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Managing Religious Tension: MUI, Legitimacy, and Urban Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

Religious conflict in Indonesia does not always stem from doctrinal differences, but often arises from issues of communication, governance, public perception, and social relations within heterogeneous urban spaces. This study aims to analyze the intervention of the Indonesian Ulema Council in the conflict involving Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta in Bekasi City Indonesia, with a focus on how MUI exercised its authority in resolving a non-doctrinal religious conflict. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with MUI administrators, local government officials, Islamic religious counselors, community leaders, reporting residents, and the leader of the study group, as well as through document analysis of MUI decrees, mediation records, media reports, and activity documentation. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that the conflict was not primarily caused by doctrinal deviation, but by miscommunication, media framing, environmental disturbance, and weak governance of a non-formal religious assembly. The study also finds that MUI's authority operated effectively through *tabayyun*, mediation, and cross-institutional coordination based on moral legitimacy rather than legal coercion. The implication of this research is that religious authority in contemporary Indonesia should be understood not only as a guardian of doctrine, but also as a form of social mediation in managing public perception, religious governance, and coexistence in heterogeneous communities.

Keywords: Indonesian Ulema Council; Religious Conflict; *Majelis Taklim*; Religious Authority; Social Mediation

Konflik keagamaan di Indonesia tidak selalu berakar pada perbedaan doktrin, tetapi kerap muncul dari persoalan komunikasi, tata kelola, persepsi publik, dan relasi sosial dalam ruang perkotaan yang heterogen. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis intervensi Majelis Ulama Indonesia dalam konflik yang melibatkan Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta di Kota Bekasi Indonesia, dengan fokus pada cara MUI menjalankan otoritasnya dalam menyelesaikan konflik keagamaan yang bersifat non-doktrinal. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pengurus MUI, aparat pemerintah setempat, penyuluh agama, tokoh masyarakat, warga pelapor, dan pimpinan majelis taklim, serta melalui analisis dokumen seperti surat keputusan MUI, notulen mediasi, laporan media, dan dokumentasi kegiatan. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konflik yang terjadi tidak terutama disebabkan oleh penyimpangan akidah, melainkan oleh miskomunikasi, framing media, gangguan lingkungan, dan lemahnya tata kelola majelis taklim non-formal. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa otoritas MUI bekerja secara efektif melalui tabayyun, mediasi, dan koordinasi lintas institusi berbasis legitimasi moral, bukan paksaan hukum. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa otoritas keagamaan di Indonesia kontemporer perlu dipahami tidak hanya sebagai pengawas doktrin, tetapi juga sebagai mediator sosial dalam mengelola persepsi publik, tata kelola keagamaan, dan koeksistensi di Masyarakat heterogen.

A. INTRODUCTION

Religious conflict in Indonesia has become increasingly complex in the last two decades. In a plural and democratic society, tensions do not always arise from clear doctrinal differences, but often from everyday frictions over public space, religious expression, community acceptance, and institutional legitimacy. Alongside the expansion of religious awareness, new forms of religious gathering have grown beyond formal institutions such as mosques, *pesantren*, and religious schools. One important example is the rise of non-formal *majelis taklim* organized in private homes, charismatic communities, or digital da'wah networks, which offer more flexible and personal forms of religious learning (A'thoina 2025). However, because many of these assemblies operate without a clear institutional structure or social coordination, they can easily generate tensions involving governance, authority, and relations with surrounding residents (Riyadi 2019).

In this context, the Indonesian Ulema Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or MUI) holds an important position as a recognized religious authority in Indonesian Muslim society. MUI not only issues *fatwas*, but also plays a role in responding to religious tensions, clarifying public concerns, and maintaining social order when religious activities create controversy in society. This role becomes especially important in urban settings, where religious expression often intersects with dense social relations, diverse community backgrounds, and competing public perceptions. In such contexts, MUI is often required to act carefully, because it must uphold religious guidance while also respecting social coexistence and avoiding unnecessary escalation (Bayhaki 2024; Muhaimin & Muslimin 2023). This makes MUI a significant actor in understanding how religious authority works beyond purely doctrinal issues.

The conflict involving *Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta* in Kelurahan Cimuning, Bekasi City, can be read as a concrete example of that broader

role. What began as a home-based religious study group gradually drew public attention as the number of participants increased and complaints from local residents began to emerge. The controversy did not primarily concern doctrinal deviation, but rather issues such as the perceived lack of transparency in *infaq* practices, the use of religious expressions that were publicly misunderstood, and the social disturbance caused by large gatherings in a densely populated urban neighborhood (Zulfan Taufik 2018). In response to these concerns, MUI became involved through *tabayyun* and coordination with local authorities to assess the issue and help manage the conflict. This case shows that the intervention of religious authority may be required not only when doctrine is questioned, but also when religious activity produces social tension in everyday urban life.

Previous research has discussed MUI as a religious institution with a dual role: as a representative of *ulama* authority and as a strategic partner of the state in managing religious affairs (Muhaimin & Muslimin 2023). Other studies show that non-formal *majelis taklim* play an important role in strengthening religious life, especially among women and urban communities, even though their informal character often creates administrative and social problems (Noor et al. 2021). In the field of religious conflict resolution, Rozikin (2024) highlights the importance of institutional intervention through collaboration between religious authorities, local government, and security actors. Likewise, Seha et al. (2025) argue that MUI has a strategic role not only in issuing fatwas, but also in mediation, education, and conflict prevention through collaborative governance. These studies are useful for understanding MUI's public role, the social function of *majelis taklim*, and the institutional management of conflict.

However, previous studies have mostly examined MUI in relation to doctrinal issues, formal conflict mediation, or general models of collaborative governance. Less attention has been given to how MUI

exercises its authority in conflicts that are religious in form but non-doctrinal in substance, especially in urban settings marked by social density, heterogeneity, and competing public perceptions. The case of Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta is important because the tension did not primarily revolve around heresy, but around governance, communication, neighbourhood disturbance, and the social legitimacy of a religious gathering.

This article, therefore, addresses that gap by analyzing MUI's intervention in the conflict involving Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta in Bekasi City, with particular attention to how MUI exercised its authority in resolving a non-doctrinal religious conflict within a heterogeneous urban environment. This research is important because it shows that religious conflict in Indonesia cannot always be understood through doctrine alone, but must also be read through the lenses of governance, public perception, and community relations. The implication of this research is that the role of religious authority in contemporary Indonesia needs to be understood not only as theological supervision, but also as social mediation in managing religious diversity and urban coexistence.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. This design is appropriate for examining a conflict embedded in a specific social setting, particularly when the analysis seeks to understand institutional intervention, the exercise of religious authority, and the negotiated responses of multiple actors within a complex urban environment. A qualitative case study allows the researcher to explore these processes in depth by attending to context, interaction, and meaning rather than reducing the case to formal variables alone. The research was conducted in Bekasi City, where the conflict took place.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. The interview participants included administrators of the Bekasi City MUI, administrators of the Mustika Jaya District MUI, the *Lurah* and *Camat* of Mustika Jaya, Islamic Religious Counselors (Penyuluh Agama Islam), community leaders, reporting residents, and the leader of Pengajian Umi Cinta. These informants were selected because they were directly involved in, or knew the conflict and MUI's intervention process. In addition to interviews, the researcher gathered documentary materials, including MUI decrees, mediation minutes, media reports, and photo and video documentation. These sources were used to complement and verify the information obtained from interviews.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the first stage, the researcher reviewed interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, then selected and coded data relevant to MUI's intervention, the nature of the conflict, and the responses of the parties involved. In the second stage, the coded data were organized into narrative summaries and comparison matrices to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across sources. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn and continuously checked against the original data to ensure that the interpretation remained grounded in the findings. To strengthen the credibility of the analysis, the researcher applied source triangulation by comparing interview data with documentary evidence and conducted member checking with key informants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. MUI's Intervention Mechanism in Handling the Umi Cinta Conflict

The oversight mechanism carried out by MUI in handling the Umi Cinta study group case began with receiving community reports

concerning alleged doctrinal deviations and social disturbances arising from the *majelis taklim*'s activities. According to one of the District MUI administrators, the first report came from residents who felt uneasy because the sermons were perceived as containing confusing narratives that sparked debate within the community (Informant 1, October 12, 2025). This report was then forwarded to the MUI's Assessment and Research Commission for initial verification to determine whether the complaints had an objective basis warranting further action.

From a sociological standpoint, this initial reporting stage is analytically significant. It reveals that the boundary between theological concern and social discomfort is rarely clear-cut in practice. Community members who filed reports were not necessarily equipped to distinguish between doctrinal irregularity and unfamiliar religious expression. What they experienced as threatening was not a verifiable departure from Islamic teaching but an encounter with a style of religiosity that fell outside their social expectations. This observation aligns with Weber's (1978) argument that the perception of religious authority and its violation is always mediated by the social and cultural context of those doing the perceiving.

Once the report was deemed worthy of follow-up, MUI conducted *tabayyun*, a direct clarification process involving the reported party, the complainants, and local community figures. A neighborhood association leader noted that the MUI team visited the location to observe the study group in session and to engage in dialogue with surrounding residents (Interview, Informant 2, October 12, 2025). This on-site presence was not merely procedural. Sociologically, it functioned as a public performance of institutional credibility demonstrating to all parties that MUI's authority rests on direct observation and rigorous verification rather than on secondhand information or social pressure (Ichwan and Noor 2019).

In the theological clarification process, MUI reviewed the content of the sermons, the rhetorical style, and the religious narratives delivered by

the leader of the Umi Cinta study group. Based on interviews with a member of the MUI Fatwa Commission, no substantial elements of doctrinal deviation were found. However, a problematic communication pattern was identified: the excessive use of metaphors and ambiguous language created multiple interpretations among attendees (Informant 2, October 15, 2025). The statement concerning *infaq*, which was subsequently perceived as offering "paid heaven tickets," became one of the triggers of community unrest, although MUI assessed it as a problem of diction and communicative framing rather than a theological deviation.

This distinction is sociologically important. By separating the theological question from the communicative and social problem, MUI performed a critical analytical function that the community itself could not perform from within its own perceptual framework. The root of the conflict lay not in what was taught but in how it was being communicated and how that communication was received within the specific social conditions of a dense urban neighborhood. This finding is consistent with Campbell's (2020) observation that urban religious life generates structural tensions between individual religious expression and the shared comfort expectations of compressed residential communities.

The non-theological dimensions of the conflict garnered the most significant attention during the investigation. A resident living near the study group location explained that every week there was severe traffic congestion, noise, and vehicle accumulation that significantly disrupted residents' daily activities (Informant 3, October 12, 2025). MUI assessed that these problems fell outside the domain of *aqidah* and were instead matters of environmental governance and public gathering management issues requiring the involvement of local government rather than religious adjudication alone. This assessment reflects the collaborative governance framework described by Ansell and Gash (2008), in which effective conflict

resolution requires coordinated participation by multiple institutional actors with distinct but complementary jurisdictions.

MUI, therefore, invited district and sub-district government officials, as well as the police, to participate in handling the issue, preventing it from remaining within the narrow frame of religious dispute and allowing it to be addressed as a matter of shared public order. At the mediation stage, MUI facilitated a series of meetings bringing together the reporting residents, the study group administrators, sub-district and district officials, and the police. The process was, according to an Islamic Religious Counselor involved in the mediation, intense at times – some study group participants did not initially accept that their activities had caused social disturbance (Informant 3, 2025). This resistance reflects a dynamic commonly observed in religious conflict contexts: when religious practice is bound up with personal identity and spiritual meaning, the boundary between criticism of governance and criticism of faith can feel indistinguishable to those involved.

The mediation eventually produced an agreement that the study group activities could continue, but must be relocated from the private home to the Al-Muhajirin Mosque. This decision functioned as what sociologists of religion describe as a legitimacy compromise an outcome in which all parties accept a modified arrangement that preserves the core interest of each side. The study group retained its right to operate and its congregation retained access to religious guidance; the community gained relief from environmental disruption; and MUI maintained its position as a mediating authority capable of producing socially accepted outcomes without resorting to punitive measures.

The success of this intervention was supported by structured coordination between MUI, local government, and the Islamic Religious Counselors. The role of the PAI was particularly important in post-mediation guidance, especially in mentoring the preacher's delivery

method to become more communicative and less susceptible to misinterpretation (Informant 1, 2025). Nevertheless, some participants resisted the intervention, perceiving as a limitation on their freedom of religious practice. This tension between institutional oversight and individual religious freedom is not unique to this case – it reflects a broader structural challenge facing religious governance in pluralistic urban Indonesia, where the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom must be balanced against the equally legitimate claim of communities to orderly public life.

The absence of a strong legal basis for MUI to impose sanctions on non-formal *majelis taklim* meant that the strategy employed was necessarily persuasive rather than coercive. Sociologically, this constraint is itself revealing. MUI's effectiveness in this case derived not from legal authority but from moral legitimacy from the community's willingness to recognize MUI's judgment as credible and authoritative. As Harimurti et al. (2020) have shown, MUI fatwas and institutional determinations exert social and political influence that shapes community and government behavior, even in the absence of juridical binding force. The Umi Cinta case confirms this dynamic: compliance was produced through recognized moral authority, not through legal compulsion.

The social impact following the intervention was measurable and significant. Residents reported that environmental conditions became noticeably more orderly after the relocation of the study group (Informant 4, 2025). Study group participants gained a more suitable and acoustically contained venue for their religious activities. Beyond these immediate outcomes, the intervention strengthened the principle of religious moderation at the grassroots level through joint guidance from MUI and the PAI. This guidance helped restructure the communication patterns of the *majelis taklim* – ensuring that narratives on *infaq*, the virtues of good

deeds, and spiritual motivation were delivered in a more structured, contextually appropriate, and resistant-to-misinterpretation manner.

From a broader sociological perspective, these outcomes illustrate what can be described as institutionally mediated community resilience. Social stability in this context was not restored spontaneously but was actively constructed through the intervention of institutions possessing sufficient legitimacy to redefine the terms of coexistence between the study group and its surrounding community. This process embodies the values of *tawassut* (moderation) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) not as abstract principles but as operative social outcomes produced through deliberate institutional action, a model with clear implications for the governance of religious diversity in other conflict-prone urban settings across Indonesia.

2. Dynamics of MUI Intervention: Between Institutional Authority and Social Negotiation

This descriptive case study shifts the analytical focus from the formal institutional action of MUI to the underlying social processes that shaped it. The intervention concerning Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta in Bekasi City, was not a straightforward top-down exercise of religious authority. Rather, it was a multilayered, highly contextual process deeply embedded in the micro-level social conditions of the neighborhood.

Data reduced through the Miles and Huberman analysis shows that MUI's intervention was not a unilateral move but an accumulation of interactions – beginning with complainants, moving through sub-district government mediation, continuing with religious assessment by Islamic religious counselors, responding to community pressure, and finally engaging the Umi Cinta study group itself (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). This complexity confirms that "MUI intervention" is merely a formal label for a prolonged process of social negotiation taking place at the grassroots level.

From a sociology of religion perspective, this dynamic illustrates what Weber (1978) described as the negotiated character of religious authority. An institution does not simply possess authority and then applied downward; it must be continuously performed, recognized, and accepted by those over whom it is exercised. In the Umi Cinta case, MUI's authority was not self-executing. It required intermediaries – sub-district officials, Islamic religious counselors, and community leaders – to translate institutional legitimacy into locally acceptable outcomes. The success of the intervention depended less on MUI's formal position and more on whether key actors in Bekasi were willing to recognize and defer to that authority in this particular context (Fauziah & Thohri 2018).

This distinction between formal authority and socially recognized legitimacy is analytically important. MUI operates through what can be described as soft power – moral and religious credibility rather than coercive force. The Umi Cinta case illustrates how the soft power of a national religious institution must be actively renegotiated at the local level, where micro-contextual factors such as the history of neighborhood relations, the attitude of local figures, and the credibility of mediators are often more decisive than macro-level institutional regulations. This finding enriches the understanding of how religious institutions manage the boundaries of religious practice in conditions of social plurality.

3. The Tabayyun Process as a Mechanism of Legitimacy Construction

The strategic initial step taken by MUI, both at the Mustika Jaya District and Bekasi City levels, was to conduct the *tabayyun* process directly at the scene. This was crucial because the initial reports received by MUI were dominated by social anxieties and community perceptions rather than verified evidence of doctrinal deviation. The Chairman of the Mustika Jaya District MUI noted that early-stage reports tended to reflect collective anxiety rather than concrete theological concerns.

Sociologically, the *tabayyun* mechanism functions as far more than a procedural verification step. It is a legitimacy-building practice through which MUI demonstrates to the public that its authority rests on epistemic responsibility – the commitment to base religious judgments on factual, objective, and accountable evidence rather than rumor or social pressure. By forming a special team, conducting direct observation of *da'wah* content, and systematically assessing delivery methods, MUI demonstrated institutional credibility in a manner visible to all parties involved. This performance of due diligence is itself a sociological act: it communicates to the community that MUI's authority is earned through rigor, not merely assumed through position (Ichwan & Noor 2019).

Externally, the *tabayyun* process functioned as a tool for social mediation. Field findings confirmed that Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta's *da'wah* content did not deviate from mainstream teachings – a finding that directly contradicted initial public reports. This verification enabled MUI to analytically separate the theological question from the sociological problem: the root cause of the conflict was not doctrinal but relational, rooted in miscommunication and social friction. By making this distinction publicly, MUI repositioned itself from a potential enforcer against deviation into a social clarifier and mediator – a shift that was essential for sustaining its legitimacy in the eyes of both the complainants and the study group.

The comparative gap between community perceptions and verified field facts, displayed through the data presentation stage of the Miles and Huberman model, is itself analytically significant. It demonstrates that religious conflict in urban settings is frequently constructed through perception rather than reality, and that the primary role of a religious authority in such cases is not adjudication but clarification. MUI's *tabayyun* function, in this case, served to recalibrate public understanding and restore the conditions for social trust.

4. Conflict as a Communication Phenomenon: Misperception, Media, and Urban Religious Life

In-depth interviews with reporting residents confirm that the conflict in Bekasi did not originate from substantial doctrinal differences. Community discomfort was primarily caused by the expressive and emotionally intense preaching style of Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta, compounded by frequent activities and amplified sound that disturbed the acoustic environment of the neighborhood (Informant 5, 2025). These field findings confirm that the core issue was one of public communication and da'wah governance, not theological dispute.

From a sociological standpoint, this finding speaks directly to the conditions of urban religious life. In densely populated urban environments, the threshold of tolerance for intense public religious expression tends to be lower than in rural settings. Urban residents live in compressed social spaces where religious activity necessarily intersects with shared public comfort, creating conditions in which expressive religiosity can be experienced as an imposition rather than an invitation (Campbell 2020)

The conflict in Bekasi is therefore not an isolated incident but a manifestation of a broader structural tension between individual religious expression and collective urban living. The escalation of the conflict was significantly accelerated by digital media. The Islamic Religious Counselor noted that residents' complaints peaked after the circulation of decontextualized sermon video clips, which triggered erroneous interpretations of the assembly's activities (Informant 2, 2025). This pattern aligns with Entman's media framing theory (1993), which explains that media selects and amplifies certain aspects of reality to serve as interpretive lenses for the public. In this case, media framing highlighted the emotionality of the preacher and the intensity of religious expression, then presented these features as indicators of potential deviation. Residents who

had never attended the study group absorbed this narrative as factual truth, demonstrating how mediated perception can become more socially powerful than direct experience.

This finding has broader implications for the sociology of religion in the digital age. Religious authority must now contend not only with physical social dynamics but with the parallel reality constructed by viral content and digital rumor. The challenge for institutions like MUI is therefore not only to manage conflict on the ground but to intervene in the informational environment that shapes how communities perceive religious actors and activities before any official process begins.

5. Media and the Production of Stigma against Non-Formal Majelis Taklim

The case study in Bekasi reveals that mass media played a central role in constructing negative stigma against Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta before any official verification had taken place. Interviews with residents indicate that the majority of negative public perception emerged after reading local news portals that featured sensational headlines framing the study group as allegedly deviant (Interview, Informant 4, 2025). This reporting preceded MUI's *tabayyun* process, meaning the public was exposed to a stigmatizing narrative at the point when the community was most receptive to it and least equipped to evaluate it critically.

Sociologically, this dynamic illustrates how stigma is produced not through direct experience but through mediated representation. The mediation minutes obtained by the researcher record that many residents who had never attended the study group accepted the existence of deviation as fact after consuming media coverage (Informant 5, 2025). Entman's framing theory (1993) explains this process precisely: by selecting and amplifying specific attributes, the preacher's emotional intensity, high intonation, and unconventional expression, media transformed observable

social facts into signifiers of religious danger. The passive public, lacking independent verification, adopted the media frame as their interpretive reality (Okoroji et al. 2021).

Analysis of the visual documents collected by the researcher, photographs and video recordings of the study group showed conditions considerably more ordinary than media coverage suggested. This gap between mediated narrative and empirical reality is not incidental; it reflects the structural tendency of media to prioritize dramatic framing over contextual accuracy (Latifah and Fahrissa 2023). A parallel pattern was observed in East Lombok, where decontextualized digital content disseminated via social media caused disinformation that escalated into physical attacks on places of worship. The Cimuning case does not reach that level of violence, but the underlying dynamic stigma production through selective digital framing is structurally identical.

For religious institutions operating in this media environment, the implication is significant. MUI's intervention had to address not only the social conflict on the ground but the informational reality that had already shaped community perception. The *tabayyun* process, in this sense, was as much a counter-framing exercise as it was a theological verification – an effort to replace a stigmatizing media narrative with an authoritative institutional account grounded in direct observation.

6. Collaborative Governance as a Model for Religious Conflict Resolution

Field findings from the Cimuning case convincingly demonstrate that resolution of sensitive social conflicts rooted in non-doctrinal religious disputes requires effective cross-institutional collaboration. Rather than acting unilaterally, MUI and local government formed a synergy that reflects the principles of collaborative governance as articulated by Ansell and Gash (Ansell & Gash 2008). As one Mustika Jaya District MUI administrator stated, handling the Umi Cinta case required the joint

presence of the government and authorities to ensure the decision would be accepted by residents (Interview, Informant 1, 2025).

This collaboration integrated actors with distinct but complementary forms of authority: the District and City MUI contributed moral and religious authority; Sub-district and District Governments provided administrative and mediation authority; the Mustika Jaya Sector Police supplied security authority; the Islamic Religious Counselors offered technical guidance authority; and community leaders brought local social authority. From a sociological perspective, the success of this collaboration depended on the capacity of these different authority structures to operate in a coordinated rather than competing manner – a non-trivial achievement in a context where jurisdictional boundaries between state and religious institutions in Indonesia are not always clearly defined.

Sociologically, this case illustrates the concept of dual legitimacy in conflict resolution. The resolution carried administrative legitimacy through government mediation and legal recognition, and moral legitimacy through MUI's religious endorsement. Neither form of legitimacy alone would have been sufficient. Residents who might have resisted a purely administrative outcome were more willing to accept a decision that carried the moral weight of the ulema. In contrast, the government's administrative presence ensured the agreement had enforceable standing beyond the mediation room (Interview, Informant 5, 2025). This dual legitimacy structure is a defining feature of how religious conflicts are most effectively managed in Indonesian society, where the boundary between civil and religious authority remains a site of ongoing negotiation.

7. Governance Deficit as the Structural Root of Conflict

This case study carefully identifies the primary structural weakness that enabled the social conflict to emerge: the absence of adequate administrative and operational governance within the non-formal Majelis

Taklim Umi Cinta. The assembly lacked a formal organizational structure, an official activity permit, standard guidelines for loudspeaker use, coordination mechanisms with local neighborhood administrators, crowd management procedures, and formal standard operating procedures for religious activities. These deficiencies created conditions in which the study group's activities were structurally vulnerable to misinterpretation, administrative challenge, and community complaint.

From a sociology of religion perspective, this governance deficit is not merely an organizational problem, it is a problem of institutional embeddedness. Sociologists of religion such as Berger (1967) have argued that religious institutions derive their social stability from their capacity to situate themselves within the legitimate structures of social order. Non-formal *majelis taklim* that operate outside recognized administrative frameworks exist in a zone of institutional ambiguity: they are socially present but institutionally invisible, which makes them vulnerable to suspicion and stigma precisely because they lack the formal markers of legitimacy that communities use to assess trustworthiness. This finding aligns with Fatchurrohman et al., (2025), who found that most *majelis taklim* in Indonesia operate without structured institutional management, resulting in both reduced effectiveness and heightened social vulnerability.

MUI's post-mediation recommendations directly addressed these structural conditions. Rather than issuing a fatwa concerning doctrinal deviation, MUI focused its recommendations on administrative and communicative reform: official registration, regulation of loudspeaker use and activity timing, coordination with local government, preacher training in public communication, and the adoption of more contextually sensitive *da'wah* methods. This orientation confirms that the primary analytical insight of this case is not about religious heterodoxy but about the relationship between institutional structure, social trust, and the legitimate operation of religious activity in urban public space.

8. MUI as a Safeguard Against the Criminalization of Religious Practice

One of the most analytically significant findings of this research concerns MUI's role as a social safeguard preventing the criminalization of non-formal religious activities. Without MUI's formal intervention, community pressure had the potential to escalate toward forced dissolution, administrative cessation of activities, or criminal reporting based on allegations of religious blasphemy. In the pattern of religious conflict in Indonesia, criminal reporting frequently becomes the point of irreversible escalation – the threshold beyond which social repair becomes structurally difficult. The criticality of this role is particularly evident in Bekasi City, an area with a documented history of social-religious tension, as reflected in cases such as HKBP Ciketing Asem (Hamluddin & Bakti 2024).

The *tabayyun* mechanism proved highly effective as a de-escalation instrument in this context. Through direct examination, verbal clarification, and systematic review of da'wah material, MUI concluded that no doctrinal deviation was present in Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta's teachings. This written institutional determination then served as the primary reference for the district government and the police in declining residents' demands for legal action. MUI's statement thus functioned as a formal buffer preventing criminalization driven by perception and social pressure rather than verified theological transgression.

Sociologically, this function illuminates the quasi-regulatory character of MUI's authority in Indonesian society. Although MUI fatwas carry no juridical binding force in the criminal justice system, as established by Ilahi et al. (2024), they possess recognized social and political power that shapes how government actors and communities respond to religious disputes (Harimurti et al. 2020; Yasin et al. 2025). This moral authority operates in a space between formal law and social norm – a space that is

sociologically crucial in a society where religious legitimacy frequently carries greater practical weight than legal procedure in resolving community-level conflicts. The Umi Cinta case demonstrates precisely how this space functions: MUI's determination did not compel compliance through law but produced it through the recognized moral authority of the ulema, which key actors across government, police, and community were institutionally and socially inclined to respect.

9. Social Implications: Religious Moderation, Community Resilience, and the Sociology of Conflict Resolution

The resolution of this conflict produced outcomes that extended beyond the immediate parties involved, with implications for the broader social fabric of Bekasi and for the theory of religious conflict resolution in urban Indonesia. Following mediation, several residents acknowledged that their initial perceptions had been formed by rumors and media framing rather than direct knowledge of the study group's activities. The study group continues to operate, now within a governance framework that addresses the structural conditions that originally generated community concern. Residents expressed a sense of restored security, reinforced by the legal and religious clarity provided by MUI's written determination.

From a sociological perspective, these outcomes reflect the operation of what can be described as institutionally mediated community resilience. Social resilience in this context does not emerge spontaneously from within the community; it is actively constructed through the intervention of recognized institutions that possess the legitimacy to redefine the terms of social coexistence. MUI's intervention strengthened public trust in religious institutions, reduced the potential for horizontal conflict, created structured space for dialogue between disputing groups, increased transparency in religious activities, and improved the communication practices of the *majelis taklim*. Each of these outcomes contributes to a thickening of the

social fabric that makes the community more capable of managing future religious tensions without escalation.

This achievement is particularly significant given the social context. Bekasi City was previously categorized among the least tolerant cities in Indonesia by the Setara Institute (Farida & Silvita, 2021). In this sensitive environment, MUI's intervention successfully redirected a conflict that carried real potential for repressive outcomes toward a resolution grounded in dialogue, verification, and institutional moderation. This outcome represents a practical application of the principle of Religious Moderation embodying the values of *tawassut* (moderation) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) not as abstract ideals but as operative social practices at the grassroots level.

More broadly, the Bekasi case supports the argument that effective religious conflict resolution in pluralistic urban societies requires institutions capable of bridging the gap between formal legal authority and informal social norms. MUI's role in this case was not to adjudicate according to law but to mediate according to recognized moral principles in a way that all parties were willing to accept. This non-judicial but socially legitimate mode of conflict resolution – grounded in the authority of the ulema, the transparency of the *tabayyun* process, and the collaborative structure of the intervention – represents a model with significant implications for the governance of religious diversity in contemporary Indonesia.

D. CONCLUSION

The main finding of this study is that MUI's intervention in the conflict involving Majelis Taklim Umi Cinta was effective not because it exercised coercive legal power, but because it mobilized socially recognized moral authority through *tabayyun*, mediation, and cross-institutional coordination. The study shows that the conflict was not fundamentally doctrinal, but was rooted in miscommunication, negative media framing,

environmental disturbance, and weak governance of a non-formal religious assembly in a dense urban setting. In this context, MUI exercised its authority by separating theological issues from social and communicative problems, clarifying public misperceptions, and redirecting the conflict from potential criminalization toward a negotiated and socially acceptable resolution. The relocation of the study group, the involvement of local government and religious counselors, and the post-mediation guidance all demonstrate that MUI's authority functioned as a form of moral legitimacy capable of restoring trust, preserving religious practice, and maintaining public order. These findings confirm that in a heterogeneous urban society, religious authority operates most effectively not as punishment, but as institutional mediation for managing non-doctrinal religious conflict.

These findings reflect the fact that religious conflict in urban Indonesia is often shaped less by doctrinal differences than by social perceptions, communication breakdowns, and the fragile legitimacy of religious practice in shared public space. The Umi Cinta case shows that religious authority becomes most meaningful when it is exercised not as a punitive force, but as a mediating institution capable of clarifying misunderstanding, reducing stigma, and negotiating coexistence among diverse social actors. In this sense, MUI's role illustrates that the governance of religious life in heterogeneous communities depends not only on theological judgment, but also on the ability of institutions to translate moral authority into socially accepted solutions. This also suggests that the sociology of religious conflict in contemporary Indonesia must pay closer attention to the everyday dynamics of communication, media framing, and institutional trust that shape how religion is practiced, perceived, and contested in urban society.

One limitation of this study is that it focuses on a single case in a specific urban setting, so its findings cannot be generalized automatically to all forms of religious conflict or all non-formal *majelis taklim* in Indonesia.

Further research could compare similar non-doctrinal religious conflicts in different urban and rural contexts to examine how religious authority, media framing, and community response vary across settings. The implication of this research is that the role of religious authority in contemporary Indonesia should be understood not only in terms of doctrinal supervision, but also as a form of social mediation that helps manage governance problems, public perception, and coexistence in heterogeneous communities.

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