Islamic Mass Organizations Figures' Views on *Ulī al-amr*: Implications for Indonesian Democracy and Compliance with The Government

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Abstract:
Diverse views among Indonesian Islamic mass organizations' figures over the existence of the Republic of Indonesia and obedience issue to the government became a topic of discussion, particularly when the government's decision about religious issues differs from that of organization. This study aimed to find

out in depth about views on ulī al-amr among figures from some Indonesian Islamic mass organizations and the issue of obedience to it within a democratic state system. This research is descriptive qualitative, using focused interviews in data collection. It is inductive in nature, which aims at developing process-oriented theories or values and data. The findings of the research showed that the representative figures recognize the Indonesian government as ulī al-amr, including ahlu al-bayt Indonesia, who prefer not to use the term because it is related to the requirement of chastity ('ismah). This recognition implied an obligation to obey the Indonesian government, even though it is run by a democratic system, not Islam. As for matters related to specific religious regulations, such as determining the beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, etc., differences from the government are not deemed as deviating from ulī al-amr, considering the democratic nature of the state, in which it provides opportunities to be diverse and recognizes those differences.

Keywords:
Ulī al-amr; Islamic mass organizations; Democracy; Governmental compliance

Introduction

Indonesia is a country that practices democracy. Its leaders are elected by the people with the majority vote, starting from the President and his deputy, the governor and his deputy, the regent and his deputy, the mayor and his deputy, the members of the People's Representative Council at each level, and the Regional Representative Council (abbreviated as DPD in Indonesian).[1] On the other hand, the majority of the Indonesians are Muslim, and so are the previous and current presidents. Under these conditions, according to the concept of *as-siyāsah as-syar'iyyah*, the President of the Republic of Indonesia should be an *ulī al-amr* for all Indonesian Muslims. Consequently, Muslim citizens must obey the government, especially in matters related to their religion, because the Republic of Indonesia has not separated itself from regulating religious life. Moreover, according to

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[1] Lita Tyesta Addy Listiya Wardhani, Farid Ibrahim, and Adissya Mega Christia, "Koherensi Sistem Pemilihan Kepala Daerah di Indonesia Terhadap Nilai-Nilai Demokrasi Pancasila," *Jurnal Pembangunan Hukum Indonesia* 2, no. 3 (2020): 305–18, https://doi.org/10.14710/jphi.v2i3.305-318.

Ibn Taymiyah, it is not permissible to oppose the legitimate government, even if the leader is a disbeliever (non-Muslim), as long as the religion is well protected.[2] This closely relates to the concept of *ulī al-amr,* which can come from other authorities outside the president in the religious field.

Research on this topic has been conducted many times. There are at least two categories of it. *First*, research on the terminology of *ulī al-amr,* according to an Indonesian Islamic organization, takes certain relevant topics. The research in the first category consists of at least five studies, such as those of Anik Zakariyah,[3] Mohammad Ali Masyrofi,[4] Eva Rusdiana Dewi,[5] Lina Rahmawati,[6] and Muhammad Nurkhanif.[7] Each of these five studies viewed the determination of the beginning of the month of Qamariyah from different perspectives of Islamic organizations in Indonesia, namely Muhammadiyah, the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (abbreviated in Indonesian as LDII),

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[2] Toha Andiko, "Pemberdayaan Qawa'id Fiqhiyyah dalam Penyelesaian Masalah-Masalah Fikih Siyasah Modern," *Al-'Adalah* 11, no. 1 (2014): 103–117, https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v12i1.178; Adelina Nasution, "Narsisme Ulama: Dilema dan Posibilitas Rekonstruksi Ushul Fiqh di Indonesia," *Al-Ahkam* 18, no. 2 (2019): 213, https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2018.18.2.2308.

[3] Anik Zakariyah, "Studi Analisis Terhadap Pandangan Muhammadiyah tentang Ulil Amri dalam Konteks Penentuan Awal Bulan Kamariah" (Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, 2015), https://eprint.walisongo.ac.id/view/creators/Zakariyah=3AAnik=3A=3A.default.html.

[4] Mohammad Ali Masyrofi, "Ketaatan pada Ulil Amri dalam Penentuan Awal Bulan Kamariah : Perspektif Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia (LDII)" (Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, 2020), https://repository.walisongo.ac.id/view/creators/Masyrofi=3AMohammad_Ali=3A=3A.html.

[5] Eva Rusdiana Dewi, "Studi Analisis Terhadap Pandangan Nahdlatul Ulama tentang Ulil Amri dan Implikasinya dalam Konteks Penentuan Awal Bulan Ramadlan, Hari Raya Idul Fitri dan Hari Raya Idul Adha" (Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, 2017), https://repository.walisongo.ac.id/view/creators/Dewi=3AEva_Rusdiana=3A=3A.default.html.

[6] Lina Rahmawati, "Analisis Ulil Amri dalam Konteks Penetapan Awal Ramadhan dan 'Idaini (Idul Fitri dan Adha) dalam Perspektif Persatuan Islam (Persis)" (Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, 2017), https://files01.core.ac.uk/download/pdf/479411308.pdf.

[7] Muhammad Nurkhanif, "Perumusan Konsep Penyatuan Kalender Madzhab Ulil Amri Persepektif Syar'i dan Astronomi," *Tafáqquh: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Keislaman* 10, no. 1 (2022): 124–48, https://doi.org/10.52431/tafaqquh.v10i1.942.

Nahdlatul Ulama (abbreviated in Indonesian as NU), and the Islamic Association (abbreviated in Indonesian as Persis). *Second*, research on *ulī al-amr* terminology in general has been conducted by looking at the perspectives of various Islamic organizations. There are at least two studies on this topic, both related to the religious field and the field of government in general like Busyro's research, which focused more on the political sociology of Islamic law[8] and Kaizal Bay's research which questioned the attitude of Indonesian Muslims in determining their attitude toward the *ulī al-amr* with the authority to look after their religious interests.[9] Therefore, distinction of this research was to examine Indonesian Islamic mass organizations' compliance with the government using the concept of *ulī al-amr* in this democratic country through representative figures of each.

This article aimed at expressing the understanding of representative figures from Indonesian Islamic mass organizations regarding the position of the government of the Republic of Indonesia in relation to the concept of *ulī al-amr*. The importance of this study was based on two arguments. *First,* there are differences between the Indonesian government and several Islamic mass organizations in matters related to the implementation of certain religious teachings, and this continues to this day. Nasaruddin Umar once said that Islamic organizations that do not obey the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in determining the beginning of Ramadhan mean that they have defied the government.[10] In fact, some organization, such as Muhammadiyah, use different methods in determining the beginning of the month, particularly Ramadhan. *Second*, Islamic mass organizations that oppose the government, such as Muhammadiyah, often receive negative reactions from the public as organizations that

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[8] Busyro, "Fatwa Lajnah Bahtsul Masail (LBM) Nahdhatul Ulama tentang Kedudukan Presiden RI Sebagai Waliyul Amri Dharuri Bisy Syaukah," *Al-Hurriyah* 12, no. 2 (2011): 51–69; Hamid Pongoliu, "The Existence of the Statement of the Companions (Fatwā Ṣaḥāba) and Its Ḥujjah in Islamic Legal Thoughts," *Al-Ahkam* 29, no. 2 (2019): 189, https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2019.29.2.4281.

[9] Kaizal Bay, "Pengertian Ulil Amri dalam Al-Qur'an dan Implementasinya dalam Masyarkat Muslim," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 17, no. 1 (2011): 115–29, https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v17i1.686.

[10] Ihsanul Fikri, "Penetapan Awal Bulan Qamariyah di Indonesia: Tinjauan Terhadap Ulil Amri Yang Berwenang," *Ijtihad* 34, no. 1 (2019): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.15548/ijt.v34i1.1.

do not maintain ukhuwah islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood).[11] Two research are posed in this study; How do Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia interpret *ulī al-amr* in a democratic state system in Indonesia through the voice of each figure? And how is the compliance of Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia with the government in this form of democratic state system?

Method

The descriptive qualitative method was used in conducting this research,[12] namely that of Robert K. Yin and Patricia Leavy, which emphasizes in-depth exploration to understand certain phenomena and to explore the meanings and perspectives of participants.[13] The data sources used in this research were primary and secondary data. The primary data source is figures from Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, including the *ulama* of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Persis, Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah, and Ahlul Bait Indonesia (abbreviated as ABI in Indonesian), one person of each. The selection of informants is based on their prominence in the organization. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from books and journal articles.

Data were collected through structured interviews (focused interviews), which were designed to elicit the research subjects' responses to specific questions.[14] Interviews were conducted directly using unique and individual sampling. Then, the literature review was

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[11] Ali Imron et al., "Dari 'Muhlal' Hingga 'Muhrabi' (Tipologi Pemikiran Hadits Hisab-Rukyat di Kalangan Muhammadiyah)," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 10, no. 2 (2015): 337–58, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.19105/ihkam.v10i2.733; Surya Sukti et al., "Political Dynamics of Islamic Law in the Reform Era: A Study of the Response of Muhammadiyah Cadres in Central Kalimantan," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (2022): 1022–45, https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i2.12415.

[12] Staffan Larsson, "Facets of Quality in Qualitative Research," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1707.

[13] Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods Vol. 5* (London: Sage Publications, 2009); Patricia Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2022).

[14] Patricia C Jackman et al., "The Event-Focused Interview: What Is It, Why Is It Useful, and How Is It Used?," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 14, no. 2 (2022): 167–80, https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2021.1904442.

emphasized at the end of the study, which led to the coordination, organization, and synthesis of the data collection.[15] The data were analyzed using data induction, so that the conclusions drawn for this research were inductive in nature, and the goal was to develop theories or values that were process and data oriented.[16]

Result and Discussion
Ulī al-amr from the Perspective of Indonesian Islamic Mass Organizations Figures

The term 'leader of a country' in Islamic references is called *ulī al-amr, imām,* caliph, *amīr,* or *waliy al-amr*.[17] This began with the reign of the Prophet through the Medina Charter by upholding religious freedom, individual independence, and social and civil rights. Al-Mawardi (d. 450 H/1075 AD) argued that the *ulī al-amr* functioned as a substitute for the Prophet in religious and world affairs.[18] Likewise, according to al-Ghazali, as quoted by Ali Haidar, *ulī al-amr* have special abilities that distinguish them from the people. In principle, the appointment of *Ulī al-amr* can be done by determining the prophethood, appointing an *imām*, or de facto handing over power, even without handing over the power of the imamate.[19]

This principle was adopted by Indonesia after independence under the government of Sukarno. Although the strength of the Muslim community at that time was very decisive, the real conditions of the president and the government in general were still not enough when it came to Islamic ideals was the system of government practiced

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[15] Benjamin F Crabtree and William L Miller, *Doing Qualitative Research* (California: Sage publications, 2022).

[16] A Srivastava and S B Thomson, "Framework Analysis: A Qualitative Methodology for Applied Policy Research," *JOAAG* 4, no. 2 (2009): 72–79, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2760705.

[17] Saefuddin Zuhri, *Menjemput Kembalinya Sang Khalifah* (Jakarta: Nizham Press, 2007); Yunahar Ilyas, "Ulil Amri dalam Tinjauan Tafsir," *Tarjih: Jurnal Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam* 12, no. 2014 (2011): 43–50, https://jurnal.tarjih.or.id/index.php/tarjih/article/view/81.

[18] Danang Yustiana and Kotimah, "Konsep Pemimpin dalam Islam (Analisis Pemikiran Al-Mawardi)," *Eksya: Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Syariah* 1, no. 1 (2023): 10–17, https://jurnal.iaih.ac.id/index.php/EKSYA/article/view/682.

[19] M Ali Haidar, *Nahdatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1998).

by the Prophet.[20] It is, among others, clear from a title given to President Sukarno in 1954 by the Nahdlatul Ulama circle, which did not yet exist in classical fiqh terms, namely *waliy al-amr al-ḍarūrī bi al-shawkah* (holder of temporary authority because of power).[21] Nahdlatul Ulama's participation in practical politics since 1945 through Masyumi, NU Party, PPP, then PKB has often been trapped in temporary situations, although these circles are basically pragmatic.[22] Therefore, according to Bruinessen, it is difficult for Nahdlatul Ulama to escape the world of politics due to the culture of leadership and the emergence of politically aware NU students.[23]

Other than NU, figures of several Indonesian Islamic mass organizations have diverse opinions about *ulī al-amr.* They range from Muhammadiyah, Persis, Al Irsyad Islamiyah, to Ahlul Bait Indonesia (abbreviated as ABI, an Islamic organization affiliated with the Shia, specifically the Shia Itsna Asyariyah). Table 1 is the results of interviews with figures from those mass Islamic organizations about the meaning of *ulī al-amr*.

Table 1. *Ulī al-amr* from the Perspective of Islamic Mass Organizations Figures

Organization	ulī al-amr definition	Implication	Evidence
NU	Government that takes care of the interests of Muslims.	*Ulī al-amr* is a leader to obey to because they are the guardians (helper) of Muslims in practicing their	The ulama agreement in Cipanas in 1954 confirmed the President of the Republic of Indonesia and all

[20] Greg Fealy, *Ijtihad Politik Ulama; Sejarah NU 1952-1967*, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: LKIS Pelangi Aksara, 2012).

[21] Ahmad Zahro, *Tradisi Intelektual NU; Lajnah Bahtsul Masail 1926-1999: Tradisi Intelektual NU* (LkiS Pelangi Aksara, 2004), 52.

[22] Mulyadi et al., "Menelusuri Jejak Intelektual KH. Hasyim Asy'ari dalam Pendirian dan Perkembangan Nahdlatul Ulama di Era Modern," *Menara Ilmu: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Ilmiah* 19, no. 1 (2025): 954–63, https://doi.org/10.31869/mi.v19i1.7053.

[23] Martin Van Bruinessen, *NU; Tradisi, Relasi-Relasi Kuasa, Pencarian Wacana Baru* (Yogyakarta: Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 1994).

Organization	ulī al-amr definition	Implication	Evidence
		religion	state officials down to the lowest level as the *waliy al-amr*.
Muhammadiyah	*Ulī al-amr* is not limited to the government (executive, legislative, and judicative), because it is only *ulī al-amr* in the state sector. In a more specific areas, such as the determination of the beginning of the Qamariah month and *ijtihād* on matters of Islamic law, the *ulī al-amr* role is served by the ulama.	The government must not interfere in matters related to religious understanding derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah	Muhammadiyah has contributed to Indonesia's struggle for independence and remains committed to supporting the government and safeguarding the integrity of the NKRI in accordance with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Throughout its history, the organization has never sought to alter the form of the state nor undermine the authority of the government
Persatuan Islam (Persis)	Persis once demanded the recognition of *ulī al-amr* in accordance with the	Persis will always attempt to ensure that legislation in Indonesia does not conflict with Islam.	Fatwa Council of the Persis Hizbah Council implicitly accept the Indonesian state in this form of democracy and the

Organization	ulī al-amr definition	Implication	Evidence
	appointment of an *imām* (leader) in an Islamic region (sulthan), including when the leader receives *bay'ah* from his people. However, it is now legitimating government as *ulī al-amr*		elected president. Also, one of the Persis figures, Muhammad Nasir, was involced in the process of returning Indonesia to the Republic of Indonesia. Neither did Persis leaders to join the DI/TII movement once based in the West Java.
Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah	There are two forms of *ulī al-amr*, namely political *ulī al-amr* and religious ones. *i*	Politically, *ulī al-amr* in Indonesia is the government of the Republic of Indonesia with all its components. Meanwhile, *ulī al-amr* in the field of religion is scholars.	It is only to submit an opinion to the government, and in the end, it is the government's decision that matters, even if it is not in accordance with Al-Irsyad's proposal.
Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI).	Leadership in Indonesia has nothing to do with the term *ulī al-amr*; it is a different thing and cannot be equated.	The president, governor, mayor, regent, sub-district head, and village head are not *ulī al-amr*. If there are humans who carry out orders	Leaders elected by the citizens must be obeyed in accordance with QS al-Mā'idah verse 1, even if they are not Muslim. ABI has never been known

Organization	ulī al-amr definition	Implication	Evidence
	Government or president is just a manager like in that of a company.	from Allah, such as the prophets, they are only messengers and not freely creating beyond Allah's commands.	to have confronted the Indonesian government.

Based on Table 1, it can be understood that there is a slightly different understanding among Islamic mass organizations' figures regarding the meaning of *ulī al-amr*. Among others, it is ABI that assumes the most different opinion from others. On the contrary, it is NU opinion's that mostly fits with the term, namely the title *waliy al-amr al-ḍarūrī bi al-shawkah* given to the ruling presidents. This means that recognition of the president's existence as *waliy al-amr* is based on enormous interests. Historically, to maintain the integrity of the newly established Republic of Indonesia, only the President of the Republic of Indonesia is worthy to be crowned and recognized as *waliy al-amr*. According to Wahbah al-Zuhayli, the term *waliy al-amr* is intended to clarify the political authority given to the president as a recognized leader in Islam who has leadership credibility in accordance with Islamic concepts.[24]

Consequently, the leaders who have been legally appointed must be obeyed as long as their policies bring benefits to the people.[25] However, *ulī al-amr* is attributed to the leader of a country (government) as long as the government leads and protects Muslims in practicing their religious teachings. Until now, Nahdlatul Ulama remains consistent with the results of the Ulama Conference in Cipanas in 1954, which stated that the President of the Republic of Indonesia is the *ulī al-amr* with the special title. This means that the Indonesian state,

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[24] Wahbah Al-Zuhayli, *Al-Fiqh Al-Islamy Wa Adillatuh 7*, 12th ed. (Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, 1433), 5328.

[25] Afif Hidayatul Mahmudah, Faisol Mubarok, and Faiqatul Himmah, "Konsep Waliyu al-Amri al-Daruri Bisysyaukah Sebagai Legalitas Keabsahan Pemilihan Umum di Indonesia," *Rechtenstudent Journal 2* 2, no. 1 (2021): 46–59, https://doi.org/10.26532/jph.v10i1.22811.

which is not based on Islam, treats its head of state like a *sulṭān* in an Islamic country. The consequence of this decision is that Muslims in Indonesia must obey and be submissive to the ruling government."

Meanwhile, for Muhammadiyah, the term *ulī al-amr* has been discussed for a long time, including that published in an issue of *Suara Muhammadiyah* magazine. Politically, *ulī al-amr* is deemed as a political ruler (executive), including the holder of legislative and judicial powers. And it is certain that in the context of a state, *ulī al-amr* is the ruling government. In matters of religion, especially belief or correct understanding of religion, the *ulī al-amr* are the ulama. In Indonesia, there is no holder of this ulama authority, such as *muftis* in other Islamic countries; hence, *ulī al-amr* in this case are religious institutions in Indonesia, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council, *Tarjih Muhammadiyah*, or *Lajnah Bahtsul Masail Nahdlatul Ulama*, and others."[26] It is clear here that while NU tends to give a general definition, Muhammadiyah prefers to break down the scope of *ulī al-amr* based on two areas, namely the political and religious sphere.

Additionally, Yunahar Ilyas, a prominent figure in Muhammadiyah, said that based on the Quran *al-Mā'idah* Verse 55, the *ulī al-amr* have to perform at least four things, namely believing in Allah, establishing the prayer, paying zakat, and always submitting and obeying Allah. Regarding the political leadership of a country, there is no disagreement among the ulama that the *umarā'* or *ḥukkām* is *ulī al-amr* with the minimum conditions mentioned above. The *ahl al-ḥall wa al-'aqd* (house of representatives) is also *ulī al-amr* in areas within its own authority, such as the enactment of laws and other powers.[27] This all means that the government is indeed *ulī al-amr* in running and administering the country.

Neither Muhammadiyah nor NU have ever questioned the Republic of Indonesia's legitimacy or the form of governance it upholds. However, Persis is different. Classical tafsir studies on *ulī al-amr* are also an inseparable part of the understanding of Persis. Therefore, at the beginning of the Indonesian independence era, Persis really wanted an Indonesian state based on Islam. The political struggle to fight for this has been carried out continuously up to the point of agreement to accept the Government of the Republic of Indonesia as *ulī al-amr* in accordance

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[26] Saad Ibrahim, Muhammadiyah Central Leadership, *Interview*, Jakarta, 2024.
[27] Ilyas, "Ulil Amri dalam Tinjauan Tafsir."

with the Presidential Decree of 1959 to return to the 1945 Constitution. Persis realized that the enforcement of Islamic provisions must be within the framework of the state and the constitution, and was convinced that the democratic system was not in conflict with Islam. Thus, these points show that Persis recognizes the Indonesian government as *ulī al-amr* in a legitimate *ad-dawlah*."[28] According to Ading Kusdiana, Persis is now more focused on religion, while issues related to the form and foundations of the state have been resolved.[29]

Meanwhile, quite similar from Muhammadiyah, Al-Irsyad specifies definition of an *imām* or leader in the religious field in the circle of ulama, while in term of government policy, it is handed over to the presidents and the cabinets. This is in line with the structural organization of Al-Irsyad. Religious leadership for Al-Irsyad is given to charismatic ulama, whoever meets the requirements, even outside Al-Irsyad. Therefore, the general chairman of Al-Irsyad may not be worthy of being followed in religious matters if he is not deemed an ulama. However, organizationally, the general chairman of Al-Irsyad is the person who is entrusted with leading this organization, including handing over religious affairs to people who really understand religion (ulama).

On the other hand, it is also the same with NU in providing requirement by mentioning that as long as the government takes care of religion and cares about people, they serve role as the *ulī al-amr* This implies that although al-Irsyad believes in the existence of different types of leadership according to the specialization, the government deemed as political power holder still needs to be responsible for religious issues.[30] To this point, it becomes clearer that an Islamic mass organization has courage and objectivity in assigning an important person not based on his/her affiliation, yet because of qualifications.

The first four organizations do not seem to be different in defining *ulī al-amr* as well as determining what is supposed to be or to do. However, as mentioned above, ABI has a very different perspective. According to a figure from this organization, the state is considered not

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[28] Jeje Zaenuddin, Central Leadership of the Islamic Union (Persis), *Interview*, Bandung, 2024.

[29] Ading Kusdiana, "Pesantren Persatuan Islam dan Kontribusinya Bagi Perkembangan Pemikiran di Indonesia (1936-2022)," *Historia Madania* 7, no. 2 (2023): 250–64, https://doi.org/10.15575/hm.v7i2.31289.

[30] Bakhtiar, Central Leader of Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah, *Interview*, Jakarta, 2024.

much different from a company, except that it is on a much larger scale. The leader in a company is only a manager, so even if the leader is a non-Muslim, it is considered okay as long as the leader can run the company well. *Ulī al-amr,* additionally, is considered to have authority from Allah (vertical) and cannot be dismissed except by Him. In a democratic country, the authority belongs to the people, not to Allah, and in the Shiite concept, it is not *ulī al-amr*. There are only horizontal leaders in this country whom we are obliged to obey on the basis of a contract. According to the Qur'anic mandate *awfū bi al-'uqūd* (execute your contracts), believers must fulfil their promises as long as they are founded on legally binding contracts and do not conflict with their vertical obligations to Allah.[31] Therefore, according to ABI, there is no such thing as *ulī al-amr* in Indonesia, nor was the government. Some of Indonesian Muslims may consider the government as the political *ulī al-amr* of Indonesia, but ABI has different views.[32]

The positions articulated by leaders of the five Islamic mass organizations generally reflect the institutional perspectives of their respective groups. With the exception of ABI, there is no substantial divergence among the other four organizations regarding the notion of ulī al-amr in the Indonesian context. They broadly equate *ulī al-amr* with the governmental authority, while recognizing certain religious qualifications relevant to community life. The differences that do appear relate primarily to whether they adopt a general or specific categorization of authority—namely, the distinction between political and religious domains. Additional variation stems from their distinct historical trajectories; for example, one organization historically envisioned an Islamic polity led by a sultan rather than a president, reflecting its earlier departure from the democratic model.

Compliance with *Ulī al-amr* in A Democratic Country

Basically, the differences in the concept of *ulī al-amr* presented above do not significantly affect compliance with the government, even

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[31] Muhsin Labib, ABI Central Executive, *Interview*, Jakarta, 2024.

[32] Abidin Nurdin, Al Chaidar, and Muhammad bin Abubakar, "Ajaran-Ajaran Syiah: Refleksi dari Masyarakat Aceh," *Siasat Journal of Religion, Social, Cultural and Political Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2019): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.33258/siasat.v2i1.11; A E Isfihani et al., "Political Law of Electronic System Implementation in Indonesia," *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah dan Masyarakat* 24, no. 1 (2024): 215–34, https://doi.org/10.19109/nurani.v24i1.22672.

though that of ABI is very different from those of other organizations. However, after exploring it through in-depth interviews, it was found that the different concepts did not have a significant effect on recognition and compliance with the Government of the Republic of Indonesia. Table 2 shows the interview transcript to support the discussion.

Table 2. The transcript of interviews about the compliance of the Islamic mass organization with *ulī al-amr*

Informant	Interview result
Nahdlatul Ulama	"Nahdlatul Ulama has declared that the government of the Republic of Indonesia, in this case the president and all government officials appointed by the president, are *ulī al-amr* to be obeyed to. This has been proclaimed and agreed upon since the Indonesian Ulama Conference in Cipanas in 1954. **Obedience to the government is not only related to state policy in general, but also specifically related to the practice of religion or worship by Muslims.** At least, the organizational platform of Nahdlatul Ulama is clear in theory, although it is possible that there are individual NU ulama who are different in practice, and this is reasonable."[33]
Muhammadiyah	"Muhammadiyah was founded long before the existence of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia. When the Indonesian state was founded, there was our general chairman whose name was Ki Bagus Hadi Kusumo, as a part of the Investigation Agency for Preparatory Efforts for Indonesian Independence (abbreviated as BPUPKI in Indonesian). This means that from a historical perspective, Muhammadiyah has no problems related to this country. Moreover, Muhammadiyah emphasized in its 47th Congress

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[33] M. Syatiri Ahmad, Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama, *Interview*, Jakarta, 2024.

Informant	Interview result
	in Makassar with its treatise on *dār al-'ahd wa asy-syahādah* which means that the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia is based on the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila as a state formed on the basis of agreements and treaties. In addition, Muhammadiyah has, is and will testify to the context of its support in real terms. **We and the country are partners, respecting each other in the context of partnership, listening and paying attention to each other**."[34]
Persatuan Islam (Persis)	"Indonesia is legally a state, so that for its people, **it is obligatory to follow all government policies and programs, provided that the government are consistent with and in accordance with the principles of the Shariah. Persis also accepts the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affair regarding hisāb and ru'yah institutions**. The involvement of Islamic community organizations is a part of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' right of consultation in *hisāb* and *ru'yah* institutions. Even if we differ each other, it is with their permission as *ulī al-amr*. If we do not have permission, it means we have exceeded our *ulī al-amr* and thus disobedient. With this permission, it means that *ulī al-amr* has authority.[35]
Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah	"**In the matter of determining the beginning of the month of Ramadan, for now, Al-Irsyad al-Islamiyah joins the government because we do not have the tools and human resources to handle it**. We never discuss *ulī al-amr* in Indonesia because it is absolutely the government of the Republic of Indonesia. Regarding Ramadhan, Shawwal, then Dzulhijjah, we also have a team

[34] Saad Ibrahim, Central Leader of Muhammadiyah, *Interview*, Jakarta, 2024.
[35] Jeje Zaenuddin, Central Leader of the Islamic Union (Persis), *Interview*, Bandung, 2024.

Informant	Interview result
	appointed by the Ministry of Religious Affair to participate in the *Ithbāt* session. We will follow the results determined at the *Ithbāt* hearing. For Al-Irsyad, the debates in the *Ithbāt* session will end when the government decides."[36]
Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI)	"**For ABI, obedience to the state is different from obedience to the government**. This country has a clear constitution and Pancasila. Obedience to the state with clear guidelines is an obligation. This is different from obedience to the government as the implementer of the Constitution and Pancasila. If the government deviates from these provisions, then we may disobey them. The government does not have sanctity *('iṣmah)*, so obedience to it is not as absolute as obedience to Allah and His Messenger. Indonesia is not an Islamic country, but a country whose regulations do not conflict with Islam, hence there is no reason not to obey this country. Regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadhan and Shawwal, we have our own *falak* institution, and recently the government's standards have been in line with our standards and criteria. Therefore, the government's decision to determine the beginning of the month is no longer different from ours. The government is now trying to adjust the standards so as not to create such big differences with Islamic community organizations, although there are always some that are different, such as Muhammadiyah."[37]

The excerpts in Table 2 make it clear that religious issues are mainly observed from the determination of the beginning of the lunar month, namely, to commence Ramadhan fasting and to celebrate Eid

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[36] Bakhtiar, *Interview.*
[37] Labib, *Interview.*

Al-Fitr. However, both NU and Muhammadiyah did not mention the issue clearly and tend to discuss it from a more general scope. Three other organizations, at opposite, made it clear that the religious issues mainly appear in the momentum of both Ramadhan and Al-Fitr. Apart from those verbatim excerpts and chosen discussion scope or theme, it is clear that those five organizations are committed to obey the Indonesian government, mainly in daily religious life issues. Some conditions, however, are still maintained, such as inabsolute compliance, because it is due to whether the government enforces Islamic values and rules.

Into some extents, this is quite surprising because, practically, apart from the historical root of engagement of those organizations before, during, or after independence, some have different decisions from the government. For instance, there are several disagreements between Muhammadiyah and the government on certain issues, particularly in Muslim worship. However, according to Haedar Nasir, Muhammadiyah has been committed to the Indonesian state since its inception and has tried to work with the government to unite the nation and improve the welfare of its people.[38] Instead of fighting the government, every time they decide something different from the government on a religious issue, Muhammadiyah first seeks approval from the government. For example, when differences arise regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadan or Shawwal, Muhammadiyah seeks formal permission from the Minister of Religious Affairs to demonstrate alignment with the government.[39] Accordingly, Persis had experienced the same. Although there are differences of opinion with the government, Persis remained in the *Ithbāt* session forum, considering that the forum is a national institution. In order to remain within the framework of obedience to *ulī al-amr*, the Persis' representatives asked for permission to dissent. According to Jeje Zaenuddin, this difference generally occurred until 2012 because before, Persis still used the *hisāb wujūd al-hilāl* method as Muhammadiyah. After 2012, Persis began to accept the ideas of the *ru'yah hisāb* experts, who were based on the astronomical experts' opinion and had almost the same thoughts as the government in

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[38] Ridwan, *Kontestasi Mazhab Hisab dan Rukyat di Indonesia*, ed. Muhammad Fuad Zain (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Ilmu, 2022), 45–56.
[39] Ibrahim, *Interview*.

determining the beginning of the Qamariyah months, especially Ramadhan, Shawwal, and Dzulhijjah.[40]

Compared to that of Muhammadiyah and Persis, NU and Al-Irsyad tend to agree with the government on this particular issue. Both organizations typically deem that the government decision is final. This may be due to the same method and tools used in very technical thing, such as in determining the beginning of a lunar month, or out of technical details, such as religious understanding or involvement of the organizational fugures within governmental bureaucracy. This, certainly, needs further investigation.

On the other hand, it is interesting to learn that although ABI assumes the most different concept of leadership, it barely opposes the state. According to its leadership principles, whoever people choose as their leader deserves for compliance even if s/he come from outside the ABI community. However, according to Muhsin Labib, Chairman of the Shura Council of ABI Indonesia, it is important to emphasize that the compliance is valid as long as regulations made by the government do not contradict Islamic principles.[41] Moreover, ABI strongly rejected the idea and movement to turn Indonesia into a caliphate state.[42] Thus, even though Indonesia is a country with a democratic system, as long as the people are bound by a contract with the government, they are obliged to obey the government. For them, it is in accordance with Allah's command *"awfū bi al-'uqūd"* (fulfill your promise/contract). This might not represent the specific cases of the religious life, yet it shows ABI's commitment of compliance as part of its distinctive leadership concept.

The concept of *ulī al-amr,* therefore, provides a religious basis for the legitimacy of power and becomes a bridge between religious doctrine and the state system. It strengthens the recognition and obedience to the state as long as the state fulfills the principles of justice and does not deviate from Islamic teachings. This is one of the characteristics of Indonesia with its democratic system. Not only are there different religions, but differences in religious understanding are

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[40] Zaenuddin, *Interview*.

[41] Labib, *Interview.*

[42] Ahmad Fahrur Rozi and Ade Solihat, "Konstruksi Realitas Pemberitaan Wacana Syiah pada Media Online Ormas Syiah Indonesia," *Mawa'izh Jurnal Dakwah dan Pengembangan Sosial Kemanusiaan* 15, no. 1 (2024): 26–52, https://doi.org/10.32923/maw.v15i1.4307.

well accommodated. In turn, this impacts how the grassroots through these organizations perceive the government's performance in living with and accommodating the differences. The testimony on this issue is well elaborated by the figures in Table 3.

Table 3. Perception of Government as *ulī al-amr*'s Performance in Accommodating Differences and Running a Democratic Country

Informant	Interview result
Nahdlatul Ulama	"The state has given us, as religious communities, the right to practice our religion in accordance with the Islamic teachings that we follow and understand. This is true not only for Muslims, but also for people of other religions. **Therefore, we are free to practice our beliefs**. That is the great thing about our country."[43]
Muhammadiyah	"**As religious people, we are protected by the state and given the freedom to express our opinions and to differ from other people.** But it must be remembered that freedom must not undermine the authority of the government. That is why when we disagree with the government, we officially ask for permission in front of many people. For instance, a notable point of divergence between Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian government concerns the determination of the beginning of Ramadan and Shawwal. This disagreement arises from the use of different methodologies: Muhammadiyah relies on astronomical calculations (*hisāb*), while the government, in coordination with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama, employs direct lunar

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[43] Ahmad, *Interview*.

Informant	Interview result
	observation (*ru'yah*) to establish the start of the lunar month. So far, our government has not wanted to impose its decisions on Islamic mass organizations in matters related to procedures for practicing religion. This is an extraordinary policy of our government. After all, we also practice our religion on the basis of government recognition.[44]
Persatuan Islam (Persis)	"Persis may be one of the Islamic social organizations that is somewhat textual in its understanding of religious texts, although this is not always the case. The government does not want to interfere with our understanding as long as it is not related to disintegration threat. **The government truly understands diversity in all things,** even ideas that seem secular are not an issue that needs to be dealt with. We are comfortable with the freedom that the state gives us."[45]
Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyah	"**The government has provided enough space for the development of religion and different religious understandings**. As far as we know, no warnings have been given to Islamic mass organizations as long as there are no signs of disobedience to this country, especially to its democratic system."[46]
Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI)	"We are different in interpreting *ulī al-amr*. But this difference does not mean opposing the legitimate government. **The state's recognition of us as an Islamic community organization has officially made us a part of the development of**

[44] Ibrahim, *Interview*.
[45] Zaenuddin, *Interview*.
[46] Bakhtiar, *Interview*.

Informant	Interview result
	Indonesia in our own way. In general, the Indonesian government, with its S*unnī* **mindset, knows that we have different concepts in many ways, but not in obedience to the government.** Indonesia is indeed unique and different from other Islamic countries. For us, the government's recognition of us with all our differences is a gift of living in this country."[47]

Based on Table 3, it can be understood that all Islamic mass organizations recognize Indonesia's greatness in protecting and developing religious communities in Indonesia. The government's attitude of providing freedom to religious communities and allowing differences of opinion on specific issues in religion has made Indonesia a unique and wise country. The aim is nothing but to maintain this unitary state. This also strengthens a democratic system that prioritizes deliberation in decision-making. Findings of this research also accord withAnanda Bisma et al., mentioning that Indonesia, with its diversity in terms of different cultures, ethnicities, religions, and traditions, has made it a very plural country and respects every difference.[48] This is both a strength for Indonesia and a source of pride on a global scale.[49]

Theoretically, Indonesia has one of the characteristics of democracy, namely respecting the preferences of its people as equal parties.[50] It seems to be true that the government aims to create

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[47] Labib, *Interview*.

[48] Azka Idhiyan Arrasyi et al., "Menjunjung Tinggi Toleransi Guna Mencapai Masyarakat Madani di Tengah Pluralisme Bangsa," *At-Tabayyuun: Journal Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2023): 50–61, https://doi.org/10.47766/atjis.v5i1.929.

[49] Sudianto Manullang, "Konflik Agama dan Pluralisme Agama," *Jurnal Teologi dan Pengembangan Pelayanan* 4, no. 1 (2014): 99–120, https://ojs.sttsappi.ac.id/index.php/tedeum/article/view/78.

[50] Leo Ahrens, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Voting and Policymaking," *Zeitschrift Für Politikwissenschaft* 34, no. 1 (2024): 77–100, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41358-024-00366-w; Achmad Kartiko et al., "The Crucial Role of Police Intelligence in Navigating Identity Politics During Elections in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 1 (2025): 155–76, https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i1.1479.

opportunities for the people to deliberate and contest all matters because not recognizing the equality of the people threatens the existence of democracy.[51] This democratic nature of the state, furthermore, is deemed as where of authority in a modern state depends.[52] Another important substance in democracy is the participation of the people in making political decisions and administering the government to realize democratic state life.[53] So far, it seems that the Indonesian government has taken the right steps and performed well by not imposing authority on its people, especially in the area of religion, and by providing legitimacy and opportunities to be different as long as it is not related to the disintegration of the nation.

However, democracy is a way to limit the actions of authoritarian rulers in managing Muslim societies by giving people the right to elect their leaders and hold leaders accountable through systems that vary from country to country. The common ground is that democracy is based on compliance principle of *syūrā* (deliberation) in Islamic rules.[54] In accordance with this, Fitriono and Suhono said that the most important thing is not the form of the state, but the openness

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[51] Spencer Mckay, "Common-Pool Resources and Democracy," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 26 (2023), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2023.2185382; Zahlul Pasha Karim and Mailinda Eka Yuniza, "Special Autonomy and Democratic Rule of Law in Indonesia: Are Two in Line?," *Petita: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum dan Syariah* 10, no. 2 (2025): 594–617.

[52] Costantinus Fatlolon, "Toward The Deepening of Democracy in Indonesia: A Habermasian Assessment of The Prospects and Problems of The General Election in Indonesia," in *Proceedings of the International Conference for Democracy and National Resilience (ICDNR 2023)* (Atlantis Press SARL, 2023), 187–206, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-148-7_17.

[53] Hariyanto et al., "The Communal Democracy of Yogyakarta Special Region's Government on the Islamic Law Eclecticism Perspective," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial* 18, no. 1 (2023): 200–221, https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v18i1.7403; Abdul Majid et al., "The Method in Understanding Hadith Through Ijmā' and Its Implications for Islamic Law in Indonesia: Studies on the Hadiths of the Month of Qamariyah," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (2023): 281–301, https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i1.12383; Suparno, Rusli, and Ia Hidaya, "A New Restorative Justice Paradigm in the Sociology of Islamic Law in Indonesia: Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah's Responses to Corruption Cases," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran* 24, no. 2 (2024): 480–502, https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v24i2.16221.

[54] Yûsuf Al-Qaradhâwi, *Min Fiqh Al-Daulah Fi Al-Islam*, 1st ed. (Kairo: Dar al-Syuruq, 1997).

of opportunities to implement Allah's law in that country.[55] On the other hand, what matters is not the package as either Islamic or democratic state, yet the substance to what values the state struggel for. Thus, according to Efrinaldi, Indonesia has substantially implemented the theory of *as-siyāsah asy-syar'iyyah*, especially in values such as the principles of deliberation, equality, justice, brotherhood, and freedom.[56]

Conclusion

In the context of Indonesian Islamic mass organizations, there is a substantial convergence in the understanding of the concept of *ulī al-amr*, despite differences in terminology. They generally distinguish between ulī al-amr in the political domain and in other specific areas, with a shared view that the Indonesian government functions as *ulī al-amr* within a democratic system. However, the ABI group holds a distinct theological position, refraining from designating the government as *ulī al-amr*, and instead viewing it as an administrative authority based on a social contract, since they believe that *ulī al-amr* must possess the attribute of *al-'iṣmah* (infallibility), which is exclusive to the prophets. Nonetheless, this doctrinal divergence does not translate into disobedience toward the state. All organizations demonstrate compliance with state regulations, including in technical matters such as the determination of Islamic lunar months. Within the framework of a democratic state, such differences remain within the bounds of obedience to *ulī al-amr*, reflecting Indonesia's unique democratic character that embraces diversity as a foundational element for maintaining national unity. This research has its weaknesses, namely, limited research time; thus, there were only a few research informants from each organization. Therefore, the data cannot be

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[55] Eko Nani Fitriono and Suhono, "Wacana Negara Islam: Kajian Kritis Kontruksi Pemikiran Khilafah Ala Hizbut Tahrir," *Ri'ayah: Jurnal Sosial dan Keagamaan* 2, no. 1 (2017): 43–55, https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/riayah/article/view/979.

[56] Misbahul Munir, "Fiqh Siyasah and the State: Mapping Paradigms of Religion-State Relations in Modern Islamic Thought," *Parewa Saraq: Journal of Islamic Law and Fatwa Review* 2, no. 2 (2023): 110–20, https://doi.org/10.64016/parewasaraq.v2i2.51; Fathorrahman, Hijrian Angga Prihantoro, and Nyak Fadlullah, "The Role of Religious Fatwas in Indonesia: An Analysis of Self-Government and Biopolitics During the Pandemic," *Petita: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum dan Syariah* 9, no. 1 (2024): 80–97, https://doi.org/10.22373/petita.v9i1.257.

further elaborated. This weakness also becomes an opportunity for future researchers to expand data sources so that different views in the same Islamic social organization can be compared.

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