

Governing from Civil Society: Muhammadiyah, Civic Islam, and Public Policy in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines Muhammadiyah's role in Indonesian public policy. It employs qualitative historical-institutional document analysis, not a systematic literature review, and limits its sources to materials published by 2022. The analysis integrates organizational decisions, Constitutional Court records, and scholarship on civil society, democracy, welfare, health, and disaster governance. The findings identify five interconnected modes of policy influence: institutional service provision, production of religious and professional knowledge, public agenda setting, coalition-based advocacy, and constitutional litigation. Muhammadiyah's schools, hospitals, philanthropic bodies, and disaster institutions make it a policy implementer as well as an external critic of the state. Its *Khittah*, anti-corruption jurisprudence, tobacco-control initiatives, pandemic response, and constitutional jihad translate religious commitments into civic claims concerning welfare, accountability, and public resources. However, influence remains uneven and should not be equated with democratic virtue or measurable policy impact. Organizational compromise, elite access, internal ideological diversity, fragmented local capacity, and dependence on state regulation constrain its autonomy. Muhammadiyah is therefore best understood as a hybrid civic institution that governs with, through, and sometimes against the state.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah; civic Islam; civil society; public policy; Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah has occupied an unusual position in modern Indonesian politics. It is neither a political party nor a conventional nongovernmental organization, yet its decisions affect schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, philanthropic agencies, disaster operations, religious practice, and public debate across the country. Its organizational autonomy allows it to criticize governments, while its extensive service institutions make it dependent on regulation, accreditation, public financing, and cooperation with state agencies. This combination places Muhammadiyah within civil society but also inside the practical machinery through which Indonesian public policy is implemented.

The category of civic Islam provides a useful starting point for interpreting this position. Hefner's account of civil Islam emphasized Muslim networks that accepted constitutional democracy, plural participation, and a differentiated public sphere rather than seeking monopolistic control of the state (Hefner, 2000). Later scholarship complicated this normative picture. Brown (2019) argued that Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama often intervene through an organizational logic of consensus and risk management rather than through a stable liberal-democratic ideology. Menchik (2016, 2019) similarly demonstrated that mainstream Muslim organizations may support electoral democracy while retaining communitarian and illiberal positions on particular rights. Civic Islam should therefore be treated as an empirical mode of organized public engagement, not as

a certificate of democratic virtue.

This distinction matters because Muhammadiyah's public role is frequently reduced to one of two narratives. The celebratory narrative presents its schools, hospitals, and humanitarian organizations as automatic evidence of civil-society success. The political narrative focuses on leaders, elections, parties, and elite negotiations. Both are incomplete. Service institutions can reproduce inequality, become commercially oriented, or operate without transparent public outcomes. Electoral distance does not mean political absence, because agenda setting, professional expertise, litigation, public statements, religious guidance, and institutional cooperation all shape policy. The relevant analytical problem is not whether Muhammadiyah is political, but how different forms of authority are converted into policy influence.

Historically, Muhammadiyah developed its public authority through social reform rather than through the capture of government. Ahmad Dahlan's educational and welfare initiatives transformed Qur'anic interpretation into schools, health assistance, orphan care, women's organization, and disciplined collective action. Under colonial conditions, these institutions created an autonomous Muslim public capable of negotiating with administrative authority while addressing needs that the state neglected (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012; Peacock, 1978). This institutional path survived changes from colonialism to independence, authoritarian developmentalism, democratic transition, decentralization, and contemporary welfare governance.

The relationship with formal politics has nevertheless been repeatedly contested. Muhammadiyah leaders participated in nationalist and Islamic political organizations, and members have entered parties and public office. Yet the organization gradually articulated a separation between organizational mission and partisan attachment. The 2002 Khittah on national and state life affirmed political participation as a legitimate religious and civic responsibility while maintaining Muhammadiyah's organizational independence from parties (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2002). This arrangement did not depoliticize Muhammadiyah. It redirected organizational politics toward public ethics, citizenship, policy analysis, social service, and nonpartisan advocacy.

The post-1998 democratic order expanded these opportunities. Decentralization opened new arenas for local cooperation and contestation; the Constitutional Court created a channel for judicial review; media liberalization enlarged the public sphere; and regulatory reform drew civil-society organizations into consultation and implementation. At the same time, democratization exposed the limits of organized Islam. Polarization, religious intolerance, patronage, and democratic decline created incentives for compromise and selective intervention (Hamayotsu, 2013; Mietzner, 2020). Muhammadiyah's position could not be inferred from its formal commitment to democracy alone; it had to be examined across actual policy fields.

Several policy arenas reveal the breadth of this engagement. In education and health, Muhammadiyah institutions supplement public provision and interact with national standards, professional regulation, and public insurance. In tobacco control, religious rulings, health expertise, and an advocacy network support restrictions designed to

protect children and public health. In anti-corruption work, moral discourse is translated into educational materials and public criticism. In disaster and pandemic governance, organizational resources become operational capacity coordinated with government. In constitutional litigation, the language of social justice and Article 33 of the Constitution is used to challenge laws governing water, oil, gas, and other strategic resources. These are different mechanisms and should not be collapsed into a single notion of contribution.

This article asks three questions. First, through which institutional mechanisms did Muhammadiyah influence public policy up to 2022? Second, how were Islamic norms translated into claims that could operate within constitutional, administrative, and professional policy arenas? Third, what limits prevented organizational scale and public legitimacy from producing consistent democratic or policy outcomes? The article argues that Muhammadiyah functions as a hybrid civic institution. It governs from civil society by providing services, producing norms and expertise, organizing constituencies, negotiating with officials, and litigating against legislation. Its autonomy is real but relational: it works with, through, and sometimes against the state.

The argument contributes to the study of religion and public policy in three ways. It moves beyond party-centered accounts of Muslim politics; it separates policy participation from proven policy effectiveness; and it treats service provision as a form of governance rather than as apolitical charity. This approach also avoids idealizing civil society. Muhammadiyah's influence can strengthen welfare, accountability, and constitutionalism, but it can also be constrained by internal diversity, organizational self-preservation, unequal local capacity, and positions that do not fully conform to liberal rights. Civic Islam is therefore best understood as a contested institutional practice.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative historical-institutional document analysis. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive retrieval of all publications concerning Muhammadiyah and policy. The unit of analysis is the mechanism through which Muhammadiyah, its autonomous organizations, and selected institutional networks entered policy processes. Sources were limited to documents and scholarship published no later than December 31, 2022, in accordance with the study design.

The documentary corpus combined four types of material. The first consisted of official Muhammadiyah texts that define organizational relations with the state and public life, including the 2002 Khittah, the 2010 Statement of Muhammadiyah Thought for the Second Century, the 2015 formulation of the Pancasila state as *Dar al-'Ahd wa al-Shahadah*, anti-corruption jurisprudence, and public statements through 2022. The second consisted of legal and policy materials, particularly the 1945 Constitution and Constitutional Court Decision No. 85/PUU-XI/2013 concerning the Water Resources Law. The third comprised academic studies of Muhammadiyah, civic Islam, civil society, democracy, welfare, public health, disaster governance, and constitutional advocacy. The fourth included documented organizational initiatives in tobacco control, pandemic response, tolerance advocacy, and cadre preparation for politics and public policy.

Documents were selected for their capacity to illuminate policy mechanisms rather than merely mention Muhammadiyah. Materials had to address at least one of the following: service delivery under public regulation; production of norms or expertise

relevant to policy; agenda setting and public communication; interaction with executive or legislative institutions; coalition-based advocacy; litigation; or co-governance during emergencies. Sources published after 2022 were excluded even when they offered retrospective interpretations. This cutoff prevents later developments from being projected backward into the period under study.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each source was coded for actor, arena, instrument, target, claimed public value, and evidence of outcome. Second, recurring patterns were grouped into five modes of influence: institutional service provision, epistemic and normative authority, agenda setting, advocacy and coalition, and constitutional litigation. Third, these modes were interpreted historically to identify changes in Muhammadiyah's relationship with public authority from autonomous social reform to regulated service partnership, policy criticism, and legal contestation.

The analysis distinguishes inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Organizational assets, networks, statements, expertise, and litigation capacity are inputs. Schools, health services, policy recommendations, court petitions, training, and emergency deployments are outputs. Changes in law, implementation, public behavior, distributional welfare, administrative accountability, or democratic quality are outcomes. Much of the available literature documents inputs and outputs more clearly than outcomes. The article therefore does not infer causal impact from institutional size, media visibility, or the adoption of religious language.

Historical-institutional analysis is appropriate because Muhammadiyah's influence depends on accumulated organizational capacity and path-dependent relationships. Hospitals and universities built for religious and social purposes later became resources for national health insurance, pandemic response, research, and professional policy advice. The Majelis Tarjih, originally organized to resolve religious questions, developed normative positions on corruption, smoking, disaster, and public ethics. The creation of courts, decentralized government, and new policy networks opened channels that earlier organizational forms could enter. Policy agency emerged from the interaction between inherited institutions and changing political opportunities.

Three limitations remain. First, official documents may present normative coherence that does not exist across branches and service units. Second, academic studies are concentrated in particular regions and often rely on elite interviews or single cases. Third, this document-based design cannot determine how policymakers privately assessed Muhammadiyah's interventions or whether affected citizens experienced improved outcomes. These limitations are treated as analytical findings: the visibility of organizational positions exceeds the availability of comparable evidence about implementation and impact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The documents reveal that Muhammadiyah's policy role cannot be represented by a single channel. It participates in public governance through a portfolio of institutional mechanisms. Table 1 organizes these mechanisms according to their principal resources, policy functions, and evidentiary limits.

Table 1. Modes of Muhammadiyah policy influence

Mode of influence	Principal organizational resource	Policy function	Key evidentiary question
Institutional service provision	Schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, welfare and philanthropic bodies	Implements public programs, supplies personnel, and generates operational feedback	Who gains access, at what quality and cost, and with what measurable outcome?
Normative and epistemic authority	Majelis Tarjih, scholars, professionals, universities, research networks	Defines harm, obligation, evidence, and legitimate public action	Do religious and expert claims change institutional or public behavior?
Agenda setting	Leadership statements, media, sermons, publications, civic education	Frames problems and raises political salience	Does visibility enter formal agendas, budgets, regulations, or implementation?
Advocacy and coalition	LHKP, autonomous organizations, issue networks, interfaith and professional partners	Negotiates, campaigns, trains, and submits recommendations	Whose interests are represented, and what compromises shape the position?
Constitutional litigation	Legal experts, organizational standing, constitutional argument, coalitions	Challenges legislation and clarifies constitutional limits	Does a judicial victory produce durable and equitable policy change?

1. From Partisan Distance to Civic Responsibility

Muhammadiyah's organizational distance from political parties is sometimes interpreted as withdrawal from politics. The historical record indicates a different development. The organization separated partisan competition from its institutional mission while retaining a broad conception of political responsibility. Earlier Khittah formulations sought to protect the movement from capture by party conflict. The 2002 Denpasar Khittah explicitly recognized politics as an important arena of national life but directed Muhammadiyah to work as an independent moral and social force, allowing members to participate individually while preventing the organization from becoming an electoral vehicle (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2002).

This distinction generated a repertoire of nonparty politics. Muhammadiyah could issue public criticism, educate citizens, cultivate cadres for public office, negotiate with governments, and advocate legal change without endorsing a party. Jung's study of electoral politics shows that this distance has never eliminated informal networks or the political choices of leaders and members (Jung, 2014). It instead creates a recurring boundary problem: organizational neutrality must be continually defended against elite affiliations, member mobilization, and government attempts to claim religious endorsement.

The 2010 Statement of Muhammadiyah Thought for the Second Century expanded this civic orientation through the language of enlightenment, transformation, nationality, and

universal humanity (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2010). The 2015 concept of the Pancasila state as *Dar al-'Ahd wa al-Shahadah* strengthened the constitutional basis. Indonesia was described as a national covenant that Muslims were obliged not merely to accept but to demonstrate through constructive citizenship, justice, welfare, and national advancement (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2015). This formulation rejected both an Islamic-state project and passive loyalty. It treated constitutional citizenship as a field of religious witness.

The normative settlement has two policy consequences. First, policy claims are normally framed through Pancasila, the Constitution, public benefit, and professional knowledge rather than through demands for exclusive religious legislation. Second, Muhammadiyah can criticize state performance without rejecting the state order. Constitutional loyalty becomes a basis for opposition to policies regarded as unjust, corrupt, oligarchic, or excessively market-oriented. The formula helps explain why judicial review, public-service provision, and anti-corruption advocacy can be described simultaneously as Islamic, national, and constitutional action.

Yet the settlement is not ideologically uniform. Burhani (2018) documents pluralist, liberal, conservative, and Islamist tendencies within Muhammadiyah. Brown (2019) shows that mainstream Muslim organizations often prefer compromise because their broad constituencies contain internal disagreement. Official language can therefore mask contestation about minority rights, gender, sexuality, religious freedom, and the proper scope of state regulation. Civic responsibility is an institutional framework for negotiation, not proof of consensus on every substantive policy.

2. Service Institutions as Policy Infrastructure

Muhammadiyah's most durable influence on public policy originates in its service institutions. Schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, orphan care, women's organizations, philanthropic bodies, and local branches were established before Indonesia possessed a comprehensive welfare state. These institutions did more than fill temporary gaps. They created organizational templates, trained professionals, normalized modern administration, and demonstrated that Muslim associations could provide public services at scale (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012). In policy terms, Muhammadiyah helped constitute the social infrastructure upon which later education, health, and welfare systems operated.

Service provision affects policy through at least four mechanisms. It enlarges practical access; it supplies trained personnel; it generates implementation knowledge; and it gives Muhammadiyah bargaining credibility. Government officials cannot treat an organization with extensive schools and hospitals as merely a pressure group. Regulations on curriculum, accreditation, health financing, professional licensing, disaster response, and social assistance directly affect Muhammadiyah institutions. The organization consequently enters policy dialogue as both a civic representative and a regulated provider.

This role is especially visible in health governance. Muhammadiyah hospitals participate in a national system shaped by Ministry of Health rules, professional standards, local licensing, and the National Health Insurance scheme. The relationship is neither pure

privatization nor independent charity. Civil-society facilities deliver services financed and regulated partly through the state. Samsudin's study of a Muhammadiyah community health fund shows how civic welfare initiatives can supplement, negotiate with, and expose gaps in public insurance arrangements (Samsudin, 2021). Such institutions create policy feedback: operational problems experienced by providers become evidence in debates over reimbursement, access, and sustainability.

Education operates similarly. Muhammadiyah schools and universities implement national curricula and accreditation while preserving distinctive religious content and organizational culture. Their scale gives the organization a stake in teacher policy, school financing, higher-education regulation, and national standards. Nevertheless, ownership should not be confused with equitable public contribution. Fees, geographic concentration, variable quality, and competition for prestige can limit accessibility. Institutional growth can also produce bureaucratic interests that favor regulatory stability and financial survival over confrontational advocacy.

The service network gives Muhammadiyah a practical form of public authority. Citizens encounter the organization as patients, students, parents, employees, donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries. This repeated contact can generate trust more effectively than occasional political campaigning. It also creates obligations. A civic organization that claims to embody *al-Ma'un* and social justice must demonstrate affordability, nondiscrimination, quality, and accountability. Public legitimacy cannot rest solely on the number of institutions because service institutions may reproduce the same exclusions found in state or market provision.

3. Normative and Epistemic Authority in Agenda Setting

Muhammadiyah enters policy not only through organizational assets but through the production of authoritative interpretations. The *Majelis Tarjih* and *Tajdid* translates Islamic sources into guidance on contemporary problems, while universities, professional associations, and policy bodies contribute scientific and legal expertise. The combination allows policy positions to be framed in multiple registers: Qur'anic ethics, constitutional principles, public health evidence, administrative feasibility, and professional standards.

The anti-corruption field illustrates this translation. *Fikih Antikorupsi* treated corruption as a religious, legal, and social violation that damages public welfare rather than merely as individual immorality (*Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah*, 2006). By connecting classical concepts of abuse, bribery, illicit consumption, and betrayal of trust with modern public administration, the text supplied a moral vocabulary for civic education. Later Muhammadiyah discussions emphasized cultural as well as structural strategies, indicating that legal enforcement would remain weak without changes in organizational and public norms (*Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah*, 2022b).

Tobacco control provides a more direct link between religious authority and regulatory advocacy. Muhammadiyah's prohibition of smoking and its health institutions supported the creation of the Muhammadiyah Tobacco Control Network. By 2021, official organizational statements connected tobacco regulation to child protection, human-resource development, and public health, while encouraging collaboration with government and health advocates (*Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah*, 2021). The policy

instrument was not a fatwa alone. Religious guidance supplied constituency legitimacy; medical expertise supplied evidence; and a network structure enabled communication and advocacy.

The same pattern appears in disaster policy. Muhammadiyah's disaster jurisprudence rejected fatalism and emphasized prevention, scientific knowledge, humanitarian ethics, and organized response. MDMC converted these norms into training, emergency systems, and cooperation with public agencies. Baidhawiy (2015) and Bush (2014) show that religious motivation can coexist with professional disaster management. The normative contribution lies in defining disaster reduction as a public and religious responsibility; the epistemic contribution lies in mobilizing health, engineering, psychosocial, and logistical expertise.

Agenda setting also occurs through statements by central leaders and specialized bodies. Such statements can draw media attention, provide moral framing, and signal organizational priorities. Their policy effect, however, varies. A public declaration may influence elite debate without changing regulations; a religious ruling may alter behavior within Muhammadiyah institutions but not among the wider population; and technical advice may be ignored when it conflicts with powerful economic interests. The analysis therefore treats agenda visibility as an intermediate output rather than a final outcome.

4. Advocacy, Coalition, and Constitutional Litigation

Muhammadiyah's policy advocacy combines insider and outsider strategies. Insider strategies include consultation, meetings with ministries and legislatures, expert participation, and institutional cooperation. Outsider strategies include public criticism, coalition campaigning, education, and legal challenge. The Lembaga Hikmah dan Kebijakan Publik and related bodies institutionalize attention to politics and policy, while autonomous organizations, universities, and professional networks create issue-specific coalitions. Training initiatives in 2022 on tolerance and prevention of violent extremism, for example, sought to strengthen policy-advocacy capacity among Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama activists (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2022a).

Coalition work allows Muhammadiyah to exceed the expertise of its formal leadership. Tobacco control connects health professionals, researchers, youth advocates, and local institutions. Anti-corruption work involves legal scholars, educators, activists, and public figures. Disaster governance links hospitals, universities, philanthropy, volunteers, government agencies, and humanitarian networks. This distributed structure can increase reach, but it complicates attribution. Not every initiative undertaken by a Muhammadiyah-affiliated academic or institution constitutes an official organizational position, and national decisions may not be implemented uniformly by regional branches.

The clearest form of adversarial policy engagement is constitutional jihad. During the leadership of Din Syamsuddin, Muhammadiyah and allied actors challenged statutes considered inconsistent with the Constitution and harmful to public control of strategic resources. The judicial review of Law No. 7 of 2004 on Water Resources became the emblematic case. Constitutional Court Decision No. 85/PUU-XI/2013 annulled the law and reaffirmed restrictions on private control of water. Muhammadiyah interpreted the

petition as defense of the *mustad'afin* and Article 33's social-welfare commitments (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015; Khakim, 2022).

Constitutional jihad is analytically significant because it translates Islamic social justice into the language of constitutional law. The instrument is neither electoral mobilization nor religious decree. It uses a state-created judicial channel, legal expertise, coalition standing, and public argument to contest legislation. Hamdanny (2021) describes it as transformative *da'wah* oriented toward civil society. The strategy demonstrates that accepting the constitutional order does not require accepting every statute enacted within it.

Litigation also reveals the limits of civil-society victory. Annulment can remove a law without guaranteeing a just replacement or equitable implementation. Courts decide legal validity, not administrative capacity. Strong legal framing may simplify conflicts over finance, infrastructure, local government, and service delivery. Moreover, constitutional litigation requires expertise and resources that favor national elites. Its participatory value depends on whether affected communities are represented substantively rather than symbolically.

5. Crisis Co-Governance and the COVID-19 Test

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the state's dependence on organized civil society. Muhammadiyah created the Muhammadiyah COVID-19 Command Center, mobilized hospitals, universities, philanthropic funds, volunteers, religious guidance, and public communication. Rachmawati et al. (2022) show that Islamic faith-based organizations contributed health services, prevention, social assistance, and religious legitimation for protective behavior. Rahmawati and Wulan (2022) emphasize the importance of Muhammadiyah's network and philanthropy in sustaining response capacity.

This response constituted co-governance rather than simple charity. Muhammadiyah hospitals treated patients within public referral and financing systems; religious authorities adapted worship guidance to health risk; universities produced information and personnel; and Lazismu mobilized resources for affected communities. Organizational autonomy enabled rapid action, but the response depended on government epidemiological rules, vaccine policy, health-system coordination, and access to public resources. The pandemic therefore made relational autonomy visible.

Crisis co-governance also amplified Muhammadiyah's policy voice. Operational experience gave leaders grounds to criticize slow, inconsistent, or inadequately evidence-based government action. Religious guidance helped resolve conflict between public-health restrictions and collective worship. Yet the availability of hospitals and volunteers should not be treated as evidence that the overall response was equitable or effective. Capacity varied among regions and institutions, health workers faced severe burdens, and public data did not allow consistent comparison of outcomes across Muhammadiyah facilities.

The disaster field exhibits the same pattern over a longer period. MDMC's integration of branches, hospitals, universities, and philanthropy provides surge capacity that public agencies may lack. Indonesia's disaster-governance framework formally recognizes

participation by nonstate actors, producing arrangements of co-governance (Srikandini et al., 2018). Cooperation can improve reach and legitimacy, but it may also transfer public responsibilities to voluntary institutions without adequate financing or accountability. The civic contribution is strongest when cooperation preserves organizational independence and clarifies public obligations rather than normalizing state withdrawal.

By the end of 2022, Muhammadiyah had thus developed a diversified policy repertoire. Its influence did not move linearly from service to advocacy or from culture to politics. The modes accumulated. Educational and health institutions remained foundational; religious and professional knowledge added agenda-setting capacity; democratic institutions opened consultation and litigation; and crises intensified co-governance. Table 2 summarizes this historical trajectory and its principal policy implications.

Table 2. Historical trajectory of Muhammadiyah's public-policy role

Period	Dominant civic-policy form	Illustrative institutional development	Policy significance
1912-1945	Autonomous social reform under colonial rule	Schools, welfare, health assistance, women's organization	Builds a Muslim public sphere and practical alternatives to limited colonial provision
1945-1998	Nation building, regulated service expansion, and managed political distance	Expansion of schools, universities, hospitals; repeated Khittah formulations	Embeds Muhammadiyah in national development while protecting organizational identity
1998-2010	Democratic opening and diversified advocacy	Decentralized engagement, public criticism, policy networks, 2002 Khittah	Creates new channels for consultation, coalition, and nonparty political participation
2010-2015	Transformative citizenship and constitutional contestation	Second-Century Statement; constitutional jihad; Dar al-'Ahd wa al-Shahadah	Connects Islamic reform, social justice, and constitutional citizenship
2015-2019	Consolidated civic Islam amid polarization	Public-service partnerships, religious-policy interventions, organizational compromise	Expands influence but exposes tensions over pluralism, rights, and democratic decline
2020-2022	Crisis co-governance and issue-specific networks	MCCC, hospital mobilization, philanthropy, tobacco control, tolerance and anti-corruption advocacy	Demonstrates surge capacity and state dependence while increasing demands for accountability

Discussion

The findings support an interpretation of Muhammadiyah as a hybrid civic institution rather than a pressure group operating outside government. Its public role combines governance functions conventionally divided among state, market, professional, religious, and voluntary actors. This hybridity explains both its unusual capacity and its structural tensions.

1. Five Modes of Policy Influence

The first mode is implementation through service institutions. Schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, welfare bodies, philanthropy, and disaster organizations convert normative commitments into recurring programs. They influence policy by enlarging capacity, generating experience, and creating constituencies affected by regulation. This is governance through provision. It can complement the state, compete with other providers, or compensate for state failure.

The second mode is epistemic and normative authority. Muhammadiyah produces religious interpretations and professional knowledge that define public problems. Anti-corruption jurisprudence reframes misuse of office as betrayal of trust and social harm. Tobacco control combines a religious prohibition with public-health evidence. Disaster jurisprudence joins theology with scientific prevention. This is governance through classification: deciding what counts as harm, obligation, evidence, and legitimate action.

The third mode is agenda setting. Leaders, councils, universities, and media networks place issues into public debate and connect them to moral narratives. Agenda setting matters because policy is shaped before formal decisions, through the construction of urgency and legitimacy. Nevertheless, media visibility is not equivalent to policy change, and official statements may primarily discipline internal constituencies.

The fourth mode is advocacy and coalition. Muhammadiyah works with government officials, professional associations, other religious organizations, research institutions, and issue networks. Coalitions expand expertise and access but also require compromise. Brown's concept of civic Islam is useful here: large organizations often seek positions that preserve internal unity and institutional influence (Brown, 2019). Compromise can stabilize democracy, but it can also dilute rights-based demands or favor incrementalism when stronger opposition is warranted.

The fifth mode is constitutional litigation. Judicial review turns organizational legitimacy, legal expertise, and social-justice claims into a formal challenge to legislation. Constitutional jihad represents the most explicit form of governing against the state while remaining inside its legal order. It expands the meaning of *da'wah* from moral persuasion to constitutional accountability. Yet legal victory remains only one stage in a policy cycle and may be reversed or weakened in implementation.

2. Civic Islam without Romanticizing Civil Society

The evidence supports describing Muhammadiyah as civic Islam, but only if the concept remains analytical rather than honorific. Muhammadiyah accepts electoral institutions, constitutional citizenship, national pluralism, and organizational independence. It invests heavily in public welfare and often uses noncoercive channels to influence policy. These features distinguish it from movements seeking exclusive religious sovereignty.

At the same time, neither organizational moderation nor service provision guarantees liberal commitments. Menchik (2019) shows that mainstream Muslim organizations can support democratic procedures while endorsing restrictions on particular groups. Burhani (2018) documents ideological plurality within Muhammadiyah, while

Hamayotsu (2013) demonstrates that civil society itself can reproduce intolerance. The public-policy implications are direct. Muhammadiyah may defend constitutional welfare and anti-corruption norms yet remain internally divided on minority recognition, gender, sexuality, and religious regulation.

Organizational self-preservation is another constraint. Extensive institutions create employees, budgets, licenses, contracts, and reputational risks. Leaders must weigh moral confrontation against possible consequences for hospitals, schools, and relations with ministries. This does not invalidate advocacy, but it means that policy positions emerge from institutional calculation as well as theology. An organization can be simultaneously principled and strategic.

3. Autonomy, Partnership, and Dependence

Muhammadiyah's autonomy is strongest when it can mobilize independent legitimacy, expertise, finance, and networks. Its philanthropy and membership reduce reliance on a single donor or ministry. Its national structure allows it to operate beyond particular local governments. Its constitutional commitment provides a legitimate language of criticism. These resources create bargaining power.

Dependence nevertheless enters through regulation and implementation. Schools require accreditation and recognition; hospitals depend on licensing, medicine supply, professional rules, and insurance reimbursement; disaster teams require access and coordination; philanthropic programs operate within tax and social-welfare regulation. Partnership can enlarge impact but also discipline criticism. The relationship should therefore be described as negotiated interdependence rather than autonomy versus co-optation.

A further complication is decentralization. Muhammadiyah's federated structure permits adaptation to local contexts, but policy capacity is uneven. Strong universities and hospitals may produce expertise unavailable to smaller branches. National statements may not be understood, financed, or implemented locally. Local leaders may develop close relationships with political executives that increase access while weakening critical distance. The organization is not a unitary actor in the same way as a ministry or corporation.

4. Measuring Contribution and Policy Effectiveness

The literature frequently treats the existence of institutions as proof of contribution. This is an input-output fallacy. A hospital network is a major civic asset, but public-health contribution requires evidence about affordability, geographic coverage, quality, referral, prevention, and patient outcomes. A policy statement may be normatively important, but influence requires evidence that officials, institutions, or citizens changed behavior. A successful court case may alter doctrine while leaving distributional inequality unresolved.

Future evaluation should identify mechanisms and counterfactuals. For service provision, researchers should compare access and outcomes across regions and provider types. For advocacy, process tracing should examine how recommendations enter drafts, budgets,

or regulations. For litigation, analysis should follow replacement legislation and administrative implementation. For crisis governance, data should distinguish people reached, service quality, public financing, and accountability to affected communities. Such research would prevent institutional admiration from substituting for policy analysis.

Democratic contribution also requires more demanding indicators. Public education, open consultation, internal deliberation, minority inclusion, transparency, and accountability matter alongside policy success. A civic organization can obtain a preferred regulation through elite access without strengthening democratic participation. Conversely, an unsuccessful campaign may deepen civic capacity by educating citizens and building coalitions. Effectiveness and democratic quality are related but distinct.

5. The Public-Policy Significance of Religious Translation

Muhammadiyah's most distinctive contribution is its capacity to translate religious commitments into multiple public languages. *Al-Ma'un* becomes welfare provision; *amanah* becomes anti-corruption accountability; protection from harm becomes tobacco control; stewardship becomes environmental and resource governance; covenant and witness become constitutional citizenship. Translation allows religious motivation to enter plural policy arenas without requiring the state to enforce a sectarian doctrine.

This translation is not automatic. It depends on institutions capable of interpretation, evidence production, and implementation. It can fail when scriptural claims are presented without policy knowledge, when professional expertise is detached from social ethics, or when organizational interests dominate both. The strongest interventions combine normative clarity, constitutional reasoning, empirical evidence, coalition support, and a feasible implementation pathway.

The framework also clarifies why Muhammadiyah's public role cannot be reduced to lobbying. It shapes citizens and professionals, delivers regulated services, creates categories of public concern, and supplies emergency capacity. These activities alter the environment in which formal policymakers operate. Muhammadiyah governs from civil society even when it does not control a ministry or party. Its influence is infrastructural as much as argumentative.

The principal risk is that infrastructural power becomes insufficiently accountable. Large civic institutions may invoke religious mission while providing limited public data, protecting internal elites, or prioritizing expansion. Civic legitimacy must therefore be accompanied by transparent governance, meaningful participation by service users, conflict-of-interest controls, and independent evaluation. Criticism of the state is credible only when the organization applies comparable standards to itself.

Table 3. Public value and accountability risks

Dimension	Potential public value	Recurring risk	Required accountability mechanism
Scale	Wide service reach and mobilization capacity	Institutional size treated as proof of impact	Comparable access, quality, cost, and outcome indicators
Religious legitimacy	Moral motivation and constituency compliance	Normative authority used without deliberation or evidence	Transparent reasoning, consultation, and rights review
State partnership	Access to finance, coordination, and implementation channels	Co-optation, muted criticism, or transfer of state obligations	Clear mandates, funding disclosure, and preserved advocacy autonomy
Decentralized structure	Local adaptation and dense community presence	Uneven capacity, elite capture, and inconsistent implementation	Minimum standards, audit, public reporting, and complaint systems
Elite access	Rapid communication with decision makers	Insider politics displacing citizen participation	Disclosure of meetings, constituency consultation, and policy traceability

CONCLUSION

This article has examined Muhammadiyah's role in Indonesian public policy through a historical-institutional analysis limited to sources published by 2022. The evidence does not support a simple description of Muhammadiyah as either an apolitical service organization or a political actor operating mainly through elections. It is a hybrid civic institution whose accumulated religious, professional, organizational, and social authority enters policy through several mechanisms.

Five modes are central. Service institutions implement and reshape education, health, welfare, and disaster policy. Religious councils and professional networks produce normative and technical knowledge. Leaders and media set public agendas. Specialized organizations and coalitions advocate policy change. Constitutional jihad uses judicial review to contest legislation within the constitutional order. During COVID-19 and disasters, these mechanisms converge in co-governance with public agencies.

The concept of civic Islam accurately captures this nonparty public engagement only when stripped of romantic assumptions. Muhammadiyah's scale and moderation do not automatically prove democratic impact, equitable service, or policy effectiveness. Its action is constrained by organizational compromise, ideological diversity, regulatory dependence, uneven local capacity, and the difficulty of translating formal positions into measurable outcomes. Some interventions defend constitutional welfare and accountability; others prioritize consensus or institutional stability.

Muhammadiyah's broader significance lies in demonstrating that religion can participate in public policy without seeking exclusive control of the state. Islamic values are translated into constitutional, scientific, professional, and humanitarian arguments. The quality of that contribution depends on whether translation produces evidence-based, inclusive, and accountable governance. Future research should therefore move beyond counting institutions and statements toward tracing decisions, implementation, distributional effects, and citizen experience. Muhammadiyah's role is substantial, but

its public value must remain an empirical question rather than an organizational presumption.

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