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Selective Isomorphism: How Indonesia's Pesantren Recognition Regime Codifies Salafiyah Curriculum Adaptation

Muhammad Sulaiman[1*], Achmad Anwar Abidin[2]
[1,2]Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren is usually read as the moment the state recognized the traditional (salafiyah) Islamic boarding school. We argue that the law did less to create a new pattern of curriculum adaptation than to codify, extend and begin to administer one that salafiyah pesantren had already built. A qualitative multiple-case evidence synthesis combines three strands: a secondary analysis of the authors' 2023 fieldwork at Riyadlul Mubtadiin Islamic Boarding School in Tuban, whose shift from "pure salaf" to "semi-salaf" began in 2017; a thematic synthesis of ten published studies (2019–2026) covering fourteen further pesantren and the Ma'had Aly sector, split into salafiyah and contrast cases; and a document analysis of regulatory instruments from 2014 to 2025 and ministry enrolment statistics. Three findings emerge. First, the price of recognition, namely general subjects, is old. What changed after 2019 is its locus. The kitab programme itself became recognizable, with certification run by pesantren and standards set largely by kiai and nyai through the Majelis Masyayikh, which we call endogenous coercion. Second, salafiyah cases cluster in the middle of Oliver's typology (compromise, avoidance and rare defiance), while acquiescence and manipulation appear only among contrast cases. Third, conformity is selective. Pesantren couple state templates to the curricular periphery, translate school forms so that they carry pesantren content, and buffer a core defined in advance from the tradition and the law. That core is buffered but not frozen, and administration may yet move its boundary.

ABSTRAK
Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2019 tentang Pesantren umumnya dipandang sebagai momen negara mengakui pesantren salafiyah. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa undang-undang tersebut tidak banyak menciptakan pola adaptasi kurikulum yang baru. Undang-undang ini lebih tepat dipahami sebagai pengodifikasian, perluasan, dan awal pengadministrasian pola yang sudah dibangun pesantren salafiyah sebelumnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan sintesis bukti kualitatif multi-kasus yang memadukan tiga sumber. Pertama, analisis sekunder atas penelitian lapangan penulis tahun 2023 di Pondok Pesantren Riyadlul Mubtadiin, Tuban, yang mulai beralih dari "salaf murni" ke "semi-salaf" pada tahun 2017. Kedua, sintesis tematik atas sepuluh studi terbitan 2019–2026 yang mencakup empat belas pesantren lain dan sektor Ma'had Aly, yang dipilah menjadi kasus salafiyah dan kasus pembanding. Ketiga, analisis dokumen atas instrumen regulasi tahun 2014–2025 serta statistik santri Kementerian Agama. Dengan kerangka isomorfisme kelembagaan, respons strategis, *selective coupling*, translasi, dan perantara regulasi, penelitian ini menghasilkan tiga temuan. Pertama, "harga" pengakuan negara, yaitu mata pelajaran umum, sudah lama ada. Yang berubah setelah 2019 adalah letaknya. Program kitab nonformal itu sendiri kini dapat diakui, dengan syarat mata pelajaran umum minimal, NISN, ujian kompetensi, dan ketentuan ijazah. Sertifikasinya dijalankan oleh pesantren, sedangkan standarnya sebagian besar ditetapkan oleh para kiai dan nyai melalui Majelis Masyayikh, yang kami sebut koersi endogen. Kedua, kasus-kasus salafiyah mengelompok di bagian tengah tipologi Oliver (kompromi, penghindaran, dan sesekali perlawanan), sedangkan penerimaan penuh dan manipulasi hanya muncul pada kasus pembanding. Ketiga, kepatuhan bersifat selektif. Pesantren melekatkan templat negara pada wilayah pinggiran kurikulum, menerjemahkan format sekolah agar memuat isi pesantren, dan melindungi inti yang didefinisikan sejak awal berdasarkan tradisi dan undang-undang. Inti itu terlindungi tetapi tidak beku, dan artikel ini mengidentifikasi kondisi yang dapat menggeser batasnya.

*Corresponding Author
Email: muhammad.sulaiman@ecampus.ut.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

The pesantren adapted to the modern state long before the state wrote a law about it. Classic accounts describe an institution built around five elements (the lodging, the mosque, the santri, the teaching of classical Islamic texts and the kiai) whose survival through colonial and post-colonial modernization depended on absorbing new forms without surrendering that core (Dhofier, 2011). Over the twentieth century, many pesantren added graded madrasah classes, general subjects and state-recognized schools alongside kitab study (Dhofier, 2011), producing a varied landscape of pondok, pesantren and madrasa that resists simple classification (Lukens-Bull, 2010). Pohl (2006) reads this tradition not as a relic but as a living resource in contemporary Indonesian civil society. Yet kitab-based learning itself remained largely outside the state's credential system. It was treated mostly as non-formal education, and graduates of traditional pesantren stayed disadvantaged in further study and employment (Nurtawab, 2019).

Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren is commonly read as the end of that exclusion. It names kitab kuning study and *dirasah islamiah* with the *muallimin* pattern as forms of pesantren education, anchors education in each pesantren's own distinctiveness, tradition and curriculum, and declares that graduates of non-formal pesantren education are "recognized as equal to formal education" at certain levels (Republik Indonesia, 2019, Arts. 5, 16(1), 23(3)). Legal analysts read the law as state recognition of the pesantren's academic tradition and independence (Ghofarrozin & Janah, 2021), and as a restructuring that brings pesantren education formally into the national system (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022).

The law did not begin from nothing, however. Since 2000, a compulsory basic education (Wajar Dikdas) programme agreed between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of National Education had already attached general education to learning in salafiyah pesantren (Anita, 2016). Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation (PMA) No. 13 of 2014 on Islamic Religious Education already regulated Pendidikan Diniyah Formal (PDF) as a unit established and owned by pesantren, and listed *mu'adalah* education among the programmes a pesantren could run (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2014, Arts. 19–25). After 2019 the field thickened quickly. PMA No. 31 of 2020 requires even non-formal pesantren education to include Pancasila and civic education, Indonesian, mathematics and natural or social science. It also ties recognition to a competency examination open only to resident santri who hold a national student number (NISN) (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020, Arts. 62–65). A Majelis Masyayikh of nine kiai and nyai was inaugurated in December 2021 (NU Online, 2021), with a statutory mandate to set the basic curriculum framework and the quality criteria for pesantren and their graduates (Republik Indonesia, 2019, Art. 29). Presidential Regulation No. 82 of 2021 opened public funding, including an endowment fund (Republik Indonesia, 2021). A national quality-assurance document (SPM Pesantren) was launched in November 2023 (Medcom.id, 2023), and in October 2025 the President approved the creation of a Directorate General of Pesantren (Amaliyah, 2025).

This sequence raises a question that existing research has not posed directly. Did the 2019 regime cause salafiyah pesantren to change their curricula, or did it ratify and then begin to administer changes they had already made? Research has developed along three largely separate streams. The first documents curriculum innovation inside single institutions, usually as a movement from "pure salaf" toward hybrid or "semi-salaf" forms (Abidin & Sulaiman, 2024; Junaidi, 2019; Kurniadi et al., 2025; Sunardi et al., 2025). These studies are rich but mostly descriptive and rarely ask why one component changed while another did not. The second analyses the law and the state's motives, tracing a shift from domestication to accommodation of Islamic education (Ghofarrozin & Janah, 2021; Kosim et al., 2023; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022), but seldom looks inside particular pesantren. The third and most recent treats pesantren as active

negotiators. Nisak et al. (2025) identify three typologies of innovation, Zaimina et al. (2026) describe salaf pesantren resistance as a defence of "epistemic sovereignty", Ismawati et al. (2026) show Salafi pesantren to be "administratively compliant, pedagogically selective and ideologically autonomous", and Syahroni and Hosna (2026) describe Ma'had Aly reform as "turats-centered but standard-mediated".

Three gaps follow. No study has brought these cases together to map the range of responses across the field and relate each to the regulatory mechanism involved. The literature describes hybridity as a blend without specifying which curricular components are exposed to state templates and which are shielded. And the temporal relationship between pesantren adaptation and state regulation is usually assumed rather than examined. Neo-institutional theory offers tools for all three tasks. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain how organizations in a common field come to resemble one another through coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. Oliver (1991) shows that organizations choose among acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation. Pache and Santos (2013) show that hybrids facing competing logics often practise selective coupling, adopting intact elements from each logic rather than decoupling formal policy from practice, the pattern long associated with ceremonial conformity (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Research on translation, a well-established theme in Scandinavian institutionalism reviewed by Wæraas and Nielsen (2016), adds that organizations rarely adopt travelling ideas unchanged but rework them as they move. Regulation studies show that rules often reach their targets through intermediaries whose authority shapes how the rules are received (Abbott et al., 2017). Education research has applied parts of this toolkit to school innovation (Robson et al., 2022), curriculum policy (García Garduño & Honorato, 2024), ultra-religious schools facing state core curricula (Perry-Hazan et al., 2024) and Indonesian Islamic higher education (Mizani et al., 2026; Waluyo, 2026). It has not yet been applied systematically to salafiyah pesantren across the 2014–2025 regulatory sequence.

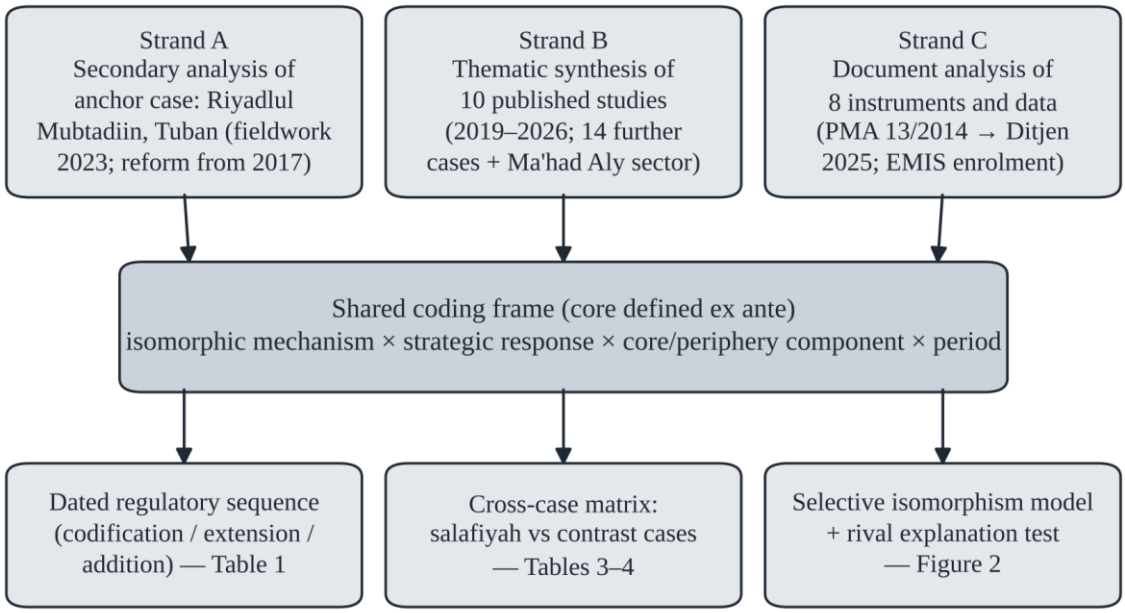
A note on terms is needed. Here *salafiyah* refers to the traditional, kitab kuning–based pesantren of the Indonesian Sunni mainstream, the "salaf" pesantren of the *muadalah salafiyah* category. It is distinct from *Salafi* pesantren aligned with the transnational Salafi *manhaj* (Makruf & Asrori, 2022). The two are often conflated in English-language writing. We keep them apart and treat Salafi, modern and madrasah cases as contrasts.

The article addresses three research questions. (RQ1) How does the 2014–2025 regulatory sequence codify, extend and add to the coercive, normative and mimetic pressures on salafiyah pesantren curricula? (RQ2) What strategic responses do salafiyah pesantren enact, as documented at Riyadlul Mubtadiin and in comparable published cases, and how do they differ from contrast cases? (RQ3) Which curricular elements, defined in advance, are coupled to state templates and which are buffered? We also test a rival explanation throughout: that the regime ratified an adaptation pesantren had already made, rather than producing it. The contribution is threefold: a dated reading of the regulatory field, a typology that separates salafiyah from contrast responses, and a core–periphery model of *selective isomorphism* that specifies where translation occurs and who controls it.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design. The study is a qualitative multiple-case evidence synthesis. It combines three data strands, each analysed with an established procedure, and integrates them through a common coding frame (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research flow



Strand A: secondary analysis of the anchor case. Riyadlul Mubtadiin Islamic Boarding School in Tuban, East Java, was founded in 1950 as the Laju Kidul pesantren. The authors conducted fieldwork there throughout 2023, through interviews with santri, alumni and administrators, observation and documents, validated by triangulation (Abidin & Sulaiman, 2024). According to the authors' field records, the shift from a "pure salaf" to a "semi-salaf" curriculum began in 2017. The earlier analysis was descriptive. Here the same data are re-analysed with a new question, an approach the secondary analysis literature calls supplementary analysis (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). Apart from the location and the dates, which come from the authors' field records, only information reported in the earlier article is used.

Strand B: thematic synthesis of published cases. We searched for studies published between 2019 and November 2026 through general and scholarly web search, following results into the Garuda and DOAJ indexes and the websites of Indonesian Islamic studies journals (searches run in November 2026). Search terms combined *pesantren salaf/salafiyah*, *kurikulum*, *kitab kuning*, *UU Pesantren*, *muadalah*, *Pendidikan Diniyah Formal* and *Ma'had Aly*, in English and Indonesian. Selection was purposive, aiming at maximum variation rather than exhaustiveness. Because screening counts were not recorded at each step, we do not report a PRISMA flow. Instead, Appendix A lists the studies used as cases and those consulted but used only as context, with reasons. A study was included as a case if it (a) reported original qualitative research or policy-document analysis on one or more named pesantren or on the Ma'had Aly sector, (b) described curriculum structure, methods or evaluation in enough detail to code, (c) addressed the relationship with state regulation or national curricula, and (d) appeared in a peer-reviewed journal. Ten studies met these criteria. Together with the anchor case they cover fifteen pesantren and one sector-level case. Cases were then classified as *salafiyah* (kitab kuning–based institutions in the traditional mainstream) or *contrast* (modern pesantren, a formal madrasah and Salafi pesantren). Claims about the distribution of responses refer to salafiyah cases only. For each case we recorded the evidence basis (full text or abstract) and the period the evidence refers to (Table 4).

Strand C: document analysis. We analysed eight instruments and data sources: PMA 13/2014; Law 18/2019; PMA 31/2020; Presidential Regulation 82/2021; official reports of Ministerial Decree 1154/2021 establishing the Majelis Masyayikh; reports of the 2023 SPM Pesantren document; the 2025 decision to form a Directorate General of Pesantren; and Education Management Information System (EMIS) enrolment data for 2022/2023–2025/2026. Documents were read for what they require, permit and leave to pesantren discretion, and in their order of issue (Morgan, 2022).

Defining the core in advance. To avoid defining the core as whatever pesantren turned out to protect, we fixed it before coding, using two independent sources. The first was the tradition's own account of what makes a pesantren: kitab study taught by the kiai, the sorogan and bandongan methods, residential moral formation, and the kiai's authority (Dhofier, 2011). The second was the law's protected categories: kitab kuning study and the pesantren's own distinctiveness, tradition and curriculum (Republik Indonesia, 2019, Arts. 5, 16(1)). The core thus comprises (1) the graded sequence of kitab, (2) kiai authority over teaching and certification of mastery, (3) sorogan and bandongan methods and (4) moral formation and its assessment. Everything else (general subjects, timetables, grade structures, report formats, evaluation calendars, enrolment data, diplomas and most co-curriculum) is periphery. Because the core was fixed in advance, any case in which a core element changed counts as disconfirming evidence and is reported as such.

Analysis. Thematic synthesis followed three stages: coding the findings reported in each study, organizing codes into descriptive themes, and developing analytical themes beyond the primary studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The coding frame had four deductive dimensions: isomorphic mechanism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), strategic response (Oliver, 1991), curricular component (core or periphery, as defined above) and period (before 2019, 2019–2022, 2023 onward). Mechanisms and responses are inferred from documented curricular structures and the authors' own interpretations in each study, not from fresh interviews about motives. Claims about *why* pesantren respond as they do are therefore interpretations consistent with the evidence, not tested explanations. The analysis was reflexive in the sense described by Braun and Clarke (2019): themes were constructed through interpretation, not discovered in the data.

Reflexivity and trustworthiness. Re-reading one's own case carries a risk of confirmation. We addressed it in three ways: by defining the core before coding, by searching the anchor data specifically for changes to core elements, and by keeping the rival "ratification" explanation in view throughout. Every classification in Tables 3 and 4 is traceable to a cited source, and the coding matrix is available on request. Two limits remain. First, published studies over-represent large, well-known or accessible pesantren, and defiant institutions are least likely to be studied. Second, the anchor fieldwork took place in 2023, largely before the SPM document was launched in November 2023. Because the study uses only published data, public documents and the authors' own earlier fieldwork, no new data were collected from human participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Codification, extension and addition: the regulatory field, 2014–2025

The first finding concerns what the post-2019 regime actually changed. Read in order of issue, the instruments fall into three groups (Table 1). Some *codify* arrangements that already existed, some *extend* them, and some *add* genuinely new requirements.

Table 1. The regulatory sequence: codification, extension and addition

Year	Instrument	Key provision	Type	Dominant mechanism	Curricular locus
2000	Wajar Dikdas in salafiyah pesantren (inter-ministerial agreement)	General education attached to salafiyah learning for basic-education equivalency	Baseline	Coercive (credential)	Periphery (added subjects)
2014	PMA 13/2014	PDF regulated as a pesantren-owned unit, with minimum general subjects (Art. 28); mu'adalah listed as a pesantren programme (Arts. 19–25)	Baseline	Coercive (formal routes)	Periphery (formal tracks)
2019	Law 18/2019	Kitab kuning and *dirasah islamiah*/muallimin as forms of pesantren (Art. 5); education based on each pesantren's own distinctiveness, tradition and curriculum (Art. 16(1))	Codification	Legitimation	Core protected
2019	Law 18/2019	Non-formal graduates recognized as equal to formal education at certain levels (Art. 23(3)); Dewan Masyayikh for internal quality assurance, including graduation exams (Art. 27); Majelis Masyayikh sets curriculum framework and quality criteria (Art. 29)	Extension	Coercive via credential; normative via kiai bodies	Certification, governance

Year	Instrument	Key provision	Type	Dominant mechanism	Curricular locus
2020	PMA 31/2020	Minimum general subjects (PPKn, Indonesian, mathematics, IPA/IPS) also for non-formal education (Art. 62(2)); competency exam organized by the pesantren, open to resident santri with an NISN and attendance records (Arts. 64–65); state emblem on diplomas (Arts. 22, 45, 64)	Addition	Coercive	Periphery, certification, data
2021	KMA 1154/2021	Majelis Masyayikh of nine kiai and nyai, first term 2021–2026	Addition	Normative (endogenous)	Governance, quality criteria
2021	Perpres 82/2021	Public funding of pesantren, including an endowment fund	Addition	Coercive (resource dependence)	Governance, reporting
2023	SPM Pesantren	Quality assurance for PDF, muadalah and Ma'had Aly; no national measures of academic achievement; detailed standards left to each Dewan Masyayikh	Addition	Normative	Evaluation, documentation
2025	Directorate General of Pesantren	Presidential initiative permit for a dedicated directorate general	Addition	Field structuration	All (prospective)

Sources: Anita (2016); Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia (2014, 2020); Republik Indonesia (2019, 2021); NU Online (2021); Medcom.id (2023); Amaliyah (2025).

Three features stand out. First, the law is written in the pesantren's own categories. Kitab kuning, *dirasah islamiah* and the *muallimin* pattern associated with Gontor's KMI system (Zarkasyi, 2020) are statutory forms, and Article 16(1) anchors education in each pesantren's own tradition. In institutional terms, this lowers the legitimacy cost of conforming, because a registering pesantren is not asked to become something else by name.

Second, the price of recognition is old, but its locus is new. Before 2019, salafiyah santri could obtain state-recognized credentials through routes that ran alongside kitab learning: the Wajar Dikdas equivalency programme since 2000 (Anita, 2016), PDF units and muadalah status under PMA 13/2014, or a madrasah. These routes already carried a general-subject price: Wajar Dikdas attached general basic education, and PDF required civic education, Indonesian,

mathematics and natural science (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2014, Art. 28). After PMA 31/2020, the kitab programme itself can lead to recognition, certified through an examination run by the pesantren, but only if the pesantren teaches four general subject areas, keeps NISN and attendance records for its santri, runs a competency examination and issues diplomas bearing the state emblem (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020, Arts. 62–65). None of these touches the kitab kuning directly. All of them import the grammar of the modern school: enrolment records, subject lists, examinations and certificates. This is coercive isomorphism in the classic sense of formal pressure from an organization on which others depend (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Here the dependence is on credentials rather than funds.

Third, much of the pressure reaches pesantren through their own religious elites. The Majelis Masyayikh consists of kiai and nyai (NU Online, 2021). The 2023 SPM document does not regulate academic achievement through national measures and leaves detailed standards to each institution's Dewan Masyayikh (Medcom.id, 2023), and even the competency examination is organized by the pesantren itself (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020, Art. 64). In the terms of regulatory intermediary theory, the state (regulator) reaches pesantren (targets) through bodies that translate and monitor its rules (Abbott et al., 2017). What is distinctive here is the intermediaries' source of authority. They are trusted not for technical expertise or independence but for religious standing, and their frameworks carry the minister's legal force. We call this *endogenous coercion*: state requirements enter the pesantren through its own elites and therefore read as self-regulation. Resisting the standards means resisting one's own senior kiai and nyai, which is socially costly. We suggest, as a hypothesis for future research, that this design lowers the likelihood of open opposition from salafiyah networks.

Enrolment data point to a less visible condition of this relocated credential gate. Table 2 reports santri numbers recorded in EMIS.

Table 2. Santri recorded in Ministry of Religious Affairs EMIS, by semester

Academic year	Odd semester	Even semester
2022/2023	4,074,011	4,845,317
2023/2024	3,143,555	3,339,536
2024/2025	3,221,332	1,605,445
2025/2026	1,378,687	—

Source: Kemenag EMIS, as reported by Santoso (2025).

We do not know why recorded numbers fell from 4.85 million to 1.38 million in three years. The data cannot distinguish a real decline from changes in registration, verification or reporting. What the table does show is that the national record of santri is unstable. Under PMA 31/2020, recognition of an individual santri's kitab learning depends on being in that record, so registration capacity becomes part of the credential gate. Musolli and Husna (2026) identify limited Dewan Masyayikh capacity to develop standardized curricula and internal quality-assurance systems as a critical challenge, and describe a programme in which seven pesantren in East Java's Tapal Kuda region drafted such documents with external support. Together, these observations suggest that the gate is easier to pass for administratively strong pesantren, a proposition we return to below.

The anchor case: a selective pattern that preceded the law

Riyadlul Mubtadiin offers a dated example of the adaptation the regime later codified. Its shift from pure salaf to semi-salaf began in 2017, when the parallel routes of Wajar Dikdas and PMA 13/2014 were available but before the 2019 law and before PMA 31/2020 made the kitab programme itself recognizable. Table 3 re-reads the data reported by Abidin and Sulaiman (2024) by curricular component, using the core defined in advance.

Table 3. Riyadlul Mubtadiin: curricular components before and after the reform that began in 2017

Component (core/periphery)	**Early period ("pure salaf")**	**2023 ("semi-salaf")**	**Likely mechanism**	**Finding**
Kitab sequence (core)	Seven grades defined by kitab (e.g., *al-Jurumiyyah* and *Safinah* in grade one; *Alfiyyah* and *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* in grade six; *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* and *Jawahir al-Balaghah* in grade seven)	Arabic sciences and *dirasah islamiyah* (nahwu, sharf, balaghah, fiqh, usul al-fiqh, tafsir, hadith, tasawwuf, tawhid) retained	n/a	Buffered
General subjects (periphery)	None	English, social sciences (including Indonesian), natural sciences, mathematics, ICT	Mimetic; later convergent with PMA 31/2020 minimum	Coupled
Method (core)	Sorogan; memorization and understanding of each text	Lecture method for kitab reading (*qira'ah*); direct method (*mubasharah*) for speaking (*kalam*)	Mimetic	**Changed (disconfirming)**
Co-curriculum (periphery)	None	Skills (bamboo weaving, gardening, fisheries, internships); self-development (silat, scouting, drum band, sport, Arabic and English debate, Qur'anic recitation, *khitabah*)	Mimetic (modern-pesantren model)	Coupled
Evaluation calendar and reports (periphery)	None; graduation by completing all texts or seven years	Quarterly and semester evaluations; reports in affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains; teacher-performance review	Mimetic and normative	Coupled
Moral assessment (core)	Not formalized	Semester *sulukiy* (moral conduct) assessment inside the report system	Translation	Buffered through translation
Kiai authority (core)	Not described in the published data	Caregiver (*pengasuh*) as highest authority; decisions by deliberation (*musyawarah*) with alumni involved	Normative	Buffered; participation widened

Sources: re-analysis of Abidin and Sulaiman (2024); reform start date from the authors' field records.

Four observations follow. First, the timing supports the rival explanation in part. The pesantren built its semi-salaf structure two years before the law and three years before the kitab programme itself could be credentialed. The general subjects it added correspond closely to the minimum later required by PMA 31/2020, although the published data do not mention civic education (PPKn) explicitly. The overlap is better read as convergence that the regime later made legible than as compliance with a rule that did not yet exist.

Second, the borrowed elements are mostly mimetic. Bilingual speech, debate, scouting and a regular evaluation cycle are hallmarks of the modern pesantren model associated with Gontor, which the authors' earlier article presented as a landmark of pesantren modernization (Abidin & Sulaiman, 2024; Zarkasyi, 2020). Mimetic isomorphism is expected where success is uncertain and a prestigious model is visible (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Policy-borrowing research adds

that borrowed models are selectively adapted to local contexts rather than copied whole (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

Third, the evaluation reform shows how a form can be adopted while its content is translated. The pesantren moved from no evaluation to a school-like calendar with reports organized by the affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains of national school assessment. Yet one of the semester instruments is a *sulukiy* assessment of moral conduct (Abidin & Sulaiman, 2024). The container is the school report, and the content is the pesantren's oldest concern, *adab*.

Fourth, the case contains disconfirming evidence. Sorogan, one of the four core elements fixed in advance, gave way to a lecture method for kitab reading. A lecture format is close to the bandongan tradition of group reading, so this may be a shift within the core rather than out of it. It is nonetheless a change to a core element, and it shows that the core is buffered but not frozen.

Five responses, two populations

Table 4 places the anchor case among the other cases. Panel A contains salafiyah cases, Panel B contrast cases. Classifications indicate the dominant pattern, because most cases combine tactics (Oliver, 1991).

Table 4. Cross-case matrix of strategic responses

Panel A. Salafiyah cases

Response	Case	Evidence of the response	Evidence period	Basis	Source
Compromise	Riyadlul Mubtadiin, Tuban	Semi-salaf structure; general subjects layered around kitab core; *sulukiy* assessment	2017 reform; 2023 fieldwork	Full (own data)	Abidin & Sulaiman (2024)
Compromise	APIK, Kaliwungu	PDF implemented to the basic rules; local content, bandongan and sorogan retained	Before 2020 (PDF under PMA 13/2014)	Abstract	Syukron et al. (2020)
Compromise	Bahrul Ulum, Tambakberas, Jombang	"Integration-multiformat": wetonan and sorogan alongside formal classes; vocational training	c. 2025	Full	Nisak et al. (2025)
Compromise	Sidosermo, Surabaya	Formal curriculum, digital technology and professional management added; kitab teaching and grave pilgrimage retained	c. 2025	Abstract	Kurniadi et al. (2025)
Compromise	Buntet, Cirebon	Kurikulum Merdeka outcomes aligned with kitab study; national standards treated as *wasilah* (means)	c. 2026	Full	Hidayati (2026)
Compromise	Accommodative-reforming salaf pesantren, Jember	Accepts selected modern elements under kiai control	c. 2026	Abstract	Zaimina et al. (2026)
Compromise	Ma'had Aly sector	2025 regulatory shift from recognition to operational standardization; "turats-centered but standard-mediated"	2025	Abstract	Syahroni & Hosna (2026)
Avoidance	Lirboyo, Kediri	Graded classical system alongside sorogan and bandongan; curriculum tied to the salaf tradition; own year-end *muhafazah*, announced before the *masyayikh*	2019	Abstract	Junaidi (2019)

Response	Case	Evidence of the response	Evidence period	Basis	Source
Avoidance	Mathali'ul Falah, Kajen, Pati	"Traditional-intensive": kitab kuning core, cautious selective integration, relative financial independence	c. 2025	Full	Nisak et al. (2025)
Avoidance	Reforming-resistance salaf pesantren, Jember	Internal reform with limited engagement with state templates	c. 2026	Abstract	Zaimina et al. (2026)
Defiance	Absolutist-resistance salaf pesantren, Jember	Resistance to educational modernity sustained by kitab preservation, kiai authority, moral discipline, spatial regulation, technological restrictions and economic self-reliance	c. 2026	Abstract	Zaimina et al. (2026)

Panel B. Contrast cases

Response	Case	Evidence of the response	Evidence period	Basis	Source
Acquiescence	Darunnajah, Jakarta (modern)	"Modern-progressive": project- and problem-based learning, digital literacy, managerial leadership	c. 2025	Full	Nisak et al. (2025)
Acquiescence	MTs Darussalam Ngoro, Jombang (formal madrasah)	National madrasah curriculum with kitab kuning, *tahfiz* and pesantren co-curriculum added	c. 2025	Abstract	Sunardi et al. (2025)
Manipulation	Ma'had Al Faruq Karanglewas and Ibnu Taimiyyah Sumpiuh, Banyumas (Salafi)	National curriculum used to secure legal status; roughly 70:30 religious-to-general content; pruning of material deemed doctrinally problematic; general subjects framed within a faith perspective	c. 2026	Abstract	Ismawati et al. (2026)
Manipulation (field level)	Gontor (modern)	Did not apply the national curriculum and used its own model (KMI); the muallimin pattern is now a statutory form	Historical	Full	Zarkasyi (2020); Republik Indonesia (2019)

Note. "Full" means checked against the full text and "Abstract" against the published abstract only. Abstract-level classifications are indicative. "c." means the period of the publication, used where the study does not date the reform itself.

The two panels show different distributions. All eleven salafiyah cases (ten pesantren and the Ma'had Aly sector) fall in the middle of Oliver's typology: seven compromise, three avoidance and one defiance. Acquiescence and manipulation appear only among contrast cases. This pattern is consistent with Oliver's (1991) propositions. Compromise is expected when pressures are multiple and their legitimacy is accepted, and here both state recognition and the kitab tradition are widely accepted as legitimate. Resistance is expected when dependence on the pressuring constituent is low. The avoidance cases (the long-established and prestigious Lirboyo and the

relatively self-financing Mathali'ul Falah) fit that expectation. We interpret their stance as a dependence effect: internal evaluation and reputation already give their graduates standing, so state credentials add less. Because this interpretation rests partly on abstract-level evidence, we treat it as indicative.

Defiance is real but rare in the published record. Zaimina et al. (2026) show that it is sustained by identifiable mechanisms and coexists in the same district with reforming and accommodative variants. Resistance is thus a choice made under shared conditions, not a property of salaf pesantren as such. The rarity of defiance may also reflect selection, since defiant institutions are the least likely to admit researchers.

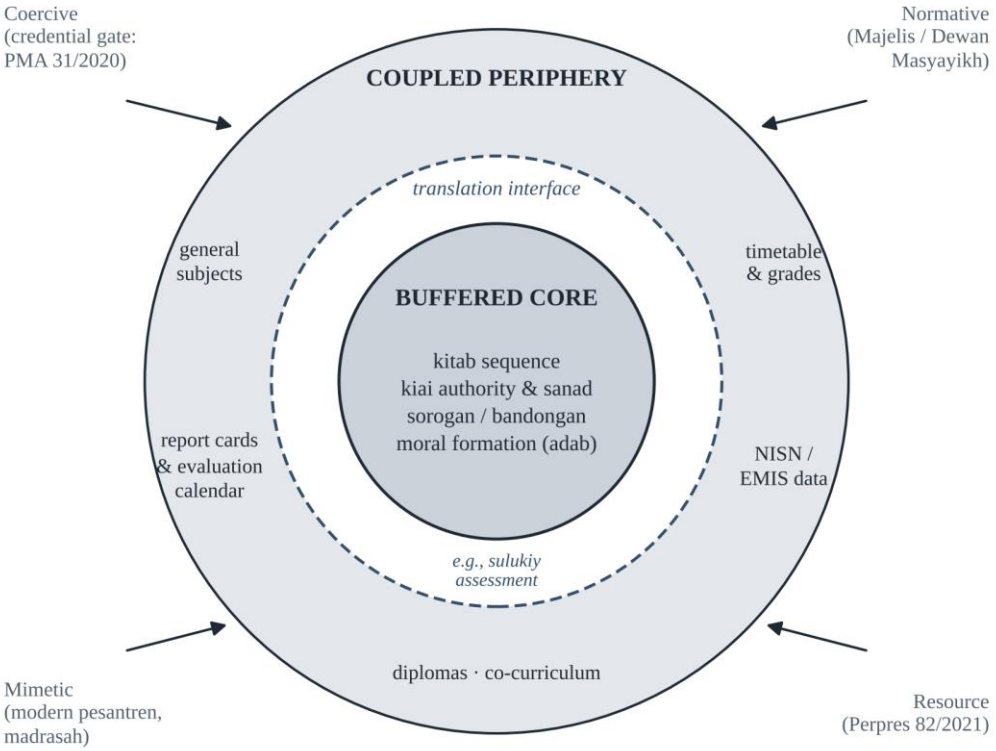
Manipulation appears in two different forms, both among contrast cases. The Salafi pesantren in Banyumas comply administratively to gain legal status while keeping ideological control of content (Ismawati et al., 2026), consistent with Makruf and Asrori's (2022) account of Salafi educators as skilled users of state curricula. This is decoupling in Bromley and Powell's (2012) sense: formal conformity is separated from what is taught. It differs from the salafiyah pattern, in which periphery elements are actually implemented. Gontor illustrates the other form, shaping the field itself, since a model that once stood outside the national curriculum has become a statutory category. We do not claim that Gontor lobbied for this outcome. The point is structural: where the regulator borrows categories from successful pesantren, the most influential response is to become the template.

Dating the evidence adds a temporal dimension. The three salafiyah cases with pre-2020 evidence (Riyadlul Mubtadiin's 2017 reform, APIK's PDF and Lirboyo) already show the selective pattern before the kitab programme itself could be credentialed. The cases documented after 2023 (Buntet, the Jember pesantren and the Ma'had Aly sector) show the same pattern persisting under the new regime. In the Ma'had Aly sector, standardization of learning outcomes and assessment is visibly intensifying (Syahroni & Hosna, 2026). The pattern is therefore older than the law, while the pressure on its boundary is newer.

Selective isomorphism: a core–periphery model

The third finding answers RQ3. Using the core fixed in advance, the salafiyah cases consistently attach state and mimetic templates to the periphery and buffer the core (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Selective isomorphism



The periphery includes general subjects, timetables and grades, report formats and evaluation calendars, enrolment data, diplomas and most co-curriculum. Credentials depend on these elements, and the salafiyah tradition never regarded them as sacred, so conceding them costs little legitimacy.

The core is buffered across cases. Riyadlul Mubtadiin keeps the kitab subjects and the *pengasuh*'s final authority. APIK Kaliwungu implements PDF but retains sorogan and bandongan (Syukron et al., 2020). Lirboyo keeps its own year-end *muhafazah*, announced before the *masyayikh* (Junaidi, 2019). Buntet names national standards as means, not ends (Hidayati, 2026). The defiant Jember pesantren protect the same core by refusing the periphery altogether (Zaimina et al., 2026).

Between the two lies a translation interface. School forms carry pesantren content: the *sulukiy* assessment inside a semester report, the fiqh of sale contracts from *Fath al-Mu'in* taught alongside digital transactions within national learning outcomes (Hidayati, 2026), and Ma'had Aly standards that measure turats-centred competencies through national assessment formats (Syahroni & Hosna, 2026).

We call this pattern *selective isomorphism*: conformity in form at the periphery, translation at the interface and buffering at the core. The idea of translation is well established in organizational research, particularly in Scandinavian institutionalism (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). Our contribution lies in where translation is located and who controls it. In the pesantren cases, translation happens at a specific interface, between a periphery coupled to state templates and a core defined by tradition and law. Religious authority decides what may cross. This specifies Pache and Santos's (2013) selective coupling for religious education. Hybrids do not only pick intact practices from each logic; they also adopt practices from one logic as vessels for the other, under the control of actors whose legitimacy comes from the second logic. The boundary itself is co-produced. Law 18/2019 protects kitab kuning, and the SPM document declines national

achievement measures, so selective isomorphism is both an organizational strategy and a regulatory design.

The disconfirming evidence matters here. Riyadlul Mubtadiin's move from sorogan to a lecture method, Nurtawab's (2019) documented decline of bandongan readings, and the formalization of Ma'had Aly *marhalah* competencies (Syahroni & Hosna, 2026) all show the core shifting at its edges. The model therefore does not predict a frozen core. It predicts that core change will be slower, more contested and more often framed as continuity than periphery change.

Ratification or response? Weighing the rival explanation

The evidence supports the rival explanation in part. The selective pattern predates PMA 31/2020 at Riyadlul Mubtadiin, APIK and Lirboyo, and it resembles the longer history of pesantren adaptation, including the general-subject requirements of Wajar Dikdas (Anita, 2016; Dhofier, 2011; Lukens-Bull, 2010). The law codifies the pesantren's own categories, and its standard-setters are kiai and nyai. On these points, the regime ratified an existing settlement rather than creating one.

Ratification is not the whole story, however. Three elements are new: the relocation of the credential gate into the kitab programme itself, the formal role of religious elites as regulatory intermediaries, and, from 2025, operational standardization in the Ma'had Aly sector. These do not create the core–periphery boundary, but they begin to administer it. We summarize the shift as a move from ratification to administration. The main risk for salafiyah pesantren lies here, because administration can move a boundary that ratification merely recorded. We identify three ways this could happen.

The first is periphery creep. Time and attention are finite, so when general subjects and examinations claim more of the timetable, the core can erode without any explicit decision to change it (Nurtawab, 2019; Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). The second is credential stratification. If recognition depends on registration and documentation capacity, large and well-resourced pesantren will convert the law's promise into credentials more easily than small rural ones (Musolli & Husna, 2026). The third is standard drift. If instruments like the 2025 Ma'had Aly reform reach muadalah and non-formal pesantren, the translation interface may narrow, and pesantren would have to justify their core in the language of measurable outcomes.

Other drivers also deserve note. Market demand and parental expectations likely pushed pesantren toward general subjects long before 2019, and alumni networks act as an independent channel of normative and financial influence. Alumni help set institutional direction at Riyadlul Mubtadiin (Abidin & Sulaiman, 2024) and fund infrastructure through a waqf movement at Mathali'ul Falah (Nisak et al., 2025). The published record does not allow these drivers to be separated from regulatory pressure. That is a task for primary research.

Comparison and theoretical implications

International comparison clarifies the Indonesian settlement. Haredi boys' schools in Israel face a state core curriculum that conflicts with their norms. Perry-Hazan et al. (2024) find "coupled institutional maintenance" there, in which schools and weakly enforcing inspectors jointly sustain noncompliance. Indonesia differs in a telling way. The Pesantren Law does not impose a core curriculum on kitab content. It places the core outside regulation and attaches requirements to the periphery, so there is less noncompliance because the most contested ground was ceded in advance. Bangladesh's qawmi madrasahs show the opposite configuration. Recognition exists only for the highest degree, secular subjects are largely excluded, and reluctance to engage the state stems from fear that external regulation will compromise epistemic

and institutional autonomy (Hasan & Anoraga, 2026). Against these cases, Indonesia's model is a negotiated middle path that buys broad recognition at the cost of periphery conformity.

Two theoretical implications follow. First, endogenous coercion blurs the separation of coercive and normative isomorphism. Where a state delegates standard-setting to religious elites, coercion and professional norms merge, and conformity depends less on enforcement than on those elites' legitimacy. This also means that rifts within the kiai community could quickly destabilize the settlement. It extends regulatory intermediary theory (Abbott et al., 2017) to intermediaries whose authority is religious rather than technical. Second, the cases support arguments that curriculum policy mixes imported, hybrid and endogenous elements (García Garduño & Honorato, 2024), and that state–Islamic education relations in Indonesia have moved from domestication toward accommodation (Kosim et al., 2023). The pesantren field adds a mechanism to these accounts: accommodation is achieved by agreeing on where the core ends. Similar negotiated autonomy has been reported for Indonesian Islamic universities (Mizani et al., 2026; Waluyo, 2026).

The religious moderation agenda appears to travel the same channel. Athoillah et al. (2024) find that pesantren implement moderation policies mainly by adding interfaith content to curricula and by fostering critical thinking and related practices, that is, at the periphery or through translation. Whether ideological programmes and credential requirements are governed by the same core–periphery boundary is a proposition future research could test directly.

CONCLUSION

This study asked how Indonesia's pesantren recognition regime relates to curriculum adaptation in salafiyah pesantren. On RQ1, the 2014–2025 sequence codifies the pesantren's own categories and extends formal routes that existed before 2019. The general-subject price of recognition dates back to at least 2000. The main change is that the credential gate has been relocated into the non-formal kitab programme itself, with certification by pesantren and standards set largely by kiai and nyai acting as regulatory intermediaries, a form of endogenous coercion. On RQ2, salafiyah cases cluster in the middle of Oliver's typology, with compromise most common, avoidance among prestigious and self-financing pesantren and defiance rare, while acquiescence and manipulation occur only among modern, madrasah and Salafi contrast cases. On RQ3, using a core defined in advance, salafiyah pesantren couple state and mimetic templates to the periphery, translate school forms so that they carry pesantren content, and buffer the kitab sequence, kiai authority, traditional methods and moral assessment. The core is buffered but not frozen. Dated evidence, including Riyadlul Mubtadiin's 2017 reform, shows that this selective pattern predates the law. The regime ratified it and has begun to administer it, and administration, through periphery creep, credential stratification and standard drift, is where the boundary may move.

Recommendation

For policy, quality-assurance instruments under the Majelis Masyayikh and the new Directorate General of Pesantren should keep the core outside numerical benchmarking and assess it on its own terms, through *sanad*, *adab*, textual mastery and scholarly reasoning, as Syahroni and Hosna (2026) propose for Ma'had Aly. Capacity support for Dewan Masyayikh and for data registration should go first to small and rural pesantren, so that recognition does not become a privilege of administratively strong institutions. The ministry should publish an explanation of EMIS enrolment changes, because individual recognition now depends on those records.

For pesantren, a written statement of which elements are core and which are open to adaptation, agreed by the *pengasuh*, the Dewan Masyayikh and alumni, would make the boundary

explicit and harder to erode. Riyadlul Mubtadiin's practice of alumni deliberation offers a natural forum for it.

For research, three designs would test the claims made here. First, follow-up fieldwork at Riyadlul Mubtadiin after the 2023 SPM document could examine whether the boundary has moved. Second, timetable studies tracking the share of instructional hours given to core and periphery elements over time would provide a direct test of periphery creep. Third, credential stratification could be tested by comparing the completeness of EMIS registration and the share of santri sitting competency examinations across pesantren of different sizes and regions. This study has further limits. It relies on published data, seven of its corpus studies are known only at abstract level, and it lacks the voices of santri, parents, nyai and small rural pesantren, as well as any focus on pesantren for girls. Each of these is a priority for future work.

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