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CONSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE INDONESIAN ULEMA COUNCIL ROLE IN POLITICAL MASS GATHERINGS MINANGKABAU REGION



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Abstract

The controversy surrounding the refusal of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) of Payakumbuh City to issue a recommendation for a 'tabligh akbar' led by Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS) during the local election period highlights a persistent tension between the protection of constitutional rights and efforts to maintain the political neutrality of places of worship. MUI Payakumbuh asserted that the decision did not target religious preaching per se, but rather aimed to prevent indications of covert political campaigning conducted under the guise of religious gatherings in mosques. This study examines the legal basis and constitutional legitimacy of MUI's action, maps the local political dynamics of Minangkabau society that shape the controversy, and assesses its implications for freedom of religion, expression, and the regulation of religious spaces in electoral contexts. The study employs a qualitative normative—empirical approach. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with MUI officials and mosque administrators in Payakumbuh, while secondary data consist of MUI fatwas and recommendations, electoral regulations (Law No. 7 of 2017, KPU and Bawaslu regulations), and national and local media reports. Data were analysed using statutory analysis, case study methods, and critical discourse analysis. The findings indicate that the prohibition of political campaigning in places of worship has a strong normative foundation in electoral law. However, from a constitutional perspective, MUI's intervention risks regulatory overreach when the notion of practical politics is applied without clear, objective criteria and accountable procedures.

Abstrak

Polemik penolakan rekomendasi tabligh akbar Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS) oleh Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) Kota Payakumbuh pada momentum Pilkada menegaskan ketegangan antara perlindungan hak konstitusional warga negara dan upaya menjaga netralitas rumah ibadah dari politik praktis. MUI Payakumbuh menegaskan bahwa yang ditolak bukan aktivitas dakwah, melainkan indikasi kampanye terselubung yang dikemas dalam bentuk tabligh akbar di masjid. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dasar hukum dan legitimasi konstitusional tindakan MUI, memetakan dinamika politik lokal Minangkabau yang melatarbelakanginya, serta mengkaji implikasinya terhadap kebebasan beragama, berekspresi, dan pengaturan netralitas rumah ibadah dalam pemilu dan pilkada. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif normatif-empiris. Data primer diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pengurus MUI Kota Payakumbuh dan pengelola masjid, sedangkan data sekunder meliputi fatwa dan rekomendasi MUI, regulasi pemilu (UU No. 7 Tahun 2017 serta peraturan KPU dan Bawaslu), dan pemberitaan media nasional serta lokal. Analisis dilakukan melalui pendekatan perundang-undangan, studi kasus, dan analisis wacana kritis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa larangan kampanye di rumah ibadah memiliki dasar normatif yang kuat dalam hukum pemilu. Namun, secara konstitusional, tindakan MUI berpotensi menimbulkan overreach apabila tafsir politik praktis diterapkan tanpa kriteria objektif dan mekanisme akuntabel.



INTRDUCTION

One of the most prominent dynamics ahead of the 2024 elections is the strengthening commitment of various religious actors to keep mosques free from practical politics. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), together with a number of Islamic organizations, has explicitly agreed to prohibit the use of mosques as arenas for supporting candidates, with the argument of maintaining the sanctity of mosques and preventing polarization among congregations. (Ichwan 2020). At the electoral regulation level, the prohibition of campaigning in places of worship is also stipulated in the Election Law and various regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). (Burhani 2017). Within this national context, the Minang region has its own unique characteristics. (Subekti 2021). The philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* places religion as the normative basis of social and political life, with scholars and institutions such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) holding strong moral authority. (Kompas 2023). On the other hand, the political history of West Sumatra shows a high intensity of identity politics based on religion and regionalism, which often colors electoral contests.

The controversy surrounding the rejection or non-issuance of a recommendation for UAS's grand preaching by the Payakumbuh MUI is a concrete illustration of the intersection between preaching, practical politics, and the authority of religious institutions. (Sumbar 2024). The Payakumbuh MUI stated that the problem was not the substance of UAS's preaching, but rather the indication of a campaign agenda packaged in the form of a large-scale religious gathering at the mosque. This controversy sparked widespread responses in the media and public sphere, ranging from defenses of the MUI's authority as the guardian of the sanctity of mosques to criticism that the decision was an excessive restriction on the right to preach and freedom of expression. (Hosen 2019).

Academically, there have been a number of studies on political campaigns in places of worship and the prohibition of their use for political purposes, both from the perspective of constitutional law and *fiqh siyasah*. (Asshiddiqie 2010; Bruinessen 2018; Subekti 2024) However, there is still a lack of research that specifically examines the role of the MUI as an interpreter of the limits of campaign preaching in the local context of Minangkabau, with a focus on constitutional analysis of restrictions on large-scale political preaching. Similarly, the discourse on the MUI as a quasi-state non-state actor in the current political contest is still mostly discussed at the national level, and has not been explored in concrete cases in regions such as Payakumbuh.

This study aims to: (1) analyze the legal and constitutional legitimacy of the actions of the Payakumbuh MUI; (2) to explain the relationship between Minangkabau political culture, identity politics, and the role of religious scholars in decision-making related to *tabligh akbar*; and (3) to formulate recommendations for future regulations

that balance the protection of constitutional rights, the neutrality of houses of worship, and religious authority. The novelty of this article lies in its sharpening of the role of the MUI as an actor interpreting the boundaries of da'wah (proselytizing) and campaigning in the local Minangkabau sphere, by positioning the ban on UAS's tabligh akbar as a form of restriction of constitutional rights that must be rigorously tested from the perspective of constitutional law and legal politics, not merely as an internal decision of a religious institution.

METHODS

This study uses a normative-empirical qualitative design to analyze the constitutional legitimacy of the actions of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Payakumbuh City in refusing to give recommendations for large-scale religious gatherings during the regional elections. The normative dimension focuses on examining the legal framework governing election campaigns and the use of houses of worship, including the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, regulations of the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), as well as fatwas and policy statements from the MUI at both the national and regional levels. (Daipon et al. 2024) Meanwhile, the empirical dimension aims to capture the socio-political context behind the emergence of this polemic.

Primary data was obtained through in-depth and semi-structured interviews with MUI officials in Payakumbuh City and mosque administrators involved in the decision-making process. Secondary data included national and local media reports, public statements, and opinions developing in the public sphere related to the case. Data analysis was conducted through the interpretation of laws and regulations, case studies, and critical discourse analysis to identify patterns of legal argumentation, institutional practices, and emerging public narratives. This approach allows for an assessment of whether the restrictions imposed by the MUI comply with the principles of legality, proportionality, and accountability from a constitutional law perspective, while also placing this case in context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The legal and constitutional legitimacy of the actions of the Payakumbuh MUI **Constitutional Rights: Freedom of Religion, Expression, and Assembly**

The 1945 Constitution places the fundamental rights of citizens as the highest normative reference in formulating the limits of actions by the state and non-state actors. (Azyumardi Azra 1996). In the context of this study, the three most relevant constitutional rights are freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution guarantees that the state guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their religion and beliefs. This guarantee is reinforced by Article 28E, which affirms

the freedom to embrace a religion and worship according to one's religion, as well as the freedom to express thoughts and attitudes according to one's conscience. Freedom of expression and access to information is also affirmed in Article 28F, while freedom of association and assembly is regulated in Article 28E paragraph (3).

However, these rights are not absolute. Article 28J of the 1945 Constitution provides the basis for restricting human rights as long as it is done by law, in order to guarantee the recognition and respect for the rights of others and to fulfill fair demands in accordance with moral considerations, religious values, security, and public order. This is where discretion arises for the state and actors in strategic positions, including religious institutions such as the MUI, to interpret when a religious expression is considered to disturb public order or violate the rights of others. (Wahyudi 2021). In the context of houses of worship, the right to practice religion (preaching, worship) and the right to express opinions often intersect with political activities, especially when religious leaders express explicit support for certain candidates or insert partisan messages into religious sermons. Large-scale religious gatherings, religious lectures, and Friday sermons can be effective channels for electoral mobilization, given the position of religious scholars as moral figures of reference. (Kompas 2023).

Tension arises when religious expression, which some view as preaching, is interpreted by others as a covert campaign. The question then shifts from “do citizens have the right to preach and listen to preaching?” to “when does preaching become campaigning?” and “who has the authority to determine that line?”. From a constitutional rights perspective, any restrictions on large-scale religious gatherings must meet the following criteria: they must be regulated by law, have a legitimate purpose, and be implemented in a proportionate and non-discriminatory manner. Otherwise, such restrictions have the potential to become a tool for silencing the fundamental rights of citizens, even if they are packaged under the pretext of maintaining order or the sanctity of places of worship.

Religion-State Relations and the Position of Religious Organizations

The relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia is unique: Indonesia is not a religious state, but it is also not a secular state in the sense of strictly separating religion from the public sphere. Instead, the state recognizes and manages religious life through various policies, institutions, and regulations. In this model, religious organizations, especially the MUI, occupy an intermediate position: they are not state institutions, but are often functioned as official partners of the state in determining the direction of religious policy. Historically, the MUI was born out of the consolidation of Islamic mass organizations, but since the New Order era it has been directed to become an official channel of communication between the government and Muslims. This dual legitimacy as representatives of the ulama on the one hand and as partners of state policy on the other shapes the character of the MUI as a quasi-state actor. The fatwas, recommendations, and statements of the MUI do not have the status

of legislation, but in practice they have very strong social and political binding power. (Rasyid 2020).

In contemporary developments, the role of the MUI goes beyond normative religious functions. This institution often acts as a policy influencer that provides moral assessments of public policies, economic products, and even political contests. When the MUI issued a call for mosques to be free from practical politics, or when regional MUI branches refused to give recommendations for certain large-scale religious gatherings, the MUI's position was no longer merely that of an interpreter of Islamic law, but also that of a *de facto* regulator of the political behavior of the people in religious spaces. This has two consequences. First, MUI decisions have a real impact on the exercise of citizens' constitutional rights, even though they are not formally state products. Second, the MUI itself has entered a gray area between moral authority and political actor. On the one hand, it claims neutrality and independence; on the other hand, it is caught in the tug-of-war between local and national political interests. In the context of the Minang region, where clerics hold a high symbolic position, MUI decisions are easily interpreted and responded to as political maneuvers, not merely religious fatwas. (Kompas 2019).

Campaigns in Mosques and Houses of Worship

The prohibition of campaigning in places of worship has become one of the normative consensuses in Indonesian electoral law. Law No. 7 of 2017 explicitly prohibits the use of government facilities, places of worship, and educational facilities for campaigning. Regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) then detail the types of activities that are prohibited, ranging from the installation of campaign materials, public meetings, to the use of pulpits to express support for election participants. A number of constitutional law studies have positioned this prohibition as an effort to maintain the neutrality of sacred spaces and prevent the symbolic domination of certain groups over places of worship. Mosques, churches, and other places of worship should ideally be spaces for spiritual gathering, not arenas for political conflict that exacerbate polarization among congregations. In the context of identity politics, the ban on campaigning in places of worship is also seen as a mechanism to curb the exploitation of religious symbols for short-term electoral gain. (Fitria 2020).

However, recent studies also show the problematic side of this prohibition when it is applied rigidly and without clear distinctions. In Islamic history, mosques were not only places of worship, but also centers for consultation, deliberation, and the management of public affairs. Politics, in the sense of managing the public interest, cannot be separated from the function of mosques. (Fitria 2020; Rasyid 2020). The problem arises when politics is narrowly defined as electoral campaigning: mentioning candidates' names, encouraging people to vote, distributing campaign materials, and so on.

The conceptual difference between value politics and practical politics is key. Value politics is when clerics talk about justice, anti-corruption, trustworthiness, protection of people's rights, and relate these to the principles of Sharia law. Practical politics is when preaching becomes a tool for mobilizing support for a particular candidate. Many cases in the field show that the line between the two is blurred. Lectures that do not explicitly mention the names of candidates can still be directed to benefit certain parties through symbols, narratives, and issue framing. It is in this gray area that the role of the MUI and election supervisors becomes crucial. If the interpretation of "campaigning" and "practical politics" is expanded without measurable criteria, then almost every large-scale tabligh that touches on public issues could be suspected of being a campaign. As a result, citizens' rights to obtain religious-based political education in places of worship could potentially be reduced, while da'wah is confined to a safe zone that is sterile from social and political criticism.(Indonesia 2022).

Identity Politics and the Role of Religious Scholars in Electoral Contests

Identity politics, particularly those based on religion and ethnicity, are prominent phenomena in both national and local elections in Indonesia.(Subekti 2024). In various regions, religious and ethnic symbols are used to draw boundaries between us and them, rally solidarity, and mobilize electoral support. Clerics, traditional leaders, and community leaders play a central role as brokers of identity. In the context of West Sumatra, identity politics is intertwined with traditional philosophy and clerical traditions. Research on the support of Sufi clerics, such as Syathariyah, shows how Sufi networks can be effective machines for mobilizing votes. Congregations that are spiritually bound to the mursyid tend to follow the political preferences of the clerics, so that houses of worship, prayer rooms, and zikir assemblies become spaces for consolidating support.

The role of religious scholars does not stop at issuing moral fatwas. In many cases, religious scholars convey subtle hints or even open support for certain candidates. This attitude can be packaged in the form of advice to vote for candidates who are "like-minded," anti-oppression, or pro-community, which implicitly points to certain figures. For religious communities, the recommendations of religious scholars often carry more weight than the candidates' own vision and mission statements.

Studies on religious areas show that fatwas, advice, and political preferences of clerics often become the main reference for citizens' political choices. When clerics object to the presence of a figure in a mosque because they are considered to carry practical political weight, congregations tend to accept this without questioning the legal basis. In this context, the MUI's decision regarding UAS's tabligh akbar cannot be interpreted merely as an administrative action, but as a strong signal that has the potential to shift public opinion towards the figure and the political network behind

him. On the other hand, the involvement of religious scholars in electoral contests also poses the risk of delegitimization. When the public perceives the MUI or certain religious scholars as being too close to those in power or to certain political groups, public trust can be eroded. Every decision, including the ban on large-scale religious gatherings, can easily be suspected of being a political maneuver rather than purely a religious decision.

The Minangkabau philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* (custom based on law, law based on the Book of Allah) affirms that custom and law support each other, with the Qur'an as the highest reference point. In socio-political practice, this means that political behavior is assessed not only from a legal-formal aspect, but also from the perspective of customary propriety and conformity with Islamic values. (Wimra 2017). Ulama and *ninik mamak* occupy a central position in interpreting what is appropriate and inappropriate in politics. Candidates who are associated with certain ulama or who have received the blessing of traditional leaders have a significant symbolic advantage. In this context, houses of worship are not merely places of prayer, but arenas for shaping political opinion laden with values, where public issues are discussed with reference to sharia and *adat*. When large-scale political rallies appear in mosques, tension is immediately felt on two levels. First, at the internal level of the congregation: will the mosque become a space for candidates to vie for influence? Second, at the normative level: is it appropriate to use the pulpit as a tool for electoral campaigning?

Some people believe that inviting speakers who are identified with certain political camps, especially during the campaign period, is a form of using mosques for practical political interests that contradicts the spirit of *adat basandi syarak* (custom based on Islamic law). On the other hand, there are those who argue that restricting the presence of certain clerics in mosques simply because they are associated with political choices is a form of discrimination and a betrayal of the principles of freedom of religion and expression. In this situation, the MUI and traditional leaders in the Minang region are in a difficult position: they must maintain the dignity of the mosque as a peaceful communal space, but they must also not get caught up in silencing practices in the name of order. The decision regarding UAS's *tabligh akbar*, whether it is seen as maintaining the sanctity of the mosque or as a political act, will be greatly influenced by the public's perception of the integrity and independence of the MUI itself.

Based on the above literature review, the theoretical framework of this article is constructed by linking four main conceptual clusters: constitutional rights, legal restrictions on elections, the position of the MUI as a religious norm entrepreneur, and the local identity politics of the Minangkabau.

First, constitutional rights provide a normative basis for citizens to practice religion, express opinions, and assemble. Any restrictions on large-scale religious

gatherings and preaching must be tested against constitutional standards: whether the restrictions are regulated by law, have a legitimate purpose, are necessary, and are proportionate. Second, electoral law restrictions provide a positive legal framework that prohibits the use of places of worship for campaigning. Here, the logic applies that sacred spaces must be free from electoral support practices that could divide congregations. However, this regulation leaves room for interpretation regarding the line between politically-tinged preaching and electoral campaigning.

Third, the MUI, as a religious norm entrepreneur, is positioned as an institution that produces and monopolizes interpretations of the limits of campaign preaching in mosques. Through fatwas, appeals, and recommendations, the MUI creates new socio-religious norms about what is and is not permissible in houses of worship, especially during election periods. With moral legitimacy and proximity to the state, the MUI is able to transform individual preferences into effective collective norms. Fourth, Minangkabau local identity politics became the context that shaped how these norms were negotiated and implemented. The interaction between religious scholars, adat, and political elites created a specific power configuration. In this configuration, MUI decisions, such as those related to UAS's *tabligh akbar*, were never socially neutral, as they were always read within the framework of local identity and power struggles. (Ichwan 2020). This theoretical framework is used to assess whether the ban or rejection of UAS's *tabligh akbar* by the Payakumbuh MUI: Can be justified as a legitimate and proportional restriction of rights in accordance with constitutional standards; or Is more accurately interpreted as a political control mechanism that utilizes religious authority to regulate the electoral contest arena.

Chronology and Empirical Context of the UAS *Tabligh Akbar* Case in Payakumbuh

The case of the rejection or non-issuance of a recommendation for Ustadz Abdul Somad's (UAS) grand preaching by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Payakumbuh City occurred in the context of sensitive local politics, namely ahead of the crucial stages of the regional elections. Based on official documents and local and national media reports, the MUI in Payakumbuh emphasized that the decision was not intended to prohibit preaching activities or limit UAS's presence as a speaker, but rather to prevent the use of mosques as venues for covert political campaigning. From an empirical perspective, UAS cannot be separated from the public perception of him as a cleric with certain political affiliations, both explicit and symbolic. In West Sumatra, UAS's lectures have strong social and political resonance, given his large congregation and reputation as a cleric with critical views of those in power. In this context, the plan for a grand *tabligh* at the mosque, especially during the political season, is not understood as a neutral religious event, but as a symbolic event that has the potential to influence the electoral preferences of the congregation.

Interviews with regional MUI officials and mosque administrators revealed that the main concern was not the textual content of the preaching, but rather the framing

of the event, the network of organizers, and the accompanying political momentum. In other words, the MUI made a contextual reading that the tabligh akbar had the potential to function as a means of political consolidation, even though there was no initial evidence of explicit calls to vote for certain candidates. This chronology shows that the MUI's decision was not an isolated act, but part of a broader effort to protect mosques from electoral politicization. However, at the same time, this case opens up serious debate about the limits of the MUI's authority, the standards for assessing practical politics, and the implications for the constitutional rights of citizens.

Analyze the legal and constitutional legitimacy of the actions of the Payakumbuh MUI

From a positive legal perspective, the prohibition of campaigning in places of worship has a relatively strong basis. Law No. 7 of 2017 on Elections explicitly prohibits the use of places of worship as campaign locations. This provision is reinforced by various KPU and Bawaslu regulations which emphasize that religious pulpits should not be used to express support for election participants, either directly or indirectly. Within this framework, the actions of the Payakumbuh MUI can be understood as a form of internalization of electoral law norms into religious practice. The MUI acts as an actor that translates positive legal prohibitions into social-religious language and mechanisms that are acceptable to congregations and mosque administrators. This function is in line with the MUI's position as a strategic partner of the state in the management of religious life. (Mietzner 2020).

However, problems arise when such prohibitions are no longer based on concrete violations, but rather on potential and perception. In election law, the category of campaigning generally requires affirmative action: mentioning the name of a candidate, using campaign symbols, encouraging people to vote, or distributing campaign materials. In the case of UAS's tabligh akbar, the ban was imposed in the pre-event stage, without any empirical evidence that the preaching would contain elements of campaigning as defined in the law. It is at this point that there has been a shift from law enforcement to preventive moral regulation. The MUI is not acting as an enforcer of electoral law, but rather as a guardian of morality in the religious sphere, anticipating the possibility of violations. Normatively, this preventive approach is understandable, but constitutionally it raises questions about the legitimacy of restricting rights before a real violation has occurred.

Constitutionality Test: Rights, Restrictions, and the Principle of Proportionality

From a constitutional law perspective, any restriction on constitutional rights must be tested against certain standards. The 1945 Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, expression, and assembly (Articles 28E, 28F, and 29), but Article 28J allows for restrictions as long as they are carried out by law, have a legitimate purpose, and are proportional. In this case, the purpose of the restriction, namely to maintain the neutrality of places of worship and prevent the politicization of religion, can be

categorized as a legitimate aim. Mosques, as religious public spaces, are indeed prone to becoming arenas of conflict and polarization when used for political campaigns. Certain restrictions can be justified for the sake of public order and the protection of the rights of other congregations who do not want mosques to become arenas of political battle.(Bush 2015).

The main issue lies in the aspects of proportionality and procedure. The restrictions imposed by the MUI are not based on formal legal mechanisms, do not go through an adjudicative process, and do not provide a transparent space for objection or clarification. In addition, the standards of practical political indications used are highly elastic and subjective, depending on the perceptions of local religious actors. From a constitutional perspective, this situation has the potential to give rise to what is known as overreach, namely the use of moral authority to excessively restrict rights. When a ban on large-scale preaching is imposed solely because the preacher is associated with politics, without clear indicators of behavior, then such restrictions risk violating the principles of necessity and least restrictive means.(Asshiddiqie 2010).

MUI as a Norm Entrepreneur: Between Moral Authority and Regulatory Power

The results of this study confirm that the MUI functions as a norm entrepreneur actor that produces, disseminates, and enforces socio-religious norms outside the formal state mechanisms. Through fatwas, appeals, and recommendations, the MUI shapes the boundaries of behavior that are considered legitimate and illegitimate in the religious sphere. In the context of Payakumbuh, the MUI's position is particularly strategic due to its strong customary and religious legitimacy. MUI decisions have not only administrative implications but also broad symbolic and political consequences. Prohibitions or rejections of recommendations for large-scale religious gatherings effectively frame such activities as problematic, even before the public is aware of the substance of the religious message to be conveyed.(Hefner 2019).

As a quasi-state-non-state actor, the MUI exists in a gray area between moral authority and regulatory power. On the one hand, the MUI is not a state institution and is not directly bound by the principles of due process of law. On the other hand, its socio-political influence means that its decisions have a real restrictive effect on rights, equivalent to or even exceeding state policy. This situation creates an institutional dilemma. Without clear standards and accountability mechanisms, the MUI's role as guardian of mosque neutrality can turn into an instrument of political control that is difficult to scrutinize and correct. In the context of constitutional democracy, this condition is dangerous because it opens the door to the restriction of rights by non-state actors without adequate legal protection.

Local Identity Politics and Public Perception in the Minang Region

The political dimension of Minangkabau local identity complicates the analysis of this case. The philosophy of adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah (custom based on religious law, religious law based on the Holy Book) makes religion the main

reference in social and political life.(Menchik 2016). Religious scholars and institutions are not only regarded as spiritual authorities, but also as guardians of public morality. In this context, the MUI's decision was readily accepted by some members of the public as a measure to protect the dignity of mosques. However, at the same time, the decision also sparked suspicions that the MUI was playing a certain political role, especially if the ban was not applied consistently to all religious figures and activities.(Sumaktoyo 2021).

Media discourse analysis shows polarization of public opinion. Some support the MUI with arguments of neutrality and order, while others consider the decision discriminatory and excessive. This polarization reflects a broader tension between the desire to maintain religious purity and the demands of freedom in a democracy. In a religious society such as West Sumatra, perceptions of the MUI's independence are a key factor in its legitimacy. When the MUI is perceived as being too close to certain political powers or groups, its decisions, including the ban on *tabligh akbar*, are easily interpreted as political maneuvers rather than religious *ijtihad*.

Synthesis: Assessing the Legitimacy of the Ban on *Tabligh Akbar*

Based on normative, empirical, and contextual analysis, the prohibition or rejection of UAS's recommendation for a large-scale religious gathering by the Payakumbuh MUI can be considered to be in a gray area of constitutional legitimacy. On the one hand, the goal of maintaining the neutrality of places of worship has a strong legal and moral basis. On the other hand, the absence of objective standards and accountable procedures places these restrictions at risk of violating constitutional rights. This case shows that the main issue is not the prohibition of campaigning in mosques as a principle, but rather who has the authority to interpret and how that interpretation is applied. Without clear guidelines, restrictions based on political perceptions can easily become instruments of exclusion and delegitimization. (Bruinessen 2018). Thus, the Payakumbuh case serves as an important lesson for the design of the relationship between religion, state, and democracy in Indonesia. It emphasizes the need for collaborative mechanisms that place the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and mosque administrators within a transparent, constitutional, and accountable framework.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the controversy surrounding the rejection of Ustadz Abdul Somad's recommendation for a large-scale religious gathering by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Payakumbuh City represents a structural tension between protecting the constitutional rights of citizens and the need to maintain the neutrality of places of worship from practical politics in the context of electoral democracy. Normatively, the prohibition of campaigning in places of worship has a strong legal basis in election regulations, particularly Law Number 7 of 2017 and

regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). Therefore, efforts to prevent the politicization of mosques cannot be automatically viewed as an unconstitutional restriction of rights.

However, the findings of this study also confirm that the MUI's actions have the potential to constitute constitutional overreach if practical political interpretations are applied broadly without objective criteria, transparent procedures, and clear accountability mechanisms. In this context, the MUI's position as a quasi-state-non-state religious actor is crucial, because even though it does not have formal legal authority, its decisions and recommendations have a real impact on the exercise of citizens' rights to freedom of religion and expression.

The Payakumbuh case shows that the main problem lies not in the principle of neutrality of places of worship, but in the absence of common standards for distinguishing between legitimate religious preaching and covert political campaigning. Therefore, this study emphasizes the urgency of collaborative regulation between the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and mosque administrators to formulate constitutional, proportional, and contextual guidelines. This approach is expected to prevent the politicization of religion without sacrificing the basic rights of citizens in a pluralistic and religious democratic space.

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