

The Manhaj Tarjih of Muhammadiyah: A Methodological Systematic Review of Islamic Legal Reasoning

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Abstract

This article systematically reviews the methodological structure of Manhaj Tarjih, the system used by Muhammadiyah to formulate Islamic legal and religious judgments. Drawing on sixteen analytical sources published no later than 2020, including official decisions, jurisprudential books, journal articles, and applied fiqh documents, the review examines how tarjih developed from the selection of stronger opinions into a comprehensive form of collective *ijtihad*. The synthesis identifies six connected layers: a methodological outlook characterized by *tajdid*, openness, tolerance, non-affiliation to a single legal school, and collective deliberation; normative reliance on the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah; spiral integration of *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* approaches; the use of semantic, causal, and public-interest methods; operational techniques such as *qiyas*, *maslahah mursalah*, *'urf*, reconciliation, preference, abrogation, and suspension of judgment; and institutional procedures that transform research and expert consultation into rulings, fatwas, and practical guidance. The findings show that Manhaj Tarjih is neither an anti-madhab textualism nor an unrestricted contextualism. It is a layered legal-reasoning system that seeks to preserve scriptural authority while incorporating scientific knowledge, social reality, *maqasid al-shari'ah*, and ethical conscience. Applied works on the Islamic calendar, disaster management, water governance, and traffic ethics demonstrate its capacity to move beyond ritual questions toward complex public problems. However, the literature also reveals terminological overlap between approach, method, and technique; uneven operationalization of the *irfani* dimension; limited publication of deliberative evidence; and a gap between formal methodology and reproducible case analysis. The review contributes an integrative architecture for understanding Manhaj Tarjih as epistemic governance for collective Islamic legal reasoning.

Keywords: Manhaj Tarjih; Muhammadiyah; Islamic legal reasoning; *ijtihad*; *bayani*; *burhani*; *irfani*; *maqasid al-shariah*

Manhaj Tarjih Muhammadiyah: Sebuah Tinjauan Sistematis Metodologis tentang Penalaran Hukum Islam

Abstrak

Artikel ini secara sistematis mengkaji struktur metodologis **Manhaj Tarjih**, yaitu sistem yang digunakan Muhammadiyah dalam merumuskan putusan hukum dan pandangan keagamaan Islam. Dengan bersandar pada enam belas sumber analitis yang diterbitkan paling lambat tahun 2020, yang meliputi keputusan resmi Muhammadiyah, buku-buku fikih, artikel jurnal, serta dokumen fikih terapan, penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana konsep tarjih berkembang dari sekadar memilih pendapat yang lebih kuat menjadi suatu sistem *ijtihad* kolektif yang komprehensif.

Hasil sintesis mengidentifikasi enam lapisan yang saling berkaitan, yaitu: (1) pandangan metodologis yang ditandai oleh semangat *tajdid*, keterbukaan, toleransi, tidak terikat pada satu mazhab tertentu, dan musyawarah kolektif; (2) landasan normatif yang bertumpu pada Al-Qur'an dan As-Sunnah al-Maqbulah; (3) integrasi spiral antara pendekatan *bayani*, *burhani*, dan *irfani*; (4) penggunaan metode semantik, kausal, dan kemaslahatan publik; (5) teknik operasional seperti *qiyas*, *maslahah mursalah*, *'urf*, *al-jam'u wa al-taufiq* (rekonsiliasi), *tarjih* (preferensi),

nasakh, dan *tawaqquf* (penangguhan putusan); serta (6) prosedur kelembagaan yang mentransformasikan penelitian dan konsultasi dengan para ahli menjadi keputusan tarjih, fatwa, dan panduan praktis.

Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa **Manhaj Tarjih** bukanlah tekstualisme anti-mazhab maupun kontekstualisme yang tanpa batas. Sebaliknya, Manhaj Tarjih merupakan sistem penalaran hukum yang berlapis, yang berupaya menjaga otoritas nash sekaligus mengintegrasikan pengetahuan ilmiah, realitas sosial, *maqashid al-syari'ah*, dan pertimbangan etis. Berbagai kajian terapan mengenai kalender Islam, fikih kebencanaan, tata kelola air, dan etika berlalu lintas menunjukkan kemampuannya untuk melampaui persoalan ibadah ritual menuju penyelesaian masalah-masalah publik yang kompleks.

Namun demikian, literatur juga memperlihatkan sejumlah persoalan yang masih perlu disempurnakan, antara lain tumpang tindih terminologi antara pendekatan, metode, dan teknik; belum meratanya operasionalisasi dimensi *irfani*; terbatasnya publikasi mengenai proses musyawarah yang melandasi pengambilan keputusan; serta adanya kesenjangan antara metodologi formal dan analisis kasus yang dapat direplikasi. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, artikel ini menawarkan suatu arsitektur integratif untuk memahami **Manhaj Tarjih** sebagai suatu sistem tata kelola epistemik (*epistemic governance*) bagi penalaran hukum Islam secara kolektif.

Kata-kata Kunci: Manhaj Tarjih; Muhammadiyah; penalaran hukum Islam; *ijtihad*; *bayani*; *burhani*; *irfani*; *maqashid al-syari'ah*.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic legal reasoning in modern Muslim organizations is shaped not only by classical jurisprudential doctrines but also by institutional procedures for selecting evidence, consulting expertise, and converting interpretation into publicly authoritative guidance. Muhammadiyah provides an important example because its Majelis Tarjih institutionalized religious deliberation within a mass organization. The council was proposed at the sixteenth Muhammadiyah congress in Pekalongan in 1927 and developed from earlier practices of interpreting religious sources for questions such as the direction of prayer, calculation of lunar months, Eid prayer in open fields, zakat administration, and vernacular preaching. Its establishment therefore formalized an existing culture of reformist *ijtihad* rather than creating legal reasoning from nothing.

The word *tarjih* originally belongs to *usul al-fiqh* and denotes the preference of one proof or opinion over another when competing arguments cannot all be applied. In early Muhammadiyah usage, it similarly referred to comparing juristic opinions and selecting the position supported by the strongest evidence. As the range of questions expanded, however, the term acquired a broader institutional meaning. *Tarjih* came to include intellectual activity directed toward formulating Islamic responses to problems that had no ready-made answer in earlier legal literature. In this broader sense, *tarjih* became almost synonymous with *ijtihad* conducted within Muhammadiyah's collective scholarly structure (Anwar, 2018).

This expansion created a methodological challenge. Returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah could not be reduced to extracting one verse or hadith for each problem. Contemporary issues involve complex causal relations, empirical knowledge, public institutions, and consequences that are not fully visible through linguistic analysis alone. The official Manhaj Tarjih therefore describes religious understanding as comprehensive and

integral. It identifies the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah as normative sources while recognizing *ijtihad* as a method for formulating judgments on probable texts and unprecedented matters (Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam PP Muhammadiyah, 2012).

Academic studies have approached the methodology from different directions. Djamil (1995) examined Majelis Tarjih's methods of *ijtihad* in relation to *maqasid* and contemporary legal questions. Abdurrahman (2002) systematized the principles and applications of Muhammadiyah's *tarjih* tradition. Abbas (2012) analyzed the integration of *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* epistemologies, while Anwar (2018) reconstructed the overall architecture of perspectives, sources, approaches, and procedures. Other studies focus on particular components: Qur'anic interpretation (Aulia, 2014), the authority of weak *hadith* (Rahmanto, 2014), astronomical reasoning in lunar-calendar decisions (Amri, 2016; Anwar, 2016), public-interest reasoning in traffic ethics (Fariadi, 2019), and the criteria of acceptable Sunnah (Rosyadi, 2020).

Despite this literature, the methodology is often described through lists whose internal relationships remain unclear. One document may distinguish sources, methods, approaches, and techniques, while later explanations use *bayani* both as an epistemic approach and as a semantic legal method. The terms *burhani* and *ta'lili* may overlap around rational-causal analysis, whereas *istislahi*, *maqasid*, and *maslahah* are sometimes presented at different levels without an explicit hierarchy. *Irfani* is formally included but is less easily translated into reproducible legal operations. These ambiguities do not necessarily invalidate the method, but they complicate teaching, comparison, and case-based evaluation.

A further problem concerns common representations of Muhammadiyah as an organization that rejects legal schools and follows texts directly. The available sources indicate a more nuanced position. Muhammadiyah does not bind itself institutionally to one *madhhab*, but it does not disregard the accumulated methods and arguments of classical jurists. *Ittiba'*, *qiyas*, *maslahah*, *'urf*, and other *usul al-fiqh* resources remain available after critical examination. The relevant distinction is therefore between non-affiliation and anti-tradition: the former preserves methodological independence, whereas the latter would imply the abandonment of juristic learning, which is not supported by Manhaj Tarjih (Abdurrahman, 2002; Anwar, 2018).

This article conducts a methodological systematic review of literature published no later than December 31, 2020. It asks three questions. First, how did the meaning and institutional function of *tarjih* develop within Muhammadiyah? Second, what sources, epistemic approaches, legal methods, techniques, and deliberative procedures constitute Manhaj Tarjih? Third, what methodological tensions and research needs emerge from its applications? The contribution of the review is an integrative architecture that distinguishes each layer and explains how they interact in collective Islamic legal reasoning

METHOD

The study employed a qualitative methodological systematic review. This design was appropriate because the object of analysis was not the aggregate effect of an intervention but the architecture of a reasoning system distributed across official decisions,

jurisprudential books, conceptual articles, and applied legal studies. The review followed the stages of planning, source identification, relevance screening, extraction, thematic coding, and synthesis recommended for systematic reviews in the social sciences (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019). Thematic synthesis was used to move from descriptions of individual methodological components to a higher-order model (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The temporal boundary included publications issued no later than December 31, 2020. Searches and cross-checks used combinations of the terms Manhaj Tarjih, Majelis Tarjih, Muhammadiyah ijtiḥad, metode ijtiḥad, Sunnah al-Maqbulah, bayani, burhani, irfani, ta'lili, istislahi, maqasid, maslahah, hisab, Fikih Kebencanaan, and Islamic legal reasoning. Sources were identified through scholarly databases, Indonesian journal platforms, library catalogues, official Muhammadiyah and Majelis Tarjih channels, and backward citation searching.

A source was included when it was bibliographically traceable, substantively available, published within the temporal boundary, and directly contributed to at least one review question. The final analytical corpus comprised sixteen sources: eight journal articles, two jurisprudential books, and six official or institutionally produced documents and applied works. Methodological references on systematic review and thematic analysis were not counted as part of the Manhaj Tarjih corpus. Official documents were treated as primary evidence of Muhammadiyah's formal methodological position; they were not assumed to demonstrate consistent implementation in every fatwa or organizational setting.

The extraction matrix recorded publication type, historical function, definition of tarjih, methodological outlook, normative sources, position on madhhab, epistemic approach, legal method, technical procedure, treatment of ḥadith, use of maqasid and empirical knowledge, collective decision process, application field, and stated limitation. Initial codes included source authority, non-affiliation, ittiba', textual semantics, causal reasoning, public interest, scientific evidence, ethical intuition, collective ijtiḥad, contradiction management, hierarchy of norms, and methodological renewal. Codes were consolidated into six connected layers. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify recurrent structures while retaining contradictions rather than forcing complete uniformity (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019).

The review did not fabricate record counts for database identification, duplicate removal, or exclusion. PRISMA 2009 informed the commitment to transparent selection, but a numerical flow diagram was not produced because complete record-level search logs were unavailable (Moher et al., 2009). The reported corpus count refers only to the sources actually analyzed and cited in the synthesis.

Table 1. Review protocol and analytical decisions

Component	Decision
Review design	Qualitative methodological systematic review with thematic synthesis
Temporal boundary	Sources published no later than December 31, 2020
Languages	English and Indonesian
Analytical corpus	16 sources: 8 journal articles, 2 books, and 6 official or institutionally produced works
Primary object	The architecture and operation of Muhammadiyah's Manhaj Tarjih
Analytical layers	Outlook, sources, epistemic approaches, legal methods, techniques, and collective procedure
Evidence distinction	Formal institutional methodology separated from academic interpretation and demonstrated application
Reporting caution	No fabricated PRISMA search totals or claim of exhaustive historical coverage

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the Analytical Corpus

The corpus spans twenty-five years, from Djamil's 1995 analysis of Majelis Tarjih ijtihad to Rosyadi's 2020 examination of Sunnah and hadith. The distribution reflects three methodological moments. The first is the codification of classical *usul al-fiqh* resources and early tarjih practice. The second is the expansion of the method around the 2000 national deliberations, when comprehensive interpretation and *bayani-burhani-irfani* integration became prominent. The third is application to complex public questions, including disaster governance, water, traffic, and global calendrical coordination.

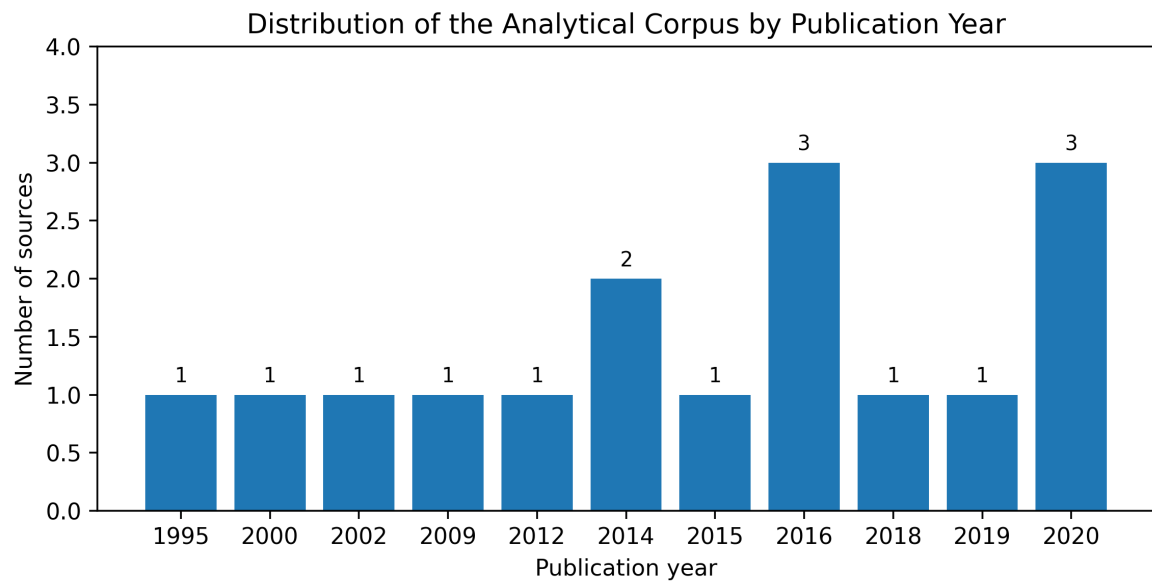


Figure 1. Distribution of the 16 analytical sources by publication year

Table 2. Core corpus and methodological contribution

Source	Type	Primary focus	Contribution to synthesis
Djamil (1995)	Book	Ijtihad methods and maqasid	Early systematic account of legal reasoning in Majelis Tarjih
MTPPI PP Muhammadiyah (2000/2012)	Official decision	Manhaj Tarjih and Islamic thought	Formal sources, methods, approaches, techniques, and epistemic assumptions
Abdurrahman (2002)	Book	Methodology and application	Sixteen principles, juristic comparison, and applied tarjih
PP Muhammadiyah (2009)	Official compilation	Himpunan Putusan Tarjih	Authoritative formulations on religion, worship, sources, and hadith criteria
Abbas (2012)	Journal article	Bayani-burhani-irfani integration	Spiral and complementary epistemological relation

Source	Type	Primary focus	Contribution to synthesis
Aulia (2014)	Journal article	Qur'anic interpretation	Textual and contextual responsibilities of Muhammadiyah tafsir
Rahmanto (2014)	Journal article	Weak hadith and epistemology	Critique of apologetic finality and hadith authority
MTT PP Muhammadiyah (2015)	Applied official work	Disaster jurisprudence	Collective, scientific, and maqasid-based public guidance
Amri (2016)	Journal article	Wujud al-hilal	Causal and historical reinterpretation supported by astronomy
Anwar (2016)	Journal article	Global Hijri calendar	Norm hierarchy and transnational calendrical reasoning
MTT PP Muhammadiyah (2016)	Applied official work	Water jurisprudence	Ecological, scientific, and public-interest extension of fiqh
Anwar (2018)	Journal article	Overall architecture	Outlook, sources, approaches, and technical procedures
Fariadi (2019)	Journal article	Traffic jurisprudence	Maqasid, state law, spirituality, and public safety
Fanani (2020)	Institutional essay	Bayani-burhani-irfani	Reception, internal debate, and integrative use since 2000
Rosyadi (2020)	Journal article	Sunnah as source	Criteria for acceptable hadith and authoritative Sunnah

Source	Type	Primary focus	Contribution to synthesis
MTT PP Muhammadiyah (2020)	Official discourse	Moderation and epistemic disruption	Contemporary rationale for balancing textual, rational, and spiritual approaches

From Preference Among Opinions to Collective Ijtihad

The first thematic finding is a historical expansion in the meaning of tarjih. In its narrow *usul al-fiqh* sense, tarjih operates after evidence or opinions appear to conflict and seeks the stronger argument. Early Muhammadiyah deliberations adopted this function because organizational growth brought together scholars with different legal backgrounds. Selecting positions supported by stronger evidence helped prevent internal disagreement from becoming fragmentation.

The later institution did more than choose among inherited opinions. New questions in medicine, finance, astronomy, gender, disaster management, environmental governance, and public ethics could not always be addressed through comparison alone. Anwar (2018) therefore describes tarjih as nearly equivalent to *ijtihad*: any disciplined intellectual activity that formulates Islamic guidance for social and humanitarian problems. The institutional term survived because it carried organizational history, but its methodological content expanded.

This expansion also changed the type of expertise required. A narrow preference exercise could be conducted mainly through mastery of transmitted legal arguments. Complex contemporary *ijtihad* requires jurists to work with physicians, astronomers, economists, environmental scientists, sociologists, and other specialists. Manhaj Tarjih defines Majelis Tarjih as an organizational institution of collective *ijtihad* whose members possess *usuli* and substantive scientific competence (Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam PP Muhammadiyah, 2012). The legal judgment is consequently produced through epistemic cooperation rather than the authority of an isolated *mujtahid*.

Collective *ijtihad* does not remove disagreement. It organizes disagreement through research papers, expert contributions, discussion, and deliberative decision. This arrangement gives Muhammadiyah rulings an institutional authority that differs from the personal fatwa of an individual scholar. It also creates a responsibility to disclose how evidence and expert knowledge were weighed, because organizational authority should rest on a traceable reasoning process rather than on the name of the institution alone.

Normative Sources and Methodological Independence

The second theme concerns sources. The formal position identifies the Qur'an and

Sunnah al-Maqbulah as the normative sources of Islamic teaching. Ijtihad is not classified as an additional source; it is a method for understanding probable texts and formulating judgments where explicit guidance is absent. This distinction preserves the priority of revelation while acknowledging that the movement from text to judgment is a human and historically situated activity (Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam PP Muhammadiyah, 2012).

Sunnah al-Maqbulah indicates that not every report attributed to the Prophet automatically carries legal authority. Hadith must undergo sanad and matn evaluation and meet criteria of acceptability. The official manhaj discusses marfu', mawquf, mursal, weak reports supported by multiple chains, narrator criticism, and indications that connect reports to the Prophet. Rosyadi (2020) emphasizes that the return to Sunnah therefore requires methodological verification rather than uncritical quotation.

Muhammadiyah's non-affiliation to one madhhab follows from the same source structure. The organization considers classical schools important intellectual resources but does not treat adherence to a single school as binding. Abdurrahman (2002) presents ittiba' - following an opinion while knowing its evidence and argument - as the minimum responsible position, whereas taqlid without knowledge of reasons is discouraged. Talfik may be accepted when the combined position has itself passed through critical tarjih.

Non-affiliation should not be confused with methodological isolation. The manhaj employs qiyas, maslahah mursalah, 'urf, linguistic rules, maqasid, reconciliation of evidence, and other tools developed within the classical juristic tradition. Muhammadiyah's independence lies in the freedom to evaluate these resources and their results, not in pretending that interpretation can occur without inherited scholarly concepts. The system is better described as post-madhhab critical appropriation than as anti-madhhab literalism.

The Layered Architecture of Manhaj Tarjih

The synthesis indicates that Manhaj Tarjih is best understood as a layered system. Its first layer is a methodological outlook or wawasan. This includes tajdid, tolerance, openness, methodological flexibility, responsibility to social change, and the refusal to bind the organization to one legal school. These commitments shape the attitude with which legal problems and inherited arguments are approached.

The second layer is normative source authority: the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah. The official text requires a comprehensive and integral understanding of these sources. This requirement rejects atomistic proof-texting in which one isolated report is treated as sufficient without comparison with the Qur'an, parallel traditions, general principles, and the broader objective of the law.

The third layer consists of epistemic approaches. Bayani begins from revealed texts and the linguistic-discursive sciences developed around them. Burhani employs

rational demonstration, empirical data, and the findings of the natural and social sciences. Irfani invokes cultivated moral-spiritual awareness, conscience, and experiential depth. Abbas (2012) and Fanani (2020) argue that the three should not be arranged as mutually exclusive alternatives. Their intended relation is complementary and spiral, although the weight of each approach may differ according to the problem.

The fourth layer contains legal methods. The formal 2000 formulation names bayani or semantic interpretation, ta'lili or causal-analogical reasoning, and istislahi or public-interest reasoning. Here bayani has a narrower technical meaning than the epistemic bayani approach. Ta'lili investigates the effective cause of a rule and supports analogy or reassessment when the relevant cause changes. Istislahi evaluates welfare, harm, and the objectives of the sharia where no explicit detailed text determines the outcome.

The fifth layer consists of operational techniques, including ijma', qiyas, maslahah mursalah, and 'urf. When texts appear to conflict, the manhaj lists reconciliation and harmonization, preference, abrogation, and suspension while further evidence is sought. The sixth layer is institutional procedure: preparing evidence, involving relevant expertise, collective deliberation, producing a ruling, fatwa, or guidance, and reopening the result when stronger evidence or changed circumstances require renewal.

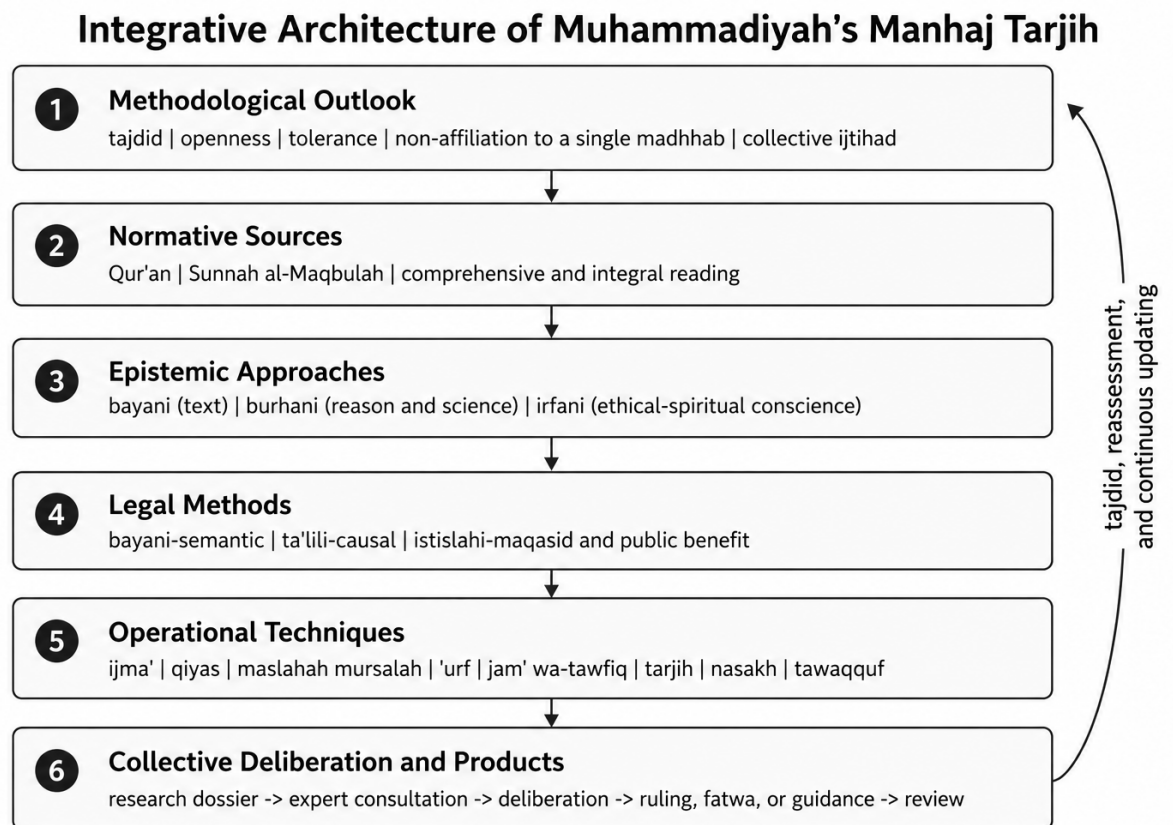


Figure 2. Integrative architecture of Muhammadiyah's Manhaj Tarjih

Table 3. Distinguishing the methodological layers

Layer	Core question	Main elements	Methodological function
Outlook / wawasan	With what intellectual attitude is the problem approached?	Tajdid, tolerance, openness, non-madhhab affiliation, collectivity	Defines orientation and limits dogmatic closure
Sources	What possesses primary normative authority?	Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah	Provides the religious reference point
Epistemic	Through which knowledge	Bayani, burhani, irfani	Connects text, science-reason,

Layer	Core question	Main elements	Methodological function
approaches	systems is the problem understood?		and ethical-spiritual awareness
Legal methods	How is a judgment inferred?	Semantic, causal-analogical, and public-interest reasoning	Translates sources and reality into legal argument
Techniques	Which operations resolve specific evidentiary problems?	Qiyas, ijma', maslahah, 'urf, reconciliation, preference, abrogation, suspension	Provides case-level analytical procedures
Institutional procedure	How does reasoning become an authoritative organizational product?	Research, expert consultation, deliberation, decision, publication, review	Creates collective authority and accountability

Textual Reasoning and Hadith Evaluation

Textual reasoning remains indispensable, especially in matters of worship whose forms are understood as ta'abbudi. The semantic method analyzes wording, general and specific expressions, commands and prohibitions, indications, context, and relationships among texts. Aulia (2014) notes that Muhammadiyah's commitment to the Qur'an requires interpretation capable of serving both internal religious guidance and wider civilizational responsibility. The text is therefore not bypassed in the name of context, but neither is interpretation reduced to translation.

Hadith evaluation is a particularly visible expression of textual discipline. The formal manhaj evaluates both transmission and content and does not assume that inclusion in a standard compilation settles every legal question. Rahmanto (2014) welcomes the critical impulse but warns that an apologetic epistemology can emerge when organizational rulings are treated as the final expression of authenticity. Scientific commitment requires the possibility of re-examining chains, texts, corroborating evidence, and prior judgments.

The category Sunnah al-Maqbulah is methodologically important because it shifts attention from labels attached to individual reports toward the result of analysis.

Rosyadi (2020) explains that acceptable Sunnah includes reports meeting valid criteria rather than every item in the hadith corpus. At the same time, the terminology needs consistent operational guidance. Differences between sahih, hasan, weak-but-corroborated, and reports supported by contextual indicators should be documented clearly in actual decisions.

Comprehensive reading also requires an integral evidence assumption. One hadith cannot be used independently when other hadiths, Qur'anic principles, or established knowledge materially alter its significance. The rule protects the methodology from fragmented textualism. Its practical strength depends, however, on whether fatwa documents show the complete evidence set and explain why certain reports or interpretations were prioritized.

Causal, Scientific, and Public-Interest Reasoning

Ta'lili and istislahi reasoning enable the manhaj to address questions beyond direct textual statements. Ta'lili analysis investigates the cause or rationale connecting a precedent with a new case. This permits qiyas, but it can also support contextual reinterpretation when the historical cause underlying an instruction no longer applies in the same way. Djamil (1995) shows that maqasid and degrees of human need are central to Majelis Tarjih's engagement with modern legal problems.

The use of astronomical calculation illustrates the relationship between text and science. Amri (2016) argues that commands to observe the crescent were associated with historical conditions and that Qur'anic indications concerning calculation support astronomical determination. Anwar (2016) extends calendrical reasoning through a hierarchy of norms, distinguishing foundational values, general principles, and concrete rules. The example demonstrates that burhani knowledge does not replace revelation; it changes the understanding of facts, causes, and feasible means through which scriptural objectives are realized.

Applied institutional works broaden the same logic. Fikih Kebencanaan treats disaster not merely as divine punishment but as a multidimensional phenomenon requiring prevention, risk reduction, science, solidarity, and protection of life. Fikih Air links scriptural norms with ecological knowledge, public access, sanitation, sustainability, and institutional governance. Fariadi's (2019) traffic jurisprudence integrates maqasid, positive law, public safety, property protection, and spiritual responsibility. These examples show a transition from rule collection toward problem-oriented fiqh.

Public-interest reasoning also creates risks. Maslahah can become an undefined justification added after a preferred conclusion. A robust istislahi argument must identify the interest protected, the evidence of likely benefit or harm, the affected groups, competing values, and the relationship to higher legal objectives. The methodological literature strongly affirms maqasid, but applied studies vary in the transparency with which these analytical steps are demonstrated.

The Integration of Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani

The adoption of bayani, burhani, and irfani is one of the most distinctive features of the post-2000 formulation. Bayani safeguards the authority and disciplined interpretation of revelation. Burhani opens legal reasoning to logic, empirical evidence, and scientific explanation. Irfani introduces ethical-spiritual awareness and resists a legal rationality emptied of conscience. Abbas (2012) describes the desired relation as spiral-circular: each corrects the excesses and blind spots of the others.

The integration should not be interpreted as assigning equal weight mechanically. Questions of prescribed ritual naturally give greater weight to bayani evidence, while astronomy, public health, environmental governance, or economics require substantial burhani input. Irfani is not ordinarily an independent source of publicly binding legal propositions. Its more defensible role is regulative: cultivating humility, empathy, sincerity, and awareness of the human consequences of legal judgment.

The literature nevertheless reveals uncertainty concerning irfani. Intuition and spiritual experience are difficult to verify collectively, and their legal function is often described more rhetorically than procedurally. If irfani is used to determine concrete rules without public criteria, it may weaken reproducibility. If it is reduced to a moral ornament, it adds little to the legal analysis. The most coherent interpretation is to position it as an ethical control over the selection of problems, treatment of persons, evaluation of consequences, and character of deliberation.

The three approaches are consequently best understood as a division of epistemic labor. Bayani asks what the authoritative texts state and how their language functions. Burhani asks what is factually occurring, why it occurs, and what consequences different interventions produce. Irfani asks whether the reasoning process preserves compassion, humility, integrity, and awareness before God. A decision becomes methodologically stronger when these questions are connected rather than answered in isolation.

Institutional Procedure, Authority, and Revision

Manhaj Tarjih is not only a theory of legal interpretation; it is a system of institutional authority. Majelis Tarjih converts scholarly reasoning into organizational products through collective deliberation. Putusan are usually associated with formal national deliberative forums and possess stronger institutional status. Fatwas respond to questions and may remain open to refinement, while guidance documents translate principles into practical conduct. The exact hierarchy should be made explicit to readers because not all texts issued through Muhammadiyah channels have identical authority.

Collective procedure offers epistemic advantages. It makes multidisciplinary participation possible, reduces dependence on one scholar's limitations, and allows objections to be tested before adoption. It also fits Muhammadiyah's organizational character: religious guidance must serve a geographically extensive movement operating schools, hospitals, universities, social services, and humanitarian programs.

Legal reasoning must therefore be administratively usable as well as doctrinally defensible.

Institutional authority can nevertheless produce closure if members treat every ruling as permanently final. Tajdid requires the opposite possibility: a decision may be reassessed when evidence, scientific knowledge, social conditions, or the understanding of maqasid changes. The history of Manhaj Tarjih itself demonstrates this reflexivity, since its terminology and approaches have repeatedly been revised. Revision should not be viewed as inconsistency but as disciplined recognition of the difference between revelation and fallible human interpretation.

For revision to strengthen rather than weaken public trust, the organization needs transparent reasons. Readers should be able to identify the question, evidence set, expert findings, methodological layer used, minority or alternative arguments, normative conclusion, and grounds for future reconsideration. The literature describes a sophisticated framework, but published products do not always display the full deliberative chain in a standardized form.

Methodological Tensions Identified in the Literature

Five tensions recur across the corpus. The first is terminological overlap. Bayani names both a broad epistemic approach and a specific semantic legal method. Burhani may refer to an epistemology, scientific evidence, or rational reasoning, while ta'lili designates causal analysis. A clearer taxonomy is necessary so that students and researchers can determine which layer is being invoked.

The second tension concerns the relation between formal sources and supporting knowledge. The Qur'an and Sunnah are described as the sources of Islamic teaching, yet scientific findings, maqasid, juristic precedents, and social facts materially shape conclusions. The methodology should distinguish normative source, evidentiary information, interpretive principle, and legal technique without implying that empirical evidence competes with revelation at the same level.

The third tension is between non-madhab affiliation and the need for cumulative scholarship. Freedom from one school encourages reform, but weak engagement with the depth of madhab reasoning can produce selective reading or reinvention of established debates. Methodological independence requires stronger, not weaker, mastery of comparative jurisprudence.

The fourth tension concerns collective authority and transparency. Ijtihad jama'i is a major strength, but the public often sees only the final decision. Without access to research papers, expert data, and deliberative reasons, it is difficult to evaluate whether the declared manhaj was consistently applied. The fifth tension is between methodological breadth and operational reproducibility. The framework can accommodate almost every relevant consideration, but a method that includes many values without specifying decision rules may be invoked selectively.

Table 4. Methodological tensions and proposed strengthening

Tension	Risk	Proposed strengthening
Approach-method overlap	Conceptual confusion and inconsistent teaching	Standardize the hierarchy of outlook, source, approach, method, technique, and procedure
Text and empirical evidence	False opposition or hidden use of science	Label normative sources, factual evidence, and interpretive principles separately
Non-madhab identity	Selective appropriation or shallow comparison	Require documented comparative engagement with classical and contemporary jurisprudence
Irfani dimension	Unverifiable intuition or merely decorative ethics	Define irfani as an ethical-regulative control rather than an autonomous public proof
Collective authority	Institutional finalism and weak public scrutiny	Publish research dossiers, expert evidence, dissent, and grounds of revision
Broad flexibility	Post hoc justification through unspecified maslahah	Use explicit consequence, maqasid, proportionality, and affected-party analysis

Discussion

Manhaj Tarjih as a Multi-Layered Legal-Reasoning System

The central interpretive finding is that Manhaj Tarjih cannot be reduced to one method. It is a system that begins before the technical interpretation of evidence and continues after a provisional legal conclusion. Methodological outlook determines openness to inherited arguments and new knowledge. Sources establish normative authority. Epistemic approaches organize relationships among text, reason, science, and conscience. Legal methods and techniques generate case-level arguments. Collective procedure converts these arguments into organizational guidance and places them within a cycle of tajdid.

This systems interpretation resolves several apparent contradictions. Muhammadiyah can affirm that the Qur'an and Sunnah are the sole foundational sources while also using scientific evidence and public-interest reasoning, because the latter function as knowledge for understanding reality and applying normative objectives rather than as competing revelations. It can remain non-affiliated to one madhhab while employing classical juristic tools, because methodological independence is compatible with comparative appropriation. It can issue collective rulings while recognizing their revisability, because institutional authority attaches to disciplined procedure rather than infallibility.

The framework is therefore closer to epistemic governance than to a conventional list of *usul al-fiqh* devices. It governs who may participate, what evidence is relevant, how different kinds of knowledge interact, how disagreements are processed, what forms of decision are produced, and how those decisions may be renewed. This institutional dimension distinguishes Manhaj Tarjih from an individual scholar's theory of legal interpretation.

Textual Fidelity Without Textual Isolation

The review also challenges the binary between textualism and contextualism. Bayani reasoning is not equivalent to isolated literal reading; it includes semantics, intertextual comparison, hadith criticism, and the interpretation of general principles. Burhani reasoning does not authorize context to cancel revelation; it supplies knowledge of facts, causes, feasibility, and consequences. Istislahi reasoning evaluates whether a proposed rule protects or undermines the objectives and public goods recognized by the sharia.

The calendar example is instructive. The legal debate is not simply whether to obey a hadith or follow astronomy. It concerns the function of observation, the historical capacity of the community, Qur'anic recognition of calculation, the objective of temporal certainty, and the scientific reliability of available methods. A layered analysis can explain why a method that differs from the surface form of an earlier practice may claim continuity with its purpose.

The same logic applies to disasters, water, and traffic. Revelation supplies values concerning life, property, responsibility, justice, and avoidance of harm. Science explains risk, causation, infrastructure, and likely outcomes. Public law and institutions determine feasible implementation. Ethical-spiritual awareness protects affected persons from being reduced to abstract variables. Manhaj Tarjih is most persuasive when the contribution of each layer is visible.

Collective Ijtihad as Epistemic Governance

Collective ijtihad is not merely a solution to the scarcity of individually qualified mujtahids. It is a response to the structure of contemporary problems. No single jurist can independently master all relevant dimensions of epidemiology, astronomy, finance, environmental science, disability, digital communication, and public

administration. Institutional collaboration is therefore part of methodological adequacy.

However, multidisciplinary must be designed rather than assumed. Experts provide factual and disciplinary judgments, while jurists articulate normative relationships. Neither group should simply endorse the other's preselected conclusion. A research protocol should identify questions for each field, uncertainties in the evidence, alternative scenarios, and the normative weight given to consequences. Deliberation becomes genuinely collective when different forms of expertise can challenge the framing of the problem itself.

This conception has implications for authority. A ruling's credibility depends not only on the seniority of participants but on the quality of the deliberative process. Institutional *ijtihad* should therefore be evaluated through procedural virtues: competence, representation, disclosure of evidence, responsiveness to criticism, conflict-of-interest management, and willingness to revise. These criteria extend the ethical meaning of *irfani* into organizational practice.

Theoretical Propositions

The synthesis supports four conceptual propositions. First, the authority of Manhaj Tarjih increases when its methodological layers are explicitly distinguished and connected. Confusion among source, approach, method, and technique weakens reproducibility even when the final conclusion may be reasonable.

Second, scriptural fidelity and contextual responsiveness are complementary when empirical knowledge is treated as evidence about reality and *maqasid* is used to connect that reality with normative purposes. The opposition emerges mainly when either texts or facts are considered in isolation.

Third, collective *ijtihad* improves legal reasoning only when multidisciplinary participation affects problem formulation, evidence assessment, and consequence analysis rather than merely legitimizing a predetermined juristic position. Fourth, *tajdid* requires institutionalized revision: the possibility of changing a ruling should be supported by documented triggers, such as stronger textual evidence, improved scientific knowledge, changed circumstances, or newly recognized harm

IMPLICATIONS FOR MUHAMMADIYAH AND ISLAMIC LEGAL STUDIES

For Majelis Tarjih, the principal implication is the need for a standardized reasoning template. Every major decision could identify the methodological outlook, primary sources, complete evidence corpus, dominant epistemic approaches, legal methods, operational techniques, expert contributions, *maqasid* analysis, affected groups, conclusion, degree of certainty, and conditions for review. Such a template would make the declared *manhaj* visible in the product.

For Tarjih education and Muhammadiyah universities, the methodology should be taught as an integrated sequence rather than as memorized lists. Students can be trained through

case laboratories in which one problem is analyzed textually, empirically, ethically, and institutionally. Comparative madhhab study remains essential because critical independence requires knowledge of the reasoning being accepted, modified, or rejected.

For broader Islamic legal studies, Manhaj Tarjih offers a model of organizational jurisprudence. Research should compare it with Nahdlatul Ulama's legal-decision system, Persis's Dewan Hisbah, MUI's fatwa procedures, and transnational fiqh academies. The comparison should examine not only substantive outcomes but also evidence rules, expert participation, institutional hierarchy, publication practices, and revision mechanisms.

The framework also has implications for empirical research. Scholars should reconstruct complete case files for selected rulings and test whether methodological claims correspond to actual reasoning. Interviews with council members, analysis of meeting records, comparison of draft and final decisions, and studies of implementation would provide evidence unavailable in conceptual documents alone.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The review is limited by the uneven availability of primary deliberative records. Official manhaj documents describe formal expectations, while published articles interpret components or applications. They do not always reveal how a particular national deliberation weighed competing evidence. The study therefore reconstructs methodological architecture rather than claiming to reproduce every internal decision process.

The corpus is limited to English- and Indonesian-language sources published up to 2020. It does not include subsequent methodological revisions or the complete archive of Tarjih congresses, fatwas, and internal papers. Several older sources have variant publication dates because journal platforms digitized issues after their nominal year. The review uses the issue year for citation while acknowledging this archival irregularity.

Future research should conduct process tracing of major rulings, including calendar, smoking, organ transplantation, disaster, financial transactions, and gender questions. It should examine dissent and change over time, develop criteria for evaluating irfani as an ethical control, and compare the formal hierarchy of putusan, fatwa, and guidance. A digital corpus of decisions with coded citations, methods, experts, and revision history would permit more systematic analysis of methodological consistency.

CONCLUSION

This methodological systematic review shows that Muhammadiyah's Manhaj Tarjih is a layered system of collective Islamic legal reasoning rather than a single technique for preferring stronger proofs. Its development from the selection of inherited opinions toward comprehensive ijtihad reflects the expanding social responsibilities of a modern religious organization. The system combines a reformist outlook, normative commitment to the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah, bayani-burhani-irfani epistemic integration, semantic-causal-public-interest methods, operational juristic techniques, and collective institutional procedure. Its distinctive strength lies in preserving revelation as the primary normative reference while incorporating scientific evidence, social reality,

maqasid, and ethical conscience. Applied works on the calendar, disasters, water, and traffic demonstrate that the method can generate problem-oriented fiqh for public life. Its principal weakness is not the absence of methodological resources, but incomplete differentiation and documentation of how those resources are selected and combined in particular cases. A stronger Manhaj Tarjih therefore requires standardized terminology, transparent research dossiers, explicit consequence and maqasid analysis, disciplined multidisciplinary deliberation, and defined mechanisms of revision. Under these conditions, Manhaj Tarjih can function as epistemic governance for a form of Islamic legal reasoning that is scripturally grounded, scientifically informed, ethically responsible, and institutionally accountable.

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