

Negotiating Salafism and national ideology of Indonesia: A study on the curriculum of Salafi educational institutions

Muhammad Hilali Basya

Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: mhilali.basya@umj.ac.id

Ali Noer Zaman

Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: alinoerzaman@umj.ac.id

Ai Fatimah Nur Fuad

Univtersitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Indonesia

E-mail: fatimah_nf@uhamka.ac.id

Daffa Tantra Pratama

Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: daffaptm130@gmail.com

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the Salafi movement in Indonesia has been seen as controversial due to its involvement in religion-based intolerance, violence, and terrorism. There is doubt about the extent to which Salafi educational institutions can nurture their students to live in accordance with the modern Indonesian nation-state. This study aims to examine the curriculum in formal and non-formal Salafi education and analyze their compatibility with the national ideology, Pancasila. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and a documentary study over approximately three months at three Salafi educational institutions in Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan, and Bogor. This article argues that even though most Salafi schools increasingly adjust to modernity and the Indonesian curriculum, they are a representation of their founders, who are Salafi ulama campaigning for their Salafi ideological vision. The Salafi vision, emphasizing the purification of faith, ritual, and social aspects, leads its students to accumulate cultural capital that creates tension with Indonesian ideology, particularly concerning gender equality, religious pluralism, multiculturalism, and freedom of thought and expression.

Selama dua dekade terakhir, gerakan Salafi di Indonesia dipandang kontroversial karena keterlibatannya dalam intoleransi berbasis agama, kekerasan, dan terorisme. Terdapat keraguan tentang sejauh mana lembaga pendidikan Salafi dapat membina siswanya untuk hidup sesuai dengan negara-bangsa modern Indonesia. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti kurikulum dalam pendidikan formal dan non-formal Salafi serta menganalisis kompatibilitasnya dengan ideologi nasional, yaitu Pancasila. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumen selama sekitar tiga bulan di tiga lembaga pendidikan Salafi di Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan, dan Bogor. Dalam artikel ini, kami berpendapat bahwa meskipun sebagian besar sekolah Salafi semakin menyesuaikan diri dengan modernitas dan kurikulum nasional, mereka tetap merepresentasikan para pendirinya, yaitu ulama Salafi yang memperjuangkan visi ideologis Salafisme. Visi Salafi yang menekankan purifikasi akidah, ritual, dan aspek sosial menyebabkan para siswanya mengakumulasi modal budaya yang menciptakan ketegangan dengan ideologi nasional, khususnya terkait kesetaraan gender, pluralisme agama, multikulturalisme, serta kebebasan berpikir dan berekspresi.

Keywords: *Salafism; National ideology; Salafi education; Curriculum; Cultural capital*

Introduction

For more than two decades, the Salafi movement in Indonesia has been controversial. Some of its controversies are its involvement in the violent inter-religious conflict in Maluku in the early 2000s,¹ as well as terrorist actions in Bali and Jakarta in 2002 and 2003.² Additionally, there were the burning of national flags by a religious teacher at a Salafi Islamic boarding school in Bogor in mid-2017,³ the involvement of a Salafi educational institution in Bogor in sending its students to join ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in Syria in 2017,⁴ as well as the involvement of its elites in several terrorist acts in Indonesia.⁵ All these raise doubts whether Salafism can shape its followers to live in accordance with the Indonesian national ideology, which is based on the values of religious pluralism and multiculturalism.

Several studies have attempted to delve deeper into the character and teachings of the Salafi movement, including those by Iqbal,⁶ Sunarwoto,⁷

¹Noorhaidi Hasan, "Interactions between Quietists and Jihadists in Indonesia: Polemics and Blurred Boundaries", *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 11, Number 2 (2023), 353-382.

²International Crisis Group, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Why Salafism and Terrorism don't Mix*, Southeast Asia/Brussels: ICG, Asia Report No. 83 (13 September 2004).

³Muhammad Hilali Basya, Idris Thaha, *Database Salafi di Indonesia*, Jakarta: PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018.

⁴Muhammad Hilali Basya, Idris Thaha, *Database Salafi di Indonesia...*

⁵Abdul Malik, "New variants of Ultra-Conservative Islamic Schools in Indonesia: A study on Islamic School Endeavor with Islamic Group Movement", *Power and Education*, Volume 16, Number 1 (2024), 14-28.

⁶Muhammad Iqbal Ahnaf, "Internet, Identity, and Islamic Movements: The Case of Salafism in Indonesia", *Islamika Indonesiana*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2014), 81-105.

⁷Sunarwoto, "Negotiating Salafī Islam and the State: The Madkhaliyya in Indonesia", *Die Welt des Islams*, Volume 60 (2020), 205-234; Sunarwoto, "Online Salafi Rivalries in Indonesia: between Sectarianism and 'Good' Citizenship", *Religion, State & Society*, Volume 49, Number 2 (2021), 157-173.

Jamhari and Asrori,⁸ Chaplin,⁹ Yakin,¹⁰ Wahib,¹¹ Sunesti et al.,¹² Basya,¹³ Jones et al.,¹⁴ Muthuswamy,¹⁵ Saalfeld,¹⁶ Tais,¹⁷ Pall,¹⁸ Bitter and Frazer,¹⁹ Ingram and Campion,²⁰ Wagemakers,²¹ Kirdis,²² Deschamps-Laporte,²³ and

⁸Jamhari, Saifudin Asrori, "The Making of Salafi-based Islamic Schools in Indonesia", *AlJaāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*. Volume 60, Number 1 (2022), 227-264.

⁹Chris Chaplin, "Salafi Islamic Piety as Civic Activism: Wahdah Islamiyah and Differentiated Citizenship in Indonesia", *Citizenship Studies*, Volume 22, Number 2 (2018), 208-223.

¹⁰Ayang Utriza Yakin, "Salafi Dakwah and the Dissemination of Islamic Puritanism in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Radio of Rodja", *Ulumuna*, Volume 22, Number 2 (2018), 205-236.

¹¹Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Being Pious Among Indonesian Salafis", *AlJaāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 55, Number 1, (2017), 1-26.

¹²Yuyun Sunesti, Noorhaidi Hasan, Muhammad Najib Azca, "Young Salafi-Niqabi and Hijrah: Agency and Identity Negotiation", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 8, Number 2 (2018), 173-197.

¹³Muhammad Hilali Basya, *Muhammadiyah dan Salafisme di masa Transisi Demokrasi Indonesia: Perlawanan Cendekiawan Muhammadiyah terhadap Revivalisme Islam*, Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2020.

¹⁴Seth G. Jones, Charles Vallee, Danika Newlee, Nicholas Harrington, Clayton Sharb, Hannah Byrne, *The Evolution of the Salafi Jihadist Threat: Current and Future Challenge from the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, and Other Groups*, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018.

¹⁵Moorthy S. Muthuswamy, "Radicalization Ecosystem as a Confounder of Violent Extremism's Drivers", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, Volume 17, Number 1 (2024), 23-43.

¹⁶Jannis Saalfeld, "Inter-Secular Party Competition and the (Non-)Formation of Salafi-Jihadist Milieus: Evidence from Tanzania and Kenya", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (28 June 2021), 1-18.

¹⁷Amine Tais, "Islam, Salafism, and Peace: Facing the Challenges of Tradition and Change", *Religions*, Volume 15, Number 93 (2024), 1-11.

¹⁸Zoltan Pall, "What Divides Salafis: How Local Realities Overwrite Grand Typologies in Cambodia's Salafi Movement", *Contemporary Islam*, Volume 17, Number 2 (2023), 263-281.

¹⁹Jean-Nicolas Bitter, and Owen Frezer, "Promoting Salafi Political Participation", *Policy Perspectives*, Volume 4, Number 5 (2016), 1-5.

²⁰Kiriloi M. Ingram and Kristy Campion, "Of Heroes and Mothers: Locating Gender in Ideological Narratives of Salafi-Jihadist and Extreme Right Propaganda", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (February 2024), 1-27.

²¹Joas Wagemakers, "How do you Solve a Problem Like Jaāhiliyya? The struggle over Sayyid Qutb's Legacy among Jordanian Muslim Brothers", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 36, Number 1 (2025), 83-108; Joas Wagemakers, "Making Sense of Sectarianism without Sects: Quietist Salafi anti-Shia Discourse in Jordan", *Mediterranean Politics*, (March 2020), 1-7.

²²Esen Kirdis, "Uncertainty and the Religious Market: the Unexpected Rise of Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia after the Arab Spring", *Journal of Church and State*. 0(0), (2020), 1-24.

²³Laurance Deschamps-Laporte, "Exploring the Fluidity of Egyptian Salafism: from

Farquhar.²⁴ These studies have examined the variations and dynamics within the Salafi movement. The social and political context in which the Salafi movement developed has influenced the character of Salafism in the region.

Although research on the Salafi movement in Indonesia has been conducted by several scholars, as described above, their studies have not provided a satisfying explanation on the type of cultural capital developed in Salafi educational institutions and the extent to which this cultural capital has potency to encourage students to uphold the national ideology (Pancasila), especially regarding religious pluralism and multiculturalism. By cultural capital I mean resources such as knowledge, skill, competency, norms, or values acquired by individuals through education as well as socialization. The concept was introduced by a French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a resource that is accumulated or transmitted through social interaction, including education.²⁵ Therefore, this article aims to reveal the curriculum developed by Salafi educational institutions, and then review the compatibility of the curriculum with the national ideology of Indonesia. Data collection was conducted over approximately three months through in-depth interviews, observation, and a documentary study at three Salafi educational institutions in Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan, and Bogor.

The growth of Salafi educational institutions in Indonesia

There are more than 10 Salafism-based educational institutions in Jakarta and the surrounding areas, such as Bogor and Tangerang Selatan. These

Quietism to Politics and Co-Optation”, *Contemporary Islam*, Volume 17, Number 2 (2023), 223-241.

²⁴Michael Farquhar, Book Review, “Salafism After the Arab Awakening: Contending with People’s Power,” edited by Francesco Cavatorta and Fabio Merone, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, (2018), 1-4.

²⁵Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”, In J Richardson, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986, 241-258.

cities, including Depok and Bekasi, are neighbouring places of Jakarta. Many of those who work in Jakarta live in those cities. They are used to being called Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi). Those institutions consist of non-formal and formal education, ranging from elementary to senior high schools. These are some of the educational institutions: Ibnu Hajar Boarding School, Fitrah Islam World Academy, Imam Nawawi Islamic School, Bina Madani, Minhaj Shohabah, Nuraida Islamic Boarding School, Pesantren Ibnu Mas'ud, and Ibnu Umar Islamic School.

Our research focused on three Salafi educational institutions, namely Ibnu Hajar Boarding School (IHBS), Ibnu Umar Islamic School (IUIS), and Pesantren (Islamic traditional boarding school) of Ibnu Mas'ud (PIM). The IHBS is located in Jakarta, the IUIS is in Tangerang Selatan, and the PIM is in Bogor. The first two former institutions are formal education, consisting of primary level (Sekolah Dasar), junior high school (Sekolah Menengah Pertama), and senior high school (Sekolah Menengah Atas), whereas the last one is non-formal education provided for kids and teenagers.

The establishment of these three Salafi educational institutions was not initiated or instructed by "external agents", but developed from religious study groups (*majelis taklim*) of Salafi *ulama* (clerics).²⁶ The idea rose from interaction between Salafi *ulama* and their disciples in the *majelis taklim*. The origin of IHBS, which was established in 2012, for instance, derived from a *majelis taklim* taught by Zainal Abidin bin Syamsuddin. He is an *alim* (cleric) or *ulama* (plural of *alim*) graduating from LIPIA (Institute of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language) located in Jakarta. The LIPIA is a higher education institution established and funded by the Saudi Arabian government in the

²⁶Peter Mandaville, "Wahhabism and the World: The Historical Evolution, Structure, and Future of Saudi Religious Transnationalism", in Peter Mandaville (ed), *Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2022, 3-34.

1980s.²⁷ Zainal Abidin's willingness to establish more formal education for the younger generation was responded to by one of his students in the *majelis taklim* by endowing him with land. Years later, Zainal Abidin established a school in this endowment land.²⁸ A similar trajectory was also found in the establishment of the IUIS.²⁹ The IUIS was established in 2009 and located in Tangerang Selatan. Abdurrahim Ayyub's dream to found the school was released after one of his pupils in his *majelis taklim* offered him endowment land. He began by establishing the primary level, then junior high school (SMP), and lastly senior high school (SMA) level.

Even though the Saudi Arabian kingdom has an interest in the spread of Salafism in Muslim countries, as revealed by many scholars such as Mandaville and DeLong-Bass,³⁰ it is not the determining factor encouraging the establishment of the schools. It is widely recognized that Saudi Arabia's financial aid helped the development of Salafi educational institutions. Since the 1980s, the kingdom has actively promoted Salafism in many Muslim countries, including Indonesia. Prevention of Shi'a influence on other Muslim countries was one of the considerations why the kingdom promoted Salafism massively.³¹ The kingdom was afraid that Shi'ism might influence Muslims to be sympathetic with the ideology, particularly in using religion (Islam) for criticizing and rebelling against their government, as happened in Iran under Reza Pahlevi's administration in 1979.³²

²⁷Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad...*

²⁸Zainal Abidin, the director of the IHBS, interview, Jakarta, 1 August 2025.

²⁹Abdurrahim Ayyub, the director of the IUIS, interview, Tangerang Selatan, 2 August 2025.

³⁰Peter Mandaville, "Wahhabism and the World" ...; Natana J. DeLong-bass, "Wahhabism and Salafism in Global Perspective", in Peter Mandaville (ed), *Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2022, 35-52; see also Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

³¹Peter Mandaville, "Wahhabism and the World" ...

³²Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Furthermore, the kingdom also tried to demonstrate its superiority among other Muslim countries worldwide as the lord of *haramain* (two sacred lands), namely Mecca and Madina.³³

The IHBS and the IUIS' experiences show that the Salafi *ulama* have a pivotal role in establishing the schools. Even though they got financial support from their students and other fundings, including from philanthropic institutions affiliated to Saudi Arabia,³⁴ the *ulama*'s willingness and initiation have played an important role in the establishment. The growth of many Salafi schools is bottom-up, with charismatic religious figures leading the process by persuading potential students to support them in establishing the schools. Consequently, many Salafi schools have strong roots in the local community, because they embody the *ulama*'s charisma. Members of the *majelis taklim* as well as communities living nearby the *majelis taklim* trust the *ulama*, who encourage them to support the *ulama* in establishing and developing the schools.

It is worth noting that due to the critical view of Salafism to religious tradition performed by Islamic traditionalist groups such as the NU (Nahdatul Ulama), the schools as well as their *ulama* are not seldom in tension with the proponents of Islamic traditionalist communities living around them. One of the main issues raised by Salafism is the *tauhid of uluhiyah*, which means Muslims are forbidden to use mediation for praying to Allah (God). The use of mediation in communicating with God is categorized by Salafism as *shirk* (polytheism). Such a religious tradition is widely performed by Indonesian traditionalist Muslims. Another controversial issue is the practice of *bid'ah* which means innovation in performing rituals and religious celebration, which is perceived by Salafi as having no precedent in

³³Peter Mandaville, "Wahhabism and the World"...

³⁴Noorhaidi Hasan, "Interactions between Quietists and Jihadists in Indonesia"..., Noorhaidi Hasan, *Laskar Jihad...*; Din Wahid, *Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia*, Dissertation at Leiden University, 2014.

the Prophet Muhammad era. Therefore, Salafism has particular followers that have not affiliated with Islamic traditionalist groups.

The growth of the Salafi audience, as shown by the emergence of many Salafi *majelis taklim* in urban areas, such as Jakarta and Tangerang Selatan, indicates that many urban Muslims are interested in the teachings of Salafi *ulama*. This trend leads the Salafi *ulama* to be confident that their teachings are favored by urban Muslims. Besides their disappointment with the deviation of Muslims' faith widely practiced by many Indonesian Muslims, especially in terms of the *tauhid uluhiyah*, the Salafi *ulama*'s confident feeling encouraged them to strengthen their Salafi teachings through establishing formal and non-formal educational institutions.

Factors influencing urban Muslims to be attracted to Salafi teachings is related to the uncertainty that urban society feels in their daily life. Some experts, such as Kirdis, argue that uncertainty causes people to be more religious.³⁵ Uncertainty is a negative feeling caused by death, economic crises, loneliness due to divorce or being far from family, great challenges or competition in the office and business, etc. Those situations and conditions are mostly found among urban societies. Living in such a situation encourages urban societies to find their solution in religion. Religions are perceived by their followers to offer God's protection from suffering, either in this life or the hereafter, and to provide "an existential answer" for the difficulty they are facing. By the existential answer, I mean an explanation of the ultimate purpose of human life, the meaning of life itself, and the struggle humans face in achieving their purpose.

Salafism is perceived by urban Muslims to provide a solution regarding uncertainty. An informant we interviewed said:

After working a week in my office, I felt so tired not only physically but also mentally. I did not enjoy the pressure of getting work targets in

³⁵Esen Kirdis, "Uncertainty and the Religious Market"...

the office. I felt like a machine forced to work without enjoying doing it. Listening to religious lectures from *ustadz* makes me realize that this situation is a sort of examination from God. I realize that I must revise my *niat* (purpose) in working. All the work I am dealing with in the office is part of my obedience to Allah. The more I remember about this purpose, the more I enjoy working.³⁶

In general, all *ustadz* (clerics or preachers), regardless of their theological affiliation, will emphasize this principle, the importance of *niat* (an aim in doing something) for obedience to Allah in all activities. What makes Salafi *ustadz*'s lectures more convincing for urban Muslims is the religious authority factor. For many urban Muslims, the Quran, the Prophet *Hadith* (sayings, actions, and behavior of the Prophet Muhammad), and precedents from the early period of Islam, which is the first three generations of Muslims, are the most authoritative sources. Urban Muslims feel more convinced if the explanation is based on these authoritative sources, as explained by an interviewee:

I am more satisfied listening to those *ustadz* (Salafi *ustadz*), because they speak based on the Quran, the Prophet's *Hadith*, and the early generations of Muslim life. For me, their explanations are more convincing. Their explanations do not come from human reason but from Allah and His guided creatures, such as the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions (*Sahabat*).³⁷

This shows that Salafi *ustadz* or Salafi *ulama* are perceived by urban Muslims to be more authoritative in terms of their sources of reference.

It is widely known that religious authority is an important issue for Muslims. However, Muslims differ in defining indicators of religious authority. For traditionalist Muslims, the genealogy of *ulama* connected to the Prophet and the great classical *ulama* is an important indicator of the

³⁶Abram (pseudonym), a member of a Salafi *majelis taklim*, interview, Jakarta, 20 July 2025.

³⁷Budi (pseudonym), a member of a Salafi *majelis taklim*, interview, Depok, 22 July 2025.

credibility of the information or knowledge they provide. Besides the Quran and the Prophet's *Hadith*, traditionalist Muslims put *ijma'* (consensus) as one of the main sources. What they mean by *ijma'* is the consensus of great and authoritative *ulama* in the classical period in responding to theological (*aqidah*), ritual (*'ibadah*), and societal (*mu'amalat*) issues. This means that the more an *ustadz* cites views or ideas of the greatest classical *ulama*, the more authoritative the *ustadz* will be. Unlike Salafi and traditionalist Muslims, modernist Muslims add modern natural and social sciences as another tool besides the Quran and *Hadith*. The conformity of Quranic and *Hadith* interpretations with modern sciences is one of the important parameters for measuring whether the information delivered by an *ustadz* is convincing. Most proponents of modernist Muslims are those who are well educated.

We found that Salafism has its own "market", particularly among urban Muslims. Even though many of the urban Muslims are more educated compared to those who live in rural areas, their understanding of modern science is not yet well-formed. Furthermore, uncertainty living in cities leads many urban Muslims to favor Salafism, which they perceive as more authoritative in their practice and belief. This means they perceive that the Salafi teachings have not yet been contaminated by human subjective opinions and, therefore, are more powerful in overcoming their uncertainty.

The Salafi *ulama's* confidence in their teachings led them to expand Salafism to a wider society, not only by establishing more religious study groups (*majelis taklim*) but also by founding educational institutions. In the early stages of the development of Salafi educational institutions, the *ulama* established non-formal education, such as *pesantrens*. Later, due to political dynamics, they began to develop more formal educational institutions comprising primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools, all of which were either under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Kementerian Agama*) or the Ministry of Education (*Kementerian Pendidikan*).

Adjustment of Salafi schools' curriculum

It is worth noting that Salafi educational institutions' decision to apply the national curriculum is influenced by political dynamics in which the Salafi movement was accused of being involved in international and national terrorism.³⁸ Those who were involved in the terror acts are figures publicly perceived as Salafi. Consequently, the terror in the World Trade Center (WTC) of America in 2001, the Bali bombing in 2002, and other terror acts during 2003-2005 in Indonesia were the context encouraging the Salafi movements to adjust their educational curriculum with the national curriculum. The movements also attempted to reform their pejorative image by adopting more non-religious subjects in their schools' curriculum.

Initially, they established a *madrasa*, a formal educational institution that teaches its students religious and non-religious subjects.³⁹ In *madrasas*, the religious subjects are taught more than the non-religious ones. The percentage composition is around 70:30. *Madrasas* are managed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Such an Islamic educational institution seems more suitable for the movement. By providing more on the religious subjects, the movements could enhance their vision for shaping the young generation of Indonesian Muslims living in accordance with Salafism.

In later development, the movement expanded its education by establishing "secular" or non-religious educational institutions.⁴⁰ The non-religious schools are not under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but under the Ministry of Education. The curriculum of these schools is more focused on non-religious subjects. Through the non-religious schools, the movement targets wider audiences.

³⁸Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafism, Education, and Youth"...

³⁹Din Wahid, *Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj...*; Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafism, Education, and Youth"...

⁴⁰Muhammad Hilali Basya, Idris Thaha, *Database Salafi di Indonesia...*; Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafism, Education, and Youth"...

Schools like the IHBS and the IUIS are the later developments of Salafi education. They are non-religious schools whose operational licenses are under the Ministry of Education.⁴¹ These schools apply the national curriculum for “secular” or non-religious knowledge. On the IHBS website, it is explained:

Karena IHBS adalah sekolah yang berafiliasi pada Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nasional, maka kurikulum yang diterapkan di unit-unit pendidikan IHBS adalah Kurikulum Pemerintah yang terdiri dari Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) 2006 dan Kurikulum 2013 (Kurtilas).⁴²

Because the IHBS is a school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education & Culture, the curriculum implemented in IHBS educational units is the Government Curriculum, consisting of the 2006 School Level Curriculum (KTSP) and the 2013 Curriculum (*Kurtilas*).⁴³

A similar description is found on the IUIS’ website:

SMPSMA Ibnu Umar merupakan sekolah sunnah yang menggunakan kurikulum K-13 sesuai dengan Dinas Pendidikan.⁴⁴

Ibnu Umar Junior and Senior High School is a *sunnah* school that uses the K-13 curriculum in accordance with the Department of Education.⁴⁵

This description on each school’s website shows that the schools use the same curriculum as applied by other formal educational institutions.

Natural sciences such as IPA (*Ilmu Pengetahuan Alam*), Biology, Chemistry, and social sciences such as Sociology, Economics, and Civic education (Pancasila Moral Education, or called PMP) are adopted from the curriculum determined by the Ministry of Education of Indonesia. For these subjects, the schools recruited relevant teachers graduating from non-religious higher

⁴¹Zainal Abidin, interview, 1 August 2025; Abdurrahim Ayyub, interview, 2 August 2025.

⁴²The school’s web, <https://ihbs.sch.id>, accessed in 4 July 2025.

⁴³The text is translated by the authors.

⁴⁴The school’s web, <https://ibnuumar.sch.id>, accessed in 4 July 2025.

⁴⁵The text is translated by the authors.

education. The books referred to for these subjects also use the standard books recommended by the Department of Education of Indonesia.⁴⁶

Through this approach, these Salafi schools ensure that their students will have the same level of competency as students in other Indonesian schools. It is not surprising that there are many of their alumni continue their higher education in non-religious faculties of state universities or private universities. This indicates that the non-religious national curriculum that the Salafi schools implement is not superficial. Even though the initial development of non-religious schools was influenced, one of them, by the political context of 2001-2005 accusing Salafism with radicalism and terrorism,⁴⁷ the Salafi schools have made great efforts in engaging their students with modernity and the Indonesian context. By modernity, I mean natural and social sciences, including modern technology as the product of modern society. The schools do not forbid students to study modern sciences, even though they recognize that those sciences derive from Western civilization, which is secular. Furthermore, by adopting the national curriculum, the schools aim to prepare their students to be capable of dealing with the conditions in Indonesia. This curriculum indicates that the Salafi schools have made efforts to inculcate the cultural capital required for living in modern Indonesia.

However, some Salafi educational institutions still preserve their original or traditional forms. Pesantren of Ibnu Mas'ud (PIM), located in Bogor, is one of them. The PIM only teaches religious subjects, which are its own curriculum.⁴⁸ This means that the PIM is a non-formal education. The institution does not use the national curriculum from either the Ministry of Religious Affairs or the Ministry of Education of Indonesia. Students

⁴⁶Zuhri (pseudonym), a teacher of the IHBS, interview, Jakarta, 1 August 2025; Mahmud (pseudonym), a teacher of the IUIS, interview, Tangerang Selatan, 2 August 2025

⁴⁷Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafism, Education, and Youth" ...

⁴⁸Husen (pseudonym), a teacher of the PIM, interview, Bogor, 5 August 2025.

in the PIM study religious subjects, and upon achieving the purpose of education, they will receive a certificate. However, the certificate is not equal to the certificate of formal education. It means that those who graduated from the PIM could not continue their education to a higher level. Therefore, the PIM offers students to take a program called *Paket* (package) A, B, or C for their formal education.⁴⁹ The *Paket A, B, or C* is an educational program equal to primary school (SD or MI), junior high school (SMP or MTS), and senior high school (SMA or MA). Students in this program will receive an official certificate equivalent to other formal education. The holders of this certificate are eligible to continue their studies to the formal higher level of education, such as pursuing studies in domestic or foreign universities. The reason why the PIM still maintains its original type is explained by Husen, one of its teachers:

Our Islamic education is based on the *manhaj* (method) of *al-salaf al-salih*. We want to keep this *manhaj* in our education. Our Islamic views emphasize the interpretation of the Quran and *Hadith*, which are in accordance with *al-salaf al-salih*.⁵⁰

This indicates that some Salafi educational institutions are still struggling to negotiate Salafism in the modern Indonesian context. Based on our observation, their numbers are not large. There is only one that we found in Jabodetabek. The curriculum in this type of Salafi education does not support its students in accumulating the cultural capital needed to live in modern Indonesia.

Tension with national ideology

The Salafi schools are not only a medium in which the institutions produce labor or skillful young Muslim generation, but they are also a

⁴⁹Husen, interview, 5 August 2025.

⁵⁰Husen, interview, 5 August 2025.

representation of the Salafi *ulama*'s ideological vision. The Salafi schools cannot be separated from the position of its founders, the Salafi clerics or *ulama*. They established schools to disseminate their ideological vision, based on *the Manhaj* Salafi. Therefore, besides the national curriculum, the schools also implement their own curriculum for religious subjects. This is mentioned in the IHBS and IUIS' website:

*Sedangkan untuk mata pelajaran agama, IHBS menerapkan Kurikulum Diniyyahnya sendiri.*⁵¹

Meanwhile, for religious subjects, the IHBS applies its own *Diniyyah Curriculum*.⁵²

*SMPSMA Ibnu Umar merupakan sekolah sunnah yang menggunakan kurikulum K-13 sesuai dengan Dinas Pendidikan dipadukan dengan kurikulum diniyyah mandiri yang sesuai dengan Al-Quran dan Sunnah...*⁵³

Ibnu Umar Junior and Senior High School are a *sunnah* school that uses the K-13 curriculum in accordance with the Department of Education combined with an independent *diniyyah* curriculum in accordance with the Al-Quran and Sunnah...⁵⁴

By the independent *diniyyah* (religious) curriculum, they mean the syllabus adopted from Saudi Arabian educational institutions. The background of the *ulama* graduating from higher education institutions supported by the Saudi Arabian government, as well as Salafism itself, which was developed by the Saudi Arabian *ulama*, are among the reasons why the Salafi schools in Indonesia adopt it. Some experts, such as Peter Mandaville, Din Wahid, and Noorhaidi Hasan, said that there are other benefits, such as financial support received by the Salafi schools from the

⁵¹The school's web, <https://ihbs.sch.id>.

⁵²The text is translated by the authors.

⁵³the school's web, <https://ibnuumar.sch.id>.

⁵⁴The text is translated by the authors.

Kingdom, by adopting the curriculum.

By adopting the Saudi Arabian curriculum, the IHBS, the IUIS, and the PIM also espouse books used by the Arabian educational institutions. For the subjects of *akidah* (faith), *ibadah* (ritual), and *mu'amalah* (social relations and transactions), the schools use books written by Ibnu Taymiyah, Ibn Abdul Wahhab, and other Saudi Arabian Salafi *ulama*.⁵⁵ Ibn Abdul Wahhab is regarded as the founder of Saudi Arabian Salafi. He lived in the 18th century. His thoughts are adopted by the Saudi Arabian kingdom for the official religious view of the state.⁵⁶ Consequently, many official *ulama* in the kingdom are influenced by Ibn Abdul Wahhab's thought. Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyah is a reformist *ulama* living in Damascus, Syria, in the 14th Century. Ibn Taymiyah is regarded as the source of Salafism worldwide.⁵⁷ It is worth noting that Ibn Abdul Wahhab is one of the *ulama* influenced by Ibn Taymiyah's thought. Therefore, we also found Ibn Taymiyah's books and his influence on the Saudi Arabian *ulama*.

Those religious thoughts emphasize the purification of faith. The doctrine underlines the *tauhid uluhiyyah*, which means Muslims are forbidden to make someone, either still alive or dead, a mediator or intermediary in their communication or praying to God (*Allah*). This principle criticizes rituals and religious traditions that are perceived to make certain *ulama* or saints mediators for Muslims' purposes.

This purification doctrine creates a tension with the religious tradition of the local community in Indonesia. One of the religious traditions becoming the object of the tension is visiting saint tombs (*ziarah kubur*

⁵⁵Husen, interview, 5 August 2025; Zuhri, interview, 1 August 2025; Mahmud, interview, 2 August 2025.

⁵⁶Muhammad Hilali Basya. *Muhammadiyah dan Salafisme di masa Transisi Demokrasi Indonesia...*

⁵⁷Muhammad Hilali Basya. *Muhammadiyah dan Salafisme di masa Transisi Demokrasi Indonesia...*

para wali) that has been being performed by many Indonesian Muslims, especially from the proponents of Islamic traditionalism, for more than 1 century. Traditionalist Muslims believe that certain *ulama*, especially saints, have a “close relation” with God. Therefore, their relationship enables them to make someone’s prayer more approvable by God. It is not surprising that traditionalist Muslims are the group that is often in conflict with Salafi clerics and institutions. There are some cases in which Salafi educational institutions were criticized by the local community due to their teaching pejorating such a religious tradition.

Appreciating such a religious tradition is part of the Pancasila values. The attitude is highlighted in the 1st and 2nd principles of Pancasila. The Indonesian nation consists of many ethnicities, tribes, and religions. They represent diverse religions and a multicultural society. All religious and cultural expressions are protected by the state constitution. Therefore, undermining them would jeopardize the Pancasila principle, which promotes multiculturalism and religious pluralism.

The purification taught in the IHBS, the IUIS, and the PIM concerns not only faith and ritual but also social aspects. Salafi believe that all aspects, including the social dimension, performed by the early three generations of Muslims (*Sahabat, Tabiin, Tabi’ al-Tabiin*) are the best precedents to be followed by Muslims. The way those generations were dressing, eating, behaving, and looking is perceived by the Salafi as the source of Islamic doctrine. Certainly, as common Muslims in general, Salafi believe that the primary source of Islam is Al-Quran and the Prophet’s *Hadith*. However, *Sahabat, Tabiin, and Tabi’ al-Tabiin* are regarded by Salafi as the best generation that purely adopt the Prophet *Hadith* (Prophet Muhammad’s saying, behavior, and position). Therefore, the Salafis campaign the way of life of those generations as a *sunnah* (precedent of the best early three generations) that must be adopted by contemporary Muslims.

Consequently, the IHBS, the IUIS, and the PIM recommended their students to dress, behave, and look like those early three generations. It is widely found that male students of these Salafi educational institutions wear trousers whose length is not more than the ankle. This view is based on the Prophet's saying and *al-Salaf al-Salih's* interpretation. Wearing trousers more than the ankle is perceived as vanity, and it is condemned by the Prophet.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the female students wear a long veil and dress as well as cover their faces.

According to Salafism, women are required to limit their role in the domestic area, which is why the female students of the IHBS and the IUIS are taught about *tata boga* and sewing.⁵⁹ *Tata Boga* is a subject that teaches female students how to prepare food and its commercial aspects. The aim of this subject is to strengthen the competency of female students in doing domestic entrepreneurship. This subject is seldom found in other Indonesian schools, except in vocational schools specializing in *tata boga*. However, in the vocational schools, the subject is taught for male and female students. It means the subjects in Salafi schools and in vocational schools have different purposes.

Limiting women's public roles is not in line with the national ideology. Pancasila guarantees women's right to play their role in the public domain. They have the right to build a career outside their domestic role. In other words, Pancasila favors gender equality, as stated in the 5th principle: "the Social Justice for all Indonesian People."

In *Muamalah*, particularly in the political aspect, the Salafism requires loyalty and obedience to the government. Muslims are prohibited from publicly criticizing the government.⁶⁰ This principle is commonly found

⁵⁸Husen, interview, 5 August 2025; Zuhri, interview, 1 August 2025; Mahmud, interview, 2 August 2025.

⁵⁹Zuhri, interview, 1 August 2025; Mahmud, interview, 2 August 2025.

⁶⁰Zuhri, interview, 1 August 2025; Mahmud, interview, 2 August 2025.

among quietist or purist Salafi.⁶¹ This doctrine distinguishes between this type of Salafi and the other types, namely, the Politico and *Jihadi*. For the Politico Salafi, Muslims are still allowed to criticize the government when they are not in line with Sharia.⁶² Meanwhile, the *Jihadi* run further by demanding Muslims fight against such a government.⁶³ It is noteworthy that the IHBS and the IUIS are the representation of quietist Salafi, whereas the PIM might be classified as *Jihadi* Salafi, because some of its teachers and students were found involved in violent extremism and went to Syria to support the ISIS group.⁶⁴

Even though not favoring violence and radicalism, the quietist Salafi doctrine regarding loyalty to the government is not in line with the principle of democracy as stated in the 4th point of Pancasila, “Democracy led by the wisdom of deliberation and representation”. This Pancasila principle provides Indonesian citizens with freedom of expression to express their ideas, including to criticize the government. Democracy, as mentioned in the Pancasila requires the participation of the citizens or public in monitoring and evaluating the government’s policies. Public participation in controlling the government’s policies is part of the people’s sovereignty, as stated in the 4th principle of Pancasila.

Cultural capital inculcated in those Salafi education still has a problem. To some extent, its cultural capital strengthens students’ competency in dealing with the Indonesian modern context. However, the capital does not have enough ‘power’ to help the students deal with Indonesian ideology appreciating gender equality, democracy, and multiculturalism. The

⁶¹Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”...

⁶²Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”...

⁶³Mohammed bin Ali, *The Roots of Religious Extremism: Understanding the Salafi Doctrine of al-Wala’ wa al-Bara’*, London: Imperial College Press, 2016; Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”...

⁶⁴Muhammad Hilali Basya, Idris Thaha, *Database Salafi di Indonesia...*

tension with national ideology can be understood as a struggle between competing forms of legitimate cultural capital within the Indonesian social field. Salafi educational institutions cultivate a specific form of cultural capital rooted in scriptural literalism, purification doctrines, and Middle Eastern (particularly Saudi-influenced) religious references, which they transmit through their *diniyyah* curriculum, dress codes, gender norms, and epistemic authority. This form of cultural capital differs significantly from the national ideology, which values pluralism, multiculturalism, gender equality, and democratic participation. As a result, what is recognized as legitimate knowledge and proper disposition within Salafi fields (e.g., rejection of local religious traditions, limitation of women's public roles, discouragement of public political criticism) is partially misaligned with the state ideology promoted through national education.

Conclusion

The controversy of its influence on religion-based intolerance, violence, and even terrorism for more than two decades in Indonesia raises doubts about whether Salafi educational institutions can support their students to live in accordance with Indonesian national ideology, which is based on religious pluralism and multiculturalism. This article presents the curriculum of three Salafi educational institutions (the IHBS, the IUIS, and the PIM) in Jakarta, Tangerang Selatan, and Bogor, and reviews their compatibility with the Indonesian national ideology.

In general, formal Salafi education has made great efforts in engaging their students with modernity and the Indonesian context, as shown by the IHBS and the IUIS. These Salafi schools applied the national curriculum and recruited relevant teachers for the non-religious subjects. Through this approach, these Salafi schools ensure that their students will have the same level of competency as students in other Indonesian schools. The IHBS and

the IUIS represent the later development of Salafi education in Indonesia, which is increasing in numbers, whereas the PIM shows the original type of Salafi education, which preserves the “traditional” curriculum.

However, the Salafi schools are not only producing skillful students competent to live in a modern Indonesian context, but also generating young Salafi cadres. The schools represent their founders, who are Salafi *ulama* fighting for their Salafi ideological vision. Consequently, Salafi doctrines as taught in the formal and non-formal Salafi educational institutions, emphasizing the purification of faith, ritual, and social aspects, lead to a tension with Indonesian ideology, particularly concerning gender equality, religious pluralism, multiculturalism, and freedom of thought and expression.

The curriculum and educational practices of Salafi institutions can be understood as mechanisms for the production and reproduction of a specific form of cultural capital rooted in Salafi ideology. These institutions do not merely transmit religious knowledge, but also inculcate embodied dispositions, religious tastes, and normative frameworks aligned with Salafi interpretations of Islam. The *diniyyah* curriculum, the use of authoritative Salafi texts, and the central role of *ulama* function as instruments for legitimizing this particular cultural capital, which is then internalized by students, guiding their worldview and social practices. At the same time, the adoption of the national curriculum represents an incorporation of dominant state-recognized cultural capital necessary for participation in the broader Indonesian social and educational field. However, the coexistence of these two forms of cultural capital—Salafi ideological capital and national civic capital—creates a field of tension. While the latter promotes values such as pluralism, multiculturalism, gender equality, and democratic participation, the former tends to privilege doctrinal purity and exclusivist interpretations. Consequently, Salafi educational institutions

become sites of negotiation where competing forms of cultural capital are contested, reproduced, and selectively integrated, shaping students' capacities to navigate between religious commitment and the demands of the Indonesian nation-state.

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