

Religious Governance and Structural Da'wah: Institutional Transformation of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs in Public Policy Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the institutional transformation of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia) within the framework of public policy and structural da'wah in response to the evolving socio-political and religious dynamics of Indonesian society. Employing a qualitative approach through document analysis and library research, this study analyzes government regulations, academic literature, policy documents, and previous scholarly studies related to religious governance, religious moderation, and state-religion relations in Indonesia. The findings reveal that the Ministry of Religious Affairs has experienced a significant paradigm shift from a predominantly administrative and doctrinal institution toward a more dialogical, inclusive, and service-oriented religious bureaucracy. In this context, religious policies such as religious moderation programs, zakat and waqf governance, halal assurance, and community religious development function not only as instruments of state regulation but also as mechanisms of structural da'wah aimed at strengthening social cohesion and public welfare. However, the implementation of these policies continues to face several structural challenges, including bureaucratization of religion, political intervention, institutional fragmentation, and declining public trust in religious institutions. This study contributes to the discourse on religious governance by highlighting the complex interaction between religion, state authority, and public policy in contemporary Indonesia. The study further argues that strengthening transparent, participatory, and collaborative governance is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of religious policy and promoting inclusive religious development in a pluralistic society.

Keywords: *religious governance, structural da'wah, public policy, institutional transformation, Ministry of Religious Affairs Indonesia*

Public Interest Statement

Religious policy plays an important role in shaping social harmony, public trust, and community welfare in multicultural societies such as Indonesia. This study highlights how Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has transformed from a purely administrative institution into a strategic actor in promoting religious moderation, social inclusion, and community empowerment through public policy. By examining the relationship between religion, state

governance, and structural da'wah, this research provides insights into how religious institutions can contribute to social cohesion while facing challenges such as bureaucratization, political intervention, and declining public trust. The findings are relevant for policymakers, academics, and religious organizations seeking to strengthen inclusive and accountable religious governance in diverse societies.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and the state has become one of the most significant issues in contemporary public governance, particularly within pluralistic and multicultural societies. In many developing countries, religious institutions are no longer positioned merely as spiritual authorities but also as strategic actors involved in social regulation, political legitimacy, and public service delivery. In this context, religious governance has emerged as an increasingly important academic discourse that examines how states manage religious diversity, regulate religious institutions, and integrate religious values into public policy frameworks. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country with extensive religious diversity, presents a distinctive model of state-religion relations in which religion occupies a central place within the public sphere and national governance system. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia/Kemenag RI) serves as the primary state institution responsible for managing religious affairs, promoting interreligious harmony, administering religious education, organizing hajj services, and implementing religious moderation policies. In recent years, the institutional role of Kemenag RI has expanded significantly in response to challenges related to religious polarization, radicalism, bureaucratic reform, and increasing demands for inclusive governance within democratic society.

Previous studies have widely discussed the relationship between religion and public policy in Indonesia from various perspectives, including religious moderation, Islamic bureaucracy, governance of zakat and waqf, and state intervention in religious life. Studies by Azra (2022) and Salim (2022) emphasize that the institutionalization of religion through state bureaucracy reflects the historical evolution of Indonesia's political and religious landscape. Meanwhile, research conducted by Saputra (2023) and Muhtadi (2022) highlights the emergence of structural da'wah as a strategic mechanism through which the state disseminates religious values and promotes social transformation via public policy instruments. Other scholars focus on the governance dimension of religious institutions, particularly concerning transparency, legitimacy, and bureaucratic effectiveness in managing public religious services (Fitriyah, 2023; Supriyatno, 2023). Furthermore, the discourse on religious moderation promoted by Kemenag RI has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its role in countering extremism and strengthening social cohesion in Indonesia's diverse society (Taufiq & Alkholid, 2021). Although these studies provide important insights into religious governance and state-religion relations, much of the existing literature tends to examine religious policy from fragmented perspectives, focusing either on administrative governance, political Islam, or religious moderation separately.

Despite the growing body of literature, several important gaps remain insufficiently explored. First, previous studies have rarely integrated the perspectives of public policy and structural da'wah simultaneously in analyzing the institutional transformation of Kemenag RI. Most studies tend to position religious policy merely as an administrative or political instrument without adequately examining its function as a mechanism of social and religious transformation.

Second, limited attention has been given to how institutional changes within Kemenag RI reflect broader shifts in governance paradigms from bureaucratic control toward participatory, service-oriented, and inclusive religious governance. Third, existing scholarship often overlooks the tensions and contradictions arising from the increasing bureaucratization of religion, including issues of legitimacy, public trust, political intervention, and institutional fragmentation within religious governance structures. Consequently, there remains a need for a more comprehensive and critical analysis that connects institutional transformation, public policy, and structural da'wah within the broader framework of contemporary religious governance in Indonesia.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the institutional transformation of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs from the perspective of public policy and structural da'wah. Specifically, this study seeks to examine how Kemenag RI formulates and implements religious policies as instruments of religious governance and social transformation within Indonesia's pluralistic society. In addition, this research investigates the challenges faced by the institution in balancing its regulatory functions, public service responsibilities, and religious authority amid democratic transformation and increasing societal complexity. Through this approach, the study attempts to answer the following research questions: (1) How has the institutional paradigm of Kemenag RI transformed within the context of public policy and religious governance? (2) How do religious policies function as instruments of structural da'wah and social transformation? and (3) What challenges and criticisms emerge in the implementation of religious governance within contemporary Indonesian society?

This study contributes to the existing literature in several important ways. Theoretically, the study develops an integrated analytical framework that combines religious governance, public policy, and structural da'wah perspectives to understand the institutional transformation of religious bureaucracy in Indonesia. Empirically, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of how Kemenag RI operates not only as a state administrative institution but also as an agent of religious and social transformation within democratic governance. Methodologically, the study enriches qualitative policy analysis by employing document analysis and institutional interpretation to examine the interaction between religion, bureaucracy, and governance structures. Furthermore, this study offers practical contributions by providing critical insights for policymakers, religious institutions, and civil society organizations regarding the importance of transparent, inclusive, and collaborative religious governance in strengthening social harmony, religious moderation, and public trust in multicultural societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The discussion on religious governance has become increasingly important in contemporary public policy studies, particularly in countries where religion plays a substantial role in the social and political order. Religious governance refers to the ways in which states regulate, manage, and institutionalize religious affairs within public life through laws, policies, and bureaucratic mechanisms (Bader, 2021). In pluralistic societies, religious governance involves balancing state authority, religious freedom, and social harmony while maintaining political legitimacy and democratic stability. Within this framework, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia/Kemenag RI) represents a unique institutional model in which religion is integrated into the formal governance

structure of the state. Unlike secular states that strictly separate religion from public affairs, Indonesia adopts a governance model that recognizes religion as an essential component of national identity and social cohesion (Ramage, 2020). Consequently, Kemenag RI functions not only as an administrative institution but also as a strategic actor responsible for regulating religious life, promoting moderation, and facilitating interreligious relations within Indonesian society.

From the perspective of public policy theory, religious policy can be understood as a set of government actions designed to influence religious practices, institutional arrangements, and public religious behavior. Dye (2017) defines public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do, implying that state involvement in religious affairs reflects broader political priorities and governance objectives. In Indonesia, religious policies encompass areas such as religious education, halal certification, hajj administration, zakat and waqf governance, and religious moderation programs. These policies are formulated and implemented through bureaucratic processes that involve negotiations between the state, religious organizations, political actors, and civil society groups. According to Fukuyama (2020), the effectiveness of public institutions depends largely on state capacity, institutional legitimacy, and governance quality. Therefore, analyzing Kemenag RI requires understanding how institutional structures, policy frameworks, and bureaucratic dynamics interact in shaping religious governance outcomes within a democratic and multicultural society.

In addition to public policy perspectives, this study employs the concept of structural da'wah as a central analytical framework. Structural da'wah refers to the process of disseminating Islamic values and promoting social transformation through institutional and political mechanisms rather than solely through individual preaching or cultural persuasion (Aziz, 2021). Unlike conventional da'wah approaches that emphasize religious sermons and moral instruction, structural da'wah utilizes state institutions, regulations, and public programs as instruments for shaping social behavior and strengthening religious values within society. Kemenag RI exemplifies this approach through policies promoting religious moderation, community empowerment, Islamic education, and economic redistribution through zakat and waqf institutions. Muhtadi (2022) argues that structural da'wah has become increasingly significant in modern Muslim societies because religious transformation can no longer rely exclusively on cultural approaches but requires institutional support and policy intervention. In this sense, religious bureaucracy functions not merely as an administrative apparatus but as a mechanism for implementing Islamic social transformation within the public sphere.

To further explain institutional transformation within Kemenag RI, this study adopts the perspective of new institutionalism, particularly historical institutionalism. According to March and Olsen (2018), institutions shape political behavior not only through formal regulations but also through norms, routines, and organizational cultures that evolve over time. Historical institutionalism emphasizes that institutional change occurs incrementally through processes such as layering, adaptation, and reinterpretation rather than sudden revolutionary shifts. The transformation of Kemenag RI from a predominantly administrative and doctrinal institution into a more service-oriented and participatory bureaucracy reflects broader changes in Indonesia's political and democratic environment after the Reformasi era. This institutional evolution demonstrates how religious bureaucracy adapts to increasing public demands for transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance while maintaining its religious legitimacy and regulatory

authority.

Furthermore, this study is grounded in the grand theory of governance and institutional legitimacy. Institutional legitimacy refers to the extent to which institutions are perceived as appropriate, trustworthy, and aligned with societal values and expectations (Suchman, 1995). Public trust in religious institutions significantly influences policy effectiveness, especially in societies where religion has strong moral and cultural authority. However, religious bureaucracy frequently faces legitimacy challenges due to corruption, political intervention, bureaucratic inefficiency, and perceived state domination over religious affairs. Several scholars argue that the bureaucratization of religion may reduce institutional credibility by transforming religious values into rigid administrative procedures detached from community realities (Habermas, 2021). Therefore, maintaining institutional legitimacy requires transparent governance, responsive public services, and policies that respect religious diversity and democratic values. Through these theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes Kemenag RI as a dynamic institution operating at the intersection of religion, governance, public policy, and social transformation within contemporary Indonesia.

Research Proposition

Existing literature demonstrates that religious governance in Indonesia has undergone substantial transformation in response to democratization, globalization, and increasing societal pluralism. Studies on Kemenag RI consistently show that the institution has expanded its role beyond administrative management toward broader functions involving social integration, religious moderation, and public service delivery (Salim, 2022; Saputra, 2023). Research conducted by Taufiq and Alkholid (2021) indicates that religious moderation programs initiated by Kemenag RI contribute significantly to strengthening tolerance and reducing religious polarization within Indonesian society. Similarly, Fitriyah (2023) argues that collaborative governance between religious institutions and civil society organizations enhances policy legitimacy and improves the effectiveness of religious development programs. These findings suggest that religious bureaucracy can function as an important mechanism for promoting inclusive governance and social cohesion in multicultural societies.

However, previous studies also reveal significant tensions and criticisms regarding the increasing institutionalization and bureaucratization of religion. Azra (2022) and Supriyatno (2023) emphasize that state involvement in religious affairs often creates political contestation over religious authority and legitimacy. Excessive bureaucratic control may weaken community autonomy, limit religious diversity, and generate public distrust toward state religious institutions. Furthermore, several scholars argue that religious governance in Indonesia remains vulnerable to political intervention, administrative inefficiency, and fragmented policy implementation (Muhtadi, 2022; Lembong, 2023). These studies indicate that institutional transformation within Kemenag RI is characterized by both opportunities and challenges, particularly concerning its ability to balance state authority, democratic governance, and religious legitimacy.

Building upon these theoretical and empirical discussions, this study proposes that the institutional transformation of Kemenag RI reflects a broader shift from administrative religious bureaucracy toward collaborative and service-oriented religious governance. Furthermore, this study argues that religious policies implemented by Kemenag RI function as instruments of structural da'wah aimed at promoting social transformation, religious moderation, and public

welfare. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends significantly on institutional legitimacy, governance transparency, and the capacity of the institution to negotiate tensions between bureaucratic regulation and community autonomy. Through this proposition, the study seeks to provide a more integrated understanding of how religious governance operates within contemporary Indonesian public policy and democratic transformation.

Research Model

This study develops a conceptual model that explains the relationship between institutional transformation, religious governance, public policy, and structural da'wah within the context of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Institutional transformation is positioned as the central process through which Kemenag RI adapts its organizational structure, governance orientation, and policy strategies in response to changing social and political environments. Religious governance functions as the broader institutional framework that regulates the interaction between state authority, religious institutions, and society. Public policy serves as the operational mechanism through which governance objectives are translated into programs and regulations, including religious moderation initiatives, zakat and waqf management, halal certification, and community religious development. Meanwhile, structural da'wah represents the normative and transformative dimension of these policies, emphasizing the role of religious bureaucracy in promoting social harmony, moral values, and community empowerment.

Within this framework, the study assumes that effective religious governance depends on institutional legitimacy, collaborative governance practices, and policy responsiveness toward social diversity and democratic values. Conversely, weak governance capacity, excessive bureaucratization, and political intervention may reduce institutional effectiveness and public trust. Therefore, the conceptual model illustrates that institutional transformation within Kemenag RI is shaped by the interaction between governance structures, policy implementation, and broader socio-religious dynamics in Indonesian society. Through this model, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the evolving role of religious bureaucracy in contemporary public governance.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a descriptive-interpretative design to examine the institutional transformation of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia/Kemenag RI) within the framework of public policy and structural da'wah. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study seeks to understand complex social, institutional, and ideological dynamics that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative procedures. The research focuses on interpreting policy orientations, institutional changes, governance practices, and religious narratives embedded within state religious bureaucracy. In addition, this study adopts a library research and document analysis strategy to investigate how religious governance is conceptualized and implemented through public policy in Indonesia. This approach allows the researcher to critically explore institutional discourse, policy transformation, and the interaction between religion and state governance within contemporary Indonesian society.

The study is situated within the context of religious governance and public administration in Indonesia, particularly focusing on the institutional role of Kemenag RI as the central

governmental authority responsible for managing religious affairs. The primary data sources consist of official government regulations, ministerial policy documents, strategic plans, reports, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies related to religious governance, public policy, and structural da'wah. Key documents analyzed in this study include laws and regulations concerning religious moderation, zakat and waqf governance, religious education, halal certification, and public religious services. In addition, scholarly literature from reputable international and national journals indexed in Scopus and other recognized academic databases was systematically reviewed to strengthen the theoretical and analytical foundation of the study. The selection of documents was conducted purposively based on their relevance, credibility, accessibility, and contribution to understanding the institutional dynamics of Kemenag RI.

Data collection was conducted through systematic document analysis and literature review procedures. The process began with identifying and collecting relevant documents related to religious governance, institutional transformation, and public policy in Indonesia. Subsequently, the documents were classified according to thematic categories, including religious moderation, structural da'wah, religious bureaucracy, governance reform, and state–religion relations. Academic sources were obtained from books, scientific journals, government publications, and official institutional websites. To ensure data credibility and reliability, the study prioritized authoritative sources, peer-reviewed publications, and official state documents. The data collection process also involved note-taking, coding important themes, and organizing data based on the research objectives and analytical framework. Through these procedures, the study aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of religious governance within Kemenag RI.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. Qualitative content analysis was employed to interpret policy narratives, institutional discourse, and governance orientations embedded within official documents and academic literature. Meanwhile, thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns, conceptual themes, and critical issues related to institutional transformation, public policy, and structural da'wah. The analytical process consisted of several stages: data reduction, data categorization, thematic coding, interpretation, and synthesis of findings. The study also utilized an interpretative approach to examine how religious governance is socially and politically constructed within the Indonesian bureaucratic context. To strengthen analytical rigor, the findings were continuously compared with existing theories and previous empirical studies concerning governance, institutionalism, and religious policy. Through this systematic analytical process, the study seeks to generate credible, coherent, and theoretically grounded conclusions regarding the evolving role of Kemenag RI within Indonesia's contemporary religious governance system.

RESULT

Respondent and Document Characteristics

This study employed qualitative document analysis focusing on institutional transformation, religious governance, and structural da'wah within Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia/Kemenag RI). The primary sources consisted of official regulations, ministerial policy documents, strategic plans, academic publications, and previous empirical studies discussing religious governance, public policy, and

institutional reform in Indonesia. The selection of documents was conducted purposively to ensure relevance, credibility, and analytical significance in explaining the transformation of religious bureaucracy in contemporary Indonesia.

A total of 47 documents were analyzed, consisting of government regulations, ministerial decrees, policy reports, scholarly books, and peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. Most of the academic references originated from Scopus-indexed journals and reputable international publishers to ensure the validity and academic rigor of the study.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Documents

No	Type of Document	Number of Documents	Percentage
1	Government Regulations and Policies	14	29.8%
2	Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles	20	42.6%
3	Academic Books	8	17.0%
4	Institutional Reports and Strategic Plans	5	10.6%
Total		47	100%

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026).

The analysis demonstrates that scholarly discussions regarding religious governance in Indonesia have increased significantly in recent years, particularly after the strengthening of religious moderation policies and bureaucratic reform within Kemenag RI. The dominance of journal articles indicates that issues related to state–religion relations, governance reform, and religious moderation have become major concerns within contemporary academic discourse.

Institutional Transformation of Kemenag RI

The findings reveal that Kemenag RI has undergone substantial institutional transformation from a predominantly administrative and doctrinal bureaucracy toward a more inclusive, collaborative, and service-oriented institution. Historically, the ministry functioned mainly as a state apparatus responsible for religious administration, hajj services, and religious education management. However, contemporary governance challenges, democratization, and increasing social pluralism have encouraged the institution to adopt broader governance functions emphasizing public service quality, interreligious harmony, and social empowerment. The transformation is reflected in the institutional shift from rigid bureaucratic control toward participatory governance practices involving collaboration with religious organizations, educational institutions, and civil society actors. This institutional change also indicates the increasing adaptation of Kemenag RI to democratic governance principles such as transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.

Table 2. Institutional Transformation of Kemenag RI

Institutional Dimension	Previous Orientation	Current Orientation
Governance Model	Administrative and hierarchical	Collaborative and participatory
Religious Approach	Doctrinal and regulatory	Inclusive and service-oriented
Policy Focus	Religious administration	Religious moderation and social

Public Engagement	Limited institutional interaction	empowerment Community-based collaboration
Bureaucratic Orientation	Centralized bureaucracy	Responsive public governance

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026).

The findings further indicate that institutional transformation within Kemenag RI is closely associated with broader political reforms in Indonesia after the Reformasi era. Democratic transition has increased public demands for accountable governance, transparency, and inclusive policy implementation. Consequently, Kemenag RI has gradually repositioned itself as a facilitator of religious harmony and social cohesion rather than merely functioning as a religious regulatory institution.

Religious Policy as Structural Da'wah

The study found that religious policies implemented by Kemenag RI function not only as administrative instruments but also as mechanisms of structural da'wah aimed at promoting religious values, social harmony, and community empowerment. Structural da'wah within the context of state governance refers to the dissemination of Islamic ethical principles through institutional frameworks, public policies, and bureaucratic programs. Several strategic policies demonstrate this transformation, including religious moderation programs, zakat and waqf governance, halal product assurance, Islamic education reform, and community religious development. These programs integrate religious values into governance practices while simultaneously addressing broader socio-economic challenges.

Table 3. Main Religious Governance Programs of Kemenag RI

Program	Policy Orientation	Social Objective
Religious Moderation	Tolerance and inclusivity	Social harmony
Zakat and Waqf Governance	Economic redistribution	Community empowerment
Halal Product Assurance	Religious service protection	Consumer trust
Islamic Education Reform	Educational modernization	Human resource development
Interreligious Dialogue	Conflict prevention	National integration

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026).

The implementation of these policies demonstrates that Kemenag RI increasingly positions religion as a strategic resource for social transformation rather than merely as a doctrinal framework. The institutionalization of structural da'wah through public policy reflects the integration of religious values into governance systems intended to strengthen social welfare and national cohesion.

Governance Challenges and Institutional Criticism

Despite the positive transformation, the findings also reveal several structural and institutional challenges faced by Kemenag RI. One of the major issues concerns the bureaucratization of religion, where religious values are increasingly translated into rigid administrative procedures that may reduce institutional flexibility and responsiveness to local religious dynamics.

The study also identified persistent concerns regarding institutional legitimacy, political intervention, and public trust. Cases related to corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and politicization of religious issues have negatively affected public perceptions toward religious institutions managed by the state.

Table 4. Major Challenges in Religious Governance

No	Challenges	Institutional Impact
1	Bureaucratization of religion	Reduced institutional flexibility
2	Political intervention	Weakening institutional neutrality
3	Public trust crisis	Declining institutional legitimacy
4	Policy fragmentation	Ineffective governance coordination
5	Administrative inefficiency	Limited policy implementation

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026).

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that governance effectiveness depends significantly on collaboration between the state and civil society organizations. Religious governance cannot rely solely on centralized bureaucratic authority because religious issues involve complex social and cultural dimensions requiring participatory approaches and institutional dialogue.

The study also found that collaborative governance practices involving Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah contribute positively to policy legitimacy and public acceptance. Such collaboration strengthens policy implementation, enhances institutional trust, and reduces tensions between state authority and religious communities.

DISCUSS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the institutional transformation of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia/Kemenag RI) reflects a broader shift in religious governance within contemporary democratic societies. The transformation from a predominantly administrative and doctrinal bureaucracy toward a more collaborative, inclusive, and service-oriented institution confirms that religious governance in Indonesia is increasingly influenced by democratic reform, globalization, and the growing complexity of social pluralism. This finding supports the argument proposed by Fukuyama (2020) that state institutions must continuously adapt their governance capacities to maintain legitimacy and effectiveness within rapidly changing political and social environments. In the Indonesian context, Kemenag RI no longer functions merely as a regulator of religious affairs but has evolved into an institutional actor responsible for maintaining social cohesion, religious moderation, and public trust in a multicultural society.

The transformation identified in this study is closely related to the concept of religious governance, which emphasizes the interaction between state authority, religion, and public administration in managing religious diversity (Bader, 2021). The findings reveal that Kemenag RI increasingly adopts collaborative governance practices involving religious organizations, civil

society actors, and local communities in implementing religious policies. This result aligns with the collaborative governance framework proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008), which argues that complex public issues cannot be effectively addressed through hierarchical bureaucracy alone but require participatory engagement and institutional cooperation among multiple stakeholders. In practice, Kemenag RI's collaboration with organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in promoting religious moderation and community empowerment demonstrates the importance of institutional partnership in strengthening policy legitimacy and public acceptance.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that religious policy in Indonesia functions not only as a regulatory mechanism but also as an instrument of structural da'wah. This study supports Aziz's (2021) argument that structural da'wah represents the institutionalization of Islamic values through state policies, governance systems, and bureaucratic programs designed to facilitate social transformation. Programs related to religious moderation, zakat and waqf governance, halal product assurance, and Islamic education reform illustrate how religious values are operationalized through public policy frameworks. In this regard, Kemenag RI acts as both a state bureaucracy and a moral institution that seeks to integrate religious principles into social governance. The implementation of structural da'wah through public policy reflects a significant expansion of the traditional understanding of da'wah, shifting from individual religious preaching toward institutional and systemic social transformation.

The emphasis on religious moderation found in this study also reflects Indonesia's broader strategy to address religious polarization, intolerance, and extremism. The findings support previous studies conducted by Taufiq and Alkholid (2021), who argue that religious moderation has become a central policy discourse within Indonesian religious governance. The moderation framework promoted by Kemenag RI emphasizes tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and acceptance of local traditions as key principles for strengthening social harmony. This policy orientation is particularly important in Indonesia's multicultural society, where religious diversity often intersects with political contestation and identity-based mobilization. The study therefore confirms that religious moderation serves not only as a theological discourse but also as a governance strategy aimed at preserving democratic stability and national integration.

However, this study also reveals significant institutional challenges related to the bureaucratization of religion. The increasing institutionalization of religious governance through administrative procedures, regulations, and state control may unintentionally reduce institutional flexibility and weaken community autonomy in religious practices. This finding is consistent with Habermas's (2021) theory concerning the colonization of the lifeworld, where bureaucratic systems increasingly dominate social and cultural spheres that were previously governed by community values and communicative interaction. In the context of Kemenag RI, excessive bureaucratization risks transforming religion into a rigid administrative object rather than a dynamic social and spiritual practice. Consequently, the challenge for religious governance lies in balancing bureaucratic efficiency with the preservation of religious diversity, community participation, and social responsiveness.

In addition, the findings indicate that institutional legitimacy remains a crucial issue in religious governance. Public trust toward Kemenag RI has been affected by bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption scandals, and political intervention in religious affairs. This supports Suchman's (1995) theory that institutional legitimacy depends on public perceptions regarding

the appropriateness, credibility, and trustworthiness of institutional actions. The study confirms previous findings by Supriyatno (2023) and Lembong (2023), who argue that crises of public trust toward religious institutions can weaken policy effectiveness and reduce institutional authority within society. Therefore, strengthening governance transparency, accountability, and institutional professionalism is essential for restoring public confidence in religious bureaucracy.

The study also highlights tensions between state authority and societal autonomy in the management of religious affairs. Although the Indonesian government positions itself as a facilitator of religious harmony, state intervention in religious governance frequently generates debates concerning religious freedom and institutional neutrality. This finding supports Salim's (2022) argument that Indonesia's religious governance model reflects continuous negotiation between democratic governance, Islamic aspirations, and state control. Kemenag RI operates within a highly contested institutional arena where political interests, religious authority, and bureaucratic structures interact dynamically. As a result, religious policy implementation often involves balancing competing demands between maintaining national stability and respecting the autonomy of religious communities.

From the perspective of institutional theory, the transformation of Kemenag RI reflects processes of institutional adaptation and incremental change as described by historical institutionalism (March & Olsen, 2018). Rather than experiencing radical institutional replacement, Kemenag RI has gradually incorporated new governance values such as transparency, participation, and public service orientation while retaining its historical bureaucratic structure. This institutional layering demonstrates how religious bureaucracy adapts to democratic transformation without completely abandoning its traditional administrative foundations. The study therefore contributes to institutional governance literature by illustrating how religious institutions in developing democracies evolve through gradual adaptation rather than abrupt structural change.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by integrating public policy, religious governance, and structural da'wah into a unified analytical framework. Previous studies often examined religious bureaucracy either from political, theological, or administrative perspectives separately. In contrast, this study demonstrates that institutional transformation within Kemenag RI can only be fully understood by examining the interaction between governance structures, religious authority, public policy, and social transformation simultaneously. This integrated perspective enriches contemporary discussions concerning state-religion relations in Muslim-majority democracies and offers a broader understanding of how religious institutions operate within modern governance systems.

Practically, the findings imply that effective religious governance requires not only administrative capacity but also collaborative engagement, institutional legitimacy, and participatory governance mechanisms. Policymakers should strengthen partnerships between Kemenag RI, religious organizations, educational institutions, and civil society groups to enhance policy implementation and public trust. Furthermore, religious policies should prioritize inclusivity, transparency, and responsiveness to social diversity in order to prevent bureaucratic domination and political instrumentalization of religion. Strengthening digital governance, public accountability systems, and community participation may also improve the effectiveness of religious governance programs in Indonesia.

Finally, this study demonstrates that Indonesia represents a distinctive model of religious governance in which religion remains deeply integrated into public administration and democratic governance. Unlike secular governance systems that separate religion from the state, Indonesia's governance model illustrates how religious institutions can simultaneously function as administrative bodies, moral authorities, and instruments of social transformation. The Indonesian experience therefore offers important insights for other multicultural and Muslim-majority societies seeking to balance religious authority, democratic governance, and social cohesion within increasingly complex political environments.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the institutional transformation of Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia/Kemenag RI) reflects a significant shift in contemporary religious governance within a democratic and pluralistic society. The findings reveal that Kemenag RI has evolved from a predominantly administrative and doctrinal bureaucracy into a more collaborative, inclusive, and service-oriented institution that integrates religious values into public governance frameworks. Religious policies related to religious moderation, zakat and waqf governance, halal assurance, and community religious development function not only as regulatory mechanisms but also as instruments of structural da'wah aimed at promoting social cohesion, religious harmony, and public welfare.

The study further confirms that effective religious governance depends on institutional legitimacy, collaborative engagement with civil society, and the ability of religious bureaucracy to balance state authority with community participation and democratic values. The study contributes theoretically by integrating perspectives of religious governance, public policy, and structural da'wah into a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding institutional transformation within religious bureaucracy. Practically, the findings imply that policymakers should strengthen transparent, participatory, and accountable governance mechanisms to enhance public trust and improve the effectiveness of religious policies in multicultural societies.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research relies primarily on qualitative document analysis and secondary data, which limits direct observation of policy implementation and community responses at the grassroots level. In addition, the study focuses mainly on institutional dynamics within the Indonesian context, thereby limiting broader comparative generalization with other countries. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ empirical field studies, comparative approaches, and mixed-method designs to examine how religious governance and structural da'wah operate across different socio-political and cultural settings.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, R.R. and F.A.H.; methodology, R.R.; validation, R.R., F.A.H., and M.F.; formal analysis, R.R.; investigation, R.R. and F.A.H.; resources, M.Y.; data curation, R.R.; writing—original draft preparation, R.R.; writing—review and editing, M.F. and M.Y.; visualization, F.A.H.; supervision, M.Y.; project administration, R.R.; funding acquisition, not applicable. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT by [OpenAI](#) to assist in language refinement, academic paraphrasing, and manuscript structuring. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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