



The Politics of Religious Recognition: A Comparative Study of Modern Government Policies In Indonesia And Turkey

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the politics of religious recognition through modern government policies in Indonesia and Turkey and compare the implications of the secularism model adopted on the position of religion in the public sphere. Religious recognition is a fundamental aspect of modern governance because it is directly related to the legitimacy of the state and socio-political stability. These two Muslim-majority countries allocate large proportions of the budget for religious administration despite adhering to the principle of secularism. This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative study method through comparative policy analysis and comparative techniques between countries. Secondary data were collected through documentation studies and systematic literature analysis of policy documents, laws and regulations, and academic literature. The results of the study show that Indonesia implements the model of religious pluralism with restrictions through the formal recognition of six official religions to manage diversity within the framework of social harmony. Meanwhile, Turkey is undergoing a transformation from rigid secularism to controlled religious governance dominated by an interpretation of orthodox Islam under the leadership of the AKP. Both countries maintain state control over religious affairs through massive religious bureaucracies such as the MORA in Indonesia and the Diyanet in Turkey. This study confirms that the politics of religious recognition is not just an administrative matter, but a complex political strategy for managing plurality, legitimacy of power, and social stability in multicultural societies.

Keyword: Politics of Religious Recognition, Religious Governance, Secularism, Religious Pluralism, Indonesia, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

Religious recognition is a fundamental aspect of modern governance because it is directly related to the legitimacy of the state and socio-political stability. Secular countries such as Indonesia and Turkey, despite the majority of the population being Muslim, actually allocate a large proportion of budgets for religious administration, even higher than countries that make Islam the official religion (Bruinessen, 2018). The concept of institutional religious freedom emphasizes that individual freedom in religion is influenced by the complexity of social embedding, thus becoming a correction to the conventional individualistic approach (Hefner,

2021). In the context of high religious diversity such as in Indonesia, the country faces the challenge of celebrating Islamic heritage while ensuring the inclusivity of minority groups through religious moderation. Thus, religious recognition is not just an administrative matter, but a political strategy that determines the way the modern state manages plurality and maintains social relations (Judijanto et al., 2024).

Indonesia implements a formal but limited system of religious pluralism through official recognition of six religions, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, as an effort by the state to manage diversity within a structured policy framework (Septiadi & Ramdani, 2024). The religious freedom landscape in Indonesia is shaped by two main elements, namely the progressive adoption of human rights in new laws and constitutions as a result of the 1998 post-democratization amendments, and religious governance that has long recognized limited pluralism and emphasizes harmony over freedom (Viri & Febriany, 2020). Recent developments indicate progress, where religious minority groups can now include belief identities on identity cards through new categories of "beliefs" beyond the six recognized religions. However, paradoxes persist because although Indonesia advocates tolerance and diversity, the practice of religious recognition is still limited to a rigid formal framework, thus posing challenges for faith groups and religious minorities in gaining full legitimacy from the state.

In contrast to Indonesia, which adopts a limited formal pluralism approach, Turkey has a very contrasting political trajectory of religion in its historical course as a modern country. Turkey underwent a dramatic transformation in its policy of religious recognition, beginning with the implementation of strict post-independence secularism under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that radically separated religion from state affairs through the abolition of the caliphate and the establishment of a Western secular system. This period was characterized by restrictions on public religious expression, the prohibition of religious organizations, and systematic efforts to minimize the role of Islam in the political and social life of Turkish society (Nor & Ibrahim, 2023). However, Turkey's religious political landscape has undergone significant shifts since the era of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002 which gradually reintegrated Islamic values into public policy, education, and governance. This transformation created a new dynamic in the relations of the state and religion in Turkey, from rigid secularism to what can be termed as neo-Ottomanism that accommodated Islamic identity within the framework of modern democracy, while still maintaining a secular constitutional structure (Gontijo & Barbosa, 2020).

Studies on the relationship between state and religion, especially in the context of Indonesia and Turkey, have been carried out by many researchers before. Research conducted by Orien Effendi (2022) entitled "State-Religion Relationship from the Perspective of Islamic-Based State Policy" highlights the relationship between state and religion in Indonesia from the perspective of Islamic-based state policy. With a juridical-normative approach and analysis of various legal products, this study found that even though Indonesia is not a formal Islamic country, Islamic legal values still have a space in the national legal system, especially in the field of private law such as marriage, Islamic banking, zakat, waqf, and hajj. The results of the study show that the relationship between the state and religion in Indonesia is symbiotic, where the state provides legality to legal products with sharia nuances while maintaining tolerance within the framework of Pancasila. On the contrary, religion is seen as important as a source of morality for the state. This research also emphasizes that the application of Islamic law in Indonesia is more inclusive than exclusive, so that its existence does not erase the plurality of laws and beliefs that exist in society (Effendi, 2022).

The research was conducted by Martin van Bruinessen (2018) with the title "The Governance of Islam in Two Secular Polities: Turkey's Diyanet and Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs". This article highlights how two secular republics, namely Turkey and

Indonesia, actually have huge religious bureaucracies—the Diyanet in Turkey and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) in Indonesia. Both were originally formed by authoritarian secular regimes as instruments of social engineering to control and "enlighten" religious people, especially conservative Muslims, to fit the state's agenda. However, in subsequent developments, these institutions were taken over by conservative and Islamist groups, thus turning into instruments to re-strengthen the position of Islam in the public sphere and even influence state policies. This article also shows the differences in the models of secularism in the two countries: Turkey, with its secularism that resembles French *laïcité*, tends to subject religion to strict state control, while Indonesia applies secularism based on pluralism with the principle of "equal distance" to all religions, although *de facto* Islam remains dominant (Bruinissen, 2018).

The research was conducted by Muhammad Fahmi Basyah Fauzi & Muhammad Asy'ari (2024) with the title "Secularism and Democracy: A Comparative Study of Turkey and Indonesia". This study compares the practice of secularism in Turkey and Indonesia as Muslim-majority countries with democratic presidential systems. Although both adhere to the principle of separation of religion and politics, their implementation differs significantly. Turkey is used as an example of a Muslim country that has succeeded in running a fully secular government, while Indonesia applies this separation in the context of religious diversity and high pluralism. This study traces the historical roots and institutional development of secularism in each country which includes the philosophical background, the relationship between secularism and democracy, and the compatibility of secularism with Islam in the modern era (Fauzi & Asy'ari, 2024).

Based on previous research, the gap in the study is still open to examine the politics of religious recognition from the perspective of modern government policies in Indonesia and Turkey. This study aims to analyze how the politics of religious recognition is realized through state policies, as well as compare the implications of the secularism model adopted by both on the position of religion in the public sphere and state life.

Charles Taylor's Confession Concept. Charles Taylor (1994) explained that the politics of recognition was born from the change in the concept of traditional honor to modern dignity in a democratic society. Taylor distinguishes between the politics of universalism that emphasizes equal rights, and the politics of difference that recognizes the distinctive identity of minority groups. In the context of a multicultural country, the politics of recognition is important so that government institutions are not exclusive, but rather provide space for cultural and religious plurality (Taylor, 1994).

State-religion relations in the political literature can be categorized into several models. First, secularism ala *laïcité* which emphasizes the strict separation between religion and state (Van Der Tol, 2020; Peker, 2019). Second, a model of religious pluralism that formally recognizes the existence of various religions and provides regulatory space for religious practices (Thompson & Modood, 2022). Third, the concept of religious governance in which the state plays an active role in regulating religious affairs through the institutionalization of religious bureaucracy (Modood & Sealy, 2021; Bossi & García Bossio, 2024).

In Indonesia, the legal basis for religious recognition is found in the PNPS Law No. 1 of 1965 which implicitly recognizes six official religions. This policy is strengthened through Article 29 paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion. However, faith groups still experience discrimination despite the Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 which gives the right to include religious identity on ID cards (Viri & Febriany, 2020; Nurwansyah & Hidayat, 2024; Arroisi et al., 2021).

Religious Recognition Policy in Turkey. Turkey initially implemented Kemalist secularism that separated religion from state affairs. However, since Erdoğan's rule, there has been a shift towards gradual Islamization (stealth Islamization) through the Diyanet as the main

religious bureaucracy (Gumuscu, 2024; Musthafa & Purwati, 2022; Öztürk & Baser, 2022). This transformation can be seen from the rapidly increasing expansion of the Diyanet's budget as well as symbolic policies such as the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque in 2020 (Gülalp, 2022; Kaplan, 2002; Oztig & Adisonmez, 2024).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research type with a comparative study approach to analyze the politics of religious recognition in Indonesia and Turkey (Creswell & D, 2018). The research method applied is comparative policy analysis with comparative techniques between countries to understand the differences and similarities in the implementation of religious recognition policies in the context of modern government (Peters, 2013). The research data source consists of secondary data in the form of policy documents, laws and regulations, academic literature, government reports, and official publications from both countries that are relevant to the theme of religious recognition. The data collection technique was carried out through documentation studies and systematic literature analysis of primary and secondary sources related to religious policies, secularism, and pluralism in Indonesia and Turkey (Sugiyono, 2017). The data analysis technique uses qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach to identify patterns, themes, and categories in religious recognition policies, as well as comparative analysis to explain the differences in secularism models and their implications for the position of religion in the public sphere in the two countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Model of Religious Recognition and Political Legitimacy in Indonesia

Indonesia implements an inclusive-selective religious recognition model through PNPS Law No. 1 of 1965 which implicitly recognizes six official religions, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Butt, 2020). This policy reflects the country's political strategy in managing religious plurality through a structured framework while maintaining national stability. Thus, formal recognition of the six religions is not just an administrative decision, but an instrument of political legitimacy that places the state as a protector of diversity as well as a guardian of social harmony.

The constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion is stated in Article 29 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution which affirms that "The State guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace his or her own religion and to worship according to his religion and belief." However, the implementation of this policy gave rise to a hierarchy of recognition, in which six official religions obtained institutional privileges, such as religious education facilities in public schools, assistance in the construction of houses of worship, and representation in the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Religion. This condition shows that although Indonesia claims to apply the principle of equal distance to all religions, in practice there are differences in treatment that are more favorable to officially recognized religions (Hidayah et al., 2024).

In the context of religious governance, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia is the main instrument of religious governance with a broad bureaucratic structure. MORA is one of the largest ministries with significant budgets, even exceeding the allocation of religious funds in a number of countries that have made Islam an official religion (Bruinessen, 2018). The role of the Ministry of Religion is not only religious administration, but includes the implementation of religious education, supervision of religious activities, management of Hajj and Umrah, and the development of harmony between religious communities.

One of MORA's important policies is the implementation of the concept of religious moderation introduced during the Joko Widodo administration. This program aims to promote Islam that is tolerant, inclusive, and compatible with national values. Through the moderate

da'i development program, the preparation of religious moderation education modules, and anti-extremism campaigns, MORA seeks to form a religious discourse that supports political stability and social cohesion (Haitomi et al., 2022). This shows how the state uses bureaucratic instruments not only to regulate, but also to shape religious interpretations and practices according to political interests.

The policy of religious recognition was further emphasized through the Joint Regulation (PBM) of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 and 8 of 2006 which established the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) at the provincial and district/city levels. FKUB functions as a forum for dialogue, conflict mediation, and advocacy for religious policies by involving representatives of various recognized religions. The existence of FKUB reflects the state's recognition of the potential for horizontal conflicts between religious communities, as well as the need for preventive mechanisms to maintain social stability (Jajuri & Rahmat, 2021).

Through FKUB, the state also regulates procedures for establishing houses of worship that require community support and recommendations from local governments. Although intended to maintain social harmony, these mechanisms are often an obstacle for religious minority groups that have difficulty meeting support requirements. As a result, discriminatory practices have emerged that put minority groups in a vulnerable position (Jajuri & Rahmat, 2021). This shows that the policy of religious recognition in Indonesia, although based on the principle of pluralism, still has the potential for marginalization.

One of the political paradoxes of religious recognition in Indonesia can be seen in the treatment of local religions and schools of belief. This group is often marginalized, even though its existence is rooted in the traditions of society. An important breakthrough emerged through the Constitutional Court Decision Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016 which gave believers the right to include their religious identity on identity cards outside of the six official religions. Nevertheless, the implementation of this decision still faces practical obstacles, both in bureaucracy and social resistance (Ginting, 2024).

The Politics of Religious Recognition in Turkey

Turkey has implemented a policy model of religious recognition based on the principle of Kemalist secularism (secularism) that radically separates religion from state affairs since the era of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Kemalist secularism, adopted through the 1928 amendment of the Constitution that removed the clause "State religion is Islam," represented a modernization project aimed at transforming Turkey from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire into a modern, secular republic. The principle of *laïcité* explicitly stated in the 1937 Constitution reflects a commitment to the total separation between religion and the state, even more radical than Western secularism because it not only separates but also controls and limits religious expression in public spaces (Çaksu, 2025).

However, contemporary political dynamics show that Kemalist's secularism has experienced a crisis of legitimacy since the era of multi-party democracy began in the 1950s and reached its peak during the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002 (Gumuscu, 2024). Erdoğan has gradually reintegrated Islamic values into public policy, education, and governance through a strategy called stealth Islamization, which is a gradual and covert Islamization that is carried out without changing the secular constitutional framework (Gumuscu, 2024).

The Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Directorate of Religious Affairs), which was established in 1924 as a replacement for the Ottoman Şeyhülislam, became the main instrument in the implementation of the policy of religious recognition in Turkey. Regulated in Article 136 of the Turkish Constitution, the Diyanet originally functioned as a tool of Kemalist secularism to control religious practices and prevent the emergence of independent religious authorities that

could challenge the legitimacy of the secular state. Especially after the 1980 military coup, the Diyanet developed into a massive state bureaucracy with the authority to control public religious practices ranging from mosque management, religious education, the procurement of Qur'an courses, to moral lessons in schools (Bruinessen, 2018).

The transformation occurred in the AKP era when the Diyanet evolved from an instrument of secularism to a tool of state Islamization. Budget data shows a tremendous expansion from about 3 billion TL in 2011 to more than 13 billion TL in 2021, even breaking 90 billion TL in 2023. This increase in the budget is accompanied by an expansion of the Diyanet's mandate that not only regulates domestic religious affairs but also serves as an instrument of global soft power through religious services and religious diplomacy abroad, particularly in countries with the Turkish diaspora and Muslim communities (Hosen & Shukri, 2023).

Erdoğan's leadership marks a significant shift in the politics of religious recognition in Turkey from strict secularism towards what can be termed neo-Ottomanism that accommodates Islamic identity within the framework of modern democracy. Islamic-oriented policies are systematically implemented through various reforms such as the lifting of the hijab ban in universities and public institutions, the expansion of religious education through Imam Hatip schools, and increasing the visibility of Islamic symbols in public spaces (Dilmac, 2025).

One of the most symbolic policies was the conversion of the Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque in July 2020 that reflected the AKP's efforts to legitimize Turkey's Islamic identity and consolidate the support of the conservative base. This policy, despite drawing international criticism, shows how Erdoğan is using religious symbols to strengthen domestic political legitimacy and project Turkey's image as the leader of the Islamic world. The transformation of urban infrastructure through the construction of magnificent mosques is also part of the strategy to bring back Islam strongly in the public space (Oztig & Adisonmez, 2024).

Comparative Analysis of Recognition Models and Political Implications

A comparison between Indonesia and Turkey shows two different trajectories in the implementation of religious governance in Muslim-majority countries. Indonesia implements a "religious pluralism with restrictions" model that recognizes religious diversity within a limited framework (Fauzi & Asy'ari, 2024). Meanwhile, Turkey is experiencing a transition from "rigid secularism" to "controlled religious governance" under the dominance of orthodox Islamic interpretations. The two countries have similarities in terms of maintaining large religious bureaucracies such as the MORA in Indonesia and the Diyanet in Turkey as instruments of state control over religious affairs.

The fundamental difference lies in the approach to religious plurality. Indonesia, with its system of recognition of six official religions, seeks to accommodate diversity through formal mechanisms despite its various limitations (Fauzi & Asy'ari, 2024). In contrast, Turkey implements a more homogeneous system with a focus on regulating the practices of its majority while providing minimal protection to non-Muslim religious minorities (Bruinessen, 2018). The Indonesian model tends to prioritize social harmony through diversity management, while the Turkish model prioritizes national cohesion through dominant religious identity.

In the context of political legitimacy, both countries use religion as a source of morality and social stability, but with different strategies. Indonesia applies religious moderation as a paradigm to balance the commitment to pluralism and the need to maintain stability in a diverse society. This strategy allows the state to position itself as a neutral mediator while still giving privileges to Islam as the majority religion. On the other hand, Turkey uses conservative Islamic rhetoric to legitimize the AKP's policies while maintaining state control over religious interpretation and practice through the Diyanet (Subchi et al., 2022).

Both models show that in the context of Muslim-majority countries, religious governance is an important instrument for managing political legitimacy and maintaining social stability. However, its implementation creates its own challenges in the form of the potential marginalization of minority groups and the tension between secular-democratic commitments and the demographic and political realities dominated by Islam. These dynamics demonstrate the complexity of state-religion relations in the context of political modernity in the contemporary Muslim world.

CONCLUSION

A comparative study of the politics of religious recognition in Indonesia and Turkey shows that these two Muslim-majority countries have developed different but common models of religious governance in maintaining state control over religious affairs through massive religious bureaucracy. Indonesia implements a model of religious pluralism with restrictions through the formal recognition of six official religions aimed at managing diversity within the framework of social harmony, while Turkey is undergoing a transformation from rigid secularism to a controlled religious governance dominated by orthodox interpretations of Islam under the leadership of the AKP. Although both use religion as a source of political legitimacy and social stability, the implementation of religious recognition policies in both countries still harbors the potential for marginalization of minority groups and creates tensions between secular-democratic commitments and Islamic-dominated demographic realities. These dynamics confirm that the politics of religious recognition in the context of the modern state is not just an administrative affair, but a complex political strategy that determines how the state manages plurality, legitimacy of power, and social stability in a multicultural society.

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