



NEGOTIATING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: AS'ADIYAH AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF NORMATIVE AUTHORITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article examines the transformation of As'adiyah's normative authority as an influential regional Islamic educational institution and religious organization in contemporary Indonesia. Departing from the premise that Islamic authority is not static, this study highlights how As'adiyah negotiates the continuity of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* tradition, particularly the Shāfi'ī school of law, in responding to contemporary social changes. The main objective of this research is to elucidate the normative sources of legitimacy, mechanisms of scholarly reproduction, and strategies through which As'adiyah transforms and sustains its authority within its contemporary socio-historical context. Employing a qualitative approach that integrates library research and fieldwork, the data were collected from literature authored by members of the As'adiyah community, in-depth interviews with both internal and external actors, and direct observations conducted at As'adiyah's central institution and its branches. The findings demonstrate that As'adiyah's authority is rooted in classical Islamic scholarly and normative traditions, reproduced through educational institutions, scholarly transmission, and leadership structures, and adaptively transformed to address contemporary social and religious issues. This study contributes to a renewed understanding of normative authority as a dynamic process through which scholarly traditions, interpretive frameworks, and institutional practices are continuously reproduced, negotiated, and reformulated in changing social contexts.

Keywords: As'adiyah, Normative Authority, Scholarly Tradition, Continuity and Change, Contemporary Indonesia

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi otoritas normatif As'adiyah sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam dan organisasi keagamaan regional yang berpengaruh di Indonesia kontemporer. Bertolak dari premis bahwa otoritas keislaman bersifat tidak statis, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana As'adiyah menegosiasikan kesinambungan tradisi *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, khususnya mazhab syafi'i, dalam merespons perubahan sosial kontemporer. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan sumber-sumber legitimasi normatif, mekanisme reproduksi keulamaan, serta strategi yang digunakan As'adiyah dalam mentransformasikan dan mempertahankan otoritasnya dalam konteks sosio-historis kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang memadukan penelitian pustaka dan penelitian lapangan, data dikumpulkan dari literatur yang ditulis oleh kalangan internal As'adiyah, wawancara mendalam dengan aktor internal maupun eksternal, serta observasi langsung yang dilakukan di lembaga pusat As'adiyah dan cabang-cabangnya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa otoritas As'adiyah berakar pada tradisi keilmuan dan normatif Islam klasik, direproduksi melalui lembaga pendidikan, transmisi keilmuan, dan struktur kepemimpinan, serta ditransformasikan secara adaptif untuk menjawab persoalan sosial dan keagamaan kontemporer. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi bagi pemahaman baru mengenai otoritas normatif sebagai proses dinamis, di mana tradisi keilmuan, kerangka interpretasi, dan praktik kelembagaan senantiasa direproduksi, dinegosiasikan, dan dirumuskan ulang dalam konteks sosial yang terus berubah.

Kata Kunci: As'adiyah, Otoritas Normatif, Tradisi Ulama, Kesinambungan dan Perubahan, Indonesia Kontemporer

Background

Normative authority in Islamic traditions is often perceived as a stable entity, transmitted linearly through established scholarly lineages and grounded in the continuity of authoritative

interpretive frameworks.¹ Such authority is

¹ Read Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); Jajat Burhanuddin, "Islamic Knowledge,



sustained not only through institutional recognition, but also through the capacity to define, transmit, and reproduce normative orientations concerning religious knowledge and practice. However, this assumption becomes problematic when confronted with the historical experiences of Islamic institutions that, in practice, reveal complex dynamics of internal negotiation, as exemplified by the As'adiyah pesantren. In this context, As'adiyah emerges as an educational institution and religious organization that offers a compelling illustration of how Islamic authority is constructed and reproduced in the contemporary era.² Historically, As'adiyah has functioned not only as an institution for the transmission of Islamic teachings rooted in the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ah* tradition, but also as a site for the ongoing production, interpretation, and transmission of normative orientations concerning Islamic knowledge and religious practice.³ Today, As'adiyah has exerted a significant national influence,⁴ positioning it within transregional networks of Islamic authority.⁵ This reality challenges normative conceptions of religious authority and underscores that Islamic legitimacy is not derived solely from the continuity of tradition, but also from an institution's capacity to negotiate change in contextually meaningful ways.

The expansion of As'adiyah's influence is closely linked to its early role as a pioneering Islamic educational institution in Eastern Indonesia. Through this position, As'adiyah has

played a central role in shaping the landscape of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia, a influence that has increasingly extended to Malaysia.⁶ At the same time, the authority constructed by the As'adiyah community rests on its self-positioning as a guardian of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ah* tradition, which is far from monolithic. This position also rests on a sustained commitment to established scholarly traditions, particularly the Shāfi'ī orientation, through which religious knowledge, normative reasoning, and practical guidance are transmitted across generations.⁷ Rather, As'adiyah's Islamic orientation has continually been shaped by leadership configurations and the intellectual inclinations of its key figures. Muhammad As'ad, the founder and first leader of As'adiyah, for instance, is known for his critical stance toward philosophical Sufism, particularly doctrines such as *wahdat al-wujūd*.⁸ In contrast, contemporary leadership under Nasaruddin Umar has affirmed Sufism as an integral component of Islamic spiritual enrichment.⁹ This shift demonstrates that

Authority and Political Power: the 'Ulama in Colonial Indonesia", *Dissertation*, Leiden University, 2007.

² Wahyuddin Halim, "As'adiyah tradition: the Construction and Reproduction of Religious Authority", *Dissertation*, Australian National University, 2015.

³ Mustaming Giling, et. al, "Characteristics and Dynamics of Sunni Sufism at the As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Islamic Boarding School", *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, 33 (1), 2025. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24014/jush.v33i1.38151>.

⁴ Hamzah Harun Al-Rasyid and Husnul Fahima Ilyas. "Islamic Scholars' Network in South Sulawesi at the 20th Century: A Note in Wajo and Soppeng." *Al-Qalam* 28, no. 1 (2022): 1. <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v28i1.1025>.

⁵ Taqwa and Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin, "Anregurutta H.M. As'ad dan Genealogi Studi Islam Asia Tenggara di Tanah Bugis Abad 20", *Palita: Journal of Social Religion Research*, 5(2), 2020.

⁶ Muhammad Alwi HS, et al, "Moderasi Beragama Pesantren: Jaringan dan Paham Keagamaan As'Adiyah, Darul Da'wah Wal Irsyad, dan Nahdlatul Ulum Sulawesi Selatan", *Dialog*, 45(1), 2022. DOI:[10.47655/dialog.v45i1.581](https://doi.org/10.47655/dialog.v45i1.581). Hamzah Harun Al-Rasyid and Husnul Fahima Ilyas. "Islamic Scholars' Network in South Sulawesi at the 20th Century: A Note in Wajo and Soppeng." Taqwa and Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin, "Anregurutta H.M. As'ad dan Genealogi Studi Islam Asia Tenggara di Tanah Bugis Abad 20". Syamsuddin Arif, "Jaringan Pesantren di Sulawesi Selatan (1928-2005)", *Dissertation* UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2007.

⁷ Wahyuddin Halim, "As'adiyah tradition: the Construction and Reproduction of Religious Authority". Imran Anwar Kuba et al, "The Contestation of Religious Authority, Social Media, and Local Fiqh: As'adiyah's Rejection of Ustadz Firanda in Wajo", *Al-Qalam*, 31 (2) 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v31i2.1698>. Mustaming Giling, et. al, "Characteristics and Dynamics of Sunni Sufism at the As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Islamic Boarding School".

⁸ Wahyuddin Halim, "As'adiyah tradition: the Construction and Reproduction of Religious Authority". This is also based on an interview with Gurutta Suyuti, one of the senior teachers at the As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School, conducted on 12 November 2025.

⁹ Ahmad Khaerussalam, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Nasaruddin Umar di Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah: Narasi Reformasi, Digitalisasi, dan Moderasi Islam", *Jurnal Intelekt Insan Cendekia*, 2 (7) 2025.



As'adiyah's authority is constituted through flexible and adaptive internal relations, rather than through the rigid reproduction of doctrine.

From this perspective, the transformation of Islamic orientations within As'adiyah warrants close examination, as it reveals how normative authority is produced, negotiated, and reformulated through ongoing processes of interpretation and institutional reproduction. Changes in Islamic orientation are significant not merely as theological developments, but also as processes through which established normative frameworks are interpreted and reformulated in response to shifting social, epistemic, and discursive contexts. In this sense, the continuity of authority is not determined by resistance to change, but by the capacity to integrate renewal within frameworks of tradition that are epistemically and socially legitimate.¹⁰ As'adiyah demonstrates that interpretations of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'ah* are plural, contextual, and responsive to the needs of the Muslim community.¹¹ Consequently, Islamic authority does not appear as a fixed or finalized structure, but rather as a historical process that is continually reshaped through the interaction of texts, traditions, and social contexts.

Existing scholarship on As'adiyah covers a broad range of themes, yet remains analytically fragmented. Wahyuddin Halim (2015; 2018; 2022)¹², for example, consistently examines the

construction, reproduction, and mass production of As'adiyah's religious authority, including through institutions such as *Ma'had Aly* and digital media platforms. Imran Anwar Kuba et al. (2025)¹³ focus on the contestation of authority between local *fiqh* traditions and transnational forms of da'wah. Historical dimensions and scholarly networks are explored by Muhammad As'ad (2009)¹⁴, Muhammad Adlin Sila (2017)¹⁵, and Hamzah Harun Al-Rasyid and Husnul Fahima Ilyas (2022)¹⁶, who position As'adiyah as a center of Bugis scholarly genealogy. Studies on Sufism, tradition, and local religious practices are advanced by Mustaming Giling et al. (2025)¹⁷, Zainal Abidin and Alfadhli (2025)¹⁸, and Muhyiddin Tahir et al. (2024a; 2024b)¹⁹. Issues of religious moderation and nationalism are addressed by Saddam Husain and Dwi Andi Eki (2021)²⁰, Darlis (2016)²¹, and Muhyiddin Tahir and

¹³ Imran Anwar Kuba et al, "The Contestation of Religious Authority, Social Media, and Local Fiqh: As'adiyah's Rejection of Ustadz Firanda in Wajo".

¹⁴ Muhammad As'ad, "Pondok Pesantren As'Adiyah." *Al-Qalam* 15, no. 2 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v15i2.498>.

¹⁵ Muhammad Adlin Sila, "As'adiyah pencetak ulama dan pesantren di Sulawesi Selatan." *Edukasi: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama dan Keagamaan*, 3(3). (2017).

¹⁶ Hamzah Harun Al-Rasyid and Husnul Fahima Ilyas. "Islamic Scholars' Network in South Sulawesi at the 20th Century: A Note in Wajo and Soppeng."

¹⁷ Mustaming Giling, et. al, "Characteristics and Dynamics of Sunni Sufism at the As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Islamic Boarding School".

¹⁸ Zainal Abidin and Alfadhli. "Pembelajaran Dan Pemahaman Kitab Tanwir Al-Qulub Santri Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang Sulawesi Selatan." *Inspirasi Edukatif: Jurnal Pembelajaran* 6, no. 1 (2025).

¹⁹ Muhyiddin Tahir, et. al. "Tradisi Yasinan Pada Malam Jumat (Studi Living Qur'an Di Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang)" *Tafasir: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, 2 (2), 2024; Muhyiddin Tahir et al. (2024). *Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang: Combining Tradition and Innovation In Islamic Boarding School Education In the Era of Society 5.0. MAERIFAH: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 1(1).

²⁰ Saddam Husain and Dwi, Andi Eka, "Moderasi beragama berbasis tradisi pesantren pada Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Sulawesi Selatan", *Harmoni*, 20(2), 2021.

²¹ Darlis, "Peran Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang dalam Membangun Moderasi Islam di Tanah Bugis", *Al-Misbbah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, 12 (1) 2016.

¹⁰ Hallaq W. B. *Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law*. Cambridge: CUP, 2001. Compare with Max Weber, *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

¹¹ Muhammad Alwi HS, et al, "Moderasi Beragama Pesantren: Jaringan dan Paham Keagamaan As'Adiyah, Darul Da'wah Wal Irsyad, dan Nahdlatul Ulum Sulawesi Selatan"; Imran Anwar Kuba et al, "The Contestation of Religious Authority, Social Media, and Local Fiqh: As'adiyah's Rejection of Ustadz Firanda in Wajo".

¹² Wahyuddin Halim, "As'adiyah tradition: the Construction and Reproduction of Religious Authority", Wahyuddin Halim "Young Islamic preachers on Facebook: Pesantren As'adiyah and its engagement with social media", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 46(134) (2018). Wahyuddin Halim, "The Mass Production of Religious Authority: A study on a Ma'had Aly program in South Sulawesi, Indonesia". *Islamic Studies Review*, 1(2) (2022).



Tarmizi Tahir (2022)²², while shifts in actors and leadership are discussed by Muhammad Alwi HS et al. (2021; 2023)²³, Ahmad Khaerussalam (2025)²⁴, and Indo Santalia and Muhsyanur (2025)²⁵. Educational practices, literacy, and institutional innovation are examined by Gaffar and Takbir (2018)²⁶, Muhsyanur et al. (2024)²⁷, Abd Haris and Nurfaika (2024)²⁸, and Dasmarianti et al. (2025)²⁹. More specifically, existing studies have given limited attention to how scholarly genealogy, institutional reproduction, and changing religious orientations intersect in the formation and transformation of normative authority. Nevertheless, these studies have yet to integratively situate As'adiyah as a locus in which the continuity of scholarly and normative traditions is negotiated alongside the transformation of authority within Indonesia's plural and transnational context.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to analyze As'adiyah as a locus of normative authority that actively negotiates the continuity of scholarly traditions and processes of contextual change in contemporary Indonesia. Its central argument is that the dynamics of continuity and transformation constitute a key mechanism through which normative legitimacy is maintained while established scholarly orientations are reinterpreted in response to contemporary contexts. As'adiyah is understood both as an Islamic educational institution genealogically connected to early Islamic traditions and as an active agent of contextualizing Islamic teachings in the modern world. In this article, normative authority refers to the socially recognized capacity to preserve, interpret, transmit, and reformulate authoritative orientations concerning Islamic knowledge and religious practice. In doing so, this article contributes to broader discussions on normative authority by offering a perspective from the Muslim periphery, demonstrating that authoritative traditions are neither uniform nor centrally fixed, but are continuously constituted through scholarly transmission, institutional practices, and adaptive local interpretation. More broadly, this study enriches global scholarly discussions on normative authority, scholarly tradition, interpretation, and institutional change in contemporary Islam.

This study is designed as qualitative library and field research aimed at providing an in-depth and contextual analysis of the dynamics of As'adiyah's normative authority, particularly its formation, transmission, reproduction, and transformation within changing socio-historical contexts. The library research focuses on primary sources authored by members of the As'adiyah community, including works produced by its founder, successive leaders, and scholars within its institutional network. These texts are treated as internal expressions of normative authority that reflect As'adiyah's theological positions, scholarly orientations, interpretive frameworks, and evolving approaches to Islamic knowledge and religious practice over time. Particular attention

²² Muhyiddin Tahir and Tarmizi Tahir, "The role of As'adiyah Islamic boarding school in the implementation of the understanding of religious moderation in religious education and preaching", *Al-Ulum*, 22(1), 2022.

²³ Muhammad Alwi HS, et al, "The Dakwah Movement of Kiai Muda in Eastern Indonesia: Study of Islamic Application and Islamization Models of As'adiyah." Muhammad Alwi HS, et. al. "Moderasi beragama pesantren: Jaringan dan paham keagamaan As'adiyah, Darul Da'wah wal Irsyad, dan Nahdlatul Ulum Sulawesi Selatan."

²⁴ Ahmad Khaerussalam, "Kepemimpinan Transformasional Nasaruddin Umar di Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah: Narasi Reformasi, Digitalisasi, dan Moderasi Islam", *Jurnal Intelekt Insan Cendekia*, 2 (7) 2025.

²⁵ Indo Santalia and Muhsyanur. Implementation of Istiqlal Spirit: Experience at As'adiyah Islamic University of Sengkang", *HUMANIST: As'adiyah International Journal of Humanities and Education*, 2(1), (2025).

²⁶ Gaffar, S., and M. Takbir, "Modernisasi pendidikan Islam abad ke-20 di Sulawesi Selatan." *El-Hikmah: Jurnal Kajian dan Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, 12(1), 2018.

²⁷ Muhsyanur, et al. "Strategies for Developing Religious Literacy Through Indonesian Language Learning at MTs Putri As'adiyah Pusat Sengkang". *MAERIFAH: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 1(2), (2024).

²⁸ Abd Haris and Nurfaika. "Progresivitas Alumni Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang dalam Menguatkan Pendidikan Moderasi Islam". *Innovations in Multidisciplinary Education Journal*, 1(1), (2024). <https://doi.org/10.61476/rzkycn67>

²⁹ Dasmarianti, et al. "The Existence of the Mu'askar al-Lughah al-'Arabiyah Program in the Context of Digital Integration at Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang", *Loghat Arabi*, 6 (1), 2025.



was given to how these sources articulate authoritative references, preserve established scholarly traditions, and provide frameworks for responding to changing religious and social circumstances. Field research was conducted through in-depth interviews, carried out both face-to-face and via social media platforms, in order to reach informants dispersed across different geographical locations. The informants comprised internal actors of As'adiyah as well as external stakeholders, such as government officials, representatives of other Islamic organizations, and members of the broader public. This approach enabled the study to capture relationships of recognition, legitimacy, and perceptions of As'adiyah's authority, including the ways its scholarly and normative orientations are recognized, transmitted, and negotiated across multiple social positions.

The field data were further reinforced through direct observation at As'adiyah's central institution in Wajo Regency and at several of its branches in different regions. These observations focused on institutional practices, religious rituals, pedagogical activities, and the mechanisms through which scholarly and normative authority is transmitted and reproduced within As'adiyah. All data were analyzed using a socio-historical approach that situates As'adiyah within the trajectory of social history and examines how its established scholarly and normative traditions are maintained, interpreted, and reformulated within changing contexts of Islam in Indonesia. The analysis therefore pays attention not only to the social recognition of authority, but also to the processes through which particular bodies of knowledge, interpretive orientations, and normative references acquire continuity and legitimacy within the institution. The analytical framework integrates Ismail Fajrie Alatas's theory of religious authority³⁰ with Pierre Bourdieu's

theory of cultural reproduction³¹. Alatas's perspective is employed to examine the formation of authority through scholarly networks and social legitimacy, while Bourdieu's framework helps to elucidate how authority is reproduced through habitus, symbolic capital, and educational institutions. The combination of these two perspectives allows for a more nuanced analysis of how As'adiyah's normative authority is formed, reproduced, legitimized, and transformed through the interaction of scholarly genealogy, institutional practices, and changing social contexts.

As'adiyah in the Context of Islam in Indonesia

As'adiyah is an Islamic religious educational institution (pesantren) that also operates as a religious organization, occupying a strategic position in Indonesian Islam as both an educational institution and a locus of normative and scholarly authority. Its presence represents not merely a local institution, but also a significant node within broader global networks. From its inception, As'adiyah functioned as a space for the transmission of Islamic knowledge from Mecca to Sengkang, Indonesia, emphasizing the continuity of tradition while remaining closely engaged with the social realities of Muslim communities.³² This positioning has rendered As'adiyah not simply a teaching institution, but an authoritative actor in shaping Islamic orientations. Its role extends to the preservation and transmission of established normative orientations, particularly through the cultivation of scholarly competence, the circulation of authoritative knowledge, and the guidance of religious practice. In this regard, As'adiyah's normative authority is not constructed solely through formal claims, but through social recognition derived from its capacity to produce religious scholars, transmit authoritative knowledge, guide religious practice, and maintain

³⁰ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What is religious authority? Cultivating Islamic communities in Indonesia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

³² Kamaluddin Abunawas, et al. *Sejarah dan Perkembangan Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah*, (Sengkang: As'adiyah Pusat, 2022).



normative continuity within society. Its significance becomes even more apparent as its influence extends beyond local geographical boundaries and resonates as far as Malaysia,³³ thereby situating As'adiyah within transnational dynamics of Islamic authority in Southeast Asia.³⁴

Genealogically, As'adiyah is deeply rooted in the Islamic scholarly tradition of the *Haramayn*. The founder of As'adiyah, Muhammad As'ad al-Bugisy (1908–1952), acquired his scholarly authority through an extensive intellectual formation in Mecca, where he was born, educated, and actively engaged in the transmission (*sanad*) of Islamic knowledge, including Qur'anic memorization, Qur'anic exegesis, *fiqh*, *hadith*, and related disciplines. This body of knowledge was subsequently disseminated in Indonesia, particularly in Sengkang, South Sulawesi.³⁵ The trajectory from a global center of Islamic learning to a local Nusantara context marks a process of localization of Islamic authority without severing ties to the classical sources of Islam (notably the prophetic era). This process of localization was not merely geographical, but also normative, as scholarly knowledge transmitted through established genealogies provided the framework through which authoritative interpretations and religious orientations were introduced and sustained in the local context. By integrating the scholarly genealogies of the *Haramayn* with local social realities, As'adiyah has continued to expand its authority across multiple regions, from its most local base in Wajo to an increasingly international reach. Today, As'adiyah oversees approximately 500 *pesantren* across various regions of Indonesia,

and its students include individuals from Malaysia. It also encompasses nearly all levels of education, ranging from early childhood education (pre-primary school) to postgraduate programs (master's level).³⁶ Moreover, members of the As'adiyah community occupy numerous strategic social positions, including roles within the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, the leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), and other key institutions.³⁷

In theological and normative terms, As'adiyah consistently affirms its affiliation with *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ah*, while maintaining a sustained commitment to the Shāfi'ī scholarly tradition as a principal framework for religious orientation and practice. This affiliation provides not only a marker of institutional identity but also an established framework for the transmission, interpretation, and contextual application of normative knowledge across generations. This orientation situates As'adiyah firmly within the mainstream of Sunni Islam in the Indonesian archipelago while reinforcing its role as a guardian of Islamic orthodoxy.³⁸ Nevertheless, this affiliation is not interpreted in a rigid or exclusivist manner. Rather, the continuity of established scholarly orientations is accompanied by processes of contextual interpretation that enable normative commitments to remain responsive to changing social circumstances. As'adiyah promotes a moderate religious approach that consciously avoids extremism.³⁹ The continuous effort to cultivate a model of religious moderation constitutes an integral

³³ Observe the branches of As'adiyah and the dissemination of its students and alumni across <https://asadiyahpusat.org/>.

³⁴ Taqwa and Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin, "Anregurutta H.M. As'ad dan Genealogi Studi Islam Asia Tenggara di Tanah Bugis Abad 20".

³⁵ Read Ummu Kalsum, KH. *Muhammad As'ad Pendiri Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang*, (Makassar: Alauddin Press, 2008); Muhammad Sabit, "Gerakan Dakwah H. Muhammad As'ad Al-Bugisy." *Dissertation*, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, 2012. Ilham. "Konsep Pendidikan Kader Ulama Anregurutta Muhammad As'ad". *Dissertation*, Universitas Ibn Khaldun Bogor, 2017.

³⁶ <https://asadiyahpusat.org/>. The researcher's observation at the central As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School in Sengkang, Wajo, in November 2025.

³⁷ Kamaluddin Abunawas, et al. *Sejarah dan Perkembangan Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah*, (Sengkang: As'adiyah Pusat, 2022).

³⁸ Mustaming Giling, et. al, "Characteristics and Dynamics of Sunni Sufism at the As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Islamic Boarding School".

³⁹ Muhammad Alwi HS, et al, "Moderasi Beragama Pesantren: Jaringan dan Paham Keagamaan As'Adiyah, Darul Da'wah Wal Irsyad, dan Nahdlatul Ulum Sulawesi Selatan".



dimension of As'adiyah's institutional practice, manifested in its educational curriculum, da'wah activities, and social relations with other religious groups. Through this approach, As'adiyah functions as a mediating force between the preservation of established normative traditions and the need for contextual responsiveness and social harmony within a multicultural society.⁴⁰ Such moderation further strengthens As'adiyah's legitimacy as an Islamic authority that is broadly acceptable across diverse constituencies.

Through networks of scholars and alumni, As'adiyah has extended its influence across Indonesia, forming Islamic networks that are both regional and transnational in character. These networks serve as mechanisms for the reproduction of normative authority, through which scholarly traditions, interpretive orientations, and religious practices are continuously transmitted, recognized, and adapted across different social contexts.⁴¹ These networks serve as mechanisms for the reproduction of normative authority, through which scholarly traditions, interpretive orientations, and religious practices are continuously transmitted, recognized, and adapted across different social contexts. In this sense, As'adiyah operates not only as an educational institution, but also as a religious organization actively engaged in the construction of the Islamic public sphere. Its roles encompass education, religious propagation, and involvement in broader socio-religious issues.⁴² Consequently, As'adiyah emerges as an institution that bridges established scholarly and normative

traditions with contemporary challenges. This position underscores its significance as a rooted yet adaptive locus of normative authority, capable of sustaining continuity while enabling contextual transformation, as further elaborated in the following section.

Genealogy and the Development of As'adiyah's Authority

The normative authority of As'adiyah cannot be understood merely as the product of modern institutional structures; rather, it is the outcome of a long and ongoing socio-historical process through which scholarly competence, authoritative knowledge, and normative orientations have been transmitted and recognized. In this context, authority within the As'adiyah community is not primarily grounded in lineage (*nasab*)⁴³, as is often the case in other religious milieus. Instead, As'adiyah bases authority on scholarly competence and professionalism, which are subsequently manifested in its leadership structures.⁴⁴ Such scholarly competence also constitutes the basis for participating in the interpretation, transmission, and articulation of normative orientations within the As'adiyah community. This authority is further reflected in the forms of respect accorded by the community to As'adiyah scholars through honorific titles such as *Anregurutta* (senior scholar), *Gurutta* ("our teacher," referring to mid-level scholars), and *Kiai Muda* (junior scholar).⁴⁵ These titles are not only socially conferred but are also institutionally produced through formal scholarly pathways,

⁴⁰ Muhammad Alwi HS, et al, "Moderasi Beragama Pesantren: Jaringan dan Paham Keagamaan As'Adiyah, Darul Da'wah Wal Irsyad, dan Nahdlatul Ulum Sulawesi Selatan"; Saddam Husain and Dwi, Andi Eka. "Moderasi beragama berbasis tradisi pesantren pada Ma'had Aly As'adiyah Sengkang Wajo Sulawesi Selatan"; Hamsir, et al, "Mangaji Tudang: AGH. As'ad Al-Bugisi's Learning Method in Strengthening Wasathiyah Islam Based on Pesantren in Eastern Indonesia", *Raushan Fiker*, 12(2), 2023.

⁴¹ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Hawai: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

⁴² See the vision, mission, and objectives of As'adiyah in <https://asadiyahpusat.org/>.

⁴³ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*, (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011); Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society: Local Politics in Madura*, (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁴ The researcher's observation during the election of the General Chair of As'adiyah on Sunday, 4 December 2022; an interview with Iin Parnisih, an alumna of the As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School, on 23 November 2026; an interview with Abdul Haris, an alumnus of the As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School, on 25 November 2026; and information obtained from various sources.

⁴⁵ Abd Kadir Ahmad, *Buginese Ulama*. (Jakarta: Badan LITBANG dan DIKLAT Kementerian Agama RI, 2012).



particularly via Ma'had Aly, which grants the designation of *Kiai Muda* and contributes to the reproduction of recognized scholarly authority.⁴⁶ Such scholarly titles do not emerge spontaneously; rather, they are the result of sustained processes in which the past, leadership, and social context are deeply intertwined. In this sense, normative authority is constructed through the continuity of scholarly tradition, social recognition, and the institutional capacity to transmit, interpret, and reproduce normative orientations that remain socially relevant.

In this regard, Halim observes that As'adiyah's authority has been established since its founding by Muhammad As'ad and has subsequently been reproduced by successive generations. A widely held perception within the As'adiyah milieu suggests that a scholar's Islamic authority is not fully recognized unless it is genealogically linked, through a chain of knowledge transmission (*sanad*), to Muhammad As'ad.⁴⁷ In other words, the authority established by Muhammad As'ad constitutes the foundational basis of religious legitimacy within As'adiyah. At the same time, this genealogy provides an epistemic foundation through which particular bodies of knowledge and normative orientations acquire continuity, credibility, and authority within the institution. His authority was inseparable from his strong scholarly networks connected to the *Haramayn*, particularly Mecca, as a global center of Islamic authority, and was symbolically and epistemically anchored in the Prophet

Muhammad.⁴⁸ Muhammad As'ad studied under several prominent Meccan scholars, including Shaykh 'Umar ibn Hamdan, Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id al-Yamani, and Shaykh Jamal al-Maliki, among others.⁴⁹ This scholarly chain functions not only as a source of historical legitimacy and social recognition, but also as a mechanism for ensuring the continuity and credibility of authoritative scholarly and normative knowledge. Within Islamic scholarly tradition, *sanad* occupies a central position as a mechanism for safeguarding the continuity, authenticity, and credibility of knowledge transmission.⁵⁰ Its significance therefore extends beyond genealogical affiliation, as *sanad* also establishes the epistemic conditions through which transmitted knowledge becomes recognized as authoritative within a particular scholarly community. Accordingly, the continuity of As'adiyah's *sanad* strengthens its position as a legitimate heir to classical Islamic traditions, while simultaneously distinguishing it from forms of religious authority lacking a well-established scholarly genealogy.

Beyond scholarly lineage, pedagogical tradition serves as a primary medium for the reproduction of As'adiyah's scholarly and normative authority. The practice of *mangaji tudang*, or *halaqah*, represents a distinctive mode of instruction that reflects the continuity of Islamic pedagogical methods since the prophetic era.⁵¹ This tradition emphasizes direct teacher–student relationships, oral transmission, and the internalization of *adab* and moral authority, rather than the mere transfer of textual knowledge. Through this relationship, the transmission of knowledge is inseparable from the formation of scholarly responsibility, ethical discipline, and

⁴⁶ The practice of conferring scholarly titles based on educational levels thus distinguishes As'adiyah's system from the title of *kiai* commonly found in other regions of Indonesia, such as Madura, Java, and elsewhere. In those regions, the title *kiai* is typically acquired through service to the community, ownership or leadership of an Islamic boarding school, perceived charisma or sanctity (*keramat*), or other social and religious factors. See Muhammad Adlin Sila, "Kiai dan Blater: antara Kesalehan dan Kekerasan dalam Dinamika Politik Lokal di Madura", *Studia Islamika*, 26(1), 2019.

⁴⁷ Wahyuddin Halim, "As'adiyah tradition: the Construction and Reproduction of Religious Authority"; This point was also conveyed directly in a discussion with Wahyuddin Halim, in an interview conducted at UIN Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia, on 16 July 2025.

⁴⁸ Asyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII*. (Jakarta: Kencana, 2007).

⁴⁹ Wahyuddin Halim, "As'adiyah tradition: the Construction and Reproduction of Religious Authority".

⁵⁰ Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi. *Al-Kifayah fi 'Ilm al-Riwayah*. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyyah, tt).

⁵¹ George Makdisi, *The Rise of College: Institution of Learning in Islam and The West*. Edinburgh University Press, 1981.



recognition of established interpretive authority. Within the As'adiyah context, *mangaji tudang* functions not only as a method of learning but also as a mechanism through which scholarly dispositions, interpretive orientations, and normative commitments are cultivated and transmitted. This practice was inherited from Muhammad As'ad's experiences in Mecca and has since been sustained, developed, and contextualized to remain relevant in contemporary Islamic education.⁵² Through this embodied practice, scholarly authority is reproduced in a manner that is inscribed in the bodies, ethics, and worldviews of students. As such, As'adiyah sustains a model of Islamic education that interweaves text, tradition, and social relations. This pedagogical continuity demonstrates that As'adiyah's authority emerges both from modern institutionalization and from scholarly practices deeply rooted in early Islamic traditions.

Over the course of its development, leadership has played a crucial role in shaping the direction and Islamic orientation of As'adiyah. The foundational period under Muhammad As'ad's leadership was marked by a strong emphasis on the Qur'an and *hadith*, accompanied by a cautious approach toward theological speculation. However, the teachings inherited from Muhammad As'ad were not frozen into static formulations; rather, they have served as ethical and normative frameworks that are continually interpreted and mediated in engagements with modern discourses such as gender equality, ecology, and religious moderation. In this context, As'adiyah's normative authority operates through processes of interpretation and contextualization rather than through the mechanical preservation of inherited formulations or resistance to change. Leadership therefore functions not only as a mechanism for preserving institutional continuity, but also as an arena of interpretive mediation through which

inherited scholarly traditions are articulated in response to new circumstances. This approach enables As'adiyah to maintain its position as a guardian of Islamic tradition while remaining relevant within contemporary Islamic discourse. Accordingly, As'adiyah's normative authority can be understood as the product of an interaction between scholarly genealogy, pedagogical transmission, and adaptive leadership. The historical dimension provides the epistemic and normative foundations of legitimacy, while the dynamics of pedagogical transmission and leadership open space for interpretation and contextual transformation, as will be further examined in the following section.

The Transformation of As'adiyah's normative Authority

The transformation of As'adiyah's normative authority can be adequately understood when situated within a dialectical framework of continuity and change, through which established scholarly traditions are preserved while their interpretive and practical articulations are continuously reformulated. As'adiyah is not merely an institution that inherits established Islamic traditions; rather, it is an institutional arena in which normative orientations are continuously negotiated, interpreted, and articulated in response to changing social contexts. As discussed earlier, religious authority does not exist as a final or fixed entity, but as a historical process in constant motion. The concept of continuity and change allows us to understand transformation within As'adiyah as a process through which normative legitimacy is sustained while established scholarly orientations remain responsive to changing circumstances. Through its capacity to adapt to change, As'adiyah has been able to maintain its position as a socially recognized Islamic authority. In other words, transformation does not negate continuity; instead, it enables established normative orientations to acquire new forms of articulation without severing their scholarly and historical foundations.

⁵² Hamsir, et al, "Mangaji Tudang: AGH. As'ad Al-Bugisi's Learning Method in Strengthening Wasathiyah Islam Based on Pesantren in Eastern Indonesia".



Continuity in As'adiyah's normative authority is primarily anchored in the preservation of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'ah* tradition, sustained reference to the Qur'an, ḥadīth, established scholarly heritage, and the continuity of classical pedagogical methods. In matters of *fiqh*, for instance, As'adiyah consistently upholds the use of the Qur'an, ḥadīth, *ijmā'*, *qiyās*, and *istiḥāb* as authoritative sources.⁵³ These references function not merely as inherited sources of knowledge, but as normative foundations through which religious questions, practices, and changing circumstances are approached and evaluated. Similarly, in the realm of pedagogy, As'adiyah maintains the practice of *mangaji tudang*, the use of *tuṛāth* (classical) texts, and a strong emphasis on scholarly *adab* as primary mechanisms for reproducing scholarly competence and normative authority. These elements function as epistemic and normative anchors that sustain the continuity of As'adiyah's scholarly orientation and institutional identity. Continuity, therefore, lies not necessarily in the preservation of identical forms, but in the maintenance of authoritative references and normative orientations through changing modes of transmission and practice. Beyond doctrinal domains—such as Sufism, as previously discussed—the practice of *mangaji tudang* itself has evolved in response to modern conditions. This is particularly evident during the leadership of Nasaruddin Umar, which coincided with the widespread adoption of Zoom as a learning medium. In this context, *mangaji tudang* has been conducted both online (via Zoom) and offline (face-to-face), and in many cases exclusively through virtual platforms.⁵⁴ The shift

from face-to-face instruction to digital platforms thus illustrates that the transformation of normative authority may occur at the level of institutional form and transmission without necessarily altering the scholarly references and normative orientation that underpin the practice.



Figure 1. Several recordings of *Mangaji Tudang (Halaqah)* by AGH. Nasaruddin Umar, Head of As'adiyah Pesantren, Sengkang-South Sulawesi, conducted via Zoom meetings and archived on the official YouTube channel of As'adiyah, @As'adiyah Channel

Another illustration of the transformation of As'adiyah's normative authority can be found in the differing scholarly and interpretive orientations between its founder and its current leadership. Muhammad As'ad, as both founder and first leader of As'adiyah, operated in a context where local communities were perceived as being affected by deviations in belief, particularly syncretic practices. Consequently, his primary focus was the purification of '*aqīdah*'.⁵⁵ He also discouraged the wider public from engaging in Sufi (esoteric) practices, which he regarded as susceptible to misinterpretation and excess, especially given the limited scholarly capacity of the broader community.⁵⁶ In his view, Sufi practice was appropriate primarily for scholars rather than lay believers. In contrast, the current leader of As'adiyah, Nasaruddin Umar, places greater emphasis on Sufism as a means of grounding Islam in everyday life. He frequently

⁵³ Kamaluddin Abunawas, et al. *Fikih As'adiyah*, (Sengkang: As'adiyah Pusat, 2022).

⁵⁴ Religious study sessions conducted via Zoom meetings are often held when the lecturer is Nasaruddin Umar. This is because Nasaruddin Umar resides in Jakarta, as he currently serves as the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, while the Islamic boarding school he leads is located in Sengkang, South Sulawesi. Various recordings of Nasaruddin Umar's study sessions are available on the YouTube channel @As'adiyah Channel, particularly under the series *Special Lectures of the As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School, Sengkang*. As'adiyah Channel,

"Pengajian Khusus Pondok Pesantren As'adiyah Sengkang | AG. Prof. Dr. KH. Nasaruddin Umar MA. https://www.youtube.com/@asadiyah_channel.

⁵⁵ Ilham. "Konsep Pendidikan Kader Ulama Anregurutta Muhammad As'ad".

⁵⁶ An interview with Gurutta Suyuti, a senior instructor at the As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School, on 21 November 2025; and an interview with Dasmarianti, a supervisor at the As'adiyah Islamic Boarding School, on 23 November 2025.



promotes Sufism as an accessible teaching that can be embraced by all segments of society. This shift reflects the different context faced by contemporary leadership, namely a modern society increasingly characterized by the erosion of intuition and spirituality and the dominance of rationalistic modes of thought.

These transformations in As'adiyah's normative authority occur as the institution develops more contextually responsive approaches to changing circumstances and emerging contemporary issues. In this sense, change functions as a mechanism of adaptation, enabling As'adiyah to remain relevant to contemporary Muslim societies. Leadership plays a decisive role in managing the dialectic between continuity and change. Each leadership configuration brings distinct intellectual and social sensibilities that shape the direction of authority transformation within As'adiyah. Leadership thus functions not only as a guardian of scholarly tradition, but also as an interpretive authority that mediates how inherited normative orientations are articulated and applied in present contexts. Here, normative authority operates through processes of internal negotiation, where inherited scholarly references encounter new discourses, circumstances, and practical demands. This process corresponds to what Alatas describes as prophetic labor (*labor*), a continuous and adaptive effort to ensure that Islamic teachings remain applicable across time and space (*ṣāliḥ li kullī zamān wa makān*). Such a process indicates that the transformation of As'adiyah's authority is reflective and controlled, rather than reactive or opportunistic.

In other instances, the transformation of As'adiyah's normative authority is also reflected in the way the institution positions itself and articulates its scholarly orientations within the Islamic public sphere. As'adiyah operates not only in the educational domain, but also engages actively in broader socio-religious discourses. Through *da'wah*, networks of scholars, and relationships with the state and other Islamic organizations, As'adiyah expands the basis of its

authoritative legitimacy. Research interviews reveal that members of the As'adiyah community are dispersed across various regions of Indonesia and extend into Malaysia, particularly in areas inhabited by Bugis-Makassar communities originating from South Sulawesi. In such a context of dispersion, As'adiyah's presence across diverse regions necessitates interpretive flexibility without sacrificing normative grounding. Such flexibility enables the institution to maintain the authority of its established references while allowing their articulation to respond to diverse social and cultural settings. Here, change functions as an institutional strategy for maintaining relevance and social influence. Accordingly, the transformation of As'adiyah's normative authority demonstrates that continuity and change are not opposing poles that negate one another, but mutually reinforcing dimensions of scholarly transmission, interpretation, and institutional adaptation. Continuity provides epistemic and normative legitimacy, while change enables established scholarly orientations to remain interpretable, applicable, and socially relevant. This dialectic positions As'adiyah as a significant case for understanding how normative authority is sustained through the interaction of scholarly continuity, interpretive mediation, and institutional adaptation in contemporary Indonesia.

Conclusion

This study affirms that As'adiyah's normative authority is formed through a complex dialectic between the continuity of scholarly tradition and strategies of contextual transformation. The main findings of this research can be summarized in three points. First, As'adiyah's normative authority is deeply rooted in the genealogy of classical Islamic scholarship, transmitted through chains of knowledge (*sanad*), the tradition of *balaqah* (*mangaji tudang*), and recognized scholarly figures, thereby sustaining the continuity and legitimacy of authoritative knowledge across generations. Second, this authority is not static; rather, it is continuously reproduced and



transformed through institutional leadership and pedagogical practices capable of interpreting and articulating the teachings of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* in contextual ways, including in relation to contemporary issues and emerging social discourses. Third, at the global level, As'adiyah's normative authority operates in a relational and adaptive manner, gaining recognition through cultural negotiation while maintaining its connection to established scholarly and normative foundations. Thus, the changes that occur should not be understood as deviations from tradition, but as institutional and interpretive mechanisms through which authoritative references and normative orientations remain relevant within continuously changing social contexts.

From this perspective, the implications of this study indicate that contemporary normative authority cannot be understood solely through institutional or abstract normative approaches, but must also be read as a social process involving scholarly networks, recognition, transmission, interpretation, and the reproduction of authoritative orientations. Practically, these findings recommend that religious institutions and organizations continue to develop models of leadership and Islamic education that are contextually responsive without severing the continuity of established scholarly traditions and normative references. In terms of religious governance and institutional development, this study provides an empirical foundation for strengthening religious moderation through locally rooted authorities that possess strong scholarly credentials, normative legitimacy, and social recognition. Nevertheless, studies of this kind still need further development, particularly through comparative research between As'adiyah and transnational networks of *ulama*, as well as by extending the analysis to the digital sphere and social media as emerging arenas for the transmission, negotiation, and reproduction of normative authority.

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Author Contribution Statement

Samsidar Jamaluddin contributed to conceptualization, research design, data collection, and manuscript drafting. Muhammad Alwi HS contributed to conceptualization, data analysis, interpretation, and critical revision. Dulsukmi Kasim contributed to data collection, analysis, and manuscript review. Muhammad Yusuf Jufri contributed to data collection, interpretation, and critical revision. All authors approved the final manuscript.

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