

## Moderate Islam vis-à-vis Salafism: Ideological Competition and Power Struggle in West Nusa Tenggara

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### Abstract

Following the collapse of the New Order regime, Indonesia's Reformation era facilitated the emergence and expansion of transnational Islamic movements, including the puritanical Salafi-Wahhabi ideology in Lombok. This development challenged the long-standing Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) Islamic tradition, giving rise to ideological, social, and political tensions. This study analyzes the contestation between these two groups using Quintan Wiktorowicz's Islamic Activism framework, with particular attention to mobilization strategies, movement framing, and their socio-political implications. The analysis is guided by two key research questions: (1) What mobilization and framing strategies do the Salafi-Wahhabi and NW groups employ to assert ideological influence in Lombok?; (2) What are the implications of this ideological competition for the socio-political dynamics of the Muslim community in Lombok? This qualitative research draws on literature reviews and online interviews with religious scholars and community leaders. The findings reveal that the Salafi-Wahhabi movement has garnered considerable support from Saudi-backed institutions such as Rabithah al-'Alam al-Islami and the Islamic Development Bank. These entities have contributed to the establishment of educational institutions, the construction of mosques and Islamic boarding schools, and the dissemination of Salafi literature. The ideological rivalry has exacerbated social polarization and fragmentation, particularly through digital platforms and the growing hijrah movement. This contestation disrupts social cohesion and affects local religious practices. The study highlights the need for a dialogic and inclusive approach to mitigate tensions and foster intergroup harmony in Lombok.

**Keywords:** Salafi-Wahhabi, Nahdlatul Wathan, ideological competitions, political mobilitie

### Introduction

The fall of the New Order regime and the emergence of the 1998 Reformation era marked a significant shift in the freedom and openness of information flow, thereby providing ample space for the expression of various religious ideologies in Indonesia. Transnational Islamic movements began to reveal themselves openly, including groups with Salafi ideology (Hasan, 2018). Salafi, introduced to Lombok by Tuan Guru Haji Husni in 1984, has become a new phenomenon in the Muslim religious circles of Lombok. The Salafi group, with its *Salafi* doctrine, claims to be purely Islamic and moves to purify Islamic practices that are considered

deviant. The Salafi-Wahhabi group considers that local traditions and cultures have distorted the Islam practiced by the people of Lombok, so they think it is something that is included in shirk or bid. The Salafi-Wahhabi group in Lombok succeeded in convincing the Muslim community there that they were part of the faithful and pure Islam. Along with the spread of Wahhabi views and the establishment of formal schools that emphasize Arabic language and Qur'an memorization, the influence of the Salafi-Wahhabi group is growing and becoming more widely known among the people of Lombok (Saparudin, 2022c, p. 20). This development is closely tied to the financial and

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ideological support of institutions under the auspices of Saudi Arabia.

The success of Salafi-Wahhabi in spreading Salafism is a challenge for moderate Islamic groups in Lombok, namely Nahdlatul Wathan. As the most prominent Islamic moderate organization in Lombok, Nahdlatul Wathan, which adheres to the ideology of *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* (ASWAJA) and represents traditionalist Islamic groups, combines Islamic teachings with local cultural traditions to convey an understanding of Islamic practice and disseminate its message. The Salafi-Wahhabi group considers the syncretic practices of Nahdlatul Wathan to be deviant, and therefore often criticises its religious teachings and influences the social position of NW in Lombok (Saparudin, 2017, p. 82).

The ideological competition between Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan has triggered social tensions among Muslims in Lombok. The differences between the Salafi *manhaj* and the ASWAJA ideology have an impact on the contestation of power and ideological conflicts that have the potential to lead to physical clashes (Saparudin, 2022a, p. 28). Based on these issues, this study aims to examine the ideological competition between the two groups through mobilisation and framing strategies, as well as their implications for each group's political opportunities. The analysis focuses on two main questions: (1) What mobilisation and framing strategies do Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan employ to build ideological influence in Lombok? and (2) What are the impacts of their ideological competition on the socio-political dynamics of Muslims in Lombok?

Several previous studies serve as important references that strengthen the arguments of this research. First, Erman Adia Kusumah's article entitled *'Wahabi: Religious Politics and the Desire for Power in Indonesia'* examines the Wahhabi movement in the political, educational, and missionary spheres. He shows that since the Reformation era, the Salafi-Wahhabi movement has developed through missionary work sponsored by Saudi Arabia, as well as through educational institutions such as LIPIA, which trains preachers with missionary material that

is often exclusive to other Islamic groups (Kusumah, 2020, p. 59).

Second, Saparudin's article, *'Desacralisation of Tuan Guru's Religious Authority: Salafi Purification Versus Traditionalism of Nahdlatul Wathan'*, discusses the efforts of Salafi elites to desacralise the religious authority of Tuan Guru NW. This conflict arose due to theological differences and a struggle for influence in the public sphere, which triggered social fragmentation (Saparudin, 2022a, p. 25)

Third, another article by Saparudin with the same title discusses the shift in religious authority in Lombok in the context of competition between Salafi and Nahdlatul Wathan. Salafi rejects local practices deemed heretical, while NW upholds Islamic values integrated with Sasak culture. This study highlights the crucial role of Tuan Guru in preserving local traditions and the challenges arising from Salafi's doctrinal purification (Saparudin, 2022b).

Most previous studies have focused on the contestation between Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) and Salafi-Wahhabi in the fields of education and religion. Few studies have examined how these two groups mobilise masses, frame culture, and exploit political opportunities in this contestation. This study fills this gap by utilizing Wiktorowicz's (2006) theory of Islamic Activism, which encompasses three main variables: political opportunities, mobilization structures, and culture and framing. All three are relevant for analysing the ideological contestation between NW and Salafi-Wahhabi in Lombok (Wiktorowicz, 2006). NW leveraged local networks and its close ties with the local government since the New Order era through the role of Tuan Guru. In contrast, Salafi-Wahhabi received transnational support, particularly from Saudi Arabia. The mobilisation structures of both groups are evident in the construction of Islamic boarding schools, mosques, and educational institutions that shape religious patterns and political preferences among the community, such as the dominance of the PKS in NTB as a reflection of Wahhabism's success in electoral politics (Hasan, 2012, pp. 38–39). In cultural and

intellectual aspects, NW preserves local Islamic traditions, while Salafi-Wahhabi advocates the purification of Islamic teachings by rejecting practices considered *bid'ah* (innovation). PKS is often criticised for promoting neo-Wahhabi ideology, which is seen as contrary to local Islamic traditions and threatening the authority of traditional ulama. Through its *da'wah* (proselytising) and political mobilisation strategies, the PKS is seen as spreading transnational ideas such as those of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism, which deepen tensions between transnational modernist Islam and local traditionalist Islam.

As a result, social polarisation, educational segregation, and political fragmentation have complicated the religious landscape in Lombok. Since 2000, this conflict has intensified, exacerbated by digital media exploited by Salafi-Wahhabi groups and the growing *hijrah* trend that strengthens their proselytising efforts. Additionally, internal divisions within NW, which is affiliated with various political parties, further complicate the situation. To maintain social cohesion and prevent broader conflict, a dialogic and inclusive approach is needed.

## Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, integrating a literature review with primary data collection through online interviews. The literature review was conducted intensively on various scientific works, journal articles, books, and reports relevant to reconstructing the historical and ideological context of the emergence of the Salafi-Wahhabi movement and its contestation dynamics with Nahdlatul Wathan in Lombok. The analysis focuses on the mobilisation strategies employed by both groups in building ideological and political influence.

The theoretical framework used refers to the concept of Islamic Activism developed by Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006), with an emphasis on three main dimensions: political opportunities, mobilisation structures, and cultural framing. This approach provides an analytical basis for understanding how the two groups position themselves in the local socio-

political landscape.

Primary data was obtained through online interviews using Zoom and WhatsApp, involving key informants such as religious leaders, academics, and community members directly involved in the ideological contestation. The collected data was then analysed thematically and triangulated with findings from the literature review to enhance the validity and reliability of the research results. Thus, this methodological approach enables researchers to identify gaps in previous studies and provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of ideological competition and socio-religious tensions in the Lombok region.

## Results and Discussion

### Violence and Contention Between Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan

The spread of proselytizing and Salafi-Wahhabi ideas received a strong response from Nahdlatul Wathan. This response occurred because of the Salafi-Wahhabi criticism of the religious practices of Nahdlatul Wathan, which were considered forms of *bid'ah*. The spread of the *Salaf manhaj* and the doctrines of heresy brought by the Salafi-Wahhabi group are deemed to have harmed the diversity of Lombok society. Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) in Lombok have fundamental differences in their religious approaches, traditions, and attitudes towards local culture. Salafi-Wahhabi adherents adhere to a puritanical ideology that rejects religious practices such as grave visits, *tahlilan*, and other local traditions, focusing instead on purifying religious beliefs through Salafi interpretations. In contrast, NW, as a traditional Islamic organisation, accepts local values and distinctive religious practices of the Nusantara region, such as regular religious study sessions, Maulid celebrations, and Sufi orders, as expressions of love for Islam and culture. These differences have sparked ideological tensions that influence the socio-religious dynamics of the Muslim community in Lombok (Said, 2019a, p. 178).

Conflicts between the Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan groups occur frequently. The

most prominent problem happened at the end of 2021, specifically in the case of Kotaraja Village, Sikur District, East Lombok (Akbar & Zulfikar, 2022). The conflict between Nahdlatul Wathan and the Wahhabi group in Lombok has escalated due to sharp differences in religious understanding. Tensions peaked in the early hours of Sunday, 2 January 2022, when hundreds of people attacked the As-Sunnah Islamic boarding school in Aikmel, East Lombok, damaging facilities and burning vehicles. The incident was triggered by a clip of a sermon by Ustaz Mizan Qudsiah, which was perceived as insulting to ancestral graves, as well as intense debates on social media regarding the Wahhabi group's ban on local traditions such as grave visits and tahlilan. The conflict escalated, marked by the destruction of the As-Syafi'i Mosque, which was still under construction. Thousands of residents from Mamben Daye and Wanasaba also joined in protesting the construction of the Wahhabi group's mosque, as it was perceived to frequently divide the community and act arbitrarily against the practices of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja). The nature of the conflict has escalated into an open and destructive conflict, characterised by acts of physical violence, property destruction, arson, and attempts to attack symbols of religious identity. As a result, not only has physical damage and material loss occurred, but social segregation has deepened and horizontal tensions have been sparked among Muslim communities in Lombok, which have long coexisted with diverse religious traditions and interpretations. (Antara, 2022). In 2021, thousands of people from Lombok staged a demonstration against the construction of a Salafi mosque in the Mamben area of East Lombok. In 2016, there was a case of the destruction of a Salafi mosque in Suela, East Lombok. The 2005 case involved seven Salafi members from their village in Batu Keliang, Central Lombok (Saparudin, 2022c, p. 8). In addition, the Salafi-Wahhabi Mosque in Peresak Hamlet, Kabar Village, Sakra Sub-district, East Lombok Regency, was vandalized in 2010. This case arose due to conflicts between fellow Wahhabi figures and differences in their

understanding of Islamic practice. The existence of this problem was utilized by one of the Wahhabi figures to provoke the residents, so there was an act of destruction of the mosque (antaranews.com, 2010). The destruction of Salafi schools also occurred in 2006 in Mataram City, and the closure of the mosque and Ubay bin Ka'ab Islamic school in Cakra Negara Mataram in 2015 (Saparudin, 2022c, p. 8). The dissolution of the Wahhabi group recitation in Beroro Hamlet, Jembatan Kembar Village, West Lombok Regency in 2006 (Liputan6.com, 2006). The insistence on mass action in East Lombok to close the activities of the Salafi-Wahhabi group in Bagek continues to roll. The protesters demanded that the East Lombok Regional Leadership Coordination Forum close down all Salafi group activities and called for the Salafi sect, which is allegedly contrary to Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah, as the majority sect believed by Sasak Muslims, to be fostered so that it does not conflict with the majority sect in Lombok (Lomboktoday, 2022).

According to Rahman, one of the people of Lombok, "The latest conflict between Nahdlatul Wathan and the Wahhabi group shows the deepening differences in religious understanding that have led to social divisions, one of which occurred in the early hours of Sunday, 2 January 2022, when around a hundred people attacked the As-Sunnah Islamic boarding school in Aikmel, East Lombok, NTB, damaging facilities and burning vehicles—an action reportedly triggered by a video clip of a sermon by Ustaz Mizan Qudsiah, which was perceived as insulting the graves of ancestors in Lombok. We believe that all parties should accept differences in interpreting Islamic teachings, as reflected in local traditions and worship practices, with greater wisdom" (A. Al Haddar, personal communication, February 4, 2025).

As explained by Rahman (2020), religious conflict in Lombok shows that differences in religious understanding, which were initially local and limited to religious practices, have now developed into a struggle for influence and authority among religious elites. Religious elites here refer to figures who have social, cultural, and religious influence, both from Nahdlatul



Wathan (NW), which represents the Aswaja tradition, and from the Salafi-Wahhabi group, which takes a textual and scriptural approach. NW figures such as Tuan Guru have high authority because they are considered heirs to local Islamic traditions, while Salafi-Wahhabi preachers such as Ustaz Mizan Qudsiyah from the As-Sunnah Islamic boarding school promote the purification of Islamic teachings (*tajdid*) but are often considered controversial because they reject local practices such as *tahlilan*, *ziarah*, and *maulid*. The strong reaction from the Aswaja community towards Salafi-Wahhabi preaching reflects resistance to the dominance of religious discourse that is perceived as foreign and contrary to local values. Thus, this conflict is not merely about theology, but also a struggle for symbolic power among religious figures to maintain their influence in society (A. Al Haddar, personal communication, February 4, 2025). The rivalry between the Salafi-Wahhabi group and local religious communities, such as Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), in Lombok is not solely due to doctrinal differences. Still, it is also closely tied to the dynamics of local religious power. The Salafi-Wahhabi group arrived with an agenda of purifying Islamic teachings, namely eliminating religious practices they consider *bid'ah*, such as *tahlilan*, grave visits, and *maulid* celebrations, which are integral parts of the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (Aswaja) tradition upheld by NW. Salafi efforts to expand their influence through the establishment of educational institutions, the construction of mosques, and the use of modern media for religious propagation triggered resistance from the local community, particularly from Nahdlatul Wathan, as they were perceived as challenging the religious authority long held by the *Tuan Guru* or *Tuan Guru Haji (TGH)*, who serve as spiritual, social, and cultural leaders in Sasak society. In this context, the term 'religious elite' refers to religious figures from both sides: from NW, the Tuan Guru with traditional and cultural legitimacy, while from Salafi-Wahhabi, the ustaz or dai with a Middle Eastern educational background and transnational *da'wah* networks. The competition between these elites reflects a contest for symbolic and

social power, in which each group seeks to gain authority to define the legitimate form of Islam in society, thereby generating local tensions and rejection of the presence of new groups that bring radically different religious interpretations (Fitriani, 2016, p. 9).

Second, the basic assumption is that the Salafi-Wahhabi group is different from mainstream Islam in Sasak society. For the Sasak people, truth is synonymous with the majority. Therefore, religious discourse from minority groups is seen as deviant and needs to be corrected. The majority of Sasak Muslims adhere to the theology of Imam Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidzi, the jurisprudence of Imam Syafi'i, and the Sufism of Imam al-Ghazali (Sari et al., 2024). These teachings were brought by Tuan Guru graduates from the Middle East and reinforced by Aswaja organisations such as Nahdlatul Wathan and Nahdlatul Ulama. The emergence of hardline Salafism has disrupted the religious harmony of the Sasak community and sparked divisions in Lombok.

The term 'Sasak community' here refers to the majority of Sasak Muslims who practise a localised form of Sunni Islam (Mutawali, 2016, p. 320). Although some Salafi-Wahhabis are of Sasak ethnicity, they differ theologically and in their religious practices. These differences are not ethnic but rather religious orientations, approaches to texts, and attitudes toward local traditions (Huda, 2019).

### **Wahhabi Resistance in the Fight for Power in Lombok**

At a time when Soeharto was trying to maintain the New Order regime in Indonesian politics, Saudi Arabia was also in a position of safety from the 1973 oil crisis. Then, Saudi Arabia sought to utilize its oil wealth to shape and expand its influence and power in the Southeast Asian region by funding faith-based schools, universities, and scholarships for international students. In Indonesia, investments made by Saudi Arabia have had a significant influence on socio-political changes. Saudi Arabia uses its influence through investment in the education sector to achieve its political goals (Nash, 2018).

Saudi Arabia's influence flowed into Indonesia through the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (DDII), which attempted to mobilize Indonesian preachers to heed various directives from government officials related to policies issued by Soeharto. The claim that DDII represented Rabithah al-Alam al-Islami strengthened the organization's existence. Thus, the New Order government, which continued campaigning against communism, encouraged and shaped the movement to require students to take religious lessons, encourage personal piety, and increase control over Islamic political expression (Hasan, 2008, pp. 45–46).

The end of the New Order era marked the emergence of hardline Muslim groups that aimed to establish an Islamic state and rejected Pancasila as the basis of the state ideology. These groups are often associated with transnational movements that promote a puritanical form of Islam, such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and Front Pembela Islam (FPI). In this context, the term 'hardline Islam' refers to groups that ideologically reject pluralism, liberal democracy, and inclusive national principles, and often resort to violence or social pressure to achieve their agenda (Hasan, 2008).

One of the primary sources of influence for this movement is the Salafi-Wahhabi ideology, which entered through education and proselytising, especially after the reform. The Salafi-Wahhabi ideology, which originated in Saudi Arabia, although not generally synonymous with violence, has in some cases become the ideological foundation for certain radical groups, especially those that reject local Islamic practices and advocate strict religious purification. Islamic education funded by the Saudi kingdom remained popular during the democratic transition, mainly due to scholarship offers and strong institutional networks (Hamid, 2016). Indonesian graduates who studied under Saudi auspices were often directed to support and fund Salafi-Wahhabi missionary institutions in the country. Strategically, Saudi Arabian leaders utilise this approach to education and proselytisation as a form of soft diplomacy to create opportunities for long-term

influence in Indonesia. This strategy not only shapes the religious orientation of Indonesia's Muslim elite but also paves the way for a more receptive articulation of Islamist politics towards transnational agendas (Bruinessen, 2018).

The rapid growth of Wahhabi groups in Indonesia became significantly noticeable after the end of the New Order era, along with the opening of a period of democratisation that allowed the re-emergence of various expressions of political Islam. In this context, the Masyumi Party, which existed in the early days of independence, symbolized the political power of Muslims who were oriented towards modernism. Although Masyumi historically stood as a pluralistic party that accommodated various modern Islamic ideas, the influence of figures such as Mohammad Natsir, who had intellectual ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, was often interpreted as a gateway for transnational Islamic ideas to enter the party (Fealy, 2001; Hasan, 2009). However, the claim that Masyumi directly represented the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood or served as a political vehicle for Wahhabi groups requires more critical examination. Some analysts suggest that while there was ideological sympathy towards the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, Masyumi did not formally become an extension of that organisation. (Burhanudin & Van Dijk, 2013). Meanwhile, the assumption that Wahhabi groups used Masyumi as a political tool is not supported by strong empirical evidence, given that Wahhabism as a theological movement operates more in the realm of preaching and education than electoral politics. Internal tensions within Masyumi involving differences of opinion between modernist and traditionalist groups were more likely to have prompted Nahdliyin circles to withdraw and form the Nahdlatul Ulama Party in 1952, as recorded in studies on the relationship between traditional and modern Islam in Indonesia (Liddle, 1999).

The massive spread of Wahhabism was supported by the movement of the Campus Da'wah Institution (LDK), which was formed in 1998 to be a forum for regeneration and a place where Wahhabi figures were born. From

the movement through LDK, the Justice Party was formed to represent its predecessor parties, which had failed to revive Masyumi, such as the New Masyumi Party and the Indonesian Islamic Political Party Masyumi. However, during its journey, the Justice Party experienced internal conflict, giving rise to the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in 2001 (Kusumah, 2020, p. 60). The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) is reasonably calculated in the national political arena. However, this party has yet to secure the presidential seat in every general election. One of PKS's sources of strength is the Campus Da'wah Institution (LDK) and the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Unit, which are extra-campus organizations with similar ideologies. However, unofficially, they are one of the party's underbosses (Kusumah, 2020, p. 60).

In the context of politics in the West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) region, the spread of Wahhabi through the influence of PKS shows the tight competition for winning people's votes. PKS has been on the political radar of the people of NTB since the 2009 general election. At that time, PKS managed to enter the top three political parties that controlled NTB and maintained its position for three consecutive general elections until the 2019 general election. PKS's vote share has increased from 8 percent in the 2009 general election to 10.5 percent in the 2014 general election and 10.9 percent in the 2019 general election (KOMPAS, 2023).

In the context of political dynamics in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), the relationship between Islamic parties such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and the Moon Star Party (PBB) with local religious figures, such as Muhammad Zainul Majdi or Tuan Guru Bajang (TGB), demonstrates that ideological differences between Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) groups do not always serve as barriers in practical politics. The support of PKS and PBB for TGB at the beginning of his emergence in the regional elections indicates that, strategically, political cooperation across religious lines can be established when there are aligned electoral interests. The fact that in the 2018 regional elections, PKS and the Democratic Party formed a coalition to support the

Zulkieflimansyah–Sitti Rohmi Djalilah ticket, with the victory also bolstered by TGB's influence, shows that theological conflicts between Wahhabi and NW elites are not necessarily reflected in political coalition patterns. This confirms that in the local context of NTB, religious differences can be negotiated in the political arena, enabling temporary integration or pragmatic coalitions between ideologically different elites. However, these coalitions are instrumental and temporary, as ideological tensions persist at the grassroots level and have the potential to resurface outside the electoral political momentum (KOMPAS, 2023).

Although there appears to be flexibility at the elite political level in building cross-ideological coalitions for electoral gain, dynamics at the grassroots level exhibit different symptoms. Ideological tensions between Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan groups continue and are even hardening in socio-religious spaces. This phenomenon can be observed in the patterns of Wahhabi missionary mobilisation in East Lombok, which reveal systematic efforts to build an ideological base through religious institutions and digital media.

The mobilisation of the Wahhabi movement in East Lombok employs the 'mosque movement' strategy, which involves building mosques as centres for spreading ideology (Said, 2019b, p. 178). Although not yet documented quantitatively, the construction of mosques by Salafi-Wahhabi groups has increased significantly over the past two decades, especially in rural areas. Mosques are used as exclusive centres for proselytising, attracting sympathy, particularly among young people who tend to favour a textual and modern approach. A concrete example is the As-Sunnah Mosque in Aikmel, which has become a centre for Salafi proselytising and was once the site of conflict, as well as the As-Syafi'i Mosque in Mamben Daya, which residents rejected for spreading Wahhabi ideology (Wiryomartono, 2023, p. 9).

In addition to mosques, they have established Islamic boarding schools and madrasahs that teach puritanical doctrines and

reject local traditions such as tahlilan, grave visits, and Maulid. As a result, social-religious segregation emerged at the village level, with Salafi congregants beginning to separate from Nahdlatul Wathan and Nahdlatul Ulama and criticising Aswaja practices in their sermons. This sparked resistance and horizontal conflicts, while also intensifying the struggle for religious authority between traditionalist and transnational reformist groups. Tuan Guru Husni was the first figure to introduce Salafism to Lombok, establishing the al-Manar Islamic boarding school in 1989. This boarding school grew rapidly and gave rise to similar institutions such as the As-Sunnah, Jamaludin, Abu Hurairah, and others. The spread of Salafism was further strengthened by a regeneration process supported by LIPIA and Imam Saud Islamic University (Saparudin, 2022a, p. 32).

In addition to physical institutions, Wahhabi groups also mobilise masses through digital culture (Rijal, 2020). While their initial emergence in Saudi Arabia was strongly anti-modern, since the 1940s they have begun to utilise media, including radio and now digital platforms such as As-Sunnah Bagik Nyaka radio, Facebook, Rinajni TV, Rodja TV, and YouTube. Digital media is considered effective in spreading Salafi-Wahhabi teachings and countering the dominance of NU and NW (Said, 2019b, p. 180). The appealing communication style makes these teachings popular among the young. The growth of Salafi-style boarding schools, study circles, and mosques indicates a widespread influence, reinforced by the dissemination of Wahhabi literature and the intensive activities of alumni from Salafi educational institutions. The phenomenon of *hijrah* has become the most prominent Wahhabi campaign among young people, especially after several celebrities admitted to converting. However, their views tend to be exclusive in Indonesia's pluralistic society. Wahhabi preaching also often raises Middle East conflicts and labels Shia as a deviant group, in line with Saudi Arabia's political interests in opposing Iran since 1979 (Kusumah, 2020, p. 62).

### **Wahhabi Da'wah and the Spread of the Purification of Islam**

The rise of the term Wahhabi began after the collapse of the New Order regime and the beginning of the Reformation era. The development of the term Wahhabi occurs with the ongoing Salafist preaching in the Sasak community. The beginning of the proselytising process can be seen from the emergence of Wahhabi groups and small communities with values that differed from those of the Sasak community, such as dress, religious practices, methods of prayer, and the Wahhabi group's attitude towards other community members. The distinctive cultural framework of the Wahhabi group is evident in their followers, who wear robes, white skullcaps, long trousers that reach above the ankles, and beards. Additionally, in their religious practices, they do not recite the qunut prayer during the dawn prayer, do not recite zikir or pray together after obligatory prayers, do not recite the talqin for the deceased during funerals, etc (Sabirin, 2014, pp. 105–106).

In addition, as a self-claiming group based on the doctrine of Salafi-Wahhabi, Salafi-Wahhabi established itself as a pure Islamic carrier group and aimed to purify the practice of community Islam in Lombok. The purification agenda of the Wahhabi group is a discursive strategy related to the production of power and religious authority in Lombok. Critics of the Wahhabi group's religious culture of Nahdlatul Wathan and Nahdlatul Ulama can be understood as Wahhabi's strategy in constructing its group as the most authoritative, representing pure Islam (Said, 2019b, p. 182).

Before the Wahhabi movement appeared in East Lombok, Nahdlatul Wathan and Nahdlatul Ulama were representatives of orthodox Islam, often confronting "Islam Wetu Telu," a religious typology embraced by a small part of the Lombok community in Bayan Village. The emergence of Wahhabism changed the structure of the orthodox category. Wahhabi considers both rival organizations as syncretic Islam and still contaminated by local traditions. Thus, Wahhabi presents as a new force representing an Islamic orthodoxy in East Lombok (Said,

2019b, p. 184). The issue of heresy is also one of the hallmarks of the Wahhabi group that distinguishes it from other Islamists. The term heresy, commonly understood by the Wahhabi group, is a new religious innovation that is contrary to Islamic principles (Saparudin & Emawati, 2023, p. 235). The issue of heresy is also one of the hallmarks of the Wahhabi group that distinguishes it from other Islamists. The term heresy, commonly understood by the Wahhabi group, is a new religious innovation that is contrary to Islamic principles (Saparudin and Emawati 2023, 235). Religious practices rated as heretics by Salafi-Wahhabi groups, such as *tahlilan*, grave pilgrimage, *talqin mayit*, *hiziban* in the religious tradition of Nahdlatul Wathan, the celebration of the mawlid of Prophet Muhammad, and others.

### **Nahdlatul Wathan: Defense of Power and Movement Existence from Wahhabi Groups**

Given Nahdlatul Wathan's political opportunities, we will discuss some specific changes that directly increased Nahdlatul Wathan's chances of organizing and mobilizing, namely those that occurred during the period from the 1950 general election to the New Order era and subsequent reforms. The first significant change in the structure of political opportunity for the organization Nahdlatul Wathan was marked by the joining of the organization's founder, TGKH Zainuddin, into the Masyumi Party as chairman of the Masyumi Advisory Board in 1952, exactly one year before the formation of Nahdlatul Wathan. The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) policy, which ultimately led to the decision to leave Masyumi and join other political movements, confirmed TGKH Zainuddin's loyalty to Masyumi by establishing a new local organization as a representation and political base. Nahdlatul Wathan was elected to the Constituent Assembly of Indonesia, the first election result representing Mashumi in 1955–1959 (Parhanudin, 2012, p. 125). However, after the dissolution of Masyumi in 1960 by President Soekarno because he was considered involved in the revolutionary government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI), the head of Nahdlatul Wathan, TGKH Zainuddin, turned to the

Indonesian Muslim Party (Parmusi) (Hamdi, 2011a, p. 134).

The second change in the structure of political opportunities occurred during the New Order era. During the New Order, Nahdlatul Wathan supported Parmusi and diverted himself by joining the Joint Secretariat of the Working Group Party (Golkar Sekber). At least two factors support Nahdlatul Wathan's backing of the Golkar Party. First, Golkar is a New Order party that is considered to have played a role in the crackdown on the communist movement in Indonesia. Second, Golkar was considered to accommodate the political aspirations of Nahdlatul Wathan at the time (Noor et al., 2004, pp. 247–248). Other considerations initiated by TGKH Zainuddin are seen in the utilization of political opportunities, especially in the state of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), which causes Nahdlatul Wathan to become intact in various relations along national political lines, as well as the empowerment of local politics that is used as a form of political maturity and the management of civil society in Lombok. In addition, the cadre of Nahdlatul Wathan, the grandson of TGKH Zainuddin, who was elected Governor of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), was used as evidence of the bargaining value of Nahdlatul Wathan in local and national political regulation (Parhanudin, 2012, p. 125).

The relationship between Nahdlatul Wathan and the Golkar Party is only sometimes harmonious. The friction between the political elite creates a strained relationship between the two parties. Nahdlatul Wathan is often disappointed by Golkar officials, but Nahdlatul Wathan does not expressly declare itself out of the Golkar Party. This attitude drew criticism from various parties and led to internal conflict within Nahdlatul Wathan, as they faced a diplomatic choice: to remain supportive of Golkar or exit the party, with the consequence that some of the leaders occupying board positions would likely face a change in position.

The third change in the structure of political opportunity occurred during the Reformation. In the Reformation era, Nahdlatul Wathan was highly considered by national political parties. However, Nahdlatul Wathan's political

affiliation is experiencing a division due to internal conflicts. Following the death of TGKH Zainuddin in 1997 and the Mukhtar in 1998, the internal Nahdlatul Wathan experienced a split into two camps: Nahdlatul Wathan Anjani and Nahdlatul Wathan Pancor. The Nahdlatul Wathan conflict in 1998 was an accumulation of previous conflicts that occurred in 1977, through a long history of a long series of elites involving the Nahdlatul Wathan elites in the fight for the power and dominance of capital sources, both internally and externally of the organization (Hamdi, 2011b, p. 4). Conflict with Nahdlatul Wathan's organization occurred during the transition period. This transitional period influences societal social-political instability, including instability among Nahdlatul Wathan members. TGKH Zainuddin's death left many questions regarding who would replace him as the leader of Nahdlatul Wathan. At the same time, TGKH Zainuddin had no son and only two daughters, Rauhun (R1) and Raihanun (R2), born to different mothers.

Nahdlatul Wathan conflict is inevitable and experienced its peak at the 10th Mukhtar in Central Lombok Praya in 1998 (Supriyanto et al., 2023). Praya Mukhtar is marked by competition and the involvement of the betting elites from both Nahdlatul Wathan camps. Before the Mukhtar, the elites held mass mobilization and political maneuvers to win their candidates. Both camps of Nahdlatul Wathan have different political party affiliations; consequently, when political momentum occurs, friction between the inevitable followers of Nahdlatul Wathan (Hamdi, 2011a, p. 134).

In the 1999 general election, Nahdlatul Wathan Pancor joined the People's Daulat Party (PDR), and Nahdlatul Wathan Anjani joined Golkar. Nahdlatul Wathan Pancor chose to cooperate with the People's Daulat Party (PDR) because the party promised to fill strategic positions in the legislature that would launch the movement of this organization in politics. Meanwhile, Nahdlatul Wathan Anjani chose to stay with Golkar because it is considered that there is an emotional bond between the Great

Manager of Nahdlatul Wathan Anjani and Golkar. Additionally, his managers also consider the psychological state of most lower-middle-class individuals, who often lack an understanding of the political landscape. They are used to elect the Golkar Party as the party of choice in the general election (Saparudin, 2022b).

In the 2004 general election, both Nahdlatul Wathan camps shifted their political direction, with Nahdlatul Wathan Pancor affiliating with the Moon and Crescent Party (PBB) and Nahdlatul Wathan Anjani affiliating with the Reform Star Party (PBR). The PBB-affiliated Pancor fortress is because the PBB is a derivative of the Masyumi Party, which has long been tied to and cooperated with Nahdlatul Wathan at the beginning of independence. Additionally, PBB offered Master Teacher Bajang Zainul Majdi, who served as Chairman of Great Manager Nahdlatul Wathan Pancor, the opportunity to become a member of the House of Representatives. Additionally, the Moon and Crescent Party (PBB) has a strong appeal and was named the sixth-largest party nationally in the 1999 general election (Muttaqin, 2021). The 2004 general election, which saw several significant positions filled by Nahdlatul Wathan Pancor members, enabled the organization to continue building relations and become affiliated with the United Nations in the 2009 general public bid. Then, in the 2008 regional head election in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), the relations between Pancor and PBB continued. The Pancor and the United Nations elite called on Master Teacher Bajang Zainul Majdi to become the future governor of the United Nations. In addition, the Pancor camp also carries prospective regents and deputies, namely Sukiman Azmy and Syamsul Lutfi. The Governor and Regent candidates, who are supported by the Moon and Crescent Party (PBB) and Pancor strongholds, are backed by only two political parties: the United Nations and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). However, the victory of the Pancor and PBB in the election of the regional heads is inevitable. Thus, the positions of governor and regent were successfully obtained, and they could defeat the

Anjani stronghold, supported by major parties such as the Golkar Party, the Indonesian Democracy Party of Struggle (PDIP), the Reformed Star Party (PBR), and the Patriot Party (Saparudin, 2017). In the 2009 general election, Pancor's stronghold, which remains affiliated with PBB, saw a decrease in votes and did not reach 2.5% of the national vote. Thus, the Pancor camp changed course and became unaffiliated with PBB. Then, in the 2014 general election, the Pancor camp was affiliated with the Democratic Party because the Democratic Party was in power at the time.

Anjani's stronghold, affiliated with the Reform Star Party in the 2004 general election, was due to Anjani's desire to become the party's supreme leader. Because, during affiliation with the Golkar party, Anjani's stronghold cadres are only placed in unstrategic positions. In the 2004 general election, the PBR secured seven seats for East Lombok Regency, which were predominantly held by Anjani strongholds, and five for West Nusa Tenggara Province, with Anjani strongholds filling four of these seats. The success led Anjani to remain affiliated with the PBR in the 2009 general election. However, unlike the 2004 general elections, the Anjani and PBR camps experienced a decrease in voting, resulting in a reduction of the number of legislative members from the PBR to 22. Then, in 2011, the PBR declared itself to join the Gerindra Party. At the time, Anjani's cadres drafted measures to gain a strategic position in the management of the Gerindra Party in NTB. However, Gerindra managers must allow them to assume strategic positions. The friction between Anjani and the Gerindra Party led to conflict and dualism in management, which affected the 2014 general election process. Thus, Anjani cadres are partially affiliated with the Hanura Party, and others are affiliated with the Nation Awakening Party (PKB) (Muttaqin, 2021). In the 2019 general election, the two camps of Nahdlatul Wathan collaborated to support the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin ticket in the 2019 Presidential Election. Both camps call on the public to unite to win Jokowi (hawari, 2018).

The political involvement of Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) is not solely for the sake of power

or representation, but also as an ideological mission to preserve local religious traditions from the influence of transnational groups such as Wahhabism (Muttaqin, 2021). NW's political movement is a cultural and religious strategy aimed at maintaining the existence of traditional Islam amid the rise of Islamic puritanism through modern da'wah channels and post-reform political power (Musawar & Suhirman, 2021).

Thus, the role of NW must be understood not only as a pragmatic actor but also as an ideological bulwark protecting local Islamic heritage from transnational Islamisation currents (Al Haddar, 2023). From the outset, NW has acted as a protector of the people of NTB from Wahhabi ideology, which rejects local religious practices such as grave visits, Maulid, and tahlilan (Mutawali, 2016). The founder of NW, TGKH Zainuddin Abdul Madjid, despite his involvement in the Masyumi Party, remained consistent with the moderate and traditional Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah line (Naamy, 2023).

The ideological contest between NW and Wahhabi intensified during the reform era, when political freedom opened space for transnational groups to expand their influence through electoral channels (Faizah, 2012). In this context, NW's participation in elections and its affiliation with political parties became a strategy to maintain its hegemony in the social, cultural, and religious spheres of NTB, which were increasingly threatened by transnational ideologies (Raihanun, 2022).

The victory of NW figures, such as TGB Zainul Majdi, reflects the success in maintaining a moderate Islamic identity rooted in local culture while resisting the rise of Wahhabi puritanism. The strategic positions of NW cadres in the legislative and executive branches serve as a protective space for traditional values and a counterbalance to the religious narratives of conservative groups (Telle, 2014).

Thus, NW's political involvement is a form of ongoing theological and cultural resistance to the Wahhabi movement. Wahhabi rejection of local practices not only threatens the Islamic identity of NTB but also triggers social tensions and political fragmentation, especially when

conservative parties such as PKS reinforce these challenges (Saparudin, 2017). NW's role in local politics is not merely about power but an ideological struggle to preserve the continuity of local Islamic traditions amid the complexities of transnational challenges.

### **Deculturalization of Islam in Nahdlatul Wathan's Da'wah**

One of Nahdlatul Wathan's cultural framing processes utilizes the phenomenon of influential local people, known as Tuan Guru, in the local political arena of the NTB region. During the New Order era, Tuan Guru was only said to play the role of a development promoter, acting as an actor delivering government programs. However, Tuan Guru's role grew over time due to the Soeharto regime's invitation to mobilize the masses in the 1971 general election. This role is regarded as crucial because it is linked to Tuan Guru's extermination of communists in East Lombok in 1965–1966 (Riswanda, 2022, p. 60).

Tuan Guru's high social status justifies the similarity between the roles of Kiai and the king in Java. This role is similar to the Tuan Guru position in Lombok. The community positions Tuan Guru as a minor king with high authority and power within specific social structures. People are more inclined to listen to and respect Tuan Guru than they are to the government. Thus, almost all Tuan Gurus have a mass of supporters known to be fanatical and loyal to their figures (Fahrurrozi, 2018; Suprpto, 2015).

Referring to Umi Syarqawi's view, "The role of Tuan Guru in Sasak society is deeply rooted in a deep spiritual connection with the people. Not only in religious aspects, but Tuan Guru are also expected to guide daily life, whether socially, politically, or economically. When they go out into the community, they bring a spiritual closeness that forms a strong bond between the leader and his followers. This allows them to direct the community more effectively, including in supporting organizational or government policies. They are respected and trusted to provide guidance, not only in religious matters, but also in living a life by Islamic teachings." (U. Syarqawi, personal communication, February 2, 2025).

In this regard, the role of Tuan Guru in society has undergone significant shifts. Currently, Tuan Guru serves as a religious and spiritual guide, as well as a member of the teaching staff, in educational institutions, and is actively involved in practical politics. Thus, when Tuan Guru runs for legislative or executive positions, it is easy for them to gain support from the community. Tuan Guru is regarded as having spiritual power, so the community trusts him more than other political figures. The community also believes that by voting for Tuan Guru, they will be rewarded generously and be able to enter heaven.

Furthermore, since the organization's inception, Nahdlatul Wathan has incorporated various local stories, such as the story of Dewi Anjani, into its preaching materials. The syncretism between cultural beliefs and religious teachings is used as symbols of locality, combined with the mission of spreading Islam carried out by Nahdlatul Wathan. Thus, this form of cultural mobilization can increase empathy and public interest in the organization. The concept of syncretism is closely related to the Sufi tradition. Sufism is carried out by developing a duality between esotericism and exotericism as a means of operationalizing this distinction within the social environment. The actualization of Sufistic thought carried out by TGKH Zainuddin is used as a communication style or da'wah of Nahdlatul Wathan, which combines the symbiosis of Sharia and the wisdom of the Sasak people (Muttaqin, 2021, p. 468).

In connection with the Sufi tradition, TGKH Zainuddin established Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan in 1967, which continues to exist and develop in the Lombok Islands, particularly in East Lombok. Tarekat Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan was founded on the reality of the Sasak community, which is closely related to the many phenomena of tarekat that Sharia does not govern and has strict regulations, making it difficult to practice. Additionally, the inner experience of TGKH Zainuddin is also a factor that contributed to the formation of Tarekat Hizib (Azis et al., 2024; Rasyad et al., 2023).



## Conclusion

This study reveals that the ideological competition between the Salafi-Wahhabi and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) groups in Lombok is a manifestation of a complex power struggle in the religious, social, and political spheres. Using Wiktorowicz's theory of Islamic activism, it was found that the three dimensions—political opportunities, mobilisation structures, and culture and framing—play a major role in strengthening the position and narrative of each group. Political reforms have opened up new spaces that Salafi-Wahhabi have exploited to mainstream their ideology through transnational support, modern education, and digital media. Meanwhile, NW remains strong through traditional pesantren networks, local political alliances, and the symbolic power of Tuan Guru, which is deeply rooted in Lombok's cultural identity. This competition not only reflects theological differences but also constitutes a contest over social-political legitimacy and religious authority at the local level.

Based on these findings, this study recommends the need to strengthen community-based approaches and inter-sectarian dialogue to prevent conflict escalation and promote social harmony amid diverse religious interpretations. Local governments and civil society actors should formulate inclusive policies that accommodate local Islamic pluralism and limit the influence of transnational ideologies that tend to be exclusive and puritanical. Academically, this study contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of local political Islam in the post-Reform era and opens up space for further research on the impact of transnational religious investment, the role of Tuan Guru in the political education of the younger generation, and conflict resolution strategies based on local values. Thus, the findings of this research can serve as a foundation for the development of social-religious studies and the formulation of policies that are more contextual and responsive to the dynamics of local Islam in Indonesia.

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