

De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah

Volume 16 Issue 2, 2024, p. 336-362

ISSN (Print): 2085-1618, ISSN (Online): 2528-1658

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v16i2.27517>

Available online at <http://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/syariah>

Government Position in Religious Authority Contestation in Indonesia: Reviewing the Government Authority in Determining the Beginning of Islamic Months

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Received: 11-06-2024	Revised: 23-10-2024	Published: 30-12-2024
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Abstract:

This article aims to examine the government's efforts and effectiveness in establishing itself as the sole religious authority in determining the beginning of the Islamic month. This qualitative study utilizes data from news sources, official decisions, and government activities related to setting the Islamic calendar, as well as fatwas from the Indonesian Ulema Council. Additionally, it presents the community's response, particularly from religious organizations, to the government's role in this matter. Drawing on Ismail Fajrie Alatas's theory of religious authority, which suggests that religious authority is shaped by a connection to the prophetic tradition and by fostering intellectual and emotional bonds with the community through service and outreach, the study finds that the government's effort to become the exclusive religious authority has encountered challenges. While the government aligns with the prophetic tradition by employing the *ru'yah* method (crescent sighting), based on authentic hadiths and followed by the majority of Muslims, the lack of intellectual and emotional connection with certain groups—such as Muhammadiyah and other religious congregations—leads them to resist the government's stance. In contrast, communities with closer intellectual and emotional ties to the government, like Nahdlatul Ulama, are more likely to align with its decisions. In the complex landscape of religious authority in Indonesia, the government navigates various roles, including tolerance, intervention, negotiation, and accommodation.

Keywords: government; religious authorities; Islamic month.

Introduction

In Islamic calendar system, determining the beginning of the month in the Islamic calendar is very important. Because it is related to the fasting of Ramadan and Hajj. Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs sets the official start of the Islamic month through a mechanism known as the Isbat session—a deliberation between the government and various stakeholders to establish the start date. During these sessions, the Minister consults with astronomy and Islamic law experts to assess the moon's position and address differing viewpoints among Muslim groups. Despite the government's active role in determining the start of the Islamic month, some groups of Muslims occasionally disagree with the government's decision.¹ This contestation between authorities can sometimes lead to public confusion. Because this issue involves both religious and social dimensions, a divergence in observance can cause discomfort—such as when one person celebrates a holiday while a neighbor continues fasting. This creates a challenge that requires careful resolution, underscoring the government's role in maintaining unity.

In some Islamic countries where Islam is the state ideology, the start of the Islamic month is determined by clerical institutions either established or affiliated with the government. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, the Supreme Judicial Council (Majlis al-Qada' al-A'la) holds this authority.² In Egypt, Dar al-Ifta', a government-affiliated clerical body, announces the start and end of Ramadan.³ In Iran, the beginning and end of Ramadan are announced by the country's highest religious leader, the Ayatollah.⁴ In these countries, once the government announces the start of the Islamic month, the public generally follows this determination. However, in countries where Islam is not the official state ideology but where Muslims form a majority—like Indonesia—differences often arise between the government and non-governmental organizations in determining the start of the Islamic month. While the Indonesian government strives to serve as the single religious authority for this purpose, similar to governments in Islamic states, its efforts face challenges, and differences in determining the start of the Islamic month persist.

Many discussions about the Islamic calendar focus on the differing methods and criteria used to determine the start of the Islamic month. Abdul Mufid and Thomas Djamaluddin conducted a study on the efforts of Southeast Asian governments, specifically the ministers of religion, to establish unified criteria for the Islamic calendar.⁵ A. Jusran Kasim and colleagues explain that the main methods for

¹ Ahmad Fadholi, "Sidang Isbat, Urgensi Dan Dinamikanya," *Asy-Syar'iyah* 4, no. 2 (2019): 162, <https://doi.org/10.32923/asy.v4i2.1000>.

² Tirta Rulamsyahrin, "The Establishment Of The Ummul Qura Calendar In An Effort To Unify The Global Islamic Calendar," in *The Dialectical Development on Sharia and Law in Indonesia*, vol. 1, 1 (International Conference on Sharia and Law, Surabaya: Faculty of Sharia and Law, State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, 2022), 136-142.

³ "Ramadan Starts in Egypt on Monday," *Ahram Online* (blog), March 10, 2024, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/2/519184/Egypt/Society/Ramadan-to-start-in-Egypt-on-Monday.aspx>.

⁴ Maryam Sinaiee, "Moon Not Sighted By Iran Ayatollah To Declare End Of Fasting," May 2, 2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202205022223>.

⁵ Abdul Mufid & Thomas Djamaluddin, "The Implementation of New Minister of Religion of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore Criteria towards the Hijri Calendar Unification," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8774>.



determining the start of the Islamic month are *ru'yah al-hilal* (sighting the crescent moon) and *hisab* (mathematical calculation). The *hisab* method involves criteria such as *wujud al-hilal* (the position of the moon above zero degrees on the horizon) and *imkan al-ru'yah* (the moon's visibility to the naked eye). The criteria for *imkan al-ru'yah* have evolved over time, leading MABIMS (The Minister of Religious Affairs of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore), as a Southeast Asian communication forum, to regularly review its accuracy.⁶ Maskufa and colleagues discuss the government's efforts to adopt new MABIMS criteria for crescent moon visibility—set at 3° altitude and 6.4° elongation—which were agreed upon by all member countries through a referendum on December 8, 2021, as part of a unification effort for the Islamic calendar.⁷ Rofiuddin and Izzuddin examine the *ru'yah* method using moon altitude as a criterion for visibility, with the currently accepted threshold being 3 degrees, marking the minimum height at which the moon can be seen.⁸

Additionally, discussions on the Islamic calendar have also explored the idea of unifying it. Ahmad Mufid notes that there are both optimistic and pessimistic views on the creation of a Unified Islamic Calendar. He observes that although there is no unified calendar, Muslims in Indonesia live in peace, but a Unified Islamic Calendar could enhance harmony among Muslims.⁹ Abdul Halim Abdul Aziz and Ahmed Kamil Ahmed proposed a Unified Global Islamic Calendar (UGIC) based on the principles of "expected visibility," the International Date Line, and a single calendar for the entire world. This proposal uses a new visibility criterion, which assesses the eye's ability to detect contrast between the crescent's illumination and the background sky, to determine the visibility of the young crescent moon. They suggest an innovative approach to calendar construction using reference lines, rather than points, with the International Date Line serving as the separator for days and months. A three-year calendar based on this method has been developed for evaluation.¹⁰ Syamsul Anwar argues that a Unified Islamic Calendar is essential, as the Prophet emphasized the importance of Muslims performing fasting, Eid al-Fitr, and qurban together. He also advocates for the use of *hisab* (astronomical calculation) rather than *ru'yah* (crescent sighting) for establishing a Unified Islamic Calendar, asserting that

⁶ A. Jusran Kasim (Corresponding Author) et al., "Determination of Hijri Calendar in Islamic History and Its Criteria in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 247–59, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol19no1.18>.

⁷ Maskufa Maskufa et al., "Implementation of the New MABIMS Crescent Visibility Criteria: Efforts to Unite the Hijriyah Calendar in the Southeast Asian Region," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 1 (June 30, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v22i1.22275>.

⁸ Ahmad Adib Rofiuddin and Ahmad Izzuddin, "Optimist And Pessimist Moon-Sighting: The Study Of Islamic Calendar Determination In Indonesia," *Muāṣarah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 4, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 119, <https://doi.org/10.18592/msr.v4i2.7543>.

⁹ Abdul Mufid, "Unification of Global Hijrah Calendar In Indonesia: An Effort To Preserve The Maqasid Sunnah of The Prophet (SAW)," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 10, no. 2 (November 25, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.102.02>; Achmad Mulyadi, "Non-Astronomical Aspects of the Success of Rukyatul Hilal in East Java," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 3 (November 16, 2024): 1859–80, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i3.25258>.

¹⁰ Abdul Halim Abdul Aziz and Ahmed Kamil Ahmed, "A Unified Islamic Calendar Proposal for the World," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 22, no. 1 (2014): 115–20, <https://doi.org/10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2014.22.01.21831>.



hisab aligns with religious principles and accommodates the changing nature of legal rulings over time.¹¹

Discussions about the Islamic calendar also involve studies on the perspectives of notable figures in Islamic astronomy. For instance, Siti Tatmainul Qulub examines the international Islamic calendar model proposed by Moh Ilyas.¹² Muh Rasywan Syarif studies Nidhal Qassum's approach to formulating an International Islamic Calendar, while Arwin Juli Rakhmadi and Muhammad Hidayat explore the ideas of Jamaluddin 'Abd ar-Raziq, who proposed a calendar called "at-Taqwim al-Qamary al-Islamy al-Muwahhad" (Unified Islamic Lunar Calendar)¹³. Ahmad Ainul Yaqin and colleagues investigate Ahmad Marzuqi Al-Bātāwī's thoughts on the Islamic calendar.¹⁴ There are also studies from experts in Islamic jurisprudence focusing on the Islamic calendar. Marwadi and colleagues, for example, analyze the views of Hamka, Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, and Moenawar Chalil¹⁵, while Abdul Mufid and colleagues examine Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's perspectives on the Islamic calendar.¹⁶

Discussions on the Islamic calendar also examine the methods and criteria used by various religious organizations and Muslim communities. For instance, Marwadi studies the dynamics of ru'yah and hisab approaches within Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Persatuan Islam.¹⁷ Discussions on the Islamic calendar also examine the methods and criteria used by various religious organizations and Muslim communities. For instance, Marwadi studies the dynamics of ru'yah and hisab approaches within Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Persatuan Islam¹⁸. Karjanto studies the Javanese calendar¹⁹, while Ade Putra examines the Bugis tribe's

¹¹ Syamsul Anwar, "Unified Islamic Calendar in the Perspective of Islamic Legal Philosophy," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 54, no. 1 (June 25, 2016): 203, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2016.541.203-247>.

¹² Siti Tatmainul Qulub, "Mengkaji Konsep Kalender Islam Internasional Gagasan Mohammad Ilyas," *Al-Marshad: Jurnal Astronomi Islam Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Berkaitan* 3, no. 1 (n.d.), <https://doi.org/10.30596/jam.v3i1>.

¹³ Arwin Juli Rakhmadi and Muhammad Hidayat, "The Issues and Prospects of the Global Islamic Calendar.," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Community Development (ICCD 2020)* (International Conference on Community Development (ICCD 2020), Malang, Indonesia: Atlantis Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201017.025>.

¹⁴ Ahmad Ainul Yaqin, Khabib Syaikhu Rohman, and Ricka Ulfatul Faza, "Ahmad Marzuqi Al-Bātāwī's Thoughts In Faḍl Al-Rahmān Book And Its Implementation On Determining Islamic Calendar In Indonesia," *Al-Hilal: Journal of Islamic Astronomy* 5, no. 2 (October 30, 2023): 155–74, <https://doi.org/10.21580/al-hilal.2023.5.2.18526>.

¹⁵ Marwadi Marwadi, Rina Heriyanti, and Farah Nuril Izza, "The Fiqh of Hisab-Ru'ya in the Twentieth Century Indonesia: Study on the Thoughts of Hamka, Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, and Moenawar Chalil about the Unification of Hijri Calendar," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 17, no. 1 (April 6, 2023): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v17i1.7902>.

¹⁶ Abdul Mufid, Lina Aris Ficayuma, and Agus Purwanto, "Interpretation Of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi Method's To The Crescent Hadith And Urgency Of Calendar Unification: A Literature Review," *Solid State Technology* 63, no. 2 (October 2020): 3525–2427.

¹⁷ Marwadi Marwadi, "Renewing the Thoughts of the Hijri Calendar of Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama and Persatuan Islam and Its Implications for Realization of National Hijri Calendar," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 15, no. 1 (June 14, 2021): 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v15i1.4870>.

¹⁸ Mohd Saiful Anwar Mohd Nawawi et al., "Hijri Month Determination in Southeast Asia: An Illustration Between Religion, Science, and Cultural Background," *Heliyon* 10, no. 20 (October 2024): e38668, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38668>.

¹⁹ Natanael Karjanto and François Beauducel, "An Ethnoarithmetic Excursion into the Javanese Calendar," in *Handbook of the History and Philosophy of Mathematical Practice*, ed. Bharath Sriraman



Lontara calendar²⁰. Irmawati Sagala and Tasnim Rahman Fitra discuss the Jambi Sultanate calendar²¹, and 'Alamul Yaqin and Syarifah Khasna explore the Naqshabandiya tariqah congregation's calendar²². Sudirman and colleagues study An-Nadzir congregation's views on the Islamic calendar, and Agus Salim and colleagues examine the unique method used by the Aolia congregation for determining the start of the Islamic month.²³

Several studies have explored the contestation of religious authority. Wahyudi Akmaliah, in his article on the responses of Muhammadiyah and NU in the new media era, found that these organizations react differently to emerging religious authorities. Muhammadiyah tends to respond more calmly and with acceptance, while NU often reacts more assertively. Similarly, Muhammad Latif Fauzi, in his research on the relationship between religious and state authorities, found that Islamic and state authorities have jointly worked to revise and reinterpret the content, meaning, and scope of Islamic law. To ensure the relevance of its norms, Islamic authorities must adapt Islamic law to align with modern legal frameworks and national sovereignty.²⁴

Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin and Eka Srimulyani found that formal and informal authorities or institutions sometimes intersect, overlap, and compete, which complicates the development and inclusion of moderate Islamic thought.²⁵

(Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 1–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19071-2_82-1.

²⁰ Ade Putra, "The Bugis Lontara Calendar in Islamic Perspective: A Dating System Used To Determine Good Days and Bad Days in the Bugis Tribe," in *The Dialectical Development on Sharia and Law in Indonesia*, vol. 1, 1 (International Conference on Sharia and Law, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya: Faculty of S, 2022), 108–12, <https://proceedings.uinsa.ac.id/index.php/ICOSLAW/issue/view/16>.

²¹ Irmawati Sagala and Tasnim Rahman Fitra, "THE USE OF THE ABOGE CALENDAR IN THE JAMBI MANUSCRIPTS: Power and Cultural Relations between Sultanates," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 18, no. 1 (June 9, 2024): 127, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2024.18.1.127-154>.

²² 'Alamul Yaqin and Syarifah Khasna, "National Holidays and Collective Leave for Eid Al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha Within the Framework of Religious Moderation in Indonesia," *Kawanua International Journal of Multicultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (June 25, 2024): 37–55, <https://doi.org/10.30984/kijms.v5i1.1000>.

²³ Agus Salim, Ridwan Ridwan, and Jamal Abdul Aziz, "Whusul Ilallah As a Methodology for Determining the Beginning of Ramadan and The End of Ramadan of The Aolian Jamaat According to The Perspective of Islamic Law," *Journal Transnational Universal Studies* 3, no. 5 (May 17, 2024): 253–64, <https://doi.org/10.58631/jtus.v3i5.95>.

²⁴ Muhammad Nasir et al., "The Contestation of Authority in Islamic Marriage Law in Aceh, Indonesia," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 November (November 9, 2023): 369, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i2.7896>; Muhammad Latif Fauzi, "The Formation of Islamic Law in Indonesia: The Interplay between Islamic Authorities and the State," *Australian Journal of Law and Religion* 1 (2022): 22–35, <https://doi.org/10.55803/T26E>.

²⁵ Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin & Eka Srimulyani, "The Contested Authorities: Institution and Agency in the Enforcement of Sharia Law in Aceh," *Indonesia Journal Of Contemporary Islam And Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.30821/Jcims.V5i2.10601>; Muhammad Akil et al., "The Jurisprudence of Religious Moderation: Strengthening Al-Wathanniyah Values at the Intersection of Islam and Nationality," *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan* 12, no. 2 (August 28, 2024): 300–314, <https://doi.org/10.29303/ius.v12i2.1410>; Muhamad Nazar, Muhammad Sjaiful, and Zahrowati Zahrowati, "Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage in Terms of Islamic Law: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Germany," *Jambura Law Review* 6, no. 1 (January 31, 2024): 124–25, <https://doi.org/10.33756/jlr.v6i1.16957>; Farida Ulvi Naimah et al., "Internalization of Local Traditions in Child Marriage from the Perspective of Maqasid Al-Usrah," *El-Mashlahah* 14, no. 2



Muhammad Nasir and colleagues, in their study on the contestation of authority in Islamic marriage law in Aceh, observed that this competition undermines trust in state authority.²⁶ Zamzami and co-authors examined contested authority among murshids (spiritual guides) within the Tariqah Qadariyah Naqshabandiyah and found that political differences among members reflect the *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) of the murshids. The competition for authority has led to conflicts and internal divisions within the tariqah, highlighting the influence of political interests on its dynamics.²⁷ Saifuddin Zubaidi, in his study on the contestation of religious authority and politics in Indonesia's cigarette fatwas, found that fatwas are more effective when ulama (religious scholars), as authority holders, can negotiate and contest with various social agents within the "cigarette fatwa arena".²⁸ Ahmad Adib Rofiuddin and Ahmad Luqman Hakim explored the contestation between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, finding that this rivalry extends beyond power dynamics to include identity reinforcement. Each group seeks to assert its influence on Islamic calendar discourse in Indonesia, thereby solidifying its unique position and authority.²⁹

Previous research on the Islamic calendar has focused on the methods and criteria used to determine the beginning of the Islamic month, efforts toward unification of the Islamic calendar, and the thoughts of Islamic astronomy figures and Islamic jurisprudence scholars on the subject. Studies on religious authority have examined the contestation between religious organizations and the relationship between state and religious authorities in law implementation. This study, however, focuses on the role of the Indonesian government in the contestation of religious authority, where numerous non-governmental religious organizations compete with each other. It also examines the efforts of the Indonesian government to become the sole authority in determining the Islamic calendar, evaluates the effectiveness of these efforts, and identifies the factors that influence this effectiveness. Additionally, the study analyzes the responses of the community, particularly religious organizations in Indonesia, to assess the success of these governmental efforts. The findings of this study offer insights into the factors that impact the effectiveness of government authority.

(October 14, 2024): 237–58, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v14i2.7942>; Abbas Arfan et al., "The Implementation of Maqashid Sharia: Heterogeneity of Scholars' Fatwas towards Islamic Banking Contracts," *Legality: Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum* 32, no. 1 (March 14, 2024): 105–28, <https://doi.org/10.22219/ljih.v32i1.32170>.

²⁶ Muhammad Nasir et al., "The Contestation of Authority in Islamic Marriage Law Indonesia," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 November (November 9, 2023): 369, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v8i2.7896>.

²⁷ Mukhammad Zamzami, Fikri Mahzumi, and Abd A'la, "Tarekat and Politics in Indonesia: Contested Authority between Murshids in the Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqsyabandiyah in East Java," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 187–208, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2022.12.2.187-208>.

²⁸ Saifuddin Zubaidi, "Cigarette Fatwas, Contestation of Religious Authority and Politics in Indonesia," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 20, no. 1 (June 10, 2020): 61–78, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v20i1.61-78>.

²⁹ Ahmad Adib Rofiuddin & Ahmad Luqman Hakim, "NGOs Contestation On Islamic Hijri Calendar In Urban Muslim Society In Indonesia: From Authority To Identity," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 27, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v27i2.5357.171-182>: <https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v27i2.5357>



Method

This study is qualitative and aims to describe the government's role as a religious authority in determining the beginning of the Islamic month. The data includes government activities related to the Islamic calendar, such as regulations, decisions, sessions, conferences, and fatwas from the Indonesian Ulema Council on the matter. These data are gathered from news, books, and articles. Additionally, the study presents and analyzes data on the responses of the community, particularly religious organizations in Indonesia, to assess the effectiveness of the government's efforts. The findings provide insights into the factors that influence the effectiveness of government authority in this context.

This paper uses a sociological approach,³⁰ specifically employing the theory of religious authority proposed by Ismail Fajrie Alatas. As quoted by Alatas from Hannah Arendt, authority is defined as a hierarchical relationship that connects a group of people to the foundations of the past, which, in this case, refers to the prophetic past. According to Alatas, for authority to be effective, the group must be able to bring the prophetic past into the present, making it relevant and aligned with local wisdom to ensure acceptance by the community. Moreover, religious authority must influence others to obey without resorting to coercion.³¹ Religious authorities can gain obedience either through the use of military force or, more commonly, by providing service, guidance, and hospitality to the community. Building authority also means fostering a community.³² A person or group seeking to establish authority must have the necessary infrastructure (such as silsila (genealogy) and *bay'ah* (loyalty) in the Tariqah tradition) that connects them to the prophetic past, thereby strengthening their bond with their followers.³³ Based on this theory, this article aims to describe the government's efforts to build its authority and explain the effectiveness of these efforts, as well as the factors that influence them.

³⁰ Fauzan et al., "Endogamous Marriage of Prophet's Descendants on the Perspective of Sociology of Islamic Law," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 18, no. 1 (June 1, 2023): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v18i1.7132>; Abd Rauf Muhammad Amin et al., "Problematic Fatwa: An In-Depth Sociological Investigation of MUI's Fatwa on Supporting Palestine's Struggle," *El-Ussrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 7, no. 1 (July 1, 2024): 237–52, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ujhk.v7i1.22020>; Fauzi Fauzi et al., "A Model of Extreme Poverty Reduction to Prevent Social Inequality in Indonesia Perspective of Sociology and Islamic Law," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 23, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 215–28, <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v23i2.1429>; Iffaty Nasyiah, Ramadhita Ramadhita, and Khoirul Hidayah, "The Protection of Local Handicrafts Through the Geographical Indication by the Regional Government in East Java, Indonesia," *Jurisdictie: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syariah* 13, no. 2 (2022): 162–87, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j.v13i2.18265>; Faridah Faridah and Rahmat Fadillah, "The Law of Bahaupan Contracts During The Covid-19 Pandemic (Study in Banjarmasin City)," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pemikiran* 22, no. 1 (November 18, 2022): 138–44, <https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v22i1.8767>.

³¹ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?: Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1b3qqfw>.

³² Alatas, 57.

³³ Alatas, 5.



Result and Discussion

Religious authority in the Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara) during the sultanate and colonial periods

During the sultanate period in the archipelago, the authority to determine the beginning of the Islamic month rested with the sultanate due to the sultan's strong influence over the people. This role reinforced the sultanate's religious authority. An example of this is found in the *Kitab Adat Aceh*, which describes Sultan Iskandar Muda's involvement in the Eid al-Fitr celebrations, alongside royal administrators (qadi), the Tumenggung, Sufis, shareefs or habeebs, imams, khateeb, qari', angham, and the general public.³⁴ In the Tidore Sultanate, a clerical institution called Joguru was established, comprising mosque imams who also served as Shara' judges, responsible for determining the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal.³⁵ In *Serat Widya Pradana* by Ronggo Warsito, it is noted that Sunan Giri II, a religious authority during the Demak Sultanate, had created an Islamic calendar based on hisab Urfi (arithmetic rather than astronomical calculation).³⁶ In 1633 AD (1043 Hijri), Sultan Agung Hanyokro Kusumo of Mataram adopted the Islamic calendar as the official state calendar, replacing the Saka calendar. This marked the point where the beginning of the Islamic month was officially determined using hisab Urfi or arithmetic calculation.³⁷

Sultan Agung's Javanese Islamic calendar, using Hisab Urfi as the method to determine the beginning of the Islamic month, remained in use until the reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwono VIII of Yogyakarta. During this period, both the Eid al-Fitr prayer schedule and the Grebeg Shawwal celebrations were based on Sultan Agung's calendar.³⁸ However, after receiving advice from Kiai Ahmad Dahlan, who served as Khatib Amin, the Sultan decided to set Eid al-Fitr prayers according to astronomical hisab, while the Grebeg celebrations continued to follow Sultan Agung's Javanese Islamic calendar. An interesting event occurred in the Sultanate of Deli. When students of Sheikh Mahmoud Chayath reported a moon sighting in Belawan to the Qadi of the Sultanate of Deli in front of the Sultan, the Qadi sought arguments to reject the testimony. Accepting it would mean that the Sultanate's Eid celebration would align with that of the Muhammadiyah organization, which based its dates on hisab. This incident reflects a contestation of authority between the Sultanate of Deli and Muhammadiyah.³⁹

According to Snouck Hurgronje, in his work *Advice of C. Snouck Hurgronje During his Service to the Government of the Dutch East Indies 1889-1936 Volume*

³⁴ "Idul Fitri Di Zaman Sultan Iskandar Muda," June 6, 2019, <https://indonesia.go.id/kategori/komoditas/767/idul-fitri-di-zaman-sultan-iskandar-muda>.

³⁵ Salnuddin, dkk, "Ethnocoanography Dan Titik Temu Aspek Syar'i Dalam Penentuan Awal Bulan Ramadhan Dan Syawal Oleh Joguru Kesultanan Tidore," *Al-Ahkam* 27, no. 1 (2017): 113.

³⁶ Ahmad Musonnif, "Geneologi Kalender Islam Jawa Menurut Ronggo Warsito: Sebuah Komentar Atas Sejarah Kalender Dalam Serat Widya Pradhana," *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 5, no. 2 (2017): 331.

³⁷ Kementerian Agama RI, *Almanak Hisab Rukyat* (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Bimbingan Masyarakat Islam Kementerian Agama RI, 2010).

³⁸ Sugeng Purwanto, "Hisab Kiai Dahlan Beda Dengan Kraton," *Pwmu.Co*, 16 Mei, 2020, <https://pwmu.co/148196/05/16/hisab-kiai-dahlan-beda-dengan-kraton/>.

³⁹ Susiknan Azhari, "Karakteristik Hubungan Muhammadiyah Dan Nu Dalam Menggunakan Hisab Dan Rukyat," *Al-Jami'ah* 44, no. 2 (2006): 463. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2006.442.453-485>



VIII, Muslims in the archipelago used two main methods to determine the beginning of the Islamic month. The first method combined calendar calculations with direct observation of the new moon (hilar), a practice that was widely accepted as the most accurate by local scholars. The second method, pure hisab (mathematical calculation), relied on astronomical calculations as recorded in the Almanac of the Dutch East Indies Government.⁴⁰ Within the Dutch East Indies government system, penghulu (religious leaders) were nominated by regents, approved by residents, and then inaugurated by the governor-general or his deputy. These penghulu were authorized to oversee the process of determining the start of the Islamic month. On the 29th day of Ramadan, they would gather in a designated field or elevated area, along with assistants, to observe the hilar. If sighted, the government would announce the sighting with cannon fire or drumbeats. Notably, according to Mohammad Roem, a diplomat and Masyumi leader, the Dutch East Indies government accommodated differences in holiday observances by extending the Lebaran holiday to two days, ensuring inclusivity for those with varying observance practices.⁴¹

During the colonial period, conflicts occasionally arose between local Muslims and the Dutch East Indies government regarding the determination of religious observances. In 1901, the Dutch East Indies government declared that Eid al-Fitr would be on Thursday, based on hisab (astronomical calculation). However, Kiai Muhammad Said, the head of the Gedongan Islamic boarding school in Cirebon, asserted that Eid al-Fitr should fall on Wednesday, based on his observations using the ru'yah al-hilar (moon sighting) method. After discussions within the Department of Binnenlands Bestuur, the government deemed his stance an act of opposition, and the Regent's court sentenced him to five years in prison. Kiai Said, however, was ultimately acquitted after successfully defending the validity of the ru'yah al-hilar method.⁴²

Government authority vs religious organization authority

Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, significantly influence the contestation of authority in determining the beginning of the Islamic month. This is partly because the Ministry of Religious Affairs includes many members from these organizations. NU and Muhammadiyah differ in their methods: NU uses the Rukyah al-Hilar method (sighting the crescent moon) in combination with hisab (astronomical calculations)⁴³, while Muhammadiyah relies solely on hisab with the criterion of wujud al-hilar, meaning the moon's height must be above zero degrees on the horizon.⁴⁴ NU asserts that only the government (hakim) or court judges (qadi) have the authority to officially determine the start of the Islamic month.⁴⁵ However, there have been instances where NU and the government reached different conclusions. Such differences arise

⁴⁰ Hendaru Tri Hanggoro, "Menentukan Hari Lebaran Pada Masa Kolonial," *Historia.Id*, 14 Juni, 2018.

⁴¹ Hendaru Tri Hanggoro.

⁴² Sobih Adnan, "Kisah Belanda Ancam Penjara Mbah Said Karena Beda Hari Raya," *Nuonline*, 03 Juni, 2019.

⁴³ Lajnah Falakiyah Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, *Pedoman Rukyah Dan Hisab Nahdlatul Ulama* (Jakarta, 2006).

⁴⁴ Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, *Pedoman Hisab Muhammadiyah* (Jogjakarta, 2009).

⁴⁵ Lajnah Falakiyah Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, *Pedoman Rukyah Dan Hisab Nahdlatul Ulama*.



because of varying criteria: in 1992, 1993, and 1994, NU's dates for the beginning of Shawwal differed from those set by the government. For example, in 1992, NU announced that 1 Shawwal 1412 H fell on April 4, based on crescent sightings in East Java and Cakung. The government, however, set 1 Shawwal 1412 H for April 5 by completing the month's cycle to 30 days (istikmal), rejecting the sightings reported by NU.⁴⁶

In Ramadan 1413 AH, NU announced that 1 Shawwal 1413 AH would fall on Wednesday, March 24, 1993, based on crescent sightings (ru'yat) from East Java and Cakung. Meanwhile, government calculations (hisab) indicated that, at sunset on that day at the Moon Observation Post (POB) in Pelabuhan Ratu, the moon was still below the horizon with a visible height of $-2^{\circ} 16' 52''$. Consequently, the government set 1 Shawwal 1413 AH for Thursday, March 25, 1993, by completing the lunar month to 30 days (istikmal) and rejecting the rukyat report from East Java and Cakung. A similar discrepancy occurred in 1994 when NU also announced the start of 1 Shawwal ahead of the government's official date.⁴⁷ In contrast, in 1998 both the government and NU aligned, declaring 1 Shawwal 1418 AH as Friday, January 30, based on istikmal. The government rejected rukyat results from East Java, deeming the testimony invalid since it did not meet the imkan al-rukyah criteria and was contrary to the widely accepted (mu'tabar) hisab, reaching the level of mutawatir (multiple corroborative witnesses).⁴⁸ Differences in the determination of Eid al-Adha also persist, stemming from varying methods and criteria, as well as different fiqh interpretations. Some advocate for Indonesia's Eid al-Adha to align with Saudi Arabia's day of wuquf (standing in Arafat), while others believe it should be based on local hilal sightings and hisab calculations.⁴⁹

During the Reformation era, NU continued to differ from the government in determining the beginning of the Islamic month. For example, in 2000 AD, the government set Eid al-Adha for March 16, while PBNU announced it for March 17. In 2001, the height of the hilal based on hisab in Yogyakarta on Thursday, November 15, reached only $1^{\circ} 09'$. At this height, the hilal was not visible. However, both the government and NU agreed on setting 1 Ramadan 1422 AH for Saturday, November 17, 2001, based on istikmal. Since 2001, NU and the government have generally aligned in determining the beginning of the Islamic month.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Muhammadiyah, which uses hisab with the criteria of wujud al-hilal (the visible crescent), often differs from the government, which employs ru'yah al-hilal (sighting of the moon). For example, in 1418H / 1998M, Muhammadiyah declared Eid al-Fitr on January 29, while the government set it for January 30. Similarly, in 1423H / 2002, Muhammadiyah set Eid al-Fitr for December 5, while the government set it for December 6. In 1427H / 2006, Muhammadiyah set Eid al-Fitr for October 23, while

⁴⁶ Risya Himayatika, *Penentuan Awal Ramadan, Syawal Dan Zulhijah: Studi Komparatif NU Dan Pemerintah Dari 1992 M-2015 M* (Semarang: Skripsi Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, 2016).

⁴⁷ Risya Himayatika, "Penentuan Awal Ramadan, Syawal Dan Zulhijah: Studi Komparatif NU Dan Pemerintah Dari 1992 M-2015 M." (Semarang, Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, 2016), 5; Ridhokimura Soderi and Ahmad Izuddin, "Kajian Faktor Psikologi Yang Berpotensi Mempengaruhi Keberhasilan Rukyat," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 19, no. 1 (June 29, 2020): 59–72, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v19i1.1930>.

⁴⁸ Himayatika, "Penentuan Awal Ramadan, Syawal Dan Zulhijah: Studi Komparatif NU Dan Pemerintah Dari 1992 M-2015 M.," 6.

⁴⁹ Himayatika, 7.

⁵⁰ Himayatika, 8.



the government/NU set it for October 24. These differences also occurred in determining Eid al-Fitr in 1428H / 2007 AD and 1432H / 2011 AD.⁵¹

At the Isbat session to determine Eid al-Fitr 1432 Hijriyah, led by Minister of Religious Affairs Surya Darma Ali, a debate arose among the members of the session. This was due to the fact that Muhammadiyah had already determined that Eid al-Fitr would fall on August 30, 2011, based on hisab, while other organizations set it for August 31, 2011. This created a spotlight on the representatives of Muhammadiyah.⁵² Furthermore, in 2012 and 2013, Muhammadiyah chose not to send representatives to the Isbat session, as they did not want their beliefs to be influenced or intervened upon.⁵³ However, in 2014, under the leadership of Minister of Religious Affairs Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, Muhammadiyah sent representatives to attend the Isbat session.⁵⁴

The differences in determining the beginning of the Islamic month in Indonesia are not only influenced by the two largest organizations but also by several smaller Muslim communities. For instance, in 2018, there was a case where Eid al-Fitr was observed on four different days. This was because several smaller Muslim communities across Indonesia followed their inherited methods for determining the time of Eid al-Fitr. First, The Naqsabandiyah Al-Khalidiyah Jalaliyah congregation in Padang, West Sumatra, following the guidance of their murshid, set Eid al-Fitr (1 Shawwal 1439 H) for Wednesday, June 13, 2018. Second, The An-Nadzir congregation in Goa, South Sulawesi, following the instructions of their Jamaah leader, and the Shattariyah congregation in Nagan Raya Regency, Aceh, along with students and the community surrounding the Mahfiludluror Islamic Boarding School in Suger Kidul Village, Jember Regency, East Java, following the guidance of the Kiai, set Eid al-Fitr for Thursday, June 14, 2018. Third, The Indonesian Government (Ministry of Religious Affairs), through an Isbat session attended by representatives of several Islamic organizations, determined that Eid al-Fitr (1 Shawwal 1439 H) would fall on Friday, June 15, 2018. Fourth, the Aboge (Alip Rebo Wage) Islamic community in Kracak Village, Ajibarang Subdistrict, Banyumas Regency, Central Java, based on the calculation of the congregation's elders, set Eid al-Fitr on Saturday June 16, 2018.⁵⁵

The Indonesian government's efforts to become the single authority

In an effort to unify the Hijri calendar in Indonesia, the government made significant strides. One key initiative was the conference on hisab and rukyat (moon sighting) held by three countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, from July 9-11, 1974, in Jakarta. During the conference, participants shared information on hisab

⁵¹ Maskufa, "Hisab Wujud Al-Hilal Sebagai Politik Identitas Muhammadiyah Dalam Diskursus Hisab Ruyat Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 6, no. 2 (2020): 192, <https://doi.org/15408/idi.v6i2.14802>; Saifuddin Herlambang et al., "Ḥusn Al-Jawāb 'an Ithbāt al-Ahīllah Bi al-Ḥisāb: Basyūnī 'Imrān's Method for Standardising the Determination of the Qamariyah Month in the Sultanate of Sambas (1913-1976)," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 2 (August 21, 2024): 222-41, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v5i2.2775>.

⁵² "Pemerintah Tetapkan Idul Fitri Pada Hari Rabu, 31 Agustus 2011," Agustus 2011, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/354060/pemerintah-tetapkan-idul-fitri-pada-hari-rabu-31-agustus-2011>.

⁵³ Aditya Revianur, "Muhammadiyah Pastikan Tak Ikut Sidang Isbat," *Kompas.Com*, 19 Juli, 2012.

⁵⁴ Tim Editor, "Hadir Di Sidang Isbat, Muhammadiyah Ajukan Syarat," *Tempo.Co*, 27 Juni, 2014.

⁵⁵ Ali Rahman, "Tahun Ini Terjadi 4 Kali Idul Fitri Di Indonesia," *Padasuka.Id*, 18 Juni, 2018.



and rukyat practices in their respective countries. This led to the establishment of the institution 'Jawatan Kuasa Penyelaras Rukyat dan Takwim Islam,' which operates under the Religious Council of Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore (MABIMS).⁵⁶

In 1998, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), organized another conference to discuss the criteria for determining the beginning of the Hijri month in Indonesia. The conference was attended by various groups, including falak experts (Islamic astronomers), astronomers, Islamic mass organizations, and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). As a result of the discussions, it was decided to adopt the MABIMS imkan al-rukyah (visibility of the crescent) criteria as the basis for determining the Hijri calendar in Indonesia. This decision came after a deliberation involving hisab experts and Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, held in Bogor from March 24-26, 1998.⁵⁷

On December 16, 2003, a conference titled Ijtima' Ulama Fatwa Commission was held and attended by the Minister of Religious Affairs. During the conference, it was decided that the determination of the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhulhijjah would be based on both the ru'yah (moon sighting) and hisab (astronomical calculations) methods, as determined by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, specifically the Minister of Religious Affairs. This decision applies nationwide, and all Muslims in Indonesia are required to follow the government's decree regarding the start of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhulhijjah. In determining the start of these months, the Minister of Religious Affairs is required to consult with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Islamic organizations, and other relevant agencies. Additionally, the results of rukyat from areas where the hilal is visible, even outside of Indonesia but within the same mathla', can be used as a guideline by the Minister of Religious Affairs.⁵⁸ This decision was later formalized as Fatwa Number 2 of 2004 by the Indonesian Ulema Council, concerning the determination of the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhulhijjah.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the government issued Law No. 3 of 2006, which expanded the competence of the Religious Courts to include the domain of Hisab and Ru'yah within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, this expansion did not mean that the Religious Courts would handle the technicalities of Hisab and Rukyat directly. The Religious Courts are only authorized to conduct the isbat (confirmation) of rukyat al-hilal (moon sighting) testimony. The responsibility for the techniques of Hisab and Rukyat after the enactment of Law No. 3 of 2006 became the authority of the Director General of Islamic Guidance within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with assistance from the Regional Office of the Ministry.⁶⁰

On September 24, 2007, Vice President M. Jusuf Kalla invited the leaders of Islamic mass organizations and Hisab and Ru'yah experts to the Vice Presidential

⁵⁶ Ahmad Fadholi, "Sidang Isbat, Urgensi Dan Dinamikanya."

⁵⁷ Ahmad Fadholi, "SIDANG ISBAT, URGENSI DAN DINAMIKANYA," *ASY SYAR'IYYAH: JURNAL ILMU SYARI'AH DAN PERBANKAN ISLAM* 4, no. 2 (December 4, 2019): 154, <https://doi.org/10.32923/asy.v4i2.1000>.

⁵⁸ Tim Penyunting, *Himpunan Keputusan Ijtimak Ulama Komisi Fatwa MUI Se-Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2012).

⁵⁹ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Fatwa Majlis Ulama Indonesia Nomor 2 Tahun 2004 Tentang Penetapan Awal Ramadhan, Syawal, Dan Dzulhijjah," n.d.

⁶⁰ Sofwan Jannah, "Urgensi Hisab Dan Rukyat Pasca Undang-Undang Nomor 3 Tahun 2006," *Al-Mawarid* XVII (2007): 115.



Palace to find common ground on unifying the beginning of the Hijri month. This meeting was followed by another at the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board Building in Jakarta on October 2, 2007, titled Dialogue and Gathering Between NU and Muhammadiyah on the Beginning of the Lunar Month. A subsequent meeting was held at the Muhammadiyah Central Board in Yogyakarta on Thursday, December 6, 2007, continuing the discussion on efforts to unify the Hijri calendar in Indonesia, particularly concerning the determination of the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.⁶¹

In 2011, the Ministry of Religious Affairs held a workshop titled "Finding Criteria for the Format of the Beginning of the Month in Indonesia" in Bogor from September 19 to 21. During this workshop, participants agreed on the imkan al-ru'yah criteria. It was decided that the criteria for determining the beginning of the months of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Zulhijjah in the Indonesian Hijri calendar would be based on the position of the hilal (crescent moon) according to hisab haqiqi bi al-tahqiq (contemporary astronomical calculations) that meet the imkan al-ru'yah criteria. The decision was made during an isbat session led by the Minister of Religious Affairs, with Ahmad Izzudin, a representative from NU, serving as secretary, and Susiknan Azhari, representing Muhammadiyah, as chairman of the session.⁶²

On April 25, 2012, the Ministry of Religious Affairs organized a "National Conference on Hisab and Rukyat" in Jakarta, where participants formulated an agreement to establish a unified Islamic calendar with agreed-upon criteria. Continuing their efforts to unify the Hijri calendar, the Ministry held a session of the Hisab Rukyat Agency on June 18-19, 2012, attended by the Indonesian Ulema Council, members of the Hisab Rukyat Agency, government representatives (including the Ministry of Religion), the Supreme Court, planetariums, universities, and representatives from Islamic mass organizations.⁶³ On November 28-30, 2017, the Ministry of Religious Affairs hosted an international seminar on Falak Jurisprudence with the theme "Opportunities and Challenges of Implementing a Single Global Hijri Calendar." The seminar was attended by representatives from several Islamic countries, all with the same goal: to discuss criteria for determining the Hijri calendar and work toward unifying the global Hijri calendar, minimizing differences between countries in determining the beginning of the Hijri month.⁶⁴

The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) adopted new criteria for determining the beginning of the Hijri month based on the 2021 agreement between the Ministers of Religious Affairs of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (MABIMS). The application of these new MABIMS criteria has led to changes in the calculation and determination of the Hijri month. Under the new agreement, the hilal criteria were updated to require a hilal height of 3 degrees and an elongation of 6.4 degrees. This agreement was formalized with the signing of a joint letter in 2021, confirming the use of these new MABIMS criteria in Indonesia starting in 2022.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Sofwan Jannah, 155.

⁶² Sofwan Jannah, 155–56.

⁶³ Sofwan Jannah, 157.

⁶⁴ Sofwan Jannah, 159.

⁶⁵ "Indonesia Applies New Criteria for Determining the Hijri Month," March 9, 2024, <https://www.brin.go.id/en/news/117816/indonesia-applies-new-criteria-for-determining-the-hijri-month>.



The discussions during these meetings led to several recommendations for unifying the national Islamic calendar. One proposal was to combine the ru'yah method with the hisab method (calculation) and the imkan al-ru'yah criteria (hilal visibility). Another recommendation suggested formulating an international Islamic calendar based purely on hisab with the imkan al-ru'yah criteria. However, these proposals did not lead to a unified agreement, as they could not satisfy all parties. Some groups within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) continue to rely on the ru'yah method without considering hisab, while Muhammadiyah uses hisab with the criteria of wujud al-hilal (hilal above the horizon, over 0 degrees, without relying on ru'yah). Additionally, some smaller Muslim communities use alternative methods, which differ from both the government's approach and the practices of the majority Muslim population. As a result, despite numerous meetings and dialogues with various Islamic mass organizations, the government has not been able to fully resolve the contestation and unify the practices of determining the Islamic calendar among Indonesian Muslims.

The effectiveness of Indonesian Government as religious authority

Despite the Indonesian government's efforts to become the sole authority in determining the beginning of the Islamic month, fragmentation and contestation over authority persist. In 2022, the government adopted the new MABIMS criteria, agreed upon by the Ministers of Religious Affairs in Southeast Asia⁶⁶, yet differences in fasting times and Islamic holidays continue. For example, in determining the beginning of Ramadan in 2022, the government set 1 Ramadan 1443 H to fall on April 3, 2022, while Muhammadiyah had already determined it to be on April 2, 2022.⁶⁷ Similarly, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) set Eid al-Adha 1443 H on July 10, 2022, following the determination that 1 Zulhijah 1443 H would fall on July 1, 2022. However, Muhammadiyah announced that the beginning of Dzulhijah would be on June 30, 2022, meaning their Eid al-Adha would be celebrated on July 9, 2022.⁶⁸ In 2023, the government set Eid al-Fitr 1444 H for Saturday, April 22⁶⁹, while Muhammadiyah marked it for April 21, 2023.⁷⁰ The government also determined that 10 Dzulhijah 1444 H, or Eid al-Adha in 2023, would fall on June 29, 2023, while Muhammadiyah had set 1 Dzulhijah for June 28,

⁶⁶ Thomas Djamaluddin, "Bismillah, Indonesia Menerapkan Kriteria Baru MABIMS," February 23, 2022, <https://tdjamaluddin.com/2022/02/23/bismillah-indonesia-menerapkan-kriteria-baru-mabims/>.

⁶⁷ Rakhmad Hidayatulloh Permana "Awal Ramadan 2022 Beda, Kondisi Serupa Terakhir Terjadi Tahun 2014" <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-6012300/awal-ramadan-2022-beda-kondisi-serupa-terakhir-terjadi-tahun-2014..>

⁶⁸ Mia Chitra Dinisari, "Perbedaan Hari Raya Iduladha 2022 Pemerintah Dan Muhammadiyah," June 30, 2022, <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20220630/79/1549655/perbedaan-hari- raya-iduladha-2022-pemerintah-dan-muhammadiyah>.

⁶⁹ "Sidang Isbat Digelar, Pemerintah Tetapkan Idulfitri 1444 H Jatuh Pada Sabtu, 22 April 2023," April 20, 2023, <https://setda.kalteng.go.id/publikasi/detail/sidang-isbat-digelar-pemerintah-tetapkan-idulfitri-1444-h-jatuh-pada-sabtu-22-april-2023>.

⁷⁰ Fria Sumitro, "Lebaran 2023 Hari Apa? Ini Versi Pemerintah, Muhammadiyah, Dan NU" <https://www.detik.com/Sumut/Berita/d-6684255/Lebaran-2023-Hari-Apa-Ini-Versi-Pemerintah-Muhammadiyah-Dan-Nu>.



2023.⁷¹ Looking ahead, Muhammadiyah has determined that Ramadan 1445 H will begin on Monday, March 11, 2024, while the government has set it for Tuesday, March 12, 2024.⁷²

In addition to Muhammadiyah, several other communities in Indonesia differ from the government in determining the Islamic calendar. These include the Congregation of Tariqah Naqshabandiyah Khalidiyah in North Sumatra⁷³, the Congregation of An-Nadzir in South Sulawesi,⁷⁴ the Congregation of Tariqah Naqshabandiyah in West Sumatra,⁷⁵ the Aboge Congregation of Purbalingga,⁷⁶ the Syattariyah Congregation of the followers of Habib Muda Seunagan in Nagan Raya Regency, Aceh,⁷⁷ the Congregation of the Aolia Mosque in Gunung Kidul,⁷⁸ the al-Muhdor Congregation in Tulungagung, and others.⁷⁹ The issue of the effectiveness of religious authority in Islam has arisen since the passing of Prophet Muhammad. The question of who has the authority to interpret religious texts has been a continuing subject of debate and even conflict among Muslims. Muslims are divided into several schools of thought due to the diverse process of transmitting religious knowledge influenced by social, cultural, and political situations.⁸⁰ The effectiveness of authority regarding the determination of the beginning of the Hijri month is caused by several factors;

Firstly, the lack of trust in the government is a key factor. Although the Indonesian Ulema Council's Fatwa Number 2 of 2004 states that the *ru'yah* method, based on the authentic hadith of the Prophet, is the valid method for determining the beginning of Islamic months, and that the government, as *uli al-amr* (the recognized

⁷¹ M Rusydi Sani, "Beda Awal Puasa, Kemenag: Kedepankan Dialog Dan Saling Menghormati," March 8, 2024, <https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/beda-awal-puasa-kemenag-kedepankan-dialog-dan-saling-menghormati-tpqo>.

⁷² Sani.

⁷³ Ahmad Arfah Fansuri Lubis, "Naqshabandiyah Sumut Tetapkan 1 Ramadan 1443 H Jatuh 1 April 2022," March 20, 2022, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-6006710/naqshabandiyah-sumut-tetapkan-1-ramadan-1443-h-jatuh-1-april-2022>.

⁷⁴ "Jemaah An Nadzir Sulsel Tetapkan 1 Ramadan Jatuh Pada 2 April," March 30, 2022, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220330151028-20-777977/jemaah-an-nadzir-sulsel-tetapkan-1-ramadan-jatuh-pada-2-april>.

⁷⁵ M Afdal Afrianto, "Jemaah Tarekat Naqshabandiyah Di Padang Mulai Puasa Pertama Pada 9 Maret," March 6, 2024, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7228202/jemaah-tarekat-naqshabandiyah-di-padang-mulai-puasa-pertama-pada-9-maret>.

⁷⁶ Vandi Romadhon, "Jemaah Aboge Purbalingga Baru Mulai Puasa Ramadan Hari Senin," March 30, 2022, <https://www.detik.com/jateng/jogja/d-6007988/jemaah-aboge-purbalingga-baru-mulai-puasa-ramadan-hari-senin>.

⁷⁷ "Jemaah Syattariyah Aceh Mulai Puasa Besok, Naqshabandiyah 1 April Baca Artikel CNN Indonesia "Jemaah Syattariyah Aceh Mulai Puasa Besok, Naqshabandiyah 1 April," March 30, 2022, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220330193824-20-778133/jemaah-syattariyah-aceh-mulai-puasa-besok-naqshabandiyah-1-april>.

⁷⁸ Muhammad Iqbal Al Fardi, "Puasa Lebih Awal, Imam Masjid Aolia Gunungkidul Buka-Bukaan Tentang Jemaahnya Baca Artikel Detikjogja, "Puasa Lebih Awal, Imam Masjid Aolia Gunungkidul Buka-Bukaan Tentang Jemaahnya," March 8, 2024, <https://www.detik.com/jogja/berita/d-7231096/puasa-lebih-awal-imam-masjid-aolia-gunungkidul-buka-bukaan-tentang-jemaahnya>.

⁷⁹ Eka Alisa Putri, "Jemaah Al Muhdor Tulungagung Sholat Ied Lebih Awal, Polisi: Mereka Punya Perhitungan Sendiri," April 20, 2023, <https://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/nasional/pr-016579981/jemaah-al-muhdor-tulungagung-sholat-ied-lebih-awal-polisi-mereka-punya-perhitungan-sendiri?page=all>.

⁸⁰ Francis Robinson, "Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 19, no. 3 (2009): 339.



authority under Islamic law), must be obeyed by all Indonesian Muslims,⁸¹ not all Muslims follow this fatwa. For instance, Muhammadiyah questions the position of the Minister of Religious Affairs as *uli al-amr*. According to Muhammadiyah, the Minister may not have expertise in both religious and astronomical fields, which leads some Muslim communities, both individuals and organizations, to disregard government decisions regarding the start of the Hijri month. In many Muslim-majority countries, religious authority is typically held by scholars, often serving as muftis.⁸² Similarly, other religious communities, such as those following the Tariqah tradition, consider the murshid (spiritual leader) and congregation leaders as the rightful holders of religious authority.⁸³ However, there are also groups that recognize the Minister of Religious Affairs as the holder of religious authority. A formal legal religious authority does not necessarily need to be someone who understands religious texts deeply, as long as they are supported by experts in the religious field. In this view, decisions in religious matters may be made collectively by a group of experts, led by the legal authority holders, in a *jama'i* (collective) manner.⁸⁴

Secondly, many scholars use different methods and criteria than those employed by the government, and they choose not to follow government regulations because they are more convinced of the accuracy of their own methods. For example, some scholars within the Nahdlatul Ulama organization in Indonesia follow the *Ru'yatul Hilal* (visibility of the crescent moon) criterion. If a person testifies under oath that they have seen the hilal, this testimony can be accepted as the basis for determining the beginning of the Hijri month. However, the government sometimes rejects these testimonies, as its astronomical calculations (*hisab*) show that the hilal is not visible. This difference in approach sometimes leads to discrepancies between Nahdlatul Ulama and the government. On the other hand, Muhammadiyah adheres to the *Wujud al-Hilal* criterion, where the hilal's position above zero degrees is sufficient to establish the start of the new lunar month. Additionally, some smaller Islamic communities use non-mainstream methods and criteria. For example, some observe phenomena such as the rising of the sea, use the Javanese Islamic calendar, or rub the *hilal* with black cloth. These alternative methods result in different conclusions than those derived from mainstream techniques, such as the *ru'yah al-hilal* (crescent sighting) and astronomical calculations.

Thirdly, there is the freedom to practice one's belief, which is supported by law. As stated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Article 29, Paragraph 2, "The State guarantees the freedom of every citizen to embrace their religion and to worship according to their religion and beliefs." Therefore, the Indonesian

⁸¹ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia Nomor 2 Tahun 2004 Tentang Penetapan Awal Ramadhan, Syawal, Dan Dzulhijjah" (n.d.), <https://www.mui.or.id/public/index.php/baca/fatwa/penetapan-awal-ramadhan-syawal-dan-dzulhijjah>.

⁸² Yunahar Ilyas, "Fiqh Ulil Amri: Perspektif Muhammadiyah," *Akalah Disampaikan Dalam Sarasehan Dan Sosialisasi Hisab Rukyat Muhammadiyah, Diadakan Oleh Majelis Tarjih Dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, Yogyakarta, Kamis 4 Sya'ban 1434 H/ 13 Juni*, 2013.

⁸³ Abdul Azis, "Socio-Political and Psychological Factors of Ulil Amri in Determining The Beginning of The Hijri Month," *Jurnal Syntax Transformation* 4, no. 11 (November 26, 2023): 180–91, <https://doi.org/10.46799/jst.v4i11.859>.

⁸⁴ "Menyikapi Perbedaan Pelaksanaan Idul Adha, 5 Hal Ini Dapat Dijadikan Acuan Masyarakat," September 22, 2015, <https://diy.kemenag.go.id/2018/index.php/web/berita/menyikapi-perbedaan-pelaksanaan-idul-adha-5-hal-ini-dapat-dijadikan-acuan-masyarakat>.



government serves only as a facilitator, allowing each Muslim community to practice their religion according to the madhhab they follow. Additionally, Indonesia is not an Islamic state, and unlike in some Islamic systems of government, where a particular madhhab is adopted as the official state school of thought, Indonesia does not enforce a single official madhhab. Fourthly, the lack of formal sanctioning or condemnation against differing views on the beginning of the Islamic month reflects the principle of religious freedom. Since the government does not impose a single religious practice, it cannot legally punish those who follow different methods or criteria for determining the Islamic calendar, as long as those practices do not infringe on public order or the rights of others.

According to the Theory of Religious Authority by Ismail Fajrie Alatas, obedience to authority stems from the strong bond or relationship between the authority and its followers. In the case of Muhammadiyah, the obedience of its members to the central leadership can be attributed to the community that the organization has cultivated. The Muhammadiyah leadership has created a system of spiritual and organizational support that binds its members to the central management, making them more loyal to the organization than to the government. This bond is both emotional and intellectual, as the leadership provides religious guidance and services to its members. Additionally, the central management of Muhammadiyah links itself to the prophetic tradition by interpreting the hadiths of the Prophet related to the determination of the Islamic months, albeit with a distinctive interpretation that is unique to Muhammadiyah. Consequently, even though the government follows the hadiths that mandate *ru'yah al-hilal*, Muhammadiyah members continue to adhere to the decisions of their central leadership, grounded in the emotional and intellectual connection they share with it.

Similar to Muhammadiyah members, followers of Tariqah and other religious congregations tend to follow the guidance of their *murshid* (spiritual leader) or the leader of their community. This is because their intellectual and emotional loyalty is deeply rooted in the *bay'at* (oath of allegiance) to the leader. The bond between followers and their leaders is nurtured through the personal care, guidance, and service provided by the teachers and leaders of the congregation, which contrasts with the relatively minimal or nonexistent support they may receive from the government. As a result, it is natural for them to prefer not to follow government decisions.

In contrast, the government enjoys greater intellectual and emotional proximity to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The methods and criteria used by the government align closely with those practiced by NU, especially in the area of *ru'yah*. The majority of *ru'yah* practitioners are affiliated with NU, which naturally results in a stronger sense of obedience among its members to the government's decisions. Additionally, the general public, particularly those not aligned with any specific religious organization, tends to show greater compliance with the government due to their emotional connection as citizens.

Government's attitude to non-governmental authorities

Due to the inefficiency of the Indonesian government's authority and the significant influence of non-governmental authorities, the government's stance on determining the beginning of the Islamic month has varied depending on the character of the sitting president. This variability has led to several approaches regarding non-governmental influences in the Islamic calendar's determination. The



first approach is tolerance. During the presidencies of Sukarno and Abdurrahman Wahid, the government was notably tolerant of differing opinions on the Islamic calendar. For example, under Sukarno, Indonesia faced differences between the two largest Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), in 1962. Muhammadiyah set Eid al-Fitr 1381 H for March 7, 1962, while NU and the government agreed on March 8, 1962. In response, President Sukarno reminded the public that unity was essential for Indonesia. Similarly, Muhammadiyah leader Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA) noted that having two dates for Eid al-Fitr did not signify division among Muslims, as all were united under the national flag and shared the *shahada*.⁸⁵ Former President Abdurrahman Wahid, on the other hand, even considered dissolving the Hisab Rukyat Agency, responsible for determining fasting times and Islamic holidays, believing it to be ineffective at unifying Indonesian Muslims on these dates. He proposed handing over the decision to Muslim communities directly, reflecting his stance that Muslims should determine the beginning of the Islamic month independently.⁸⁶

Second, intervention. During the New Order, the government, with its militaristic approach, often attempted to unify Muslims through consolidation efforts, sometimes in unexpected ways. There were cases of government surveillance and intervention aimed at Muslim communities. When discrepancies arose in determining the start of the Islamic month, the government provided discretionary guidance, even to limited groups like state officials and mosque caretakers.⁸⁷ Third, negotiation and accommodation. In the Reform Era, where democratization expanded, the government took a more negotiated approach with non-governmental authorities. During this period, the rule of law allowed room for disputes between these authorities, leading the government to adopt the methods and criteria of the most dominant non-governmental bodies in determining the Islamic calendar. This was evident under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono,⁸⁸ and during the time of President Joko Widodo,⁸⁹ who incorporated the views of religious organizations in the *Isbat* sessions and allowed groups differing from the government to follow their own fasting and holiday observances.

The government has sought to eliminate differences in determining the start of the Islamic month. Efforts have included establishing regulations and developing suitable criteria to unify the Islamic calendar. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has issued a fatwa urging Muslims to follow the government, and the government holds *Isbat* sessions, inviting representatives from various Muslim groups in Indonesia. However, these efforts have not achieved unity. While, normatively, the

⁸⁵ Eko Sulistyono, "Soekarno, Ramadan, Dan Idul Fitri," July 4, 2016, <https://parstoday.id/news/indonesia-i13777-soekarno-ramadan-dan-idul-fitri>.

⁸⁶ Salman Farishi, "Sejarah Hisab-Rukyat: Antara Kebijakan Dan Kebijaksanaan," May 1, 2023, <https://kumparan.com/salman-farishi/sejarah-hisab-rukayat-antara-kebijakan-dan-kebijaksanaan-20JMIwJAfGg>.

⁸⁷ Ayung Notonegoro, "Kala Orde Baru Meringkus Hilal Ramadan," May 5, 2019, <https://alif.id/read/ayung-notonegoro/kala-orde-baru-meringkus-hilal-ramadan-b218725p/>.

⁸⁸ "Presiden Ajak Kaum Muslim Terima Perbedaan Penetapan 1 Syawal 1427 Hijriah," Oktober 2006, <https://surabaya.kemenag.go.id/nasional/presiden-ajak-kaum-muslim-terima-perbedaan-penetapan-1-syawal-1427-hijriah-rp85t>.

⁸⁹ "Sidang Isbat Diikuti Perwakilan Ormas Islam, Termasuk NU Dan Muhammadiyah," April 2, 2022, <https://dki.kemenag.go.id/berita/sidang-isbat-diikuti-perwakilan-ormas-islam-termasuk-nu-dan-muhammadiyah-2-PAYIk>.



Minister of Religious Affairs is considered the *uli al-amr* (Islamic authority) who should be obeyed, sociologically, many communities reject the government's decisions because they prefer their own methods. These groups do not accept the government as *uli al-amr* for a variety of reasons. Forcing these groups to conform could lead to societal conflict. Ultimately, a solution may only be possible if all groups willingly accept the government's decisions.

Conclusion

Differences in determining the start of the Islamic month are common in Indonesia, stemming not only from variations in methods and criteria but also from disputes over religious authority. The Indonesian government has assigned religious affairs to the Minister of Religious Affairs, whose responsibilities include setting the Islamic calendar for fasting and holidays. However, many Indonesian Muslims do not follow the Minister's decrees on these matters. To achieve consistency, the Minister of Religious Affairs would need to serve as the sole religious authority in determining the Islamic month. To this end, the Minister has engaged in discussions with various Muslim communities, both those aligned with and opposed to government determinations, and has also participated in international forums to help develop a unified Islamic calendar. Additionally, the Indonesian Ulema Council has issued a fatwa affirming the Minister's position as the highest religious authority. Yet, these efforts have not changed the stance of groups that disagree with the government, so differences in fasting and holiday dates persist. These discrepancies are largely due to a lack of emotional and intellectual connection between these groups and the Minister of Religious Affairs. This study focuses on the role and effectiveness of the Indonesian government as a religious authority. Comparative studies are needed to examine levels of community compliance with government-affiliated religious authorities in other Muslim-majority countries. Such studies would help identify factors that influence Muslims' compliance with religious authorities linked to their governments.

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