

RECONFIGURING TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC EDUCATION AMID GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT: POST- WAHHABISM AND MADRASAH RESPONSES TO THE IRAN-ISRAEL CONFLICT IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The Iran-Israel conflict has posed new challenges for Saudi-oriented Salafi educational institutions in Indonesia and tensions between their theological commitments and the broader Muslim solidarity with Palestine. The article examines the reconfiguration of educational ideology and institutional responses among post-Wahhabism madrasahs in Lombok and Banten, Indonesia, in response to these geopolitical developments. The present study is a descriptive qualitative case study based on observations, interviews, and document analysis. The findings suggest that the conflict did not fundamentally alter the theological bases of the madrasahs. Rather, it triggered strategic discursive and institutional adjustments. School leaders regularly described the conflict in terms of *maṣlaḥah*, humanitarian solidarity with Palestine, and social harmony. Salafi doctrinal commitments were sustained. In addition to theological debates, institutions expanded their educational programs, deepened local participation, and broadened public engagement to maintain educational legitimacy amid

growing geopolitical polarization. The paper argues that these developments are best understood in terms of post-Wahhabism, which refers not to a new theological doctrine but to the reconfiguration of educational ideology, institutional strategy, and religious authority in response to changing geopolitical and socio-political contexts.

Keywords: *Transnational Islamic Education, Post-Wahabism, Sovereignty, Social Justice, and Islamic Brotherhood Solidarity.*

A. Introduction

In popular discourse, the terms Wahhabism and Salafism are often used interchangeably. Analytically, they are distinct. The term Wahhabism specifically denotes the eighteenth-century reform movement begun by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in central Arabia, historically institutionalized through its association with the Saudi state. In contrast, Salafism is a larger transnational Sunni movement that advocates a return to the practices of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and encompasses a range of currents, from quietist to political and jihadi orientations (Haykel, 2014; Meijer, 2009). Educational institutions affiliated with Saudi religious networks in Indonesia tend to identify themselves as Salafi or *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* rather than Wahhabi. This article, therefore, uses the concept of post-Wahhabism as an analytical category to account for the contemporary reconfiguration of Salafi educational institutions that have long been influenced by Saudi religious networks but are increasingly responsive to shifting geopolitical realities, changing patterns of religious authority, and local socio-political contexts (Muhtarom, 2019). Thus, the term post-Wahhabism does not refer to a new theological doctrine or the self-identification of the institutions; rather, it describes how the institutions have changed their educational, ideological, and political positioning within present transnational Islam.

One of the most important social and religious movements in the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries was the Islamic revival. The decline of the religion, political disintegration, colonial expansion, and the need for moral reform sparked many revivalist movements that arose spontaneously throughout the Muslim world. These movements shared aims of religious purification and renewal, but were highly heterogeneous in their theological orientations, political strategies, and historical trajectories (DeLong-Bas, 2004; Salem, 2004a; Shiwa Zárate, 2023). Among these are the reform movements of Shah Waliullah al-Dihlawi in India (1703-1762), the Wahhabi Movement under Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab in Arabian Peninsula (1703-1787), the Senussi Movement led by Muhammad Ali al-Sanussi in Algeria and Egypt (1787-1859), the Idrisi Movement in East Africa, the Usman dan Fodio Movement in Northern Nigeria (1754-1817), the Mahdist Movement of Sudan (1881-1898) led by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi (Barbhuiya, 2020; Dallal, 2018; Halimatussaddiyah et al., 2025; Salem, 2004b). Other Islamic revivalist leaders included Sayyid Muhammad Abdallah Hasan in Somalia (1864-1920), the leader Hajji Shariat Allah in Bengal (1781-1840), and Al-Hajj Umar Tall in Guinea, Senegal, and Mali (1794-1865). Many Islamic revivalist movements were strongly opposed to Western imperialism and Christianity, and also to the modern colonial government. However, the Wahhabi group was moderately accepting of Christian authority and modern colonial governments, unlike other Islamic revivalist groups, although it was religiously prejudiced against other Islamic movements (Ahmed, 1981; Khan, 1970; Lewis, 1999; Robinson, 1985; Sanneh, 1988).

Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century, Wahhabism has often been seen as having relatively close ties to Western powers, particularly the U.S., Britain, and Europe (Conker, 2018; Enazy, 2009; Gause, 2009; Iqbal, 2021; Kostiner & Kostiner, 1994). Meanwhile, the movement has often challenged other interpretations of Islam that it views as inconsistent with its own. Such claims to exclusive

religious truth have thus become a key strategy to maintain the ideological identity and influence of Wahhabism (Rabasa et al., 2004). Since the late twentieth century, the spread of transnational Islamic ideologies has become more structured and polarized (Murtado & Waehama, 2024; Parawati, 2024). According to Bano and Sakurai (2015), there are three main poles of ideological gravity for transnational Islamic ideologies: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran. Bano and Sakurai (2015) point out that the current transnational Islamic educational landscape has emerged around a few major centers of religious authority, most notably Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran. Historically, Saudi Arabia has been a major locus for the propagation of Wahhabi-Salafi religious thought, Egypt has been important through Al-Azhar and other Sunni scholarly traditions, and Iran has been the main center for Twelver Shi'i religious authority. Relations between Iranian Shi'ism and Saudi Wahhabism had entered a more constructive phase before the escalation of the Iran–America/Israel conflict, with possibilities for mutual recognition, respect, and limited cooperation (Ehteshami & Hinnebusch, 2014). This development has also impacted Wahhabi communities in Indonesia, particularly in Lombok and Banten. However, the resurgence of conflict between Iran, the U.S., and Israel has reignited tensions between the two transnational Islamic currents, which has affected Wahhabi communities in Indonesia and received more attention from the broader Indonesian Muslim society (Astanto & Nurwahidin, 2024).

The Iran–Israel conflict has also become an important issue in the Indonesian educational discourse, especially as Wahhabism is seen as one of the transnational Islamic ideologies that has successfully adapted to Indonesia's modern educational landscape (Asrori et al., 2025; Ilhamsyah & Ramli, 2024; Zuhri & Syamsi, 2023). Wahabi educational institutions have also received considerable recognition, especially in Lombok and Banten, where strong religious ties to Mecca and Medina define Muslim identity. During the conflict, major Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, supported Iran

through public statements and diplomatic channels (Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah, 2025; Trikarinaputri, 2025; Wandu, 2025). Unlike NU, Muhammadiyah, and Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), many Wahhabi groups avoided openly supporting Iran (Jannah & Azharun N, 2026). Thus, Wahhabism, a transnational movement with Saudi ties, has become an Islamic current that is being closely scrutinized in Indonesia, partly because of its prominent influence in current Islamic discourse (Hamdi, 2019).

There are several reasons why this issue is of special concern in Indonesian education. Wahhabism is frequently associated with strong anti-Shi'ism sentiments. Second, Saudi Arabia has long-term strategic relations with the U.S. in many sectors. Third, Saudi Arabia's geopolitical position has long been dependent on backing from the U.S. and Europe. Fourth, Saudi Arabia still has the U.S. and Israel as important security partners. Fifth, Indonesian Wahhabi networks are widely perceived to be linked to, influenced by, and sustained by transnational religious networks originating from Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabi-oriented madrasahs in Lombok and Banten today are in a deep paradoxical crisis caused by the Iran-Israel conflict (Suryana & Hermawan, 2026). Most Indonesian Muslims, particularly those from Lombok and Banten, tend to interpret the conflict as a struggle of Islam against non-Muslim powers. Thus, groups seen as pro-American or pro-Israeli are often viewed as defending the interests of non-Muslims against Islam. Those Wahhabi madrasahs that do not directly confront this issue are increasingly under social and religious pressures in Indonesian Muslim communities. On the one hand, Wahhabi groups have long claimed to be defenders of the Islamic tradition based on the Qur'an, Sunnah, and prophetic traditions. However, their reluctance to support Iran seems to be at odds with the opinion of many Indonesian Muslims who believe that Iran has a rightful place in the conflict. This tension has posed a major ideological and social challenge to modern Wahhabism.

This paper addresses this condition by demonstrating how Indonesian Wahhabi schools deal with one of the most critical

global political issues today, the conflict between Iran and Israel. The story of Iran is a story of human dignity, Islamic unity and friendship, Iranian national independence, Palestinian freedom, and the resistance against the new forms of colonialism and domination by the U.S. and Israel.

B. Method

The qualitative multiple-case study design is employed to analyze Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, which are crucial venues for the transmission, negotiation, and contestation of international religious ideas (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2017). The design permits a discussion of the transformation, adjustment, and contestation of post-Wahhabi orientations in modern Islamic education. We suggest a multiple-case study design, which allows for a broader exploration of ideological processes across institutions, as well as comparison between cases and a focus on local contexts. Thus, Islamic religious schools act as a conduit between local cults and international Islamic revivalist movements. The research is targeted at selected educational institutions in post-Wahhabism, such as madrasahs and Islamic schools in Lombok and Banten. The sites were chosen because of their long-standing relations with transnational Islamic movements and strong traditions of Islamic education (Harto et al., 2025). As previous studies have shown, the interaction between local religious traditions and transnational revivalist movements in Lombok and Banten has led to significant ideological transformations (Pardi et al., 2024; Saparudin, 2017; Saparudin & Salim, 2023). Hence, these two cases are especially relevant as the main cases for the study of post-Wahhabism responses to contemporary geopolitical developments. As further empirical evidence, a small number of interviews from Yogyakarta are included to strengthen the analytical interpretation. Yogyakarta is not a third case study, but a way to see whether the patterns of discourse identified in the two main cases also appear outside the main research settings. Consequently, the analytical

framework, interpretation, and conclusions remain rooted in the empirical evidence from Lombok and Banten.

The data were collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data for this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews with school leaders, teachers, curriculum developers, religious instructors, and other educational actors. The study also explored daily educational practices, religious practices, and institutional cultures through participant observation. Data were then analyzed using an inductive thematic approach. The interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were coded for recurring themes, patterns, and ideological narratives. The analysis focused on three axes: transnational Islamic ideas and their transmission through educational institutions; the negotiation and local adaptations of these ideas; and the transformative impact of these processes on Islamic thought, educational practices, and institutional identity. To enhance the credibility of our results, we used data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In line with the research objectives, a sampling strategy was adopted focusing on institutions that appeared deeply engaged with transnational Islamic ideologies, both those that were explicitly or implicitly Wahhabi/post-Wahhabi and those that regularly interacted with mainstream Islamic traditions. Those cases involved both Wahhabi-leaning madrasahs based in Lombok and Banten, such as Madrasah Abu Hurairah and Madrasah Assunnah in Cirebon. All participants provided informed consent for the research aims. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and the study took care to avoid religious, ideological, and geopolitical sensitivities surrounding this area.

C. Result

Navigating Transnational Islamic Competition in Indonesia: Wahhabi Revivalism and the Transformation of Madrasah Education

The proximity to Mecca and Medina, Islam's holiest cities, is among the great assets of Wahhabi education in Indonesia. Many Indonesian Muslims would probably consider these cities tremendously religious in Lombok and Banten. While going to Mecca and Medina might seem like a mere indication of financial wealth or another thing to cross off your list, it is only those chosen by God who get the chance to go on such a journey. Consequently, those who have undertaken Hajj or Umrah are generally well respected and considered to have a unique blessing from God. This religious and cultural perception has contributed to the growth of Wahhabi educational institutions, particularly in Lombok and Banten.

For example, Wahhabi madrasahs also consolidated their role by describing the center point of education to be the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, PBUH. This focus is evident not only in their curriculum but also in the names of many of their schools and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). For instance, Assunnah, which means "following the path of Prophet Muhammad"; Abu Huraira, who narrated more hadith than anyone else; and, more recently (in later centuries), Al-Bukhari, because he is viewed as the best editor and compiler of hadith. They are also names that represent the faith of their respective institutions in what they believe are true Islamic teachings. For this reason, discussions in Wahhabi educational settings often return to a central question: "What is the Qur'anic evidence, and what is the authentic hadith?"

In addition to focusing on the Qur'an and hadith, Wahhabi madrasahs also present themselves as leading centers for Arabic education. Several of them have teachers who studied or lived in Saudi Arabia for years, which often leads people to believe they possess greater knowledge of Arabic and its culture. Such a background gives the Wahhabi teachers in Lombok considerable

religious authority. The Qur'an and the Sunnah were initially revealed in Arabic, which is why many Muslims believe that proficiency in the language lends a better understanding of these texts. This reputation has contributed to the strengthening of Wahhabi madrasahs in Lombok's modern Islamic education system. Their graduates are also known to often memorize parts of the Qur'an and hadith and speak Arabic fluently. Classical Islamic texts are not included in the Arabic classes taught by these schools, which are primarily focused on speaking and conversing with others.

For many years, the educational approach of Wahhabi madrasahs made them one of the most influential Islamic schools in Lombok. Only a handful of well-established pesantren, such as Nurul Hakim, Al-Aziziyah, and Governor Muhammad Umar, were competing against them until 2020. After 2020, the landscape underwent a transformation. The schools affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama and Nahdlatul Wathan invested heavily in modernizing their institutions, improving educational offerings, and expanding into the Hajj and Umrah travel sector, which had previously been dominated by Wahhabi networks. This led to the removal of the connection between Wahhabi teachers and travel to and from Mecca and Medina. At the same time, these groups strengthened their Qur'anic teachings and produced *huffaz* (individuals who have completely memorized the entire Quran) in increasing numbers. Nurul Qur'an, situated in Central Lombok, is an example. The district's northern, central, and southern regions are served by three major campuses that were established in 2015.

However, the increasing number of non-Wahhabi pesantren and madrasahs has made it difficult for Wahhabi-oriented educational institutions to maintain their influence among Muslim communities in Lombok. The conflict between Iran and Israel has only added to the severity of this problem. In Lombok, many Muslims perceive the conflict as a confrontation between Islam and non-Muslims, creating an environment where groups that do not openly support Iran can be perceived as supporting non-Muslim interests. Social pressure has been increasing among

Wahhabi madrasahs as repercussions. One of the more moderate Wahhabi madrasah movements in Yogyakarta was also analyzed by the researchers to gain a wider perspective. Unlike many other regions in the country, the pesantren associated with Wahhabis displayed a distinct growth pattern during fieldwork. Due to Yogyakarta's thriving intellectual culture, the ongoing influence of Muhammadiyah, and local Islamic traditions, the Wahhabi movement has become more moderate in its public engagement and more flexible. Notwithstanding these variations, the reactions of Wahhabi teachers in Yogyakarta were much like those observed by their instructors in Lombok and Banten. During an interview, Ustadz Burhan, a senior supervisor at the Pesantren Islamic Center Bin Baz (ICBB), was initially hesitant to discuss the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict, viewing it as 'a sensitive political issue'. Furthermore, he recognized that a definitive verdict was beyond his capabilities and that his opinions might not align with popular opinion in Yogyakarta. Additionally, when asked about the other questions, he said, "It is important to preserve *maslahah*, maintain peace, and ensure regional stability." According to him, the safety and welfare of Muslim-majority Middle Eastern nations, such as Saudi Arabia, are crucial because of their central position in the spiritual life of Muslims as the capital of Mecca and Medina and the location of the Hajj pilgrimage. He emphasized the importance of this fact.

Saudi Arabia must be included in any response to the conflict, as Burhan stated. When asked if Iran could be considered a major player in the defense of Palestine, he declined to provide reassurance. His answer is a "serious question," but one that shows how this response will be handled with great care and concern while also respecting core Wahhabi values, particularly the importance of maintaining doctrinal purity and what they consider the true teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. For Wahhabi groups, the primary objective of Islamic education is to assist students in practicing Islam as per the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This commitment affects how their schools are managed. Considering the increasing public concern about ethical and moral

issues faced by certain pesantrens, they prioritize incorporating Islamic principles into daily school activities. The measures involved segregating male and female students, assigning male teachers to male classes and female teachers to female classes, and dividing rooms so boys and girls could study together. Similarly, activities for both male and female teachers are carried out in this way. The connection between students and teachers is also closely monitored. Teachers should be respected, but students are not expected to show personal devotion or admiration towards an Ustadz or Kyai (respected Javanese Islamic leader). They are designed to avoid *fitnah* (religious wrongdoing) and reinforce the idea that ultimate devotion belongs only to God. The Wahhabi madrasah movement in Yogyakarta is similar to the response of comparable institutions in Lombok and Banten to international political conflicts.

From Wahhabi Revivalism to post-Wahhabism: The Adaptation of Transnational Islamic Education in Lombok and Banten

Among the Wahhabi madrasahs and Saudi-inspired Islamic educational institutions in Lombok, two schools, Madrasah Assunnah and Madrasah Abu Hurairah, have shown remarkable consistency in promoting Wahhabism. Mataram's Muslim population was introduced to Wahhabi beliefs through the establishment of Madrasah Abu Hurairah in its central area. Madrasah Abu Hurairah eventually became, in the perception of many urban Muslim families, particularly those from middle- and upper-income brackets, a high-quality educational institution. Its popularity made it one of the primary routes for students seeking to continue their studies in Mecca and Medina. Many Muslims living in Lombok, particularly those in urban areas, consider studying in Mecca or Medina to be a significant religious and social symbol. Local Muslims are known to hold these two holy cities in high regard, especially when they can afford to study there. This image helped to position Madrasah Abu Hurairah as a highly respected Islamic school among the urban middle- and

upper-class families in Lombok. For almost 20 years, it was a significant representation of Islamic education on the island.

The strong reputation of Wahhabi madrasahs in Lombok was established by Madrasah Abu Hurairah in Mataram. Madrasah Assunnah in Bagek Nyaka, East Lombok, was a prime example of success, developing in a manner similar to that of Madrasah Abu Hurairah. While Madrasah Abu Hurairah gained popularity among urban Muslims, Madrasah Assunnah was quickly embraced by those in rural areas. Within ten years, it had become one of the top Islamic schools in East Lombok. The school's impact was not limited to rural areas, as urban families also embraced it and began comparing its educational standards with those of Madrasah Abu Hurairah. With the growth of Madrasah Assunnah, *pesantren* affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, Nahdlatul Wathan, and Nurul Hakim faced stronger competition from those who followed their tradition. Nurul Hakim's position was particularly exceptional. It was widely regarded as a moderate organization, often affiliated with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama to maintain positive relations with Wahhabis. Madrasah Assunnah prompted Muslim families in East Lombok and other areas of the island to abandon their pursuit of education at the well-known *pesantren* in Pancor and Anjani. Instead, a growing number of people decided to send their children to Madrasah Assunnah and other *pesantren*-based communities.

It was at this time that the Muslims of Lombok came under the greatest influence of Wahhabism. The Wahhabi factions were very much in favor of the purification of Islam by going back to the correct *'aqidah* (Islamic creed). They stressed the importance of being a *kaffah* Muslim, practicing the Sunnah of the Prophet in everyday life, wearing appropriate Islamic attire, and performing religious rituals in accordance with their understanding of authentic Islam. These subjects were part of the curriculum of the Wahhabi *pesantren* and madrasahs. Many of these schools' graduates left with the strong sense that their version of Islam was the most authentic. It was therefore not uncommon for high school students to take on leadership roles in their religious

communities, such as leading prayers and guiding religious activities. They urged Muslim communities in the region to substitute existing religious practices with those that glorified Wahhabi beliefs. The Shi'a community is one of the groups most criticized in Wahhabi education. In Lombok, Shi'a Islam is viewed as an unorthodox branch of Islam, and students attending Wahhabi madrasahs, such as Madrasah Abu Hurairah and Madrasah Assunnah, receive this perspective. Shi'a beliefs are depicted as misguided and more dangerous than other religious views. The educational establishments have systematically been used to teach and reinforce anti-Shi'a beliefs. Some Muslims who were influenced by Wahhabis thought that Shi'a Islam was less than fully Islamic or was a greater theological threat than non-Muslims or atheists. This view was particularly prevalent among those who were strongly religiously connected to Saudi Arabia. These networks of Wahhabi preaching have been spreading since the Reformasi period and still today.

This confrontation with neighboring Iran and Israel has become a major obstacle for Wahhabi ideology in Indonesia, especially in Lombok, where Muslims are very strong supporters of Islamic unity and solidarity. The clash has raised questions about the long-standing Wahhabi opposition to Shi'a Islam, as Muslim residents of Lombok have discovered Iranian religious traditions and Shi'a culture there through social media and other online channels. This has resulted in some cases of changing public opinion with the rise of Shi'a Islam. The Shi'a Muslims were previously ignored by Wahhabi groups, but now they are accused of being overreactive to American and Zionist interests. Iran is viewed as an Islamic bastion for opposition and unity. Iran has also been backed by the Muslim community in Lombok, who believe it can effectively challenge the U.S. and Israel. The perception of Wahhabi groups and Gulf Arab states has increased, particularly because of their representatives in Indonesia, who have mostly avoided showing support for Iran. At the same time, the member states of major Indonesian Islamic organizations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and Al-Irsyad, as well

as various Muslim organizations, are increasingly showing their support for the Palestinian cause and their solidarity with Iran. As social pressure mounted and public perception waned, the tactics of the Wahhabi movements slowly evolved. Increasingly, Islamic boarding schools have moved beyond narrow discussions of doctrine and ideological differences to wider social issues such as gender equality, social justice, and ethical concerns. This change is most notable as in past years these issues were often the fault of Wahhabi institutions.

Today, Wahhabi educational institutions seem to prioritize ideological messages rather than focusing on issues of religious truth, social division, or the strong opposition between Wahhabism and Shi'ism. Instead, they now present themselves as modern, responsive institutions that address issues such as gender equality in the U.S., social justice systems, and moral concerns in Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions, particularly contemporary Wahhabi pesantren and madrasahs in Lombok, are now associated with modern, urban-style educational services. The management systems they employ have become more sophisticated, akin to those used in Muhammadiyah educational institutions. The institutions' relatively high tuition fees have helped establish their reputation as schools that prioritize teacher welfare and professional management, a feature not shared by many other Islamic schools in Lombok. This has contributed to their popularity. Many schools associated with the Wahhabi group employ comparable methods, such as registration fees, state-of-the-art edifices, and extensive advertising to attract middle-class Muslim parents from across the country. The curriculum of these schools is typically focused on a few core programs, such as memorizing Qur'an texts, studying Living Hadith, adopting Wahhabi-style dress, and studying scientific subjects using modern, technological approaches. The attributes they possess have become fundamental components of their educational identity and continue to influence the lives of Muslim residents in Lombok.

Negotiating Change in Wahhabi Madrasahs: Gender, Social Justice, and Educational Quality in Contemporary Indonesia

Based on recent observations, Wahhabi madrasah movements have demonstrated a considerable amount of flexibility in their responses to the social pressures created by the Iran-Israel conflict and the challenges they face in the public sphere. They are often seen as above criticism, but their tactics are usually pragmatic and calculated. They do not tend to meet opposition head-on. Instead, they respond with a degree of moderation, patience, and slow engagement. When Wahabi teachings first arrived in Lombok, most Muslims there were Shafi'i adherents, and that was the pattern we observed. Wahhabi groups rarely engaged in open confrontation with public resistance. Instead, they depended on a calm demeanor, polite conversation, and restrained public debate. Over time, this approach helped lower tensions and opened opportunities for dialogue with local communities. With resistance weakening, the teachings of the Wahhabis were introduced more slowly through educational and social networks. Wahhabi madrasahs have demonstrated flexibility in responding to contemporary issues, including criticisms of gender inequality. In response, many institutions created separate educational spaces for women, with female teachers and staff overseeing them. These spaces provided a sense of comfort and security for female students. They also served as a means of introducing Wahhabi values more profoundly. In these educational environments, many female graduates became very attached to Wahhabi teachings. As a result, some graduates tend to dismiss alternative Islamic interpretations when they come across them later. This strong ideological loyalty has been observed regularly by families in Lombok who observed changes in their daughters' religious attitudes after studying in Wahhabi pesantren or madrasahs. Wahhabi groups have been involved in discussions on social justice, governance, and gender issues. They often attack the state, blaming weak governance and limited social protection as the root of public problems. However, their relation to formal politics has grown more complex. One example is the

2020 legislative election in East Lombok, where a woman connected with Wahhabi circles won a seat in the Regional House of Representatives in Indonesia (DPRD, *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*). Interestingly, she contested the election on the ticket of the Indonesian political party *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDI-P), and her main electoral base was Wahhabi communities.

This is interesting because Wahhabi political orientations are usually associated with parties such as *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS). However, the Wahhabi-affiliated lawmaker from East Lombok reportedly had a less favorable opinion of PKS. There is more work to be done on the deeper reasons for Wahhabi skepticism toward state institutions, but their increasing engagement in local politics may suggest that their previous distance from government stemmed from a lack of access to political power. Wahhabi networks appear to be becoming more comfortable with the state as they have greater access to democratic institutions. Wahhabi movements are more active today on social justice issues. Among their activities are supporting orphans, assisting communities in need, and expanding access to education. They have also proved to be quite adaptable in working with local Muslim communities. For example, Wahhabi-oriented pesantren in Kopang, Central Lombok, has developed practices that are difficult to distinguish from those of Nahdlatul Ulama or Nahdlatul Wathan-affiliated pesantren. During a conversation with the leader of the pesantren, the researcher heard him say, “It is enough that I alone am like this (a Wahhabi).” This reflects a tendency to downplay the Wahhabi label and to present the institution simply as a pesantren grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah. This strategy allows Wahhabi pesantren to more easily blend into communities largely influenced by Nahdlatul Ulama, Nahdlatul Wathan, and the Shafi'i school traditions. In fact, the differences between pesantren that are oriented toward Wahhabism and mainstream Islamic educational institutions in Lombok have become invisible. They are also adaptable in their relationships with larger social

networks and contemporary lifestyles. For example, Pondok Pesantren Al-Bukhori in Central Lombok. The pesantren's leader had studied in Saudi Arabia, and one of its main buildings was allegedly funded by Saudi scholars, but it maintains good relations with various Islamic organizations, including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Nurul Hakim, and Nahdlatul Wathan. Also funding its educational activities through proceeds from Hajj and Umrah travel services, it is an example of how Wahhabi institutions have wedded religious education with modern social and economic strategies.

The researcher found that the leader of Pondok Pesantren Al-Bukhori uses communities of vintage bicycles (onthel) and Piaggio motor scooters (Vespa) to broaden the pesantren's social networks and increase public engagement. The symbols are used not only to promote but also to relate the pesantren culture to local cultural life. "The onthel and Vespa are symbols of simplicity, humility, and the meaning of life's journey," said Dr. Riyan Al-Lomboki. In the pesantren, they stand for patience (ṣabr), consistency (istiṣāmah), gratitude, brotherhood, and personal development. Their raggedness is not read as a defect but as a mark of survival. Through these cultural symbols, Al-Bukhori presents a form of "new Wahhabism" that is expressed not only in religious teachings but also in local traditions and social relations. These institutions also emphasize professional and disciplined management of education. The researcher observed that foundation leaders closely monitor teachers' responsibilities and ensure that teaching responsibilities remain consistent. The Wahhabi educational institutions often claim to be better organized and more effective than many traditional pesantren. Another key strategy is evident in how they respond to the Iran-Israel conflict. Wahhabi educational actors often steer conversations toward the Palestinian issue, rather than taking a clear position for or against Iran or the U.S. They hope to retain social acceptance by Lombok Muslims by prioritizing Palestinian solidarity over taking sides in geopolitical disputes, and by

avoiding deeper ideological rifts in a religious landscape increasingly defined by division.

The capacity of the Wahhabi educational movements to sustain their madrasahs and pesantren from the pressures of the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict is increasingly visible in Indonesia, including in Banten. They survive by being flexible, integrating socially, and trying to reconcile the religious principles of Wahhabism with Indonesian culture and modern developments. In recent years, many Wahhabi-affiliated institutions have become more amenable to accommodating national values, linked their teachings to broader notions of nationalism, responded to globalization and modernity, and established closer relations with local communities, even if this has entailed downplaying explicit Wahhabi markers of identity. This pattern resembles the current development of Wahhabi educational movements in Banten, Lombok, and other parts of Indonesia.

Researchers obtained several important insights through field observation, interviews, and document analysis on the development of the Wahhabi madrasah movement in Banten. One interesting view was from Ustadz Fachruddin, supervisor of the Islamic Boarding School of Riyadhussolihin in Pandeglang, Banten. He said the conflict between Iran, the U.S., and Israel must be seen in a larger context and cannot be reduced to a simple political problem. He recognized the issue's complexity but insisted that the conflict is intimately tied to issues of Islamic creed (*'aqīdah*). He said, "Some Muslims see Iran as a defender of Islam, but the issue of *'aqīdah* needs another standard of evaluation." For him, the question is whether a position is compatible with the teachings of God and the Prophet. In contrast to *furu'īyyah* (practical religious matters), differences among Indonesian Muslim organizations, *'aqīdah* issues are a basic theological boundary. Thus, he asked whether Muslims should be supporting movements with theological bases that are incompatible with *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. Fachruddin made three main points in discussing the Iran-U.S.-Israel conflict.

His first call was for Muslims to reassess Iran's claim to be a defender of Islam and Palestine. He argues that political narratives about Palestine should not be taken at face value but should be analyzed in terms of the broader actors, interests, and ideological backgrounds involved. He noted that certain groups supporting the Palestinian cause are affiliated with Shi'a groups or organizations that don't adhere to the *Manhaj* Sunni, in his opinion. Second, he claimed that the conflict endangers the stability of the Middle East, especially Sunni-majority countries like Saudi Arabia, which many Wahhabi circles consider the hub of tawhid-based Islamic scholarship. He rejected the idea that Saudi policies are shaped solely by its ties to the U.S., asserting that they are instead guided by principles of public welfare (*maslahah*) and the avoidance of greater harm (*mafsadah*). He also warned that military conflict without enough strength could bring greater suffering to Muslim communities, as he believed had happened in the Hamas-Israel conflict. Third, Fachruddin emphasized the authority of Saudi scholars to interpret contemporary issues. He thought Saudi religious scholars were qualified to exercise *ijtihad* and to provide guidance on contemporary political issues. However, he viewed Iranian religious leaders as supporting a more militant approach based on resistance against perceived enemies of Islam. The Saudi approach is marked by the need to preserve the religious purity of the Islamic community by strict adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, whereas the Iranian discourse is focused on political resistance and confrontation. He ended his views with what has become a common pattern in contemporary Wahhabi discourse. He stressed that in the midst of complicated geopolitical tensions, Muslims should ultimately submit to God and pray for a peaceful resolution. The answer is that the current Wahhabi movements, while facing the ideological challenges the Iran–U.S.–Israel conflict poses, continue to focus on theological certainty, social stability, and religious continuity, while waiting for the end of the conflict.

D. Discussion

The data show that Indonesia –especially Lombok and Banten– has become an important space where different transnational Islamic ideologies compete. The growth of Wahhabism during the Reformation era shows how political openness created opportunities for such movements to expand. Its presence alongside mainstream organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama reflects Indonesia's diverse but often contested religious landscape. Beyond theological debates, the spread of Saudi Wahhabism into popular culture and celebrity circles suggests it has moved beyond religious teachings and become part of wider cultural and lifestyle trends. This supports Noorhaidi Hasan's idea of "Popular Islam," where Wahhabi ideology functions not only as a religious belief system but also as an identity marker, especially among urban middle-class Muslims (Hasan, 2014).

A key finding of this study is that symbolic connections to Mecca and Medina provide Wahhabi institutions with a significant advantage. In Lombok and Banten, studying in or visiting these holy cities is seen not only as a prestigious experience but also as a sign of religious distinction and divine favor. This reflects Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, where religious credentials linked to sacred places can be transformed into social authority (Bourdieu, 1991). As a result, Saudi-trained teachers and affiliated institutions often hold a level of religious legitimacy that is difficult for other groups to challenge. This symbolic power also represents a form of Saudi religious soft power, built through scholarships, educational programs, religious networks, and the global spread of Islamic knowledge (al-Rasheed, 2010; Pétriat, 2020). Scholars such as Hegghammer (2009) argue that Saudi Arabia has used these transnational networks not only for religious purposes but also to promote its influence and position as a center of Islamic authority. Through schools, mosques, charities, and training programs, Saudi-linked institutions have helped spread Salafi-Wahhabi interpretations of Islam while

shaping ideas of religious authenticity and legitimacy among Muslim communities worldwide (Sheikh, 2025).

Through this process, Wahhabi institutions can present themselves as the most authentic interpreters of the Qur'an and hadith while portraying other Islamic traditions as less connected to Islam's original sources. Similar patterns have been found in studies of Salafi networks in Indonesia, where educational ties with Saudi Arabia provide important sources of religious authority and legitimacy (Hasan, 2006; Laffan, 2011). More broadly, transnational Islamic movements across Southeast Asia gain influence by linking local Muslim communities with global centers of religious authority (Noor, 2002, 2004). In this context, connections with Saudi Arabia serve not only to transfer religious knowledge but also to build prestige, symbolic power, and institutional credibility. These networks allow Wahhabi institutions to position themselves as intermediaries between local Muslim communities and the sacred centers of Islam (Azizah et al., 2025).

Wahhabi institutions further strengthen their claim to religious authority by emphasizing fluency in spoken Arabic, which is presented not only as a language skill but also as direct access to the language of revelation. In Islamic education, mastery of Arabic often serves as a marker of religious competence and textual authority, especially in reformist and Salafi contexts (Boyle, 2004; Hefner, 2009). Thus, Arabic proficiency becomes a form of symbolic capital that reinforces the legitimacy of Wahhabi institutions. Combined with their educational and symbolic links to Saudi Arabia, this linguistic authority helps sustain their claims of doctrinal authenticity and influence in shaping religious identity and leadership beyond formal education. However, this symbolic foundation has faced growing challenges, particularly due to the Iran–Israel conflict, which has put pressure on Wahhabi identity in contemporary Indonesia. The conflict has complicated the long-standing anti-Shi'a narrative that has been central to Salafi-Wahhabi discourse. Studies of Middle Eastern sectarianism show that sectarian identities are not fixed but are constantly

reshaped by geopolitical changes and shifting political alliances (Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Matthiesen, 2013).

By presenting Shi'ite Iran as a major Muslim actor resisting American and Israeli power, the conflict challenges Wahhabi narratives because it appeals to broader Islamic solidarity among Indonesian Muslims. The responses of Ustadz Burhan and Ustadz Fachruddin reveal a strategy of ambiguity; they neither openly support Iran nor defend American or Israeli actions. Instead, they rely on theological and procedural arguments, such as *'aqidah*, *maslahah*, and the authority of Saudi scholars, thereby avoiding alignment with either side. References to *maslahah*, *aqidah*, and obedience to senior Saudi scholars similarly functioned as defensive rhetorical devices. As per the interview with Ustaz Fachruddin, the Supervisor of Islamic Boarding School of Riyadhussolihin in Pandeglang, Banten, he views that "The Iran-Israel conflict cannot be understood simply because it is related to issues of faith." According to him, although Iran is perceived as defending Palestine, support for Iran should be assessed based on its alignment with the beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. He emphasized that the conflict needs to be approached critically because the public does not fully understand the political dynamics behind the war, while the involvement of Shi'a groups in supporting Palestine is also a consideration. Additionally, he believes that Saudi Arabia's non-confrontational stance reflects consideration of *maṣlaḥah* and an effort to maintain regional stability, based on the *ijtihad* of Saudi scholars. Therefore, he chooses to follow the views of Saudi scholars and hopes the conflict will end soon.

Rather than resolving the contradiction between anti-Shi'a doctrine and sympathy for Palestine, these narratives temporarily displaced the debate from geopolitical alignment to questions of religious methodology and shifted the discussion to the Palestinian issue. Shifting public discourse from Iran to Palestine is a discursive strategy employed by school leaders to reduce sectarian polarization, while maintaining a theological commitment aligned with Saudi Arabia and the legitimacy of the

local Muslim community. This strategy serves as a discursive mechanism to ease geopolitical tensions within the local Muslim community. Such arguments enabled school leaders to maintain doctrinal continuity while minimizing public controversy. This ambiguity reflects a wider tension within Indonesian Wahhabism, whose close ties to Saudi Arabia create vulnerabilities, especially when Saudi relations with the U.S. become a subject of public debate

The findings from Lombok, Banten, and Yogyakarta demonstrate that the Iran–Israel conflict functions not merely as an external geopolitical event but as a theological stress test for Saudi-oriented Salafi educational institutions in Indonesia. For decades, these institutions have maintained a doctrinally anti-Shi'a orientation while simultaneously deriving symbolic and educational authority from Saudi Arabia. The recent conflict complicates this position because many Indonesian Muslims increasingly frame Iran not primarily as a Shi'ite state but as a Muslim actor confronting Israel and defending Palestine. Consequently, Salafi institutions encounter competing expectations between maintaining doctrinal consistency and responding to widespread Muslim solidarity with Palestine.

E. Conclusion

The Iran–Israel conflict did not fundamentally alter the theological foundations of Salafi madrasahs, but it has reshaped the way their educational ideology is understood, taught, and presented to the public. In response to geopolitical pressures and local expectations, madrasahs have developed an educational narrative that combines a commitment to Salafi doctrine with an emphasis on *maṣlaḥah*, humanitarian solidarity with Palestine, and social harmony. Therefore, the reconfiguration discussed in this article occurs primarily at the level of educational discourse, institutional strategies, and negotiations over religious authority, rather than at the level of doctrinal change.

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