

Policing Islamic Orthodoxy: Classificatory Authority and the Institutional Translation of Majelis Ulama Indonesia Fatwas

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Abstract

Fatwas issued by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) are not formally binding as state law. However, in practice, they delineate the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy and generate social and administrative consequences. While previous studies have examined MUI's authority and the politics of orthodoxy at the national level, less attention has been given to how theological classifications produced by regional MUI boards generate varying consequences across different local contexts. This article examines how regional MUI boards exercise classificatory authority over teachings deemed deviant and the mechanisms through which such classifications produce effects beyond the fatwa-issuing institution. Drawing on a qualitative comparative case study of five fatwas issued by the MUI provincial boards in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra, the study combines documentary analysis with semi-structured interviews conducted during fieldwork from May to September 2024. Employing the concepts of symbolic power and classificatory authority, the article finds that MUI engages in Islamic creed policing through processes of identification, investigation, clarification, normative classification, and correction of teachings positioned outside the boundaries of orthodoxy. This practice is predominantly protective-consolidative in North Sulawesi and protective-legitimative in North Sumatra. These variations, however, cannot be explained by majority-minority demographics alone. Rather, they emerge from the interaction of case-specific characteristics, MUI-state relations, and local institutional networks. The article argues that the regulatory significance of fatwas lies less in their formal legal force than in MUI's symbolic authority to produce classifications recognized as authoritative and, through institutional translation, capable of generating governance effects without becoming state law.

[Fatwa yang diterbitkan oleh Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) secara formal tidak memiliki daya ikat sebagaimana hukum negara. Namun, dalam praktiknya, fatwa tersebut menentukan batas-batas ortodoksi Islam dan menghasilkan konsekuensi sosial maupun administratif. Meskipun studi terdahulu telah mengkaji otoritas MUI dan politik ortodoksi pada tingkat nasional, masih terbatas perhatian terhadap bagaimana klasifikasi teologis yang dihasilkan oleh MUI daerah menimbulkan konsekuensi yang beragam dalam konteks lokal yang berbeda. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana MUI daerah menjalankan otoritas klasifikasi terhadap ajaran yang dinilai menyimpang dan mekanisme melalui mana klasifikasi tersebut menghasilkan efek di luar lembaga penerbit fatwa. Dengan menggunakan studi kasus komparatif kualitatif terhadap lima fatwa yang diterbitkan oleh MUI tingkat provinsi di Sulawesi Utara dan Sumatera Utara, penelitian ini menggabungkan

analisis dokumen dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur yang dilakukan selama penelitian lapangan pada Mei hingga September 2024. Dengan menggunakan konsep kekuasaan simbolik dan otoritas klasifikasi, artikel ini menemukan bahwa MUI menjalankan pengawasan terhadap akidah Islam melalui proses identifikasi, investigasi, klarifikasi, klasifikasi normatif, dan koreksi terhadap ajaran yang ditempatkan di luar batas-batas ortodoksi. Praktik ini secara dominan bersifat protektif-konsolidatif di Sulawesi Utara dan protektif-legitimatif di Sumatera Utara. Namun, variasi tersebut tidak dapat dijelaskan semata-mata oleh konfigurasi demografis mayoritas-minoritas. Sebaliknya, variasi tersebut muncul dari interaksi antara karakteristik spesifik kasus, relasi MUI-negara, dan jaringan institusional lokal. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa signifikansi regulatif fatwa tidak terutama terletak pada kekuatan hukum formalnya, melainkan pada otoritas simbolik MUI untuk menghasilkan klasifikasi yang diakui sebagai otoritatif dan, melalui translasi institusional, mampu menghasilkan efek tata kelola tanpa harus menjadi hukum negara.]

Keywords: Classificatory Authority, Deviant Sect, Fatwa, Institutional Translation, Islamic Orthodoxy, Majelis Ulama Indonesia.

Introduction

Debates over the boundaries between orthodoxy and heterodoxy are central to the relationship among Islamic law, religious authority, and the state across Muslim societies. This issue is particularly salient in matters of *‘aqidah* (Islamic creed), especially when a group develops interpretations of prophecy, revelation, sources of religious doctrine, the nature of God, or fundamental ritual obligations that differ from established teachings, thereby raising questions about whether such beliefs can still be situated within the boundaries of what is recognized as legitimate Islam. The designation of a teaching as “deviant,” therefore, is not merely a theological judgment but also an act of classification that delineates the boundary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy while raising questions about who has the authority to draw that boundary and what social and institutional consequences may follow.¹ Experiences across different countries demonstrate that the relationship between religious classification and the state takes different forms. In Pakistan, for example, the Ahmadiyya, who identify themselves as Muslims, were constitutionally classified as non-Muslims in 1974 and subsequently subjected to various forms of state restriction.² In Malaysia, by contrast, fatwa institutions occupy a more institutionalized position within state-level legal structures, such that, through gazettelement procedures and applicable legal mechanisms, fatwas concerning teachings classified as deviant may acquire legal and administrative consequences.³ These differences demonstrate that the force of a religious judgment is determined not only by its theological substance but also by the institutional authority that produces it and its relationship to structures of state power.⁴

¹ Ali Qadir, “When Heterodoxy Becomes Heresy: Using Bourdieu’s Concept of Doxa to Describe State-Sanctioned Exclusion in Pakistan,” *Sociology of Religion* 76, no. 2 (June 2015): 155–76.

² See: Qadir, 155–76; Sadia Saeed, “Pakistani Nationalism and the State Marginalisation of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7, no. 3 (2007): 132–52.

³ See: Yuki Shiozaki, “The Historical Origins of Control over Deviant Groups in Malaysia: Official Fatwā and Regulation of Interpretation,” *Studia Islamika* 22, no. 2 (August 2015): 205–32; M. Ridho Ilahi et al., “Fatwa Institutions in Handling Religious Blasphemy Crimes in Indonesia and Malaysia,” *Al-Ahkam* 34, no. 1 (March 2024): 33–62.

⁴ Fatima Zainab Rahman, “State Restrictions on the Ahmadiyya Sect in Indonesia and Pakistan: Islam or Political Survival?,” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (July 2014): 408–22.

In Indonesia, the relationship between religious authority and the state assumes a different configuration. Fatwas issued by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) are formally neither legislation nor regulations and do not, in themselves, possess the coercive force of state law. However, following the beginning of the reform period in 1998, MUI's position as a source of religious authority grew stronger alongside its efforts to reorient its institutional role from *khādim al-ḥukūmah* (servant of the government) to *khādim al-ummah* (servant of the Muslim community).⁵ Democratization expanded the space for religious expression and multiplied the actors competing to produce Islamic authority, while simultaneously creating greater opportunities for MUI to play an increasingly active role in defining the boundaries of orthodoxy through fatwas concerning Ahmadiyya, religious pluralism, liberalism, secularism, and various groups classified as *aliran sesat* (deviant sects).⁶ In such cases, fatwas function not only as normative responses to questions of Islamic law but also as instruments of boundary-making through processes of identification, examination, classification, and differentiation between beliefs regarded as orthodox and those positioned as deviant.⁷ This article uses the term '*aqidah* policing (policing of Islamic creed) to describe these practices. Drawing on the analytical shift from religious police to religious policing,⁸ the term is not intended to equate MUI with the police or to suggest that MUI possesses formal coercive authority. Rather, '*aqidah* policing refers here to practices through which recognized religious authorities examine, classify, correct, and regulate the boundaries of beliefs considered acceptable within Islam and, under certain conditions, produce normative classifications that may be used by social actors and state institutions.

Previous scholarship on MUI and fatwas in Indonesia can be categorized into three major strands. First, institutional-historical studies emphasize changes in MUI's position within the relationship between the state and society. This literature demonstrates that, since its establishment, MUI has occupied a distinctive position at the intersection of the '*ulamā*' (Muslim scholars), Muslim society, and the government, such that its fatwa authority cannot be separated from the configuration of religion-state relations. Following the fall of the New Order, MUI sought to distance itself from the political circumstances surrounding its establishment and reoriented itself from *khādim al-ḥukūmah* to *khādim al-ummah*.⁹ This repositioning coincided with an expansion of MUI's institutional role in several areas, particularly halal certification and Islamic finance, where certain regulatory changes produced

⁵ See: Moch. Nur Ichwan, "'Ulamā', State and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 1 (2005): 45–72; Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (May 2020): 21–35.

⁶ See: Piers Gillespie, "Current Issues in Indonesian Islam: Analysing the 2005 Council of Indonesian Ulama Fatwa No. 7 Opposing Pluralism, Liberalism and Secularism," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (May 2007): 202–40; Moch Nur Ichwan, "The Local Politics of Orthodoxy: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia in the Post-New Order Banten," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 6, no. 1 (June 2012): 166–94.

⁷ Ichwan, "The Local Politics of Orthodoxy," 166–94.

⁸ Martijn Oosterbaan and Tessa Diphooorn, "From Religious Police to Religious Policing," *Culture and Religion* 23, no. 3 (July 2023): 225–39.

⁹ Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy," 21–35; Moch Nur Ichwan, "3. Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy," in *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam* (ISEAS Publishing, 2018), 60–104.

institutional authority resembling a quasi-legislative function.¹⁰ Second, scholarship on the politics of orthodoxy, conservatism, and exclusion shifts attention from MUI's institutional position to how it exercises its authority to define the boundaries of Islam. This literature shows that, in the post-reform period, MUI became increasingly active in safeguarding orthodoxy, issuing normative judgments on matters of *'aqidah*, and responding to groups regarded as falling outside the boundaries of mainstream belief.¹¹ Fatwas and policies concerning Ahmadiyya, for example, demonstrate that the delineation of orthodoxy involves not only doctrinal differences but also the construction and maintenance of sociopolitical authority. At the same time, the exclusion of heterodox groups can contribute to the production of collective solidarity and a sense of "we-feeling."¹² However, the consequences of fatwas do not invariably follow a linear trajectory toward exclusion or violence. Controversial fatwas may also generate contestation and open spaces for debate over Islam, the state, and interreligious relations.¹³ Third, scholarship on the localization of MUI authority demonstrates that the politics of orthodoxy operates not only at the national level but also through MUI's regional branches. These studies reveal ideological heterogeneity across branches and show that the orientations of regional MUI boards are shaped by local sociopolitical configurations, their relationships with regional governments, and MUI's character as an institution perceived as both semi-official and semi-representative.¹⁴ Therefore, the consequences of a fatwa cannot be understood solely through its normative content but must also be situated within the configuration of relationships among religious authorities, society, and state institutions in particular local contexts.

Although existing literature has explained MUI's institutional transformation, the politics of orthodoxy, and the connections between fatwas and the state, it has not sufficiently addressed why fatwas that share the same formally non-binding status can produce different social and administrative consequences across local contexts. To fill this gap, this article compares fatwas concerning teachings classified as deviant in two provinces with different demographic and institutional configurations: Muslims constitute a minority at the provincial level in North Sulawesi, whereas they constitute a majority in North Sumatra.¹⁵ This article argues that the capacity of regional MUI fatwas to regulate the boundaries of orthodoxy derives not primarily from their legally binding force but from

¹⁰ Tim Lindsey, "Monopolising Islam: The Indonesian Ulama Council and State Regulation of the 'Islamic Economy,'" *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 48, no. 2 (August 2012): 253–74.

¹¹ Ichwan, "Ulamā, State and Politics," 45–72; Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Treating Minorities with Fatwas: A Study of the Ahmadiyya Community in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 8, no. 3 (September 2014): 285–301.

¹² Jacqueline Hicks, "Heresy and Authority: Understanding the Turn against Ahmadiyah in Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 3 (September 2014): 321–39; Jeremy Menchik, "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (July 2014): 591–621.

¹³ Mun'im Sirry, "Fatwas and Their Controversy: The Case of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI)," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (February 2013): 100–117; Norshahril Saat, "Theologians 'Moralising' Indonesia?," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 44, nos. 4–5 (2016): 546–70.

¹⁴ Julian Millie and Linda Hindasah, "Regional Aspects of the Indonesian Ulama Council's Ideological Turn," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (May 2015): 260–81; Ichwan, "The Local Politics of Orthodoxy," 166–94.

¹⁵ See: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sulawesi Utara, *Provinsi Sulawesi Utara dalam Angka 2023* (Manado: BPS Provinsi Sulawesi Utara, 2023), 294; Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sumatera Utara, *Provinsi Sumatera Utara dalam Angka 2023* (Medan: BPS Provinsi Sumatera Utara, 2023), 251.

MUI's symbolic power to produce religious classifications that are recognized as authoritative. This classificatory authority is exercised through practices of '*aqidah*' policing, encompassing the identification, examination, clarification, normative classification, and correction of teachings positioned outside the boundaries of orthodoxy. Under certain conditions, these classifications undergo institutional translation, whereby MUI's theological judgments become relevant to the considerations, procedures, or actions of actors and institutions beyond the fatwa-issuing body without first being transformed into state law. The article demonstrates that the form and intensity of this translation are not determined by majority-minority demographics alone but emerge through their interaction with case-specific characteristics, MUI-state relations, recognition of MUI's authority, and local institutional networks. Therefore, the comparison between the two provinces is not intended to establish a deterministic causal relationship between demography and the consequences of fatwas but rather to explain how formally similar classificatory authority can generate different governance effects across distinct regional configurations.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using a comparative case study design to explain how MUI's fatwa authority operates in defining the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy and how the resulting religious classifications do or do not produce social and administrative consequences across different regional contexts. Fieldwork was conducted over five months, from May to September 2024, in the provinces of North Sulawesi and North Sumatra. These two provinces were purposively selected because they exhibit different demographic configurations: Muslims constitute a minority at the provincial level in North Sulawesi, whereas they constitute a majority in North Sumatra. This demographic difference is not treated as a single causal variable but rather as a contextual condition that enables the study to compare how the demographic position of Muslim communities interacts with case-

Table 1
Corpus of Provincial MUI Fatwas Analyzed

Issuing Institution	Fatwa Number	Object of the Fatwa	Date of Fatwa
North Sulawesi Provincial MUI	Fatwa No. 01 of 2015	Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq	February 6, 2015
North Sulawesi Provincial MUI	Fatwa No. 02 of 2019	Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect	August 8, 2019
North Sumatra Provincial MUI	Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006	Hirfi Nuzlan's Teachings in the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group/Naqsyabandiyah Jabal Hindi	June 14, 2006
North Sumatra Provincial MUI	Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013	Ar Rahman Study Group	May 24, 2013
North Sumatra Provincial MUI	Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013	Certain Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin in the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group	September 10, 2013

Source: Compiled from documents of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI and North Sumatra Provincial MUI (2025).

specific characteristics, MUI-government relations, institutional networks, and local social dynamics. The units of analysis consist of five fatwas issued by the provincial MUI boards of North Sulawesi and North Sumatra, selected according to three criteria: (1) they were issued after 1998; (2) the object of assessment was an identifiable religious movement, study group, Sufi order, or religious community; and (3) the document explicitly classified particular teachings as “deviant,” “heretical,” “deviant and misleading,” or contrary to Islamic teachings (see Table 1).

Table 2
Characteristics of Research Informants

Informant Code	Gender	Institutional Position	Location	Interview Date
SULUT-01	Male	General Chairman of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI	Manado	August 2024
SULUT-02	Male	Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI	Manado	August 2024
SULUT-03	Female	Secretary of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI	Manado	August 2024
SUMUT-01	Male	General Secretary of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI	Medan	July 2024
SUMUT-02	Male	Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI	Medan	July 2024
SUMUT-03	Male	Secretary of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI	Medan	July 2024

Source: Compiled from interview data (2025).

The data were collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The primary documentary sources included fatwas, meeting minutes or other meeting documentation, requests for fatwas, research and investigation reports, circular letters, recommendation letters, and documents issued by government agencies or other institutions that referred to, responded to, or followed up on the fatwas. In addition to the five documents constituting the case units, the study draws on several documents issued by the central MUI as supplementary normative sources, particularly the 1980 MUI Fatwa on the Qadiyan Ahmadiyya, the MUI Fatwa No. 11/MUNAS VII/MUI/15/2005 on the Ahmadiyya Sect, and the 2007 MUI National Working Meeting Fatwa on the Ten Criteria for Deviant Sects. These three documents are not treated as case units but are used to reconstruct the normative parameters that serve as points of reference for defining the boundaries of *‘aqīdah* and classifying religious deviance at the regional level. The documentary data were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with six key informants purposively selected based on their institutional positions and their involvement in or knowledge of the cases under study. The informants consisted of MUI officials and members of the Fatwa Commission or related commissions who were knowledgeable about the processes of receiving reports, examination, clarification, fatwa issuance, religious guidance, and MUI’s relations with government institutions. The interviews were primarily designed to reconstruct processes that could not be fully ascertained from the texts of the fatwas, including the institutional considerations underlying the decisions, clarification mechanisms,

understandings of the functions of fatwas, and relations with government institutions following the issuance of the fatwas.

The data were analyzed qualitatively through a systematic and comparative reading of fatwas, supporting documents, and interview data. The analysis draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, particularly his understanding of the capacity of actors and institutions with recognized authority to produce, name, and impose categories and divisions of the social world as legitimate.¹⁶ Building on this framework, the study employs "classificatory authority" as an analytical concept to explain MUI's capacity to produce religious classifications recognized as authoritative in defining the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy.¹⁷ Symbolic power is operationalized by tracing the sources of MUI's legitimacy, the procedures for examining cases and issuing fatwas, the use of normative sources, and the forms of recognition accorded to MUI's judgments by social actors and government institutions. Classificatory authority is treated as a concrete manifestation of symbolic power in the practice of defining the boundaries of orthodoxy and is operationalized by identifying the objects and grounds of classification, the normative categories employed—such as "deviant," "heretical," or "deviant and misleading"—the recommendations accompanying these classifications, and the responses of actors and institutions outside MUI. The analysis then traces how these classifications move beyond the internal domain of the fatwa-issuing institution and acquire relevance in social or administrative arenas. The findings from each case are subsequently compared across North Sulawesi and North Sumatra to identify similarities, differences, and variations in the operation of fatwa authority across distinct social and institutional configurations. The validity of the interpretations is maintained through triangulation of sources and methods and by consistently distinguishing among documentary content, informants' accounts, and the researcher's interpretation.

MUI and the Institutionalization of Classificatory Authority over Deviant Sects

The MUI occupies a distinctive position within the configuration of religious authority in Indonesia. Established on July 26, 1975, at the First National Congress of Ulama in Jakarta,¹⁸ MUI was created as a consultative body that brings together *'ulamā'*, *ḥu'ama'* (Muslim leaders), Muslim intellectuals, representatives of Islamic organizations, and religious representatives from state institutions.¹⁹ From its inception, this composition positioned MUI between the state and Muslim society. On one hand, MUI provides religious guidance to the Muslim community; on the other, it serves as an intermediary among the *'ulamā'*, Islamic organizations, Muslim society, and the government.²⁰ This position is crucial to understanding the sources of MUI's authority. the MUI does not derive its authority to make law from state legislative mechanisms; rather, it constructs its authority through its representation of the *'ulamā'*, religious expertise, institutional procedures, and recognition by

¹⁶ See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 14–25.

¹⁷ See: Pierre Bourdieu, Loïc J. D. Wacquant, and Samar Farage, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (March 1994): 1–18.

¹⁸ "Profil MUI," Majelis Ulama Indonesia, accessed August 29, 2025, <https://mui.or.id/profil-mui>.

¹⁹ Saat, "Theologians 'Moralising' Indonesia? 546–70."

²⁰ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Behind the Scenes: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975–1998)," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (May 2004): 148–51.

society and state institutions. From the perspective of symbolic power, this configuration enables MUI's religious judgments to be received as authoritative pronouncements. Fatwas, therefore, are not merely normative opinions in Islam but also constitute one of the principal means through which MUI constructs and exercises its religious authority.²¹

This authority is institutionalized through collective procedures for issuing fatwas. Within MUI's institutional structure, fatwas are principally issued by the Fatwa Commission. MUI's Guidelines for Fatwa Issuance distinguish between a fatwa as an *'ulamā'* response or explanation concerning a religious matter of general applicability and an MUI fatwa as a written decision on a religious matter that has received approval from commission members at a formal meeting.²² The issuance of a fatwa must refer to the Qur'an, hadith, *ijmā'* (consensus), *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), and other *mu'tabar* (authoritatively recognized) legal proofs and must be preceded by an examination of the issue in question and its social and religious implications.²³ These procedures are important not only as technical mechanisms of decision-making but also as means of establishing the legitimacy of the classifications produced by MUI. This authority is also distributed vertically. Through their respective Fatwa Commissions, provincial and regency or municipal MUI boards may issue fatwas on regional matters that have not yet been addressed by the central MUI, while highly sensitive matters require coordination and consultation with the central body.²⁴ MUI's fatwa structure thus combines normative standardization at the national level with scope for judgment at the regional level. This central-local relationship enables regional MUI boards to respond to religious issues arising within their respective jurisdictions without becoming entirely detached from the national normative framework.²⁵

The significance of this capacity increased following the end of the New Order. During the New Order, MUI's establishment and development occurred within a context of strong government involvement, requiring the institution to continually negotiate between the demands of Muslim society and the interests of the state.²⁶ The reform period in 1998 altered this dynamic without completely severing MUI's relationship with state institutions. At MUI's Sixth National Congress in 2000, the organization reaffirmed its reorientation from *khādim al-hukūmah* to *khādim al-ummah*.²⁷ This repositioning strengthened MUI's claim to represent the normative interests of the Muslim community while simultaneously increasing the significance of fatwas as instruments for shaping the religious agenda. However, this shift did not render MUI entirely independent of the state. Rather, their relationship became more relational: MUI retained its position as a non-state religious authority, while the government continued, in various domains, to recognize and draw upon MUI's religious expertise and

²¹ See: Lindsey, "Monopolising Islam," 253–74; Sandya Mahendra and Muhammad Junaidi, "The Position of the Indonesian Council of Ulama in The Indonesian State Governmental Legal System: The Perspective of Abū Ḥasan al-Māwardī," *Al-Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah dan Hukum* 8, no. 1 (June 2023): 1–15.

²² Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Pedoman Penetapan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, in *Peraturan Organisasi Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Jakarta: Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2016), 72–3.

²³ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Pedoman Penetapan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, 75–8.

²⁴ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Pedoman Penetapan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, 82–3.

²⁵ Hosen, "Behind the Scenes," 147–79.

²⁶ Hosen, "Behind the Scenes," 147–79.

²⁷ See: Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy," 21–35; Ichwan, "3. Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam," 60–104.

judgments.²⁸ An important characteristic of MUI fatwas in the post-New Order period, therefore, lies in the gap between their formal status and their social influence. Fatwas are not state law and do not possess legal coercive force in themselves,²⁹ yet MUI's symbolic authority enables them to define religious issues, shape the attitudes of the Muslim community, and, under certain conditions, serve as points of reference for institutions beyond MUI.³⁰

The domain of *'aqidah* most clearly demonstrates how this authority functions as a classificatory authority. One important precedent was MUI's 1980 fatwa on the Qadiyan Ahmadiyya, issued at its Second National Congress. After assessing Ahmadiyya teachings, MUI classified the group as "outside Islam, deviant, and misleading," while simultaneously emphasizing the need for engagement with the government to address the issue.³¹ A recommendation issued at MUI's 1984 National Working Meeting subsequently associated the presence of Ahmadiyya with social unrest, divisions in religious life, and public-order concerns, calling on the relevant authorities to reconsider its legal status. This pattern was reinforced by the MUI Fatwa No. 11/MUNAS VII/MUI/15/2005 on the Ahmadiyya Sect. In addition to reaffirming Ahmadiyya as a group outside Islam and as "deviant and misleading," the fatwa classified Muslims who followed its teachings as *murtadd* (apostates), urged its adherents to undertake *al-rujū' ilā al-ḥaqq* (return to the true teaching of Islam), and recommended that the government prohibit the dissemination of its teachings, suspend the organization, and close its places of activity.³² This series of decisions reveals two levels at which fatwa authority operates. At the first level, MUI engages in theological classification by determining the position of a particular teaching within the relationship between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.³³ At the second level, this classification is accompanied by recommendations concerning how the Muslim community and the government should respond to the group that has been classified.³⁴

This classificatory authority over deviant sects became increasingly standardized when MUI's National Working Meeting adopted the Ten Criteria for Deviant Sects on November 6, 2007.³⁵ Unlike fatwas directed at specific groups, these criteria provide general parameters

²⁸ See: Muhammad Lutfi Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions: Examining the Role of the Indonesian Ulama Council and Its Political Fatwa in Handling the Spread of Covid-19," *Khaṣanah Hukum* 5, no. 3 (December 2023): 230–44; Erni Budiwanti and Levi Geir Eidhamar, "The State and Religion in Indonesia: The Indonesian Ulama Council's Authority on Public Health and National Lottery," *Religions* 17, no. 1 (January 2026): 72.

²⁹ Lindsey, "Monopolising Islam," 253–74.

³⁰ See: Fuad Mustafid, Khoiruddin Nasution, and Ali Sodiqin, "Positivization of the Council of Indonesian Ulama's Halal Fatwa: Policy and Position in Indonesian Legislation," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 23, no. 1 (June 2024): 155–66; Abdullah Ghazali et al., "Islamic Institutional Advocacy Against Land Grabbing: A Comparative Analysis of MUI, Muhammadiyah, and NU in Indonesia," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran* 25, no. 1 (August 2025): 113–49.

³¹ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Ahmadiyah Qadiyan," in *Himpunan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2010), 41–42.

³² Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Aliran Ahmadiyah," in *Himpunan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2005), 101–5.

³³ Hicks, "Heresy and Authority," 321–39.

³⁴ Ichwan, "The Local Politics of Orthodoxy," 166–94.

³⁵ "Ketua MUI Bidang Fatwa Sampaikan 10 Kriteria Aliran Sesat," Majelis Ulama Indonesia, March 26, 2024, <https://mui.or.id/baca/berita/ketua-mui-bidang-fatwa-sampaikan-10-kriteria-aliran-sesat>.

for assessing religious teachings or doctrines. The parameters include: (1) denying one of the pillars of faith or pillars of Islam; (2) adhering to an *'aqīdah* that is inconsistent with *shar'ī* (Islamic legal) proofs; (3) believing in the existence of revelation after the Qur'an; (4) denying the authenticity of the Qur'an; (5) interpreting the Qur'an without adhering to established principles of Qur'anic exegesis; (6) denying the status of hadith as a source of Islamic teachings; (7) insulting or denying a prophet; (8) denying Muhammad's status as the final prophet and messenger; (9) altering the fundamental forms of worship that have been normatively prescribed; and (10) declaring fellow Muslims to be unbelievers without a *shar'ī* basis.³⁶ The significance of these guidelines lies not only in the substance of the criteria themselves but also in the institutionalization of a classificatory apparatus through which doctrinal diversity can be translated into normative categories such as “deviant,” “heretical,” or “deviant and misleading.” In this sense, classificatory authority constitutes a concrete manifestation of MUI's symbolic power: the capacity to name and categorize a teaching while simultaneously securing recognition of that category as an authoritative religious judgment.

Nevertheless, the existence of parameters established by the central MUI does not imply that classificatory practices at the regional level operate mechanically or uniformly. The Guidelines for Fatwa Issuance provide regional MUI boards with the authority to address religious matters specific to their regions that have not yet been addressed by the central MUI. The processes of identification, examination, clarification, categorization, and formulation of recommendations unfold within the unique social and institutional contexts of each region.³⁷ Regional variation within the MUI demonstrates that the institutional orientations and practices of regional boards do not merely replicate the positions of the central body but are also shaped by local sociopolitical conditions and their relationships with regional governments.³⁸ The relationship between the central and regional MUI boards in addressing groups classified as deviant can thus be understood as an interaction between normative standardization and institutional contextualization: the central body provides the parameters of orthodoxy and the framework of authority, while regional MUI boards apply and operationalize these in concrete cases. It is at this point that the practice of *'aqīdah* policing becomes analytically relevant. Building on the conceptual shift from religious police to religious policing,³⁹ this practice does not denote coercive authority of the kind exercised by state police but rather a series of institutional actions through which religious authorities identify suspected deviations, examine and clarify teachings, assign normative classifications, and determine appropriate responses to those teachings and their adherents. However, the capacity to classify does not uniformly produce the same consequences in every case. From the perspective of symbolic power, the effectiveness of classification depends on recognition of the authority that issues it. In the context of this study, the reach of MUI's classifications also depends on their interaction with actors and institutions beyond the fatwa-issuing

³⁶ The ten criteria serve as parameters for issuing fatwas concerning deviant sects, rather than constituting a fatwa against any particular group. See: Majelis Ulama Indonesia, “Keputusan Rapat Kerja Nasional MUI Mengenai Sepuluh Kriteria Aliran Sesat,” preprint, Jakarta, November 2007.

³⁷ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Pedoman Penetapan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, 82–3.

³⁸ Millie and Hindasah, “Regional Aspects of the Indonesian *Ulama* Council's Ideological Turn,” 260–81.

³⁹ Oosterbaan and Diphooorn, “From Religious Police to Religious Policing,” 225–39.

body.⁴⁰ This framework serves as the point of departure for examining the cases in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra: not merely to identify which teachings were classified as deviant, but to explain how classificatory authority was produced and exercised and how it generated different consequences within regional configurations where Muslims occupy minority and majority positions.

Fatwas of North Sulawesi Provincial MUI on Deviant Sects: Protecting ‘*Aqīdah*’ and Promoting Internal Consolidation

The North Sulawesi Provincial MUI is part of MUI’s institutional structure at the provincial level and performs functions related to religious guidance, coordination among ‘*ulama*’, and the provision of religious guidance to the Muslim community. Demographically, Muslims constitute a minority in the province.⁴¹ This context is important because studies of regional MUI boards demonstrate that their institutional orientations and fatwa practices do not always uniformly reproduce the policies of the central MUI but are also shaped by local social, religious, and political dynamics.⁴² In North Sulawesi, interview data indicate that allegations of religious deviance generally do not immediately result in the issuance of a fatwa. The process typically begins with reports from community members or religious leaders, followed by examination, clarification, and guidance directed toward the parties involved. A fatwa is considered a subsequent measure when doctrinal differences are deemed irresolvable through persuasive mechanisms.⁴³ This pattern demonstrates that MUI’s classificatory authority operates not merely through the assignment of religious categories but also through institutional procedures that establish the legitimacy of the classifications ultimately produced.

Table 3 presents two fatwas issued by the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI concerning teachings classified as deviant: Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq and Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan (LINI) Sufi Sect. Both cases demonstrate a shared protective function regarding ‘*aqīdah*’, but they differ in the extent of linkage between religious classification and government institutions. Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 called on the South Minahasa Regency Government to prohibit and monitor the dissemination of Nurul Insan Haq.⁴⁴ Fatwa No. 02 of 2019, meanwhile, provided more explicit recommendations, urging the government to prohibit the dissemination of LINI Sufi sect teachings, take legal action if dissemination continued, and provide rehabilitation and religious guidance to its followers.⁴⁵ The institutional response was also more visible in the LINI Sufi sect case, when the Bolaang Mongondow Regency Government, through the

⁴⁰ Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” 14–25.

⁴¹ See: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sulawesi Utara, *Provinsi Sulawesi Utara dalam Angka 2024* (Manado: BPS Provinsi Sulawesi Utara, 2024), 294.

⁴² See: Millie and Hindasah, “Regional Aspects of the Indonesian *Ulama* Council’s Ideological Turn,” 260–81; Ichwan, “The Local Politics of Orthodoxy,” 166–94.

⁴³ SULUT-02, “Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI,” (Manado), August 2024.

⁴⁴ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq,” February 6, 2015.

⁴⁵ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect,” August 8, 2019.

National Unity and Politics Agency (Kesbangpol), stated it would coordinate with the police and the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI).⁴⁶ This difference demonstrates that the protective-consolidative character of the North Sulawesi MUI does not imply an absence of state involvement. Religious guidance, correction, and the regulation of the Muslim community's internal boundaries remain the dominant orientation, while the extension of MUI's classifications into the administrative arena varies according to the characteristics and development of each case.

Table 3
Fatwas of North Sulawesi Provincial MUI on Teachings Classified as Deviant

Fatwa	Principal Issues Classified	Classification	Orientation of the Fatwa	Institutional Reach
Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq	Religious interpretations and practices deemed to lack an adequate basis in the Qur'an and hadith	The teachings were declared "deviant"; the teacher was instructed to cease disseminating them, and followers were directed to return to Islamic teachings	Protective-consolidative: safeguarding the boundaries of <i>'aqīdah</i> through the cessation of dissemination, religious guidance, and the return of followers	The government was asked to prohibit and monitor dissemination, but sufficient evidence of formal administrative enforcement has not been identified
Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect	Claims concerning "revelation," the use of dreams as a basis for religious teachings, veneration of the imam, the addition of a phrase following the <i>shahāda</i> , and <i>kaffāra</i> or charitable payments believed to remove the obligation to perform prayer	The group was declared "deviant and misleading"; followers who accepted its doctrines were declared <i>murtadd</i> , whereas social participants were not classified as <i>murtadd</i>	Protective-consolidative with external extension: classification accompanied by correction, religious guidance, rehabilitation, and reintegration	The government was asked to prohibit dissemination and take legal action; a response from the Kesbangpol indicating plans to coordinate with the police and the TNI was documented

Source: Compiled by the authors from fatwa documents, interview data, and research documentation (2023).

Fatwa on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq

North Sulawesi Provincial MUI Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 determined that the teachings propagated by Nurul Insan Haq deviated from Islamic teachings. In its considerations, the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI identified several issues, including understandings deemed to obscure Islamic teachings, interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith regarded as excessive or lacking a valid basis, and the emergence of social unrest in Wawontulap Village, South Minahasa. Based on this assessment, Nasir Katiandago was instructed to cease teaching and

⁴⁶ SULUT-01, "General Chairman of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI," (Manado), August 2024.

disseminating these doctrines, his followers were directed to return to orthodox Islamic teachings, and the South Minahasa Regency Government was asked to prohibit and monitor their dissemination.⁴⁷ Thus, the fatwa contained an external dimension from the outset through its recommendation to the government. However, its protective and consolidative character is more clearly reflected in the emphasis on clarification and religious guidance before the fatwa's issuance, with limited evidence of formal administrative enforcement following its issuance.

Normatively, the fatwa's reasoning was constructed through references to several Qur'anic verses, hadiths, and Islamic legal maxims. Qur'an 3:103 was invoked to affirm the obligation to preserve communal unity and adhere to God's teachings; Qur'an 4:59 emphasized obedience to God and the Messenger, as well as the referral of disputes back to the sources of religious teaching; Qur'an 5:3 affirmed the perfection of religion; Qur'an 2:79 was cited to reject the formulation of teachings subsequently attributed to God; Qur'an 59:7 affirmed the obligation to follow the Messenger; and Qur'an 17:85 placed limits on human claims to knowledge concerning the spirit. The cited hadiths reinforced the boundaries of faith, the obligation to follow the Sunnah, and the rejection of religious innovations deemed to lack a valid basis. Meanwhile, the Islamic legal maxims "*dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*" (preventing harm takes precedence over attaining benefit) and "*al-ḍarar yuzāl*" (harm must be removed) provided a basis for preventing harm and eliminating injury.⁴⁸ When read as an integrated whole, this structure of Islamic legal reasoning demonstrates that the fatwa not only assessed the substance of the teachings but also established the normative sources regarded as authoritative for defining the boundaries of orthodoxy.

The institutional dimension of this classification becomes more apparent in the process through which the fatwa was issued. The Nurul Insan Haq case originated with Letter No. KK.23.07/02/PW/2015, dated April 21, 2015, from the Head of the Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urussan Agama*, KUA) of Tombasian Subdistrict concerning the group's presence in Wawontulap Village. The letter contained a report on teachings disseminated by Nurul Insan Haq's leader, Nasir Katiandago, and was accompanied by teaching materials submitted for examination by the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI. Since the titles of these teaching materials are not specified in the research documents available for verification, this study does not identify them further.⁴⁹ After receiving the report, the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI conducted a series of examinations, including a working-group meeting with the head of the KUA and an investigation involving Nasir Katiandago, active followers, former followers, representatives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the KUA, and the regional MUI. The fatwa was subsequently adopted at a meeting of the North Sulawesi MUI Fatwa Commission on November 15, 2015.⁵⁰ This sequence demonstrates that the category of "deviant" was not an automatic response to a

⁴⁷ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, "Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq."

⁴⁸ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, "Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq."

⁴⁹ Head of the Tombasian Subdistrict Office of Religious Affairs, "Letter No. KK.23.07/02/PW/2015," April 21, 2015.

⁵⁰ SULUT-03, "Secretary of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI," (Manado), August 2024.

community report but was produced through processes of examination, clarification, and institutional assessment.⁵¹

From the perspective of symbolic power, these procedures are important because they demonstrate that MUI's authority resides not only in the ultimate designation of a teaching as "deviant" but also in its institutional capacity to determine the object of examination, the evidence considered relevant, the normative sources employed as standards of assessment, and the form of correction deemed appropriate. MUI's power, therefore, lies primarily not in its capacity to exercise legal coercion but in its ability to produce religious classifications recognized as legitimate and authoritative. In the Nurul Insan Haq case, this classificatory authority was directed primarily toward terminating the dissemination of the teachings, providing religious guidance, and returning followers to what MUI regarded as correct Islamic teachings. The protective function is evident in safeguarding the boundaries of *'aqidah*, while the consolidative function operates through efforts to maintain the internal normative cohesion of the Muslim community. Although the government was mentioned in the fatwa's recommendations, the available data are insufficient to demonstrate that the classification was subsequently translated into formal administrative action. The case, therefore, illustrates the strength of MUI's authority at the classificatory stage but a more limited reach at the stage of institutional translation.

Fatwa on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect

North Sulawesi Provincial MUI Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the LINI Sufi Sect presents a more complex pattern than the Nurul Insan Haq case. The case originated from a request by the Head of the KUA of Lolak Subdistrict through Letter No. B-0120/KUA.23.01.01/BA.00/4/2019, dated April 18, 2019.⁵² The Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI subsequently conducted several stages of examination, including a working group meeting, an investigation involving Syukron Mamonto and seven congregation members, a meeting with the Head of the KUA as well as current and former group members, and consideration of statements from former members. Following a deliberative session with the leadership of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, the fatwa was issued on August 8, 2019.⁵³ As in the Nurul Insan Haq case, this sequence demonstrates that religious classification was preceded by information gathering, examination, and clarification involving the parties whose teachings were under scrutiny.

Compared to the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI Fatwa No. 01 of 2015, Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 employs a more standardized normative framework. In addition to referencing the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic legal maxims, the fatwa explicitly cites the 2007 MUI National Working Meeting Fatwa on the Criteria for Deviant Sects and the 2015 Decision of the Fifth National Ijtimā' of MUI Fatwa Commissions concerning *ḍawābiṭ al-takfīr* (parameters of excommunication). Four principal teachings became the primary objects of assessment: (1) the claim that the imam received a mandate through "revelation"; (2) the use of dreams as a

⁵¹ SULUT-02, "Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI."

⁵² Head of the Lolak Subdistrict Office of Religious Affairs, "Letter No. B-0120/KUA.23.01.01/BA.00/4/2019," April 18, 2019.

⁵³ SULUT-03, "Secretary of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI."

basis for religious teachings; (3) the veneration of the imam accompanied by the addition of a particular expression after the two declarations of the *shahāda* (profession of faith); and (4) the payment of *kaffāra* (expiation) or charitable contributions believed to remove the obligation to perform the five daily prayers. The legal proofs invoked aimed to distinguish prophetic revelation from personal spiritual experience, limit the status of dreams as a normative source, affirm the valid form of the *shahāda*, and maintain the obligation to perform prayer as prescribed by the *Shari‘a* (Islamic law).⁵⁴ This structure of legal reasoning demonstrates a more explicit connection between MUI’s normative standardization at the national level and classificatory practices at the regional level.

Based on this normative framework, the North Sulawesi MUI classified the LINI Sufi sect as “deviant and misleading.” The fatwa then differentiated the status of followers according to their level of involvement in and acceptance of the group’s doctrines. Those who believed in the LINI Sufi sect’s teachings were declared *murtadd*, required to repent, and instructed to return to Islam. In contrast, those who participated only in the group’s social activities without accepting its doctrines were not declared *murtadd* but were instructed to leave the group as a measure of *sadd al-dhārī‘ah* (blocking the means to harm).⁵⁵ This differentiation demonstrates that the MUI’s classificatory authority was not applied uniformly to all members of the group. The extent to which individuals accepted the doctrines served as the basis for differentiating their religious status and the normative consequences imposed upon them. Thus, classification not only determined the group’s collective position but also distinguished the status of individuals according to their relationship to teachings deemed deviant.

A more significant difference emerged at the post-classification stage. Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 issued broader recommendations to the government, urging it to prohibit the dissemination of the teachings, take legal action if dissemination continued, provide rehabilitation and religious guidance, and guarantee the civil rights of former followers. Simultaneously, the public was encouraged to accept repentant individuals back into the community and to refrain from acts of violence.⁵⁶ This structure of recommendations demonstrates that the fatwa did not serve an exclusionary function solely. In addition to delineating boundaries and classifying deviance, it provided mechanisms for correction, rehabilitation, and reintegration for those willing to abandon teachings deemed deviant. ‘*Aqidah*’ policing, therefore, operates not only through defining the boundaries of orthodoxy but also through mechanisms governing the possibility of individuals’ return within those normative boundaries. In the LINI Sufi sect case, classificatory authority also received more visible institutional recognition. The response of the Bolaang Mongondow Regency Government through the Kesbangpol, which stated it would coordinate with the police and the TNI,⁵⁷ demonstrates that MUI’s religious judgment acquired relevance within the administrative arena. However, this evidence does not indicate that the fatwa itself became state law or automatically bound government officials. Rather, the available data more

⁵⁴ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect.”

⁵⁵ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect.”

⁵⁶ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect.”

⁵⁷ SULUT-02, “Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI.”

accurately indicate an initial stage of institutional translation, in which the theological classification produced by MUI began to serve as a point of reference for institutional coordination beyond MUI. The LINI Sufi sect case thus illustrates how MUI's symbolic power can extend beyond the internal domain of the fatwa-issuing institution through institutional recognition, without transforming MUI into an institution possessing formal coercive authority.

Fatwas of North Sumatra MUI on Deviant Sects: Protecting 'Aqīdah and Institutional Translation

Unlike in North Sulawesi, Muslims constitute a demographic majority in North Sumatra.⁵⁸ However, this majority position is not considered in this study as a factor that automatically confers stronger authority to the MUI. Instead, demography is understood as one contextual condition that interacts with case-specific characteristics, MUI-government relations, social mobilization, and the availability of institutional channels. This perspective is important because studies of regional MUI boards demonstrate that fatwa authority does not operate

Table 4

Fatwas of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI on Teachings Classified as Deviant

Fatwa	Principal Issues Classified	Classification	Fatwa Orientation	Institutional Reach
Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006 on the Teachings of Hirfi Nuzlan in the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group/Naqsyaban diyah Jabal Hindi	Views concerning the salvation of adherents of other religions, spiritual experiences involving the Angel Gabriel, and other teachings deemed inconsistent with Islamic orthodoxy	The teachings were deemed “deviant,” and the decision was upheld when reconsideration was requested	Protective-legitimative: the classification was used to safeguard the boundaries of 'aqīdah while also providing the basis for MUI's institutional position	Strong: the fatwa became intertwined with an MUI recommendation, the police licensing process, and an advisory issued by the Department of Religious Affairs
Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013 on the Ar Rahman Study Group	Esoteric interpretations of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, <i>qalam</i> , the Ka'ba, the human body, and the relationship between God and human beings	The teachings were declared “deviant from Islamic teachings”	Protective: establishing normative boundaries in relation to the teachings under scrutiny	Limited: social responses and rejection were documented, but evidence of a direct connection to government administrative action remains insufficient
Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013 on Certain Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin in the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group	Views concerning the creation of Adam, the payment of <i>zakāt</i> to a teacher, and the permissibility of certain marriages without a guardian or witnesses	Certain teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin were declared deviant from Islamic teachings	Protective-legitimative: the leader and followers were directed to repent and undertake <i>al-rujū' ilā al-ḥaqq</i>	Moderate: the classification was used in social mobilization and reports to law enforcement but did not constitute a state legal decision

Source: Compiled by the authors from fatwa documents, interview data, and research documentation (2023).

⁵⁸ See: Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sumatera Utara, *Provinsi Sumatera Utara dalam Angka 2023*, 251.

uniformly but is shaped by local social and political configurations.⁵⁹ In this study, this pattern is reflected in three fatwas issued by the North Sumatra Provincial MUI: Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006 on the Teachings of Hirfi Nuzlan in the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group/Naqsyabandiyah Jabal Hindi, Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013 on the Ar Rahman Study Group, and Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013 on Certain Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin in the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group. All three cases demonstrate a protective function with respect to *'aqidah*, but they differ in the extent to which the MUI's classifications extended beyond the internal domain of the fatwa-issuing institution to acquire social or administrative relevance.

Fatwa on the Teachings of Hirfi Nuzlan in the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group

The North Sumatra MUI Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006 addressed the teachings of Muhammad Hirfi Nuzlan within the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group/Naqsyabandiyah Jabal Hindi. Before issuing the fatwa, the North Sumatra MUI conducted an examination and clarification process involving the leader of the study group.⁶⁰ Several teachings were scrutinized, particularly views concerning the salvation of adherents of other religions and Hirfi Nuzlan's spiritual experiences associated with encounters with and guidance from the Angel Gabriel.⁶¹ According to the North Sumatra MUI's assessment, these matters were no longer considered merely individual Sufi experiences but had become teachings within the domain of *'aqidah* and thus could be evaluated according to the boundaries of orthodoxy recognized by the MUI.⁶² The implications of this assessment extended beyond theological classification. When a request was made to reconsider Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006, the North Sumatra MUI upheld its original decision. In December 2009, when the Babur Ridha group sought to organize a North Sumatra-level Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an for older adults, the North Sumatra MUI, through Letter No. 710/DP-P II/SR/XII/2009, declined to issue a recommendation, citing that its earlier decision remained in effect.⁶³ Simultaneously, the North Sumatra Regional Office of the Department of Religious Affairs issued an advisory urging the public to adhere to the North Sumatra MUI fatwa.⁶⁴ This sequence of actions demonstrates that a classification initially produced within the arena of religious authority began to acquire significance beyond the internal process of fatwa issuance.

⁵⁹ See: Ichwan, "The Local Politics of Orthodoxy," 166–94; Millie and Hindasah, "Regional Aspects of the Indonesian Ulama Council's Ideological Turn," 260–81.

⁶⁰ SUMUT-02, "Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI," (Medan), July 2024.

⁶¹ Uqbatul Khoir Rambe, Nurliana Damanik, and Aprilinda M. Harahap, "The Struggle for Spiritual Authority from the Holy Land to Indonesia: Reference from the Tarekat Naqshabandiyya Jabal Hindi (TNJH) in North Sumatra," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 10, no. 2 (December 2020): 204–25.

⁶² North Sumatra Provincial MUI, "Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006 on the Hirfi Nuzlan's Teachings in the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group/Naqsyabandiyah Jabal Hindi," June 14, 2006.

⁶³ Alamsyah M. Dja'far, "Fatwa MUI, MTQ Digagalkan Aparat," *Monthly Report on Religious Issues*, no. 26 (January 2010): 1–2.

⁶⁴ North Sumatra Regional Office of the Department of Religious Affairs, "Letter No. KW.02/2-C/BA.00/2452/2009," November 2009.

This case provides the clearest evidence among the three North Sumatra cases of how MUI's symbolic power operates through classificatory authority and, through institutional recognition, acquires administrative reach. The chain of mechanisms can be traced through several stages. First, MUI used its religious authority to classify Hirfi Nuzlan's teachings according to the normative boundaries of *'aqidah*. Second, this classification was upheld upon reconsideration and subsequently became the basis for MUI's refusal to issue a recommendation for an event organized by the Babur Ridha group. Third, when MUI's recommendation became intertwined with the police licensing process and its assessment was also referenced by the Regional Office of the Department of Religious Affairs, the theological classification gained relevance within institutional processes beyond the formal authority of the fatwa-issuing body. In this sense, the administrative consequences of the fatwa did not arise because the fatwa was transformed into state law but through institutional translation, whereby the normative classification produced by MUI was recognized and used by other institutions as a consideration in exercising their own authority. This finding demonstrates that the regulatory force of a fatwa depends not solely on its formal legal status but also on MUI's classificatory authority's capacity to secure recognition and connect with the administrative capacities of other institutions.⁶⁵

Fatwa on the Ar Rahman Study Group

North Sumatra MUI Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013 addressed the Ar Rahman Study Group, which operated in Sambirejo Timur Village, Percut Sei Tuan Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency. The North Sumatra MUI identified several of the group's teachings as deviating from accepted interpretations of Islam. These included associating *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* with the human body, interpreting "*qalam*" as the male sexual organ, the door of the Ka'ba as the female sexual organ, semen as a gemstone, and specific formulations concerning the relationship among God, human beings, prophethood, and sainthood.⁶⁶ Through this fatwa, the MUI established normative boundaries against religious interpretations and practices considered outside Islamic orthodoxy. In the same year, incidents of rejection, dissolution of gatherings, and tensions between local communities and members of the Ar Rahman Study Group were documented.⁶⁷ However, the available data are insufficient to establish a direct causal relationship between the fatwa and these social responses. Similarly, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the MUI's classification was specifically used as the basis for any government administrative decision.⁶⁸ This case thus illustrates social consequences and contestation but does not provide sufficient empirical grounds to conclude that institutional translation into the administrative arena occurred.

This distinction is analytically important because it demonstrates that MUI's classificatory authority can vary in its influence across different social and institutional arenas.

⁶⁵ Mustafid, Nasution, and Sodikin, "Positivization of the Council of Indonesian Ulema's Halal Fatwa," 155–66.

⁶⁶ North Sumatra Provincial MUI, "Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013 on the Ar Rahman Religious Study Group," May 24, 2013.

⁶⁷ SETARA Institute, *Stagnasi Kebebasan Beragama: Laporan Kondisi Kebebasan Beragama/Berkeyakinan di Indonesia Tahun 2013* (Jakarta: SETARA Institute, 2014), 8.

⁶⁸ SUMUT-01, "General Secretary of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI," (Medan), July 2024.

At the first level, the fatwa established a normative classification by designating the Ar Rahman teachings as outside the boundaries of orthodoxy recognized by MUI.⁶⁹ At the second level, this classification existed within a social context characterized by rejection of, and tensions surrounding, the group targeted by the fatwa, although the available evidence does not establish a causal relationship between the two. The Ar Rahman Study Group case thus demonstrates an important limitation of institutional translation: social recognition of MUI's classificatory authority alone does not transform a fatwa into a basis for administrative action. The transition from religious classification to administrative consequences, therefore, requires additional mechanisms through which institutions with administrative authority recognize, utilize, and translate that classification.

Fatwa on the Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin and the Sammaniyah Sufi Order

North Sumatra MUI Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013, issued on September 10, 2013, addressed certain teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin within the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group. This fatwa followed a complaint from a former disciple and direct clarification with Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin.⁷⁰ The decision was primarily based on three teachings: the belief that the Prophet Adam was created by angels at God's command; the requirement that a disciple's *zakāt al-māl* (obligatory almsgiving on wealth) be given to the teacher who introduced the disciple to God; and the permissibility of *nikāḥ mut'ah* (temporary marriage) or unregistered marriage without a guardian and witnesses.⁷¹ Importantly, the North Sumatra MUI did not classify the entire Sammaniyah Sufi Order as deviant. Instead, the decision specified that "certain teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin" deviated from Islamic teachings and advised the leader and his followers to repent and undertake *al-rujū' ilā al-ḥaqq*.⁷² This formulation demonstrates that MUI's classificatory authority can operate selectively by limiting the designation of deviance to particular doctrines rather than automatically applying it to an entire religious tradition or community.

Following the issuance of North Sumatra MUI Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013, the classification entered a broader arena of dispute and was utilized by social actors for mobilization and in reports submitted to the police.⁷³ In this context, the fatwa acquired a legitimizing function by providing normative categories that could support demands for action by law enforcement authorities. However, this function must be distinguished from a state legal decision, as the use of a fatwa in police reports does not imply that law enforcement authorities are legally bound by the MUI's classification. From the perspective of symbolic power, the Sammaniyah case occupies an intermediate position between internal classification and full administrative translation. The MUI's authority extended beyond the domain of the Fatwa Commission and gained recognition in the social arena, but evidence

⁶⁹ Ramli Abdul Wahid, "Aliran Minoritas dalam Islam di Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 2 (July 2018): 145.

⁷⁰ SUMUT-03, "Secretary of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI," (Medan), July 2024.

⁷¹ Wahid, "Aliran Minoritas dalam Islam di Indonesia," 148.

⁷² North Sumatra Provincial MUI, "Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013 on the Certain Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin in the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group," September 10, 2013.

⁷³ SETARA Institute, *Stagnasi Kebebasan Beragama*, 7–10.

of its integration into state administrative procedures is not as strong as in the Hirfi Nuzlan case. This case, therefore, demonstrates how classificatory authority can broaden the arena in which a group is addressed without becoming a source of formal law.

A comparison of the three cases demonstrates that ‘*aqidah*’ policing in North Sumatra operates through a combination of protection, correction, and legitimation, with varying degrees of institutional translation. At the procedural level, the MUI employs reports, examinations, clarifications, dialogue, and religious guidance to establish religious classifications. At the substantive level, the protective function is evident in efforts to define the boundaries of ‘*aqidah*’ and to guide leaders and followers toward *al-rujū’ ilā al-ḥaqq*.⁷⁴ The key difference lies in the extent to which these classifications influence the fatwas that are issued. The Hirfi Nuzlan case demonstrates the strongest form of influence, as MUI’s decision became intertwined with recommendations, the police licensing process, and the stance taken by the Department of Religious Affairs. The Sammaniyah case illustrates the use of classification in social mobilization and reports to law enforcement, while the Ar Rahman Study Group case shows social resonance without sufficient evidence of direct administrative translation. Therefore, the protective-legitimative character is best understood as a dominant cross-case tendency rather than a uniform characteristic manifested identically in every fatwa. In North Sumatra’s Muslim-majority context, the demographic position creates conditions under which MUI’s classificatory authority may gain broader recognition, but it is not the sole cause. The reach of a fatwa’s consequences remains contingent on case-specific factors, MUI-government relations, acceptance by social actors, and the availability of institutional channels through which MUI’s symbolic power can extend beyond the fatwa-issuing institution.⁷⁵

MUI Fatwas and ‘*Aqidah*’ Policing: Protective-Consolidative and Protective-Legitimative Patterns

A comparison of the five fatwas examined in this study demonstrates that MUI’s authority to define the boundaries between orthodoxy and deviance operates through different configurations at the regional level. The difference lies not in the presence or absence of a protective function regarding ‘*aqidah*’, as this function is evident in both North Sulawesi and North Sumatra, but rather in the consequences that follow the classificatory process. In North Sulawesi, the protection of ‘*aqidah*’ is predominantly intertwined with the internal consolidation of the Muslim community, whereas in North Sumatra, MUI’s religious classifications tend more strongly to acquire a legitimizing function when used by social actors or government institutions. This variation reinforces findings from previous studies showing that regional MUI boards do not simply reproduce the orientation of the central MUI uniformly but instead exhibit variations associated with local sociopolitical and

⁷⁴ SUMUT-02, “Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI”; SUMUT-03, “Secretary of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra Provincial MUI.”

⁷⁵ See: Giyarsi, Im Fahimah, and Miti Yarmunida, “Indonesian Ulama Council Fatwa on Boycotting Products Supporting Israel in the Ijtihad Discourse of Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah,” *Nusantara: Journal of Law Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2023): 156–67; Anang Anas Azhar, Puji Santoso, and Qasem Muhammad, “Faith-Based Political Communication in Mandailing Natal’s Regional Elections,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 2 (May 2025): 1291–316.

institutional configurations.⁷⁶ Studies of the local politics of orthodoxy similarly demonstrate that defining the boundaries of Islam involves not only theological differences but also the construction and exercise of religious authority within local power structures.⁷⁷ Within this framework, this article uses the term ‘*aqīdah*’ policing to refer to the institutional practices through which MUI identifies, examines, clarifies, classifies, and corrects teachings deemed to fall outside the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy. This conceptualization builds on the analytical shift from viewing religious police as formal agencies or organizations to understanding religious policing as practices of regulating religious boundaries that may be undertaken by a range of actors.⁷⁸ The term ‘*aqīdah*’ policing, therefore, does not imply that MUI possesses coercive authority comparable to that of state agencies; rather, it emphasizes MUI’s capacity as a religious authority to produce classifications recognized as authoritative and that, under certain conditions, become relevant to the actions of social actors and government institutions.

North Sulawesi: From Protecting ‘Aqīdah’ to Internal Consolidation

The protective dimension constitutes the first layer of MUI’s practice of ‘*aqīdah*’ policing in North Sulawesi. In North Sulawesi, Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 declared Nurul Insan Haq deviant from the Qur’an and hadith; its teacher was instructed to cease disseminating the teachings, and its followers were directed to return to orthodox Islamic teachings.⁷⁹ Later, in North Sulawesi, Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 drew this boundary more explicitly by classifying the LINI Sufi sect as “deviant and misleading” and directing followers who accepted its doctrines to repent.⁸⁰ This pattern demonstrates that fatwas function as instruments of boundary-making, determining which beliefs are positioned within or outside Islamic orthodoxy.⁸¹ In this context, protection entails not only restricting particular teachings but also producing normative certainty regarding the boundaries of beliefs considered legitimate.

The protective function, however, explains only one aspect of how fatwas operate. The consolidative dimension is evident in how the North Sulawesi MUI manages the community after allegations of deviance arise and normative boundaries are established. The research data demonstrate that reports of deviance do not immediately result in fatwas; instead, they undergo processes of summons, examination of teachings, clarification, and religious guidance.⁸² North Sulawesi MUI informants also emphasized that a fatwa is not always the first measure taken and that resolution through internal mechanisms is initially pursued. Even after a fatwa is issued, government involvement does not occur with the same intensity in every case. Both fatwas contain recommendations to the government, but only

⁷⁶ See: Millie and Hindasah, “Regional Aspects of the Indonesian *Ulama* Council’s Ideological Turn,” 260–81; Busro Busro, “Religious Life between Symbolic Power, Sacred Space, Political Thought, and Knowledge Production,” *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 10, no. 1 (March 2026): v–xvi.

⁷⁷ See: Ichwan, “The Local Politics of Orthodoxy,” 166–94; Hicks, “Heresy and Authority,” 321–39; Andri Ashadi et al., “Practice Acceptance and Label Rejection: Social Ambivalence toward Islam Nusantara in Minangkabau, Indonesia,” *International Journal of Islamic Khazanah* 16, no. 1 (May 2026): 16–35.

⁷⁸ Oosterbaan and Diphoorn, “From Religious Police to Religious Policing,” 225–39.

⁷⁹ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 01 of 2015 on the Teachings of Nurul Insan Haq.”

⁸⁰ North Sulawesi Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 02 of 2019 on the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi Sect.”

⁸¹ Burhani, “Treating Minorities with Fatwas,” 285–301.

⁸² SULUT-02, “Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI.”

the LINI Sufi sect case demonstrates a clearer connection with coordination among the Kesbangpol, the police, and the TNI.⁸³ Internal consolidation, therefore, is not synonymous with the absence of the state; rather, the term refers to the tendency for correction, religious guidance, and reintegration to remain the dominant mechanisms, while extension into the administrative arena occurs selectively.

Within this configuration, the minority position of Muslims at the provincial level provides a crucial context for the consolidative function of fatwas. Theoretically, the construction of symbolic boundaries vis-à-vis groups perceived as different can contribute to the formation of collective identity and the maintenance of group boundaries.⁸⁴ In the Indonesian context, studies on intolerance and the politics of orthodoxy similarly demonstrate that boundary-making vis-à-vis religious groups positioned outside orthodoxy can be associated with the formation of solidarity and collective identity.⁸⁵ The findings of this study show that this mechanism takes a particular form within the configuration of North Sulawesi: boundary-making through fatwas is primarily aimed at strengthening the normative integrity and internal cohesion of the Muslim community, although in some cases such classifications may also extend to coordination with government institutions. The minority position, however, is not treated as a singular cause. It is more appropriately understood as one contextual condition that interacts with case-specific characteristics, the degree of social unrest, and MUI-government relations.⁸⁶ In this sense, the metaphor of an “identity fence” aptly captures the function of fatwas in separating orthodoxy from heterodoxy while simultaneously helping to maintain the community’s normative boundaries within a pluralistic social environment.

North Sumatra: From Protecting ‘Aqīdah to Institutional Legitimation

The protective function also serves as the foundational layer of MUI’s practice of ‘*aqīdah*’ policing in North Sumatra. In the three cases analyzed, the North Sumatra MUI issued fatwas or decisions to delineate the boundaries of orthodoxy concerning contested doctrines: Hirfi Nuzlan’s teachings on the salvation of adherents of other religions and spiritual experiences;⁸⁷ the interpretations advanced by the Ar Rahman Study Group;⁸⁸ and certain teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin concerning the creation of Adam, *ṣakāt* (obligatory almsgiving), and marriage. As in North Sulawesi, classification did not occur without prior examination or clarification. Those whose teachings were under scrutiny were asked to provide explanations, while in the case of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin, the decision explicitly directed

⁸³ SULUT-01, “General Chairman of the North Sulawesi Provincial MUI.”

⁸⁴ Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167–95.

⁸⁵ See: Menchik, “Productive Intolerance,” 591–621; Muniron Muniron, Fidia Astuti, and Faiz Marikar, “Lived Social Sufism beyond Institutions: Non-Institutional Charismatic Authority in Contemporary Indonesian Islam,” *Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 9, no. 3 (December 2025): 257–72.

⁸⁶ Millie and Hinasah, “Regional Aspects of the Indonesian Ulama Council’s Ideological Turn,” 260–81.

⁸⁷ North Sumatra Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 22/KEP-07/MUI-SU/VI/2006 on the Hirfi Nuzlan’s Teachings in the Babur Ridha Sufi Study Group/Naqsyabandiyah Jabal Hindi.”

⁸⁸ North Sumatra Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013 on the Ar Rahman Religious Study Group.”

the leader and his followers to undertake *al-rujū‘ ilā al-ḥaqq*.⁸⁹ At the protective level, therefore, there is no fundamental difference between the two provinces: in both, MUI exercises its authority to establish the boundaries of orthodoxy, identify deviance, and provide mechanisms for correction. In this sense, fatwas function as a practice of boundary-making that distinguishes, through normative classification, beliefs positioned within the boundaries of orthodoxy from those outside them.⁹⁰

The difference becomes more apparent when these classifications extend beyond the internal domain of the fatwa-issuing institution. In this article, the term “legitimative” function does not imply that fatwas possess legal force equivalent to state regulations or that every fatwa automatically triggers government action.⁹¹ Rather, the legitimative function refers to the capacity of MUI’s classifications to provide a normative basis that social actors or government institutions may use to justify, formulate, or implement responses to groups classified as deviant. This mechanism is most clearly illustrated in the Hirfi Nuzlan case. After the 2006 decision was upheld, the North Sumatra MUI declined, in 2009, to issue a recommendation for an activity organized by the group; MUI’s position subsequently became intertwined with the police licensing process, while the Department of Religious Affairs in North Sumatra also referred to the MUI fatwa in addressing the issue. In this case, the article identifies a process of institutional translation: MUI’s theological classification did not become state law but acquired relevance to the considerations, procedures, or actions of institutions beyond MUI.⁹²

This process can be understood through the relational nature of symbolic power. MUI’s authority does not stem from possessing its own coercive capacity but from its classifications being recognized as authoritative and interacting with actors who hold different institutional resources.⁹³ In this context, MUI’s classificatory authority provides normative legitimation, while the government, police, and administrative institutions possess distinct capacities to apply those classifications in their actions. However, this process does not occur uniformly. The Ar Rahman case demonstrates social resonance without sufficient evidence of direct administrative translation,⁹⁴ whereas the Sammaniyah case demonstrates the use of a fatwa in mobilization and reporting to law enforcement without transforming the fatwa itself into a state legal decision.⁹⁵ These variations confirm that the relationship among fatwas, social responses, and state action is contingent rather than automatic.

⁸⁹ North Sumatra Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013 on the Certain Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin in the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group.”

⁹⁰ See: Lamont and Molnár, “The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences,” 167–95; Luqmanul Hakim, Suci Amalia Yasti, and Yassinta Ananda, “The Rejection of Prophetic Traditions: Analyzing the Inkar Sunnah Movement in West Sumatra, Indonesia,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (September 2024): 272–95.

⁹¹ See: Hosen, “Behind the Scenes,” 147–79; Lindsey, “Monopolising Islam,” 253–74.

⁹² See: Mustafid, Nasution, and Sodikin, “Positivization of the Council of Indonesian Ulama’s Halal Fatwa,” 155–66; Abdurrohman Kasdi et al., “Fatwa and Religious Authority: Islamic Law, Social Media Ethics and Digital Age,” *Al-Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syari’ah dan Hukum* 11, no. 1 (March 2026): 56–66.

⁹³ Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” 14–25.

⁹⁴ North Sumatra Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 01/KF/MUI-SU/V/2013 on the Ar Rahman Religious Study Group.”

⁹⁵ North Sumatra Provincial MUI, “Fatwa No. 03/KF/MUI-SU/IX/2013 on the Certain Teachings of Syekh Muda Ahmad Arifin in the Sammaniyah Sufi Study Group.”

The comparison of the two Indonesian provinces ultimately demonstrates that *'aqīdah* policing relies on the MUI's symbolic power to produce religious classifications recognized as authoritative. However, the consequences of these classifications depend on the local contexts in which that authority operates.⁹⁶ In North Sulawesi, classificatory authority predominantly produces a protective-consolidative pattern, where fatwas safeguard the boundaries of *'aqīdah* while reinforcing internal normative cohesion. In some cases, this authority extends to coordination with government institutions. In North Sumatra, the protective pattern remains foundational, but MUI's classifications exhibit a stronger protective-legitimative tendency when employed by social actors or government institutions, with the Hirfi Nuzlan case providing the clearest example of institutional translation. These differences cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between Muslim minority and majority contexts. Demography is one contextual factor that interacts with case-specific characteristics, MUI-state relations, recognition of MUI's authority, and the availability of social and institutional networks.⁹⁷ The principal contribution of this study, therefore, is not the claim that MUI holds a legal monopoly over fatwa production, but rather that MUI occupies a privileged position in producing authoritative classifications of orthodoxy. The power of these classifications lies in their capacity to extend beyond the formally non-binding status of fatwas as religious norms and, through recognition and institutional translation, generate diverse governance effects at the regional level.⁹⁸

Monopolizing Islamic Orthodoxy: From Classificatory Authority to Governance Effects

In this study, the term “monopolizing Islamic orthodoxy” should be understood as an analytical category rather than a legal monopoly that positions the MUI as the sole institution authorized to issue fatwas in Indonesia. It refers to the concentration of institutional authority within the MUI to produce religious classifications that receive broad recognition and, under certain conditions, serve as reference points for state institutions when addressing religious issues. Since its establishment, the MUI has occupied a distinctive role as an intermediary among the *'ulama'*, Muslim society, and the government, with fatwas serving as one of the principal instruments through which this authority is constructed, exercised, and maintained.⁹⁹ This role became increasingly prominent in the post-New Order period, when the MUI gained greater scope to shape the religious agenda and define the normative boundaries of Muslim life.¹⁰⁰ Regarding *'aqīdah*, Hasyim demonstrates that the strengthening of the MUI's position through recognition by the state and Muslim organizations has contributed to a concentration of authority in fatwa-making on *'aqīdah* issues, such that the

⁹⁶ See: Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” 14–25; Millie and Hindasah, “Regional Aspects of the Indonesian *Ulama* Council's Ideological Turn,” 260–81.

⁹⁷ See: Ichwan, “The Local Politics of Orthodoxy,” 166–94; Hakim et al., “Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions,” 230–44; Ahmad Suaedy et al., “Language, Authority, and Digital Media: The Impact on the Legitimacy of Fatwas,” *Abkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 23, no. 1 (2023): 1–24.

⁹⁸ See: Hasyim, “Fatwas and Democracy,” 21–35; Millie and Hindasah, “Regional Aspects of the Indonesian *Ulama* Council's Ideological Turn,” 260–81.

⁹⁹ Hosen, “Behind the Scenes,” 147–79.

¹⁰⁰ See: Ichwan, “*Ulamā*?, State and Politics,” 45–72; Hasyim, “Fatwas and Democracy,” 21–35.

MUI's judgments occupy a dominant position in determining which beliefs fall within or outside the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy.¹⁰¹ Thus, "monopoly" in this article does not imply the absence of alternative religious authorities but rather the MUI's privileged institutional position in producing authoritative classifications of orthodoxy.

While this concept explains MUI's position within the structure of religious authority, the findings of this study demonstrate that the consequences of this concentrated authority are not uniform at the regional level. Previous scholarship has extensively examined the strengthening of MUI and controversies surrounding its fatwas at the national level, including how fatwas may be associated with restrictions and conflict but may also generate contestation and open spaces for debate over Islam, the state, and pluralism.¹⁰² At the same time, subnational studies of MUI reveal heterogeneity across regional branches, as their institutional orientations and religious practices are shaped by local sociopolitical configurations and patterns of interaction with regional governments.¹⁰³ This study advances this line of analysis by demonstrating that majority-minority demographics constitute one contextual condition that interacts with the form and reach of the consequences generated by fatwas. In North Sulawesi, the authority to define the boundaries of *'aqidah* is predominantly oriented toward protecting and internally consolidating the Muslim community, although the LINI Sufi sect case demonstrates the possibility of extending this authority through coordination with government institutions. In North Sumatra, by contrast, the protective function remains foundational, but MUI's classifications exhibit a stronger tendency to acquire a legitimizing function when used by social actors or government institutions, with the Hirfi Nuzlan case providing the clearest example. These differences do not indicate a simple causal relationship between demography and the effects of fatwas. Majority-minority status is more appropriately understood as one condition that interacts with case-specific characteristics, the degree of social unrest, MUI-regional government relations, recognition of MUI's authority, and the availability of institutional networks that enable religious classifications to extend beyond the internal domain of the fatwa-issuing institution.¹⁰⁴

This pattern also demonstrates that the concentration of MUI's authority in matters of *'aqidah* differs from the institutionalization of fatwa authority in other fields, particularly halal certification and the Islamic economy.¹⁰⁵ Lindsey demonstrates that post-Suharto

¹⁰¹ Syafiq Hasyim, "Majelis Ulama Indonesia and Pluralism in Indonesia," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 41, nos. 4–5 (May 2015): 487–95.

¹⁰² See: Sirry, "Fatwas and Their Controversy," 100–117; Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy," 21–35; Irawan et al., "Negotiating Legal Pluralism: Syncretism of Islamic Law and Balinese Adat in Pegayaman Village," *El-Mashlahah* 15, no. 1 (June 2025): 149–64.

¹⁰³ See: Millie and Hindasah, "Regional Aspects of the Indonesian Ulama Council's Ideological Turn," 260–81; Ichwan, "The Local Politics of Orthodoxy," 166–94.

¹⁰⁴ See: Nasruddin Yusuf et al., "Diverging Mitigation Strategies of Indonesia's Ulama Council in Majority and Minority Muslim Regions," *Al-Banjari: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 25, no. 1 (June 2026): 45–70; Nasruddin Yusuf, Ridwan Jamal, and Misbahul Munir Makka, "Strategic Ambiguity in Governing Religious Deviance: Policy Inconsistency, Social Stability, and Human Rights in Indonesia," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 11, no. 1 (June 2026): 17–34.

¹⁰⁵ See: Khusniati Rofi'ah, Martha Eri Safira, and Muhammad Ikhlas Rosele, "The Effectiveness of Accelerating Halal Product Certification: Regulations and Companions," *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System* 4, no. 2 (June 2024): 449–76; Arim Nasim et al., "Driving Maqāsid Al-Shari'ah Performance in

regulatory changes expanded MUI's formal role within the administration of Islamic law and, in certain fields, produced forms of institutional monopoly in halal certification and Islamic finance. Within this configuration, some MUI fatwas may acquire a quasi-legislative character when integrated into state regulatory mechanisms.¹⁰⁶ Fatwas concerning teachings classified as deviant follow a different institutional trajectory. In halal certification and the Islamic economy, the regulatory force of fatwas is primarily strengthened through their formalization or integration into state legal and administrative structures.¹⁰⁷ In matters of *'aqidah*, by contrast, fatwas remain fundamentally normative religious judgments that do not possess coercive legal force on their own. Nevertheless, the classifications they produce may have social and administrative consequences when recognized and utilized by government institutions, state authorities, or social actors in responding to specific cases. This study, therefore, extends Lindsey's analysis by demonstrating that the institutionalization of MUI's authority does not always occur through legal formalization. In matters of orthodoxy, institutionalization may occur more relationally through a process of institutional translation, whereby theological classifications produced by MUI gain relevance to the considerations, procedures, or actions of institutions beyond the fatwa-issuing body without first becoming state law. In this sense, institutionalization refers to the increasing embeddedness of MUI's authority within a broader institutional configuration, whereas institutional translation refers to the mechanism through which MUI's religious classifications become relevant to other institutions.

Within this framework, the concept of *'aqidah* policing elucidates the specific manner in which the MUI's authority operates to regulate the boundaries of belief. This conceptualization builds on the analytical shift from viewing religious police as formal institutions to understanding religious policing as a practice of regulating religious norms, which may be undertaken by a variety of actors.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, policing does not imply that MUI possesses coercive authority comparable to that of the police or state law enforcement agencies; rather, it refers to a series of boundary-making practices. These include identifying contested teachings, examining and clarifying them, normative classification, determining whether a teaching falls within or outside the boundaries of orthodoxy, and correcting and guiding followers toward *al-rujū' ilā al-ḥaqq*. Under certain conditions, this process extends to

Islamic Banks: The Roles of Islamic Social Reporting, Intellectual Capital, and Sharia Governance," *Al-Muamalat* 13, no. 1 (April 2026): 102–18; Setiawan bin Lahuri et al., "Halal Certification Governance in Indonesia: An Islamic Legal Appraisal Based on Maṣlaḥah Principles," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 24, no. 2 (December 2025): 233–47; Ending Solehudin et al., "Transformation of Shariah Economic Justice: Ethical and Utility Perspectives in the Framework of Maqashid Shariah," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 24, no. 1 (June 2024): 101–15.

¹⁰⁶ Lindsey, "Monopolising Islam," 253–74.

¹⁰⁷ See: Moh. Nizar and Mohammad Zaki Ahmad, "Halal Governance and Its Societal Impact: A Comparative Study of Certification Regimes in Indonesia and Malaysia for Muslim Families," *EL-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 8, no. 2 (2025): 952–78; Bambang Iswanto, "Job Creation Law and Consequences in Determining Halāl Products: Analysis of the Halāl Product Fatwa Committee," *Al-'Adalah* 20, no. 1 (June 2023): 179–210; Holis Holis et al., "Bridging Istimbātī and Taṭbīqī: An Integrative Ijtihād Model for Halal Fatwa Governance and Regulatory Compliance," *Nusantara: Journal of Law Studies* 5, no. 1 (June 2026): 691–727; Setiawan bin Lahuri et al., "A Normative Analysis of DSN-MUI Fatwa No. 154/DSN-MUI/V/2023 and Its Implications for Sharia ETF Governance in Indonesia," *Al-Muamalat* 13, no. 1 (March 2026): 50–75.

¹⁰⁸ Oosterbaan and Diphooorn, "From Religious Police to Religious Policing," 225–39.

recommendations addressed to the government or the use of MUI's classifications by other institutions and actors.¹⁰⁹ The power of '*aqidah*' policing, therefore, lies not in MUI's coercive capacity but in its symbolic power to produce religious classifications recognized as authoritative.¹¹⁰ Classificatory authority, as a concrete manifestation of this symbolic power, can generate different consequences depending on the extent to which MUI's classifications gain recognition and are translated through local social and institutional configurations. In the North Sulawesi corpus, this process predominantly produces a protective-consolidative pattern, whereas in the North Sumatra corpus, it exhibits a protective-legitimative tendency, with varying degrees of institutional translation across cases. The contribution of this study, therefore, is not to claim that MUI possesses a legal monopoly over the production of fatwas but to explain how MUI's privileged position in producing classifications of orthodoxy enables formally non-binding fatwas to generate governance effects through varying forms of recognition and institutional translation at the regional level.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the authority of regional Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) fatwas to define the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy derives primarily not from their legally binding force but from MUI's symbolic power to produce religious classifications recognized as authoritative. Through the practice of '*aqidah*' policing (policing of Islamic creed), this power is exercised through processes of identification, examination, clarification, normative classification, and correction of teachings and followers positioned outside the boundaries of orthodoxy. A comparison of five fatwas in North Sulawesi and North Sumatra shows that the protective function regarding '*aqidah*' is present in both regions, but the social and institutional consequences of these classifications vary according to regional contexts. In North Sulawesi, this practice predominantly follows a protective-consolidative pattern emphasizing religious guidance, correction, reintegration, and the maintenance of the Muslim community's internal normative boundaries, although the Laduna Ilma Nurul Insan Sufi sect case demonstrates the potential for extension into coordination with government institutions. In North Sumatra, the protective function remains foundational, but MUI's classifications exhibit a stronger protective-legitimative tendency when used by social actors or government institutions, with the Hirfi Nuzlan case providing the clearest evidence of institutional translation from theological classification into the administrative arena. These variations confirm that majority-minority demographics do not constitute a singular cause determining the consequences of fatwas. Instead, these consequences emerge through the interaction of the Muslim community's demographic position, case-specific characteristics, MUI-state relations, recognition of MUI's authority, and the availability of institutional networks at the regional level.

¹⁰⁹ Syafiq Hasyim, "The Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) and Aqida-Based Intolerance: A Critical Analysis of Its Fatwa on Ahmadiyah and "Sepilis"," in *Religion, Law and Intolerance in Indonesia*, ed. Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker (London: Routledge, 2016), 211–33.

¹¹⁰ Fariz Alnizar, "The Language of Exclusion: Ideology and Power in the Fatwa of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia on Ahmadiyah," *Journal of Islamic Law* 6, no. 1 (February 2025): 67–88.

These findings contribute to the study of Islamic law by shifting attention from the conventional dichotomy of whether fatwas are “binding” or “non-binding” to the question of how non-state religious norms can generate governance effects within plural legal and institutional orders. This article demonstrates that MUI’s privileged position in producing classifications of orthodoxy enables its symbolic power to operate through classificatory authority. Moreover, consequences beyond the fatwa-issuing institution emerge through institutional translation, whereby MUI’s theological classifications are recognized and utilized in the considerations, procedures, or actions of other institutions without needing to be transformed into state law. In this sense, the “monopoly” of fatwa authority is more accurately understood as the concentration of institutional privilege in producing authoritative classifications of orthodoxy rather than as a juridical monopoly over fatwa production. This interpretation simultaneously situates *‘aqidah* policing as a relational practice of boundary-making: MUI produces normative classifications, while its social and administrative reach depends on recognition and connections with other actors and institutions. Because this study is limited to five provincial-level fatwas in two regions, the protective-consolidative and protective-legitimative typology is not intended as a deterministic model generalizable to Indonesia as a whole. Future research should examine these mechanisms across more diverse regional contexts, systematically incorporate the perspectives of communities targeted by fatwas and the government institutions that respond to them, and longitudinally trace the conditions under which religious classificatory authority acquires—or fails to acquire—social and administrative consequences.

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