Assessment criteria are often broad and open to interpretation, such as the requirement in Selangor that applicants have Islamic morals and have never been convicted of a criminal offense. The generality of these criteria gives the committee considerable discretion to approve or reject applications based on standards that may not be stated in writing or explicitly. This discretion is a core control mechanism of the system, allowing religious authorities to shape the religious discourse not only by punishing deviations, but also by proactively preventing voices deemed undesirable from gaining an official platform.

Third is the submission of certificates. Upon completion, certificates are often categorized according to area of specialization. In Selangor, these categories include: 1) M1 (Certificate in Teaching the Holy Scriptures) awarded to preachers or scheduled teaching using classical religious texts; 2) M2A/M2B (Certificate in Teaching the Qur'an) for advanced or basic Qur'anic skills; 3) M3 (General Teaching Certificate) for general lectures such as Maghrib lectures or tazkirah; and 4) M4 (Special Teaching Credential) for individuals who may not meet standard academic qualifications but possess expertise in a specific field. These categories increasingly reflect the level of professionalization and specialization within the state-regulated religious education profession.

3. Tauliah Controversy

Supporters of the tauliah system argue that it is an important mechanism for maintaining order and purity in Islam in Malaysia. Their main argument is to preserve the faith of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah, which is the official doctrine of the state, and to curb the spread of teachings that are considered deviant, extreme, or heretical. From an Islamic legal perspective, this obligation is justified through the principles of Maqasid al-Syariah (the main objectives of Sharia), particularly Hifz al-Din (preserving religion), and the method of Sadd al-Zari'ah (preventing evil). By screening preachers, the authorities aim to ensure that only qualified individuals convey knowledge to the public, thereby preventing division, maintaining social harmony, and protecting national security from individuals who may exploit religious platforms for improper purposes.

On the other hand, the tauliah system has faced significant criticism for allegedly restricting freedom of speech and creating unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles. Critics question the

legitimacy of these regulations, especially when applied to professional preachers who already hold recognized academic qualifications. This issue is exacerbated when prominent preachers are banned from delivering sermons in a state solely because they lack local credentials, as was the case with the cancellation of sermons by Ustaz Azhar Idrus and Ustaz Wadi Annuar in Selangor. Furthermore, there are concerns that this system could potentially be abused as a political tool to silence voices critical of the government, as well as questions about the competence of the assessment panel, which may lack the knowledge of the clerics being interviewed.

Overall, the controversy over credentials reflects a tension between two legitimate goals: the state's need to control religious discourse for the sake of public order and the individual's right to freely disseminate religious knowledge. While authorities view it as a necessary preventive measure, critics see it as an unreasonable restriction. The biggest challenge to the current system is the explosion of social media, which allows preachers to disseminate their content widely without physical permission. This digital reality renders existing law enforcement, designed for physical spaces, increasingly irrelevant and forces authorities to rethink regulatory methods in an era where the boundaries of preaching can no longer be controlled by state permits.

CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of preacher certification policies in Indonesia and Malaysia reveals two fundamentally different models of religious governance, shaped by the unique political, legal, and social landscapes of each country. Despite the common objective of regulating religious discourse, a close examination reveals notable discrepancies in their underlying rationales, the mechanisms through which they are executed, and the entities responsible for their implementation. The most fundamental difference between the two nations' approaches to religious policy lies in their primary objectives. In Indonesia, policies are explicitly driven by security imperatives to counter radicalism. In Malaysia, the primary focus is on preserving doctrinal purity and orthodoxy.

In Indonesia, programs initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) are rooted in concerns about the spread of extremist ideology and terrorism. The objective is to establish a cadre of preachers who not only disseminate moderate Islam (*Wasathiyah*), but also possess a robust nationalist perspective and demonstrate allegiance to the principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. However, the top-down approach of the state has encountered significant opposition from prominent religious civil society organizations, including the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah. The program is regarded by religious authorities as an unwarranted state intervention into the realm of religious authority, which they believe to be their domain. Consequently, the policy culminated in a compromise: the establishment of a voluntary "certified preacher" program, which functions primarily as a credential for enhancing competencies rather than a mandatory license to preach.

In contrast, the *tauliah* system in Malaysia is a binding legal obligation, not a voluntary option. This policy is not centralized but rather falls under the jurisdiction of each state, administered by the Majlis or Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri (JAIN). The primary objective of this institution is to ensure that all public Islamic teachings align with the official creed of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah and the Shafi'i school of thought. In addition, it is tasked with the filtration of teachings deemed heretical. According to Sharia law, the act of preaching without *tauliah* is considered a criminal offense, punishable by financial penalties and incarceration. This stringent framework is indicative of Malaysia's constitutional structure, wherein the Sultan serves as the paramount religious authority within his respective state, thereby conferring upon state religious institutions considerable legal authority to enforce doctrinal orthodoxy.

A notable distinction emerges when contrasting these approaches, underscoring their unique features and implications. The Indonesian model is the result of negotiations within a pluralistic

democratic space, where state authority over religion must compete and compromise with civil society forces. The result is a persuasive soft power approach. In contrast, the Malaysian model is a manifestation of the state's legally regulated hard power, where doctrinal compliance is enforced through bureaucracy and sanctions. However, despite these fundamental differences, both countries face a growing common challenge: the explosion of religious proselytizing in digital media. Virtual platforms such as YouTube and TikTok operate outside the reach of physical tauliah jurisdiction and voluntary certification programs, creating a largely unregulated arena for religious discourse that challenges the effectiveness of both models of state control in the digital age.

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