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The Influence of Traditional Religious Authority on Digital Preachers: Case Studies of Ustadz Hanan Attaki and Ustadz Adi Hidayat

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate whether traditional religious authorities in the case of two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah) still have greater authority than the new media friendly religious figures. This research employs the bai'at (edification) of Ustadz Hanan Attaki (UHA) to Nahdlatul Ulama and the admission of Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH) to the Muhammadiyah General Board as a case study. This research attemps to answer two questions: How do new religious authorities still need to rely on traditional religious authorities? Why are the traditional religious authorities in NU & Muhammadiyah still able to survive during the development of new media and the emergence of new religious authorities? Using the theoretical framework of Max Weber, this study explains the process of forming authority. This research finds that first, new religious authorities lack key elements of "authority." The long-established structures within traditional groups provide a level of legitimacy that is difficult for new religious authorities to replicate without integrating into these networks. Second, traditional authorities have spent decades, even centuries, building a loyal following and strong organizational infrastructure. These networks are supported by political capital, granting traditional authorities protection, and influence that new figures cannot easily access.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, New Religious Authority, Traditional Religious Authority, Ustadz Adi Hidayat, Ustadz Hanan Attaki.

Introduction

A lot of research pertaining to religious authority, especially in the realm of Islam in Indonesia, states that traditional religious authority is under threat due to the changing times and the accelerated growth of information technology. Akmaliah[1] said that the penetration of new religious authorities that emerged after the fall of Soeharto's presidency and was amplified by easy access to information via social media and the internet did not get responses from traditional religious authorities in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. The former, although a bit late, is responsive in responding through discourse counters in cyberspace or new media, while the latter is not very responsive and even tends to be calm. Previously, Arifianto[2] proposed the concept of a "Marketplace of Ideas" to explain the phenomenon of a variety of new religious authorities that bring diverse religious understandings and

interpretations and are packaged with more interesting language and visualization, which are different from religious understandings or interpretations brought by the traditional religious authorities. The many choices of this "religious understanding menu" allow "consumers" to choose which one is suitable and according to their "tastes." According to Arifianto, the new religious authority, amid the development of social media, won this "trade" because it could package its preaching in an attractive way and be in demand by consumers.

Krämer & Schmidtke cited Max Weber, who said that authority is the capability or the strong influence of someone's ruling or rule to be listened to, obeyed, and then followed without any need or help from any coercive or recursive power. What differentiates between authority and power is that authority is the absence of power and power vice versa. There are several roles and functions of religious authority itself, such as the capability, including right, chance, and power, to give the definition toward the right practice and belief; having the right to direct marginalization, identification, and exclusion toward the heresy, deviance, and apostasy as well as their advocates or agents. To make the discussion easier, the author first defined what a traditional religious authority is and what a new religious authority is. Rosidi, Saputra, and Gayinef (2024)[3] tried to provide definitions regarding traditional religious authority and came up with a different definition. They said that someone who had pursued education in Islamic educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools *(pesantren)* and Islamic universities that focus on studying some Islamic knowledge, has the right to be acclaimed as religious authority. Due to their Islamic educational background, they have the ability and capability to access and understand all Islamic foundational texts, such as the Qur'an and hadith, and master the Arabic language as well. Yazid & Kholmuminov[4] added that traditional religious authorities are those who appear wearing *koko,* cap *(peci),* and turban *(surban).* However, according to the author, the definition mentioned above is only individual character and capacity and does not guarantee having the power and authority to influence others, as Max Weber said. The author tends to choose the definition of traditional religious authority presented by Arifianto[5] & Akmaliah,[6] that traditional religious authority is an established authority that has been around for a long time and already has broad religious influence on society. In the Indonesian context, two of them are the largest Islamic organizations, namely NU and Muhammadiyah.

Kailani & Sunarwoto[7] opined that, unlike the traditional religious authorities, these new actors, so-called new religious authority, frequently wear trendy attire such as skullcaps *(kupluk),* hats, shirts, and others, that are seemingly related to what has been becoming trends in urban Muslim youth. Due to their willingness and capability to serve *da'wa* (religious preaching) in a more popular and "trendy" way, as well as their savvy and mastery in communication skills in social media in the academic realm, they are all well-known as religious entrepreneurs[8] or, according to Inayah Rakhmani's definition, is called "*da'wahtainment*" or ability to present an Islamic message in a way more entertaining. Some of the new Islamic preachers in Indonesia are Adi Hidayat, Abdul Somad, Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym), and Hanan Attaki. They have proved themselves as preachers who could serve innovative and entertaining preaching methods yet simplistic and literalist interpretations of Islamic values and teachings. They emerged as a fresh religious authority among pious middle-class Indonesian Muslims with large influences and followers.[9]

Some scholars like Hew[10] & Slama[11] said that the fast escalation of all those fresh religious authorities's popularity is, in time, declining and reducing the established traditional religious authorities, which are affiliated to NU and Muhammadiyah. They abruptly realize that their way of teaching and

preaching to their followers is no longer relevant within the modern Islamic community in Indonesia, especially for those who are millennials and Gen-Z Muslims from middle-class backgrounds.

The use of more entertaining and attractive social media or any modern mass media is frequently implemented by these new religious authorities to convey their religious sermons or teachings. They also utilize any model of social media that suits and is compatible with the needs of Indonesian millennial Muslims. Because their way of preaching is in accordance with the tastes and topics needed by middle-class backgrounds, especially the millennial generation, they receive more attention, and all religious interpretations and understandings that come out of them are widely heard and followed so that they automatically become a new source of religious authority. Here, the author defines new religious authorities as people or institutions who gain their religious authority not because they use frills or the infrastructure of established or traditional religious authorities but because of their own initiatives and creative steps in conveying their *da'wah*.

Among the new religious preachers who have obtained their own authority and are accepted among urban Muslim communities are Ustadz Hanan Attaki (UHA) and Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH). UHA is a graduate of Al-Azhar, Cairo, Egypt, who is gaining popularity and is known by the people thanks to the community he created, namely *Shift Pemuda Hijrah*. He uses the da'wah method by approaching various hobby communities and subcultures.[12] *Shift Pemuda Hijrah* often holds religious agendas that target young people wrapped in youth styles. This unique and different model of preaching is then much liked by young people, and many are starting to follow it.[13] When accessed on June 28, 2023, *Shift Pemuda Hijrah's* Instagram account *@pemudahijrahofficial* has 127 thousand followers, and the UHA Instagram account has 9.5 million followers. Meanwhile, UAH is a Libyan Tripoli graduate who has become famous through his lectures on YouTube. He has the characteristic of assertive preaching and is occasionally interspersed with humor. One of the things that stands out from his preaching method is that he can quote various verses of the Qur'an and Hadith without having to read. He even memorized the number of verses and the specific location of the verses of the Al-Qur'an and Hadith. Several videos featuring it on YouTube have even been watched millions of times. When accessed on June 28, 2023, his official YouTube channel *@AdiHidayatOfficial* has gained 3.99 million followers. Meanwhile, his personal Instagram *@adihidayatofficial* has reached 4.3 million followers. He also founded the Quantum Akhyar Institute, an Islamic teaching and study institute in Bekasi Bhayangkara.[14] UHA and UAH are two examples of new religious authorities who are clever and responsive in packing their da'wah via social media platforms and various other forms of new media. According to Eickelman & Anderson,[15] the new religious authority is whoever is championed in communicating and serving religious messages and values through new media. And these two figures can represent new religious authorities who are good at using new media.

However, the emergence of new religious authorities here does not mean causing established or traditional religious authorities to decline and demise, as stated by several scholars. Islamic narratives and innovative da'wah models from new religious authorities only act as contributors to new ideas in the "marketplace of ideas"[16] and do not necessarily threaten or even reduce traditional religious authority. In the Indonesian context, the determination of the beginning month of Ramadan, the beginning of the Hijri month, and the stipulation of several religious fatwas, traditional religious authorities such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and MUI are still the primary references. Most recently, the two pilots of the new religious authorities above, UHA and UAH, came together and became an official part of the traditional religious authorities in Indonesia, NU & Muhammadiyah.

Based on the explanation above, there are two crucial research questions for understanding the dynamics of religious authority in contemporary societies, particularly in the context of Indonesia, where religious life is deeply intertwined with both traditional institutions and the rapid evolution of digital media. The first question is why new religious authorities still need to rely on traditional religious authorities. This research question is essential because it sheds light on the complex interplay between innovation and tradition in religious leadership. In an era of unprecedented access to information and religious content through new media, one might assume that new religious authorities would be fully independent, relying solely on their platforms and charismatic appeal. However, this question helps to explore why, despite the growing reach of new religious leaders, they often seek validation, legitimacy, and institutional support from traditional religious authorities. This speaks to a deeper social and cultural reality: the authority of new religious figures is often incomplete without the historical, social, and institutional legitimacy that established organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have cultivated over decades. By addressing this question, it can be understood why religious authority, a matter of individual charisma or media, does not just reach but is profoundly shaped by social structures and cultural trust. This also opens questions about the ways in which new religious movements interact with, challenge, and rely on existing power structures in the religious sphere.

The second question is why traditional religious authorities like NU and Muhammadiyah are still able to survive amid the development of new media and the emergence of new religious authorities. This question is equally significant because it addresses the resilience of long-established religious institutions in the face of rapid societal changes. New media technologies have transformed the way religious content is consumed, allowing new religious authorities to build large followings and engage with audiences directly, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. Yet, despite the proliferation of online religious leaders and influencers, traditional organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah continue to hold considerable sway. This raises important questions about the factors that contribute to their continued survival—factors that are not only about religious teachings but also about their historical and social roles within Indonesian society. These organizations have established themselves as crucial to national identity, education, and social welfare, making them not just religious bodies but integral parts of the national social fabric. Understanding why they remain so relevant in the age of digital media and why they continue to retain their authority even as new forms of religious leadership emerge is key to understanding the broader dynamics of power, legitimacy, and influence in religious life today.

Together, these research questions are important because they help to grasp the evolving nature of religious authority in a rapidly changing world. They highlight the ways in which new media can both disrupt and reinforce traditional structures, and they provide insight into how religious institutions adapt, survive, and even thrive amidst the challenges posed by technological and social transformation. These questions also encourage a deeper exploration of the role of media in shaping religious communities, not just as a tool for dissemination but as an essential element in the ongoing negotiation of authority and legitimacy. The answers to these questions are, therefore, essential for anyone seeking to understand the future of religious institutions and leadership in Indonesia and, more broadly, in societies navigating the complexities of modernity, tradition, and media.

Literature Review

Religious authority in the Islamic tradition has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry for centuries, encompassing various dimensions such as textual interpretation, institutional power, charismatic leadership, and societal influence. Scholars have extensively discussed how religious authority functions

within the Islamic framework, including its evolution and adaptation in different socio-historical contexts. A recurring theme in these discussions is the dynamic interaction between traditional religious authorities and emerging forms of authority, particularly in the modern and digital eras. The growth of new media has accelerated these transformations, as it enables individuals outside traditional hierarchies to claim authority by amassing followers and disseminating religious content. This shift has compelled traditional religious authorities to reassert and redefine their roles, navigating the tension between preserving tradition and engaging with contemporary challenges.

In classical Islamic scholarship, religious authority was traditionally rooted in textual mastery and communal recognition. The ulama emerged as custodians of religious knowledge, deriving their authority through rigorous engagement with the Quran and Hadith and their ability to perform ijtihad (independent reasoning). These scholars were central to the interpretation of Sharia, serving as guides for the Muslim community and intermediaries between the divine and the temporal world. The classical conceptualization of religious authority is well-documented by scholars such as Hallaq,[17] who argues that the ulama's authority was inherently tied to their scholarly credentials and alignment with established Islamic jurisprudential principles.

Over time, this authority structure diversified, accommodating other forms of influence, such as that of Sufi sheiks, whose legitimacy often stemmed from their perceived spiritual charisma and personal piety. Sufism introduced a complementary layer of authority that emphasized experiential knowledge and personal transformation, as opposed to the predominantly legalistic focus of the ulama. The interplay between these forms of authority enriched the Islamic tradition but also created points of contention, particularly in contexts where legalist and spiritualist perspectives diverged. Trimingham (1998)[18] highlights how the coexistence of ulama and Sufi leaders reflects the pluralistic nature of Islamic authority, underscoring its flexibility in addressing diverse societal needs.

The colonial period introduced further complexities to the notion of Islamic religious authority. Colonial administrations often sought to undermine or co-opt Islamic institutions, reshaping traditional structures to align with their governance strategies. For instance, in British-controlled India, the introduction of Anglo-Muhammadan law displaced traditional qadi courts, diminishing the role of ulama in legal matters and fostering new forms of Islamic reform movements. Reformist leaders such as Syed Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal advocated for reinterpreting Islamic principles considering modernity, challenging both colonial impositions and entrenched traditional authorities). These developments underscore how Islamic authority has historically been shaped by external pressures and internal reformist impulses, demonstrating its resilience and adaptability.

In the modern era, the rise of the nation-state further complicated the dynamics of religious authority. State actors in many Muslim-majority countries have sought to centralize religious authority, often through the creation of state-sanctioned religious bodies. Institutions such as Egypt's Al-Azhar and Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs illustrate how states have attempted to regulate religious discourse, positioning themselves as arbiters of orthodoxy. However, these efforts have frequently led to tensions between official religious figures and independent scholars or movements, as state-sponsored clerics are often perceived as politically compromised. Zeghal (1999)[19] notes that such tensions reveal the persistent struggle over who holds the legitimate authority to speak on behalf of Islam in the modern context.

The digital age has brought about a profound transformation in the structures and perceptions of religious authority. Social media platforms and online technologies have enabled new actors to emerge as religious authorities, often bypassing traditional hierarchies. Figures such as Ustadz Abdul Somad,

Ustadz Hanan Attaki, and Ustadz Adi Hidayat have leveraged these platforms to reach vast audiences, demonstrating how digital tools can amplify the influence of charismatic individuals. Unlike traditional authorities whose legitimacy was tied to scholarly credentials or institutional affiliation, these digital preachers often derive their authority from their ability to connect with audiences through relatable language and accessible content. This phenomenon has prompted scholars such as Campbell (2010)[20] to explore how digital media reshapes religious engagement and challenges established forms of authority.

In the Indonesian context, numerous scholars have contributed to the study of religious authority, offering valuable insights into its dynamics. Azyumardi Azra[21] has extensively analyzed the historical development of ulama networks in Southeast Asia, and Ahmad Najib Burhani has investigated the influence of organizations like Muhammadiyah[22] and Nahdlatul Ulama[23] on shaping Islamic discourse. This diverse body of research underscores the richness of Indonesian scholarly contributions to understanding the evolving nature of Islamic authority in contemporary society.

The interaction between traditional and digital religious authorities has also raised important questions about the criteria for legitimacy in contemporary Islamic contexts. While traditional scholars continue to emphasize the importance of formal education and adherence to jurisprudential norms, digital preachers often rely on charisma and their ability to address contemporary issues compellingly. This divergence has led to debates about the potential benefits and pitfalls of the democratization of religious authority. While the accessibility of religious knowledge through digital media can empower lay Muslims, it also raises concerns about misinformation and the erosion of scholarly rigor. Wheelar (2012)[24] argues that the digital age presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic authority, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that integrates traditional and modern elements.

Research on the topic of religious authority has been widely discussed by scholars, as mentioned above. Others discussed the condition of religious authority in the era of new media, which is growing very quickly.[25] In that research, it was explained that traditional religious authorities must deal with new religious authorities who are good at using social media as a medium for their preaching. That research also discusses how traditional religious authorities must adapt and adjust to the increasingly familiar digital climate used as an alternative preaching media.

The debate about the definition, concept, and scope of religious authority itself also provokes its own debate as scholars and theologians engage in ongoing discussions and disagreements about what precisely constitutes religious authority. These scholars often develop their own unique concepts and definitions, grounded in different philosophical, historical, and theological perspectives, offering a variety of arguments to support their views. As a result, the question of what qualifies as religious authority becomes a complex, multifaceted issue that ultimately challenges our understanding of its role and significance within society and faith traditions.[26]

Despite the extensive body of literature on Islamic religious authority, there remains a significant gap in research specifically addressing the adaptation strategies of traditional religious authorities in response to the rise of digital preachers. While some scholars have examined the success of new religious authorities in leveraging technology, there has been limited exploration of how traditional institutions and scholars are reclaiming their roles in this rapidly changing landscape. This gap is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where the interplay between traditional organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah and prominent digital preachers like Hanan Attaki and Adi Hidayat offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of Islamic authority.

Existing studies on Hanan Attaki and Adi Hidayat have primarily focused on their preaching methods and the content of their da'wah activities, whether online or offline.[27] However, these studies have yet to fully explore the broader implications of their affiliation with traditional Islamic organizations for the concept and practice of religious authority. By examining their allegiance to Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, this study seeks to fill this gap and contribute to a deeper understanding of the negotiation between traditional and digital religious authorities. This focus distinguishes the present research from previous works, offering a novel perspective on the strategies employed by traditional Islamic authorities to maintain their relevance and legitimacy in the digital age.

In conclusion, while there is a rich body of literature exploring religious authority in the Islamic tradition, the specific dynamics of how traditional authorities adapt to and integrate with emerging digital forms of authority remain underexplored. The cases of Ustadz Hanan Attaki's affiliation with Nahdlatul Ulama and Ustadz Adi Hidayat's integration into Muhammadiyah offer a unique lens through which to examine these dynamics. This research addresses a critical gap in the field, providing new insights into the strategies employed by traditional Islamic authorities to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the digital era.

Research Method

In this qualitative study, the author plays a central and active role as the primary actor in the research process, taking responsibility for the design, execution, and interpretation of the study's activities. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative methods, focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural contexts, prioritizing in-depth insights over numerical measurement or statistical generalization. Once the data is collected, the author will analyze it using an inductive approach, which means that the analysis will be guided by the data itself rather than starting with preconceived hypotheses or theories. Inductive analysis involves identifying patterns, themes, and insights directly from the data, allowing for the development of new theories or conceptual frameworks that emerge naturally from the observations. In qualitative research, the emphasis is placed on the meaning and depth of the data rather than on making broad generalizations or applying statistical analyses. The aim is to uncover and understand the lived experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of the subjects involved, giving priority to the context and significance of those experiences. While quantitative research seeks to generalize findings to larger populations, qualitative research values the uniqueness of individual cases and the insights they can offer into complex human phenomena. Therefore, in the outcome of this study, the focus will be on providing a rich, detailed interpretation of the data, offering a deep understanding of the research subject rather than on applying the findings to larger groups or general contexts. It is aimed to portray factual, accurate, and systematic images and descriptions pertaining to the properties, relationships, and facts between the phenomena being investigated.[28]

The author will map data sources into 2 types: primary data and secondary data. The former was gained from all reports on the internet relating to UHA's *bai'at* to Nahdlatul Ulama and the admission of UAH to the Muhammadiyah Central Board. The data related to news and writings about the entry of Ustadz Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attaki into Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama was collected from June 1 to September 1, 2023. This period was chosen because it is close to the date when Ustadz Hannan Attaki was inducted into Nahdlatul Ulama and when Ustadz Adi Hidayat was appointed as a central board member of Muhammadiyah. The selection of this time frame assumes that both Ustadz Hannan Attaki and Ustadz Adi Hidayat intended to gain the sympathy of the members of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah to strengthen their respective positions of religious authority. The letter was

collected from books, journals, book chapters, and other written sources related to all the keywords in this research. For analysis, the author uses the theory of religious authority formulated by Max Weber. He said that authority describes the ability or opportunity to have one's rules and rulings followed and obeyed without recourse to coercive power. If we look at it in a religious context, then anyone, whether an individual or a group, whose attitudes or views are followed and obeyed without coercion or threats can be categorized as a religious authority.

Results and Discussion

The Alliance between the Two: The Sign of New Religious Authorities' Lack of Influences

Ustadz Hanan Attaki (UHA) is a prominent millennial preacher who has gained significant popularity among Indonesian youth due to his modern approach to da'wah and his ability to connect with younger generations. Through the community he founded, Shift Pemuda Hijrah, UHA has successfully attracted thousands of young people to engage in his da'wah activities, empowering them to embrace a more active and meaningful spiritual life. His ability to resonate with the concerns, challenges, and aspirations of young Muslims in Indonesia has made him one of the most sought-after figures in contemporary Islamic preaching. As a result of his growing influence, UHA is frequently invited to deliver safari sermons—a series of lectures and religious talks—across various regions of the country. However, despite his popularity, these safari sermons have not always proceeded smoothly. In 2022, UHA faced significant opposition when his planned sermons were rejected in seven cities within East Java province, including Gresik, Jember, Situbondo, Sidoarjo, Sumenep, Bondowoso, and Pamekasan. This rejection raised concerns about the increasing polarization in the Indonesian religious landscape. The opposition to UHA's sermons generally came from activists and paramilitary groups who are affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's largest and most influential traditional Islamic organizations. NU has long been a dominant force in shaping religious discourse and practices in the country, and some of its members view UHA's preaching as a challenge to their authority and traditional interpretations of Islam. One of the primary reasons cited for the rejection of UHA's sermons was the accusation that he was linked to Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). This transnational Islamist organization advocated for the establishment of a global caliphate, which was officially banned in Indonesia in 2017. The association with HTI has been a controversial issue for many Islamic leaders and organizations in Indonesia, especially for those who view HTI's ideology as incompatible with Indonesia's secular, pluralistic state system. The allegations against UHA raised questions about his alignment with certain ideological movements, further fueling opposition to his da'wah activities in regions where NU's influence is strong. Consequently, UHA's rejection in these cities was not only a reflection of ideological differences but also a manifestation of the larger tensions within Indonesian Islam, as various factions within the Muslim community vied for influence over the direction of the nation's religious discourse.[29] Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia is a transnational Islamic organization whose vision is to build an Islamic state and reject the democratic system imported from the West.[30] On accusations of having participated in this organization, UHA's sermons were considered to contain elements of HTI teachings, which led to the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia. Due to this reason, many of his lecture agendas were rejected by Nahdlatul Ulama activists, an Islamic organization that is loyal and helps maintain the Indonesian democratic values as something final.[31]

However, after these various rejections, uniquely on Thursday (11/05/2023), UHA declared himself as a Nahdlatul Ulama cadre through loyal *bai'at* to Nahdlatul Ulama, which was carried out at the *halal*

bi halal event for the Big Family of the Sabilurrosyad Gasek Islamic Boarding School in Malang, East Java. The *bai'at* was led by the chairman of the East Java Nahdlatul Ulama Regional Board KH. Marzuki Mustamar. UHA joined Nahdlatul Ulama because when he performed Umrah, he wanted to meet a teacher who could guide him in his *da'wah* mission. Then, his wife asked him to meet KH. Marzuki Mustamar was the person who then led him to perform *bai'at.*[32] Shortly after this *bai'at*, on June 2, 2023, UHA subsequently received an invitation to give a sermon in Jember City, East Java Province, to be precise, at the Riyadhus Sholihin Assembly. UHA, who, before taking *bai'at*, had difficulty organizing *da'wah* in East Java Province. After taking *bai'at*, they even received respect and care from people who had previously rejected them.[33]

The story of the joining of the new religious authority with the traditional religious authority was also experienced by UAH and Muhammadiyah. As mentioned above, UAH is a preacher who has gained popularity and authority through the audio-visual content he uploads to various social media platforms.[34] On various social media platforms, UAH has millions of followers, for example, on Instagram and YouTube, even exceeding the number of followers of official media from traditional religious authorities, Muhammadiyah and NU.[35] In terms of engagement and affordability of digital da'wah to media consumers, UAH clearly means more than engagement from media affiliated with traditional religious authorities. Apart from having extensive engagement in cyberspace, UAH has also built Islamic boarding schools in Cipancur, Sukacai, Baros, Serang, Banten villages. The Islamic boarding school, which has an area of approximately 1.5 hectares, is named the Rafiah Akhyar Islamic Boarding School (MIRA) Institute. Ustad Adi Hidayat is also active in Musyawarah Studies, which are attended by several Indonesian celebrities, including Ari Untung, Dude Herlino, Dimas Seto, and others.[36] However, with all the fame he has, UAH is still willing to become a vice chief for the Tablighi Council of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah for the 2022-2027 period.[37] UAH does have a Muhammadiyah education background. He is a graduate of the Darul Arqam Muhammadiyah Garut Islamic boarding school. However, he did not gain popularity and authority by carrying the label Muhammadiyah or using Muhammadiyah's facilities, but he got it purely from his innovative and interesting da'wah strategy, especially through new media.

Arifianto[38] said that this phenomenon is an "alliance between new and traditional/old religious authorities." New religious authorities, in alliance with old religious authorities, can exert significant influence over the policies issued by traditional religious authorities. Roy discusses the evolution of Islamic authority in modern Muslim societies, emphasizing how newer religious movements, which he calls "Islamist movements," have attempted to create alternative centers of authority separate from traditional religious institutions. However, these movements often find themselves needing to collaborate or coexist with established religious organizations that have a deep-rooted presence and institutionalized authority. Roy suggests that the integration of new leaders into traditional structures can be seen as a form of accommodation, where new movements are either co-opted or must comply with the established organizational hierarchies. Esposito offers a broad perspective on the evolution of Islamic authority, noting the tension between formal, institutional religious authorities (such as ulama councils and religious courts) and newer, often charismatic leaders who rise to prominence outside of these structures. He emphasizes that while new religious figures can bring innovation to the faith, they often must either challenge or accommodate the existing systems of authority that have long been established in Islamic societies.[39]

In this instance, Muhammad Zaitun Rasmin, the chief of Wahdah Islamiyah, has been promoted to the role of deputy secretary general of the Islamic Religious Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia [MUI]).

Tengku Zulkarnain, another conservative Islamic preacher who has made controversial statements about non-Muslims, ethnic Chinese, and LGBTQ people, also serves as a MUI deputy secretary general. Arifianto[40] referred to this as the success or victory of the new religious authorities who have been able to penetrate and enter the traditional religious authority structure. However, according to the author, this is not a victory; instead, it shows that the old religious authority is more powerful than the new religious authority. What must be remembered is that the traditional religious authorities here already have an established system and organizational hierarchy. When new religious authorities enter the system, they must automatically work according to the existing established system and not necessarily make their own rules. In the case of UHA and UAH, for example, UHA is still tied to the organizational structure of Nahdlatul Ulama at the provincial level, which, in terms of influence, is inferior to the organizational structure at the central level. UAH is also the same. He is the vice chairman of the Tabligh Council of Muhammadiyah. He is under the leadership of the chairman of the council, even far under the influence of the general board of Muhammadiyah himself.

As Max Weber mentioned, authority denotes the capability of someone's rules or rulings to be conducted and obeyed by others without any form of forcing power. Authority is always a side that has authority and has the right to be followed, whether it be an individual, group, or institution. In the case of Hanan Attaki, he must follow all the rules outlined by Nahdlatul Ulama. In a YouTube video uploaded by the NU Channel Youtube account on May 12, 2023, UHA pledged 6 points of *bai'at* guided by the chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama on the provincial level. This *bai'at* implies that UHA is bound by the rules, vision, and values of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization. UHA cannot freely and without control act at will without respecting organizational rules. According to UHA, during his Umrah pilgrimage in Mecca, he claimed to have been guided by Allah to seek a teacher who could lead him on the right path. He felt that, up until that point, he had not been on what he considered the "correct path" in his understanding of Islam. Consequently, he decided to approach Marzuki Mustamar, a former teacher of his wife and asked to be mentored in the proper teachings of Islam. Following this decision, he was formally inducted into Nahdlatul Ulama after being initiated into the organization through a *bai'ah* (oath of allegiance).

Even in the UAH case, he became the vice chairman of the Tabligh Council of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, which was bound by organizational rules. In the culture of Muhammadiyah, the council is a supporting element of the leadership, which carries out some of the main tasks of Muhammadiyah.[41] The willingness of UHA and UAS to be bound by the structure of traditional religious authority here shows that it still has strong influence and authority in society through long historical traces and established organizational structures and systems.

Solid Structure and Position of Traditional Religious Authority

In the study of Islamic religious authority, three critical points must be emphasized to understand the complex nature of this concept fully. First, religious authority in Islam fundamentally derives from two primary sources: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Both sources hold equal and complementary positions in guiding the beliefs and practices of Muslims. The Qur'an, as the literal word of God, and the Sunnah, which encompasses the actions, sayings, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad, provide the foundational framework for Islamic law and ethics. However, it is not enough to simply reference these texts; it requires a deep level of intellectual engagement, scholarly interpretation, and contextual understanding to apply their teachings appropriately to the diverse and often evolving circumstances of contemporary society. This intellectual endeavor, often referred to as ijtihad (independent reasoning), has led to the emergence of a wide range of interpretations and schools of thought within Islam as

scholars have debated the meaning of the Qur'anic verses and Hadiths. Over time, this multiplicity of interpretations has resulted in various exegetical traditions or tafsirs, which contribute to the formation of multiple religious authorities. Consequently, Islamic religious authority is not monolithic but rather is shaped by a variety of scholarly opinions and methodologies that emerge in response to different historical, cultural, and social contexts. Second, it is essential to recognize that Islam does not possess formal, institutionalized structures of religious authority comparable to those found in other religious traditions, such as the Church and its ordained clergy in Christianity. In the absence of an overarching religious hierarchy in a central religious body or clergy, Islamic religious authority is largely decentralized. Instead, religious authority in Islam is vested in the 'ulama—the plural form of 'alim, referring to individuals who are well-versed in Islamic sciences and law. These scholars are not ordained through a formal clerical system; rather, they gain recognition based on their expertise, piety, and ability to interpret Islamic texts. In addition to the scholars themselves, various religious educational institutions, such as madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic universities, play a crucial role in cultivating and transmitting religious knowledge. These institutions, often community-based or independent, serve as centers for Islamic learning and help shape the religious authority of the scholars who teach and study within them. Unlike the Christian tradition, which has formalized roles such as priests, bishops, or cardinals, Islamic religious authority is more fluid and decentralized, dependent on the knowledge, reputation, and scholarly achievements of the individual 'ulama. Third, the study of Islamic religious authority cannot be fully understood without considering the significant role played by political leaders and rulers. Unlike in some religious traditions, where religious authority is independent of political power, in Islam, the relationship between religious authority and political authority is intertwined. Historically, rulers and caliphs have played a pivotal role in defining and supporting religious practices, shaping religious institutions, and enforcing the interpretation of Islamic law. Even though Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) is theoretically independent of the state, rulers have often had the power to appoint religious scholars to key positions, influencing the direction of religious interpretation and practice. In many Muslim-majority societies, religious scholars and political rulers collaborate to shape laws and policies that align with Islamic principles, further consolidating the relationship between religious and political authority. This symbiotic relationship between religious scholars and political rulers has led to the view that religious authority is, to some extent, subject to the decisions and actions of the state. Over time, this interplay has shaped the contours of Islamic religious authority, demonstrating how the authority of the 'ulama and religious institutions is often shaped by the political context in which they operate, making it an inherently dynamic and contextual process.[42]

Between traditional religious authorities and new religious authorities, of course, both try to explore the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an and hadith and then form their respective religious authorities. Both are individuals or organizational units that have religious figures who certainly have a qualified capacity to understand and absorb interpretations and meanings from the two primary reference sources for Islam. However, what differentiates the new and traditional religious authorities is their relationship with the authorities, in this case NU and Muhammadiyah.

Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, certainly has good relations with the Indonesian state. In terms of its history, Nahdlatul Ulama played an active role in its efforts to expel the Dutch colonists from the territory of the Indonesian state. This struggle is seen as an effort to maintain religious ideology and nationalism as a form of love for the motherland *(hubb al-wathan)*. NU's role in expelling the Dutch colonizers is a religious recommendation that must be carried out. The law became the decision of the NU *'ulama*, which eventually gave birth to a movement called *Resolusi Jihad* (*Jihad*

Resolution) to fight against Dutch colonialism.[43] When formulating the ideology of the Indonesian state, namely Pancasila, many Muhammadiyah religious figures were involved in this very important agenda, including Kasman Singodimedjo, Ki Bagus Hadi Kusumo, and KH. Kahar Muzakir.

These two traditional religious authorities have also declared themselves loyal to the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia. Muhammadiyah, through the official stance of its organization, which is contained in a book entitled *Negara Pancasia Sebagai Darul 'Ahdi wa Syahadah* (Pancasila State as *Darul 'Ahdi wa Syahadah*)[44] had stated that Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) is a gift from God for the struggle of all elements of the people who contain the soul, mind, and lofty ideals of independence. Muhammadiyah considers several dictums in the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia to be important and fundamental because they contain the soul, philosophy, thoughts, and ideals of being a state to live up to and maintain. Nahdlatul Ulama is also like that. He has proven his commitment to maintaining the integrity of Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia through his struggle against colonialists and upholding a moderate understanding of religion. Nahdlatul Ulama is an organization that actively spreads *Wasathiyyah* (moderate) Islamic teachings and counteracts radical and extreme religious views. Thanks to their loyalty to Indonesia, even before Indonesia became an independent country, and in accordance with Indonesia's vision & mission, NU and Muhammadiyah became the largest Islamic organizations with the largest number of followers in Indonesia. Many figures from NU and Muhammadiyah are entrusted with strategic positions in the Indonesian government that play an important role in considering state policies. It is this historical memory and unity of vision that gives NU and Muhammadiyah bargaining power and closeness to the government of the Republic of Indonesia.[45]

Even though they were left behind in terms of *da'wah* innovation in the realm of new media, these traditional religious authorities soon realized this and began to innovate and start exploring new media to launch their *da'wah*. Many preachers who were affiliated with the old religious authorities began to emerge and gain their respective popularity. They started filling new media platforms and could compete with new religious authorities.[46] The closeness of traditional religious authorities to rules and their awareness of the use of new media platforms is what makes them exist and can regain their religious authority, especially in the context of this country, Indonesia. Realizing that traditional religious authorities still have "power" in this all-digital and increasingly modern life, it is only natural that new religious authorities are willing to join traditional religious authorities even though they must enter a lower structure and hierarchy

Conclusion

This study concludes that the entry of new religious authorities into the traditional religious authority structure is driven by a variety of factors. First, many new religious figures lack access to crucial elements of "authority," such as a well-established organizational framework and institutional recognition, which the old religious authorities already possess. The long-standing organizational structures of traditional religious groups—whether in the form of madrassahs, Islamic councils, or scholarly institutions—provide a level of legitimacy and authority that is difficult for new figures to replicate without integration into these structures. Second, traditional religious authorities have had the time to build a network of loyal followers and militant organizations over decades, if not centuries, a deeply entrenched infrastructure that new authorities must reckon with when seeking to expand their influence. These historical foundations are supported by the political capital accrued through relationships with the government and state, which has granted traditional religious authorities a level of protection and authority that

newer figures cannot access as easily. The historical memory of past political engagements and the ongoing connection with state power continue to be key factors in maintaining the dominance of traditional religious authorities.

Moreover, the older religious authorities have increasingly adapted to the changing media landscape and have become more adept at utilizing new media platforms to convey their messages, engage with younger generations, and maintain their relevance in the digital age. They have embraced the potential of platforms such as social media, podcasts, and online lectures to connect with their followers, effectively using the same tools that new religious authorities employ. As a result, traditional religious authorities have been able to maintain their influence and, in some cases, expand their reach, turning the digital space into a battleground for authority between old and new religious figures. This growing presence of established religious leaders on new media platforms has led to a situation where new religious authorities are not only competing for influence among younger and more digitally savvy audiences but are also vying for the same platforms and resources that the traditional authorities have already mastered. Consequently, the increasing ability of old religious authorities to use new media has intensified the competition, making the landscape of religious authority more dynamic, contested, and complex than ever before.

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