



The Criminalization of Islamic Discourse in the Case of the *Ar-Risalah* Bulletin in Yogyakarta, 1983-1986

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Abstract

This article examines the criminalization of Islamic discourse in the case of the *Ar-Risalah* Bulletin in Yogyakarta from 1983 to 1986. The study focuses on the shift in *Ar-Risalah*'s position from a media outlet for youth outreach at the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque to a text that was called into question in New Order-era news coverage and legal proceedings. This research employs historical methods through the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, using a sociology of religion approach as well as Lewis A. Coser's theory of social conflict. The primary sources for this research consist of contemporary news reports from *Kiblat*, *Tempo*, *Berita Yudha*, and *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, as well as an interview with Nur Wahid, a historical source regarding the General Sudirman Mosque. The findings reveal that the criminalization of *Ar-Risalah* occurred through the labeling of the bulletin as a disseminator of false

news, a catalyst for unrest, a subversive entity, and a threat to Pancasila. This article emphasizes that the discourse on Islamic politics during the New Order era was not only present through political parties or large organizations but also through local spaces such as mosques, newsletters, reading networks, and youth communities outside the formal political institutions that were strictly controlled by the state at that time.

Keywords: *Criminalization, Islamic Discourse, Ar-Risalah Newsletter.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji kriminalisasi wacana Islam dalam kasus Buletin Ar-Risalah di Yogyakarta pada 1983-1986. Fokus kajian diarahkan pada perubahan posisi Ar-Risalah dari media dakwah pemuda Masjid Jenderal Sudirman menjadi teks yang dipersoalkan dalam pemberitaan dan proses hukum Orde Baru. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah melalui tahap heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi, dengan pendekatan sosiologi agama serta teori konflik sosial Lewis A. Coser. Sumber utama penelitian berupa pemberitaan sezaman dari *Kiblat*, *Tempo*, *Berita Yudha*, dan *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, serta wawancara dengan Nur Wahid sebagai narasumber sejarah Masjid Jenderal Sudirman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kriminalisasi Ar-Risalah terjadi melalui pelabelan terhadap buletin sebagai penyebar berita bohong, pemicu keonaran, subversi, dan ancaman terhadap Pancasila. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa wacana politik Islam masa Orde Baru tidak hanya hadir melalui partai politik atau organisasi besar, tetapi juga melalui ruang lokal seperti masjid, buletin, jaringan bacaan, dan komunitas pemuda di luar lembaga politik formal yang dikontrol negara secara ketat pada masa itu.

Kata Kunci: *Kriminalisasi, Wacana Islam, Buletin Ar-Risalah.*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Islam and the state during the New Order era revealed tensions between religious expression, the state's political interests, and control over the public sphere. The New Order government did not completely shut down Islamic activities as a religion, as worship, religious study groups, religious education, and da'wah were still allowed to take place. However, when expressions of

Islam moved into the political realm such as criticism of the state, ideas about Sharia, or discussions regarding the relationship between Islam and the state the government began to frame them as issues of national security, order, and stability.

Bahtiar Effendy explains in his writing that the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia from the early days of the republic through the New Order era was often marked by tension between Islamic political aspirations and the state's interests in maintaining its ideological foundation and political stability (Effendy, 2011). In the context of the New Order, this tension became increasingly apparent through restrictions on political Islam and the use of state-sanctioned rhetoric such as Pancasila, national stability, subversion, and security (Syamsuddin & Fatkhan, 2010).

In a political climate that restricts the expression of formal Islam itself, mosques have become an important space for Muslims to foster communication, provide guidance, and disseminate ideas. Mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as social spaces that facilitate religious study sessions, discussions, leadership training, education, and the exchange of Islamic literature.

During the New Order era, when formal political channels were increasingly restricted through the depoliticization of Islamic parties, the enforcement of Pancasila as the sole ideology, and the Campus Life Normalization (NKK) policy, mosques actually emerged as alternative spaces for Muslim youth themselves. In his writing, Yudi Latif demonstrates that during the New Order era, the da'wah movement and the mosque youth movement flourished as a form of Islamic expression as formal political spaces became increasingly restricted (Latif, 2012).

It is within this framework that the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque in Yogyakarta is positioned as the social backdrop for the emergence of Islamic discourse, as this mosque serves not only as a religious space but also as a social space where Muslim youth, da'wah, Islamic literature, and Islamic political discourse converge. The activities such as religious study sessions, discussions, book fairs, and Islamic reading networks that have flourished around the mosque demonstrate that da'wah is not limited to religious sermons but also

involves shaping public opinion and disseminating ideas through Islamic media.

One of the Islamic media outlets that emerged within the mosque community was the Ar-Risalah Bulletin. This bulletin can be viewed as part of a network of print da'wah publications that originated within the mosque community and among Muslim youth. However, as it evolved, Ar-Risalah came to be seen not merely as a da'wah medium but began to be associated with Islamic discourse that the New Order government considered sensitive.

This framing became increasingly apparent when the Ar-Risalah Bulletin became the subject of media coverage and legal proceedings. The discourse, which had originally taken place within the context of youth outreach at mosques, was then reframed in the language of law and national security. Ar-Risalah was linked to allegations of subversion, the spread of false news, public disorder, and threats to the state ideology. This shift demonstrates that the Ar-Risalah issue was not merely a matter of publishing a bulletin, but also concerned the New Order government's methods of criminalizing, interpreting, and restricting Islamic discourse deemed to go beyond the bounds of religious outreach.

In this study, the author identified several works of literature relevant to the research topic. *First*, Bahtiar Effendy, in *Islam and the State*, examines the political relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia. Bahtiar's study is significant because it elucidates the tensions between the political aspirations of Islam and the state, particularly during the New Order era. However, Bahtiar's research operates at the macro level that is, the relationship between Islam and the state on a national scale. In contrast, this study examines the issue of political Islam in a more local context specifically, the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque in Yogyakarta by examining how the mosque, its newsletter, and media coverage are part of the struggle within the discourse of political Islam (Effendy, 2011).

Second, in *Muslim Intellectuals and Power*, Yudi Latif discusses the development of the Muslim intelligentsia, the da'wah movement, the public sphere, and the Islamic intellectual response to political pressure under the New Order. Yudi Latif's study helps illustrate that

mosques can serve as spaces for the articulation of Islam when formal political spaces are restricted. However, this research has not specifically addressed the activism of the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque Youth Group (MJS) or the Ar-Risalah Bulletin. This study differs in that it positions MJS youth activism as the primary focus of the analysis and Ar-Risalah as part of the dynamics of Islamic political discourse in Yogyakarta (Latif, 2012).

Third, in his study on the dynamics of the youth at the Syuhada Mosque in Yogyakarta, Imam Sopyan showed that mosques in the 1980s could serve as centers of Islamic youth activism. That study shares similarities with this one, as both examine mosque-based youth activism in Yogyakarta during the New Order era. However, Imam Sopyan's subject of study was the Syuhada Mosque, whereas this study focuses on the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque. Furthermore, Imam's research places greater emphasis on leadership development and changes in the nature of da'wah, while this study emphasizes the struggles of mosque youth activism within the broader discourse of Islamic politics, as illustrated by the case of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin (Sopyan, 2014).

From these studies, it is evident that research on political Islam during the New Order era, da'wah movements, Muslim public spaces, and mosque activism has indeed been extensive. However, studies that specifically examine the connection between youth activism at the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque and the struggles surrounding Islamic political discourse as reflected in the Ar-Risalah Bulletin during the New Order era in Yogyakarta from 1983 to 1986 remain scarce. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the General Sudirman Mosque as a local space for da'wah, media, news reporting, and state control in the case of Ar-Risalah.

Based on the above discussion, this study poses three research questions: *first*, how did the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque become a space for Muslim youth activism in Yogyakarta; *second*, how did the Ar-Risalah Bulletin emerge as a platform for the mosque youth's Islamic political discourse; and *third*, how did the New Order government criminalize the Islamic discourse in the Ar-Risalah Bulletin

through media coverage, allegations of subversion, and legal proceedings.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a socio-political history of Islam that examines the relationship between religious activities, the social sphere of Muslims, media for da'wah, and political power during the New Order era. The study focuses on the case of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin in Yogyakarta from 1983 to 1986. The approach used in this study is the sociology of religion, as religion in this context is understood not only as a normative doctrine but also as a living social phenomenon within society. Through this approach, the study seeks to examine how Islamic discourse which developed within the da'wah spaces of mosques, particularly through the Ar-Risalah Bulletin was subsequently framed as a political issue by the New Order government.

To analyze these dynamics, this study employs Lewis A. Coser's theory of social conflict. According to Coser, conflict is a struggle over values, status, power, and resources considered important in society. Conflict does not always take the form of physical confrontation; it can also manifest as a clash of values, a struggle for legitimacy, and differences in interests among social groups (Coser, 1956). This theory is relevant because this study examines the struggle between mosque-based Islamic missionary communities and the New Order government in defining the meaning and boundaries of Islamic political discourse.

The method used in this study is the historical method, which was carried out in four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. In the heuristic stage, the researcher first traced sources related to the Ar-Risalah Bulletin case and the dynamics of political Islam during the New Order era. The search for sources was conducted by looking for contemporary news reports in media outlets such as *Kiblat*, *Tempo*, *Berita Yudha*, and *Kedaulatan Rakyat*. These sources were used to examine how the Ar-Risalah case was reported, constructed, and linked to issues of subversion, unrest, anti-Pancasila sentiment, and national stability.

During the research process, neither the physical archives nor the original manuscripts of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin were found; therefore, this study does not treat the bulletin's content as a direct primary source, but rather examines the case through contemporary news reports, the state's response, and other available supporting sources. In addition, the researcher also collected secondary sources in the form of books, articles, and previous studies discussing political Islam, da'wah movements, and the political policies of the New Order.

After the sources were collected, the researcher conducted a source critique to assess the authenticity, credibility, and contextual background of each source. This critique is important because contemporary sources, particularly press reports, not only contain information about events but can also reveal the perspectives, interests, and political rhetoric that emerged during the New Order era. Next, the researcher conducted an interpretation by linking the activities of the youth at the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque, the publication of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin, press coverage, legal proceedings, and state control. The final stage involves historiography systematically and analytically organizing the research findings to demonstrate that the criminalization of Islamic discourse in the *Ar-Risalah Bulletin* case occurred not only through legal proceedings but also through news coverage, political labeling, and the use of state security rhetoric against expressions of Islam in Yogyakarta.

DISCUSSION

The General Sudirman Mosque as a Space for Muslim Youth Activism

Initially, the General Sudirman Mosque (MJS) did not begin as a large building bustling with da'wah activities from the start. Before it was established as a mosque, there was a small prayer room on the site that local residents used for the five daily prayers. The land on which the prayer room stood was originally privately owned. When plans to build a mosque emerged around 1970, several residents donated their land to become part of the mosque complex. MJS was subsequently built in 1394 H/1974 CE at Jalan Rajawali No. 10, Kolombo Complex,

Demangan Baru, Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta (Wahid, interview, May 20, 2026).

In its early stages, MJS was affiliated with the Syuhada Dormitory and Mosque Foundation (Yasma Syuhada). It was even once referred to as “Syuhada II,” as it emerged from a network of individuals who had previously been active within the Syuhada Mosque community in Kotabaru. Several figures, such as Halim Tuasikal, Zubair Qohari, and Adi Winata, are cited as the early leaders who helped spearhead the establishment of MJS. From this, it is evident that from the very beginning, this mosque was built not only as a place of worship for the community but also as part of an urban da’wah network in Yogyakarta (Wahid, interview, May 20, 2026).

The first phase of MJS’s development focused on the da’wah needs of the local community. Its activities centered on encouraging congregational prayers at the mosque, providing religious education for children in the Kolombo neighborhood, and strengthening the religious life of the surrounding community. During this period, several Muhammadiyah figures, including A.R. Fahrudin, delivered Friday sermons, led study sessions, and gave Ramadan talks at the mosque. This early character indicates that MJS grew as a space for urban da’wah closely tied to the traditions of education and community development (Wahid, interview, May 20, 2026).

Changes began to emerge when Yogyakarta, as a city of education, attracted many students and activists. The environment outside the mosque also influenced the activities taking place within it. After the Campus Life Normalization/Student Affairs Coordination Board policy was implemented in 1978, some of the students’ creativity and activities shifted off-campus. The MJS dormitory, occupied by some of the mosque administrators, subsequently became a gathering place for Muslim activists. In an interview, Nur Wahid explained that during the 1970s and 1980s, there were at least two mosques that served as gathering places for Muslim activists in Yogyakarta: the UGM Campus Mosque and the MJS (Wahid, interview, May 20, 2026).

This development meant that MJS was no longer limited to preaching to the local community. It began to serve as a gathering

place for young Muslims, activists, and Islamic reading groups. It was here that the mosque took on a broader social function. Religious study sessions, discussions, housing for activists, and the circulation of Islamic literature turned MJS into a space where Islamic ideas were discussed and exchanged. In this context, the discourse on Islamic politics should not be understood as a party movement, but rather as Islamic ideas that grew through outreach, reading, discussion, and youth networks.

This development meant that MJS was no longer limited to preaching to local residents. MJS began to serve as a gathering place for Muslim youth, activists, and Islamic reading circles. Religious study sessions, discussions, housing for activists, and the circulation of Islamic literature turned MJS into a space where Islamic ideas were discussed and exchanged. This pattern of youth activism at MJS was not an isolated phenomenon but part of the broader development of the Muslim youth da'wah movement of the 1980s (Prayogi, 2019). At this juncture, the discourse on Islamic politics should not be understood solely as a party-based movement but rather as Islamic ideas that took root through da'wah, reading, discussion, and youth networks.

It was from this environment of da'wah and reading that the Ar-Risalah Bulletin emerged. In 1985, Tempo referred to Ar-Risalah as a tabloid published by the Yogyakarta Mosque Youth Communications Board. In the same report, Ar-Risalah was noted to have been in publication since November 1981 and ceased operations following a raid on October 4, 1983. This information is significant because it indicates that Ar-Risalah did not originate from a formal political party, but rather from a network of mosque youth and the tradition of printed da'wah (Tempo, 1985).

Ar-Risalah then became a medium that expanded these ideas from the mosque to the broader public sphere. Ideas that had originally circulated in religious study sessions, discussions, and book fairs began to take written form one that could be printed, preserved, and distributed. It is in this context that MJS can be understood as a space for Islamic political discourse. The mosque provided the social space, Muslim youth brought the activities to life, reading networks

expanded the discourse, and Ar-Risalah served as the medium that carried these ideas beyond the confines of the mosque.

The Ar-Risalah Bulletin as a Forum for Islamic Discourse Among Mosque Youth

The Ar-Risalah Bulletin should first be viewed as part of the MJS's da'wah environment, rather than interpreted directly as a legal matter. In the early 1980s, da'wah activities around the mosque took place not only through religious study sessions, discussions, and book fairs, but also through readings circulated among Muslim youth. As Mujiburrahman explains in his writing, the public sphere is a space where people discuss shared issues, either directly or through the media (Mujiburrahman, 2007).

That means, in modern Muslim society, the proliferation of print and electronic media has paved the way for the emergence of a Muslim public sphere a space where religious, social, and political issues are discussed (Mujiburrahman, 2007). This understanding is essential for interpreting the Ar-Risalah Bulletin. The bulletin serves not only as a medium for da'wah but also as a small space where Islamic discourse is circulated, read, and debated by the mosque's youth community. Through Ar-Risalah, the discourse that has developed around MJS can move beyond the study circle into a broader readership.

Ar-Risalah's identity as a medium for da'wah is evident in a *Tempo* report from the October 26, 1985, edition. In the report titled "*Pengadilan Ar Risalah: Surat dari 'Bumi Allah'*" (*The Ar-Risalah Trial: A Letter from 'Bumi Allah'*), *Tempo* refers to Ar-Risalah as a tabloid published by the Yogyakarta Mosque Youth Communication Agency (BKPM). Irfan Suryahardi, a youth activist with MJS, explained that Ar-Risalah had been in publication since 1981, with a circulation of around ten thousand copies, and ceased publication following the raid on October 4, 1983. This information indicates that Ar-Risalah was not merely a temporary leaflet, but a da'wah medium with a publisher, a circulation period, and a network of readers (Tempo, 1985).

The fact that the Yogyakarta Mosque Youth Communication Board is listed as the publisher highlights Ar-Risalah's close ties to the

world of mosque-based youth da'wah. This bulletin did not originate from a political party or a professional media company, but rather from a community engaged in da'wah communication. Therefore, Ar-Risalah is best understood as a community-based media outlet: it connects mosques, Muslim youth, Islamic literature, and urban readers. Its significance lies not only in the number of copies distributed, but in its role as a small node in the local da'wah network in Yogyakarta (Tempo, 1985).

As a da'wah medium, Ar-Risalah also reflects a shift in the patterns of disseminating Islamic ideas. Da'wah, which previously relied heavily on sermons and in-person gatherings, began to take place through written texts. The newsletter ensures that Islamic ideas do not end once a religious study session concludes. It can be passed from hand to hand, reread, and discussed further by its readers. In this regard, Ar-Risalah became part of the local Muslim public sphere—a space where religious ideas are communicated through media and community networks. In his writing, Mujiburrahman explains that print and electronic media help open up spaces for Muslim discourse on religious, social, and political issues (Mujiburrahman, 2007).

The discourse on Islamic politics in Ar-Risalah should not be immediately interpreted as a formal party or organizational movement. It is more accurately understood as Islamic ideas that began to engage with issues concerning the state, the Muslim community, Pancasila, Sharia, Darul Islam, and Islamic identity. Martin van Bruinessen notes that Ar-Risalah is associated with writings about Kartosuwiryo and Daud Beureueh. These two figures carry significant political historical weight due to their connections to Darul Islam and the Islamic State of Indonesia (Bruinessen, 2013).

Kartosuwiryo and Daud Beureueh hold significant positions in the history of political Islam in Indonesia. Both are associated with the history of Darul Islam and the Indonesian Islamic State, movements that once posed a serious challenge to the republican government. Consequently, discussions about these two figures during the New Order era cannot be separated from the state's memory of rebellion, Islamic sharia, and the concept of an Islamic state (Bruinessen, 2013).

In this context, Solahudin's account helps explain why the terms Darul Islam, Islamic sharia, and the Indonesian Islamic State carried such heavy political weight during the New Order era. Solahudin demonstrates that the DI network in Solo and Yogyakarta remained a topic of discussion through activities such as cadre training, religious study sessions, usrah group development, and interactions among Islamic figures in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Consequently, when Ar-Risalah was linked to figures such as Kartosuwiryo or the idea of the Indonesian Islamic State, the state tended to interpret it not as ordinary religious discourse but as a sign of political and security threats (Solahudin, 2011).

However, this interpretation must be approached with caution. The complete archives of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin have not been found in their original form, so the researcher in this study cannot claim to have read the bulletin's entire content firsthand. Information regarding Ar-Risalah was obtained primarily from contemporary media reports, such as *Kiblat* and *Tempo*, as well as from secondary literature discussing the da'wah movement and political Islam during the New Order era. Therefore, this section is not intended to summarize the entire ideology of Ar-Risalah. What can be explained is its historical role as a da'wah medium that served as a platform for local Islamic political discourse, which emerged among the youth of Yogyakarta's mosques—a group that had a network of readers and subsequently drew the attention of the mass media.

This caution is certainly warranted, as some secondary sources place Ar-risalah within the context of the broader Islamic movement. Martin van Bruinessen, for example, mentions the existence of a number of semi-clandestine newsletters in Yogyakarta in the early 1980s that were linked to Irfan S. Awwas (Bruinessen, 2013). This information indicates that Ar-risalah was not isolated from the dynamics of Islamic da'wah and activism under the New Order. However, this information should not be used directly to replace an analysis of primary sources. In historical research, secondary literature serves as context, while contemporary news reports remain the foundation for reconstructing Ar-risalah's position.

From this perspective, Ar-Risalah can be understood as a bridge between the da'wah space of the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque and the broader sphere of Islamic discourse. The mosque provides the social environment, Muslim youth serve as the driving force, book fairs and reading networks expand its circulation, while Ar-Risalah gives written form to the ideas developing around the mosque. As Eickelman and Anderson point out in their work, media in Muslim societies can shape new public spheres because it helps transform the ways in which Muslims construct authority, community, identity, and socio-political discourse (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003).

At this point, Ar-Risalah plays a key role in this discussion—not primarily as a legal medium or a forum for court cases, but rather as a medium for da'wah that demonstrates how Islamic political discourse can emerge from local spaces such as the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque.

The Criminalization of Discourse on Islam and the Legal Proceedings Against the Ar-Risalah Bulletin

The debate over the criminalization of Islamic discourse in the Ar-Risalah case stems from differing interpretations of a da'wah publication. Within the MJS community, Ar-Risalah was understood as part of da'wah activities, Islamic literature, and communication among mosque youth. However, once this bulletin entered the realm of news coverage and the courtroom, its meaning began to shift. The New Order government no longer viewed it as ordinary da'wah media, but rather as a text associated with subversion, the spreading of unrest, and a threat to Pancasila. This conflict arose because the same text was understood differently—by its community as da'wah media, and by the state as dangerous Islamic political discourse.

The discussion regarding the Ar-Risalah Bulletin does not stop at its role as a medium for Islamic preaching in Yogyakarta. While the previous section positioned Ar-Risalah as a bulletin that emerged from the MJS mosque's youth community, Islamic reading culture, and young people's da'wah activities, this section examines the shift in its status as it entered the realm of legal discourse. It traces the transformation of a da'wah medium—which initially circulated within

religious communities—into one interpreted through the state’s framework as a threat to national security.

This shift in stance cannot be separated from the political climate of the New Order, which prioritized stability as the primary measure of public life. At that time, the state not only monitored political parties and mass organizations but also the smaller spaces where ideas circulated, including newsletters, religious study groups, mosques, and reading networks. This is reinforced by David T. Hill’s analysis that the press during the New Order era was subject to state control through licensing, censorship, and political pressure (Hill, 2011).

Before Ar-Risalah covered the court case, several sources indicated that the socio-religious environment around the General Sudirman Mosque had already been the focus of Islamic media attention. The December 5-20, 1983, issue of *Kiblat*, in an article titled “*Kiprah ‘Anak-Anak Sudirman’: Gelapnya Sebuah Citra*” (*The Activities of ‘Sudirman’s Children’: The Dark Side of an Image*), described the General Sudirman Mosque as a vibrant space filled with youth activities, book fairs, religious study sessions, and da’wah (proselytizing) activities. In that report, *Kiblat* wrote that the activities of young people around the mosque “demonstrated a vibrant mosque youth scene” (Kiblat, 1983). This shows that even before it was mentioned in a legal case, the Ar-Risalah neighborhood was already known as a space for Muslim youth outreach.

However, the *Kiblat* report also shows that the community’s image began to change following the arrests of several individuals linked to Ar-Risalah. In the same article, *Kiblat* mentioned the arrest of Irfan Suryahardy, editor-in-chief of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin, and several others associated with that missionary network (Kiblat, 1983). It was here that the process of Ar-Risalah’s changing image began to emerge, although it had not yet fully reached the courtroom.

The political context of the early 1980s helped shape the state’s interpretation of Ar-Risalah. During this period, the New Order was reinforcing the single principle of Pancasila and restricting political and religious expressions deemed capable of disrupting national stability. Bahtiar Effendy explains that the relationship between Islam and the state during the New Order era was marked by the state’s suspicion of

political Islamic aspirations, particularly when Islam emerged as an ideological force beyond the state's official control (Effendy, 2011). Therefore, when Ar-Risalah made headlines in court coverage, this case could not be viewed merely as a local matter, but rather as part of a broader pattern of state control over Islamic discourse.

The next phase was evident in a *Tempo* report published on October 26, 1985. In a report titled "*Pengadilan Ar Risalah: Surat dari Bumi Allah*" (*The Ar-Risalah Trial: A Letter from 'Bumi Allah*), *Tempo* covered the trial of Irfan Suryahardy at the Sleman District Court. Irfan was identified as the former editor-in-chief of the Ar-Risalah Bulletin and had been in custody since early October 1983. (Tempo, 1985) This report shows that Ar-Risalah had entered the courtroom—it was no longer confined solely to the realm of religious outreach.

In the article, Ar-Risalah is still referred to as a tabloid published by the Yogyakarta Mosque Youth Communication Agency. Irfan explained that Ar-Risalah was a da'wah publication that had been in circulation since 1981, had a circulation of around ten thousand copies, and ceased publication following the raid on October 4, 1983 (Tempo, 1985).

However, in the prosecutor's view, Ar-Risalah was no longer regarded as an ordinary medium for Islamic preaching. *Tempo* reported that the prosecutor assessed Ar-Risalah to have been systematically compiled for specific political purposes. One of the main charges was that the bulletin was aimed at the struggle to enforce Islamic Sharia law and lead to the establishment of an Islamic State of Indonesia (Tempo, 1985). This allegation was linked to articles about figures such as Mohammad Natsir, Kartosuwiryo, and Daud Beureueh. From this, it is evident that the texts in the bulletin were not merely interpreted as religious writings but were situated within a broader political context. The state interpreted the texts, figures, and networks as a unified whole deemed to pose an ideological threat.

Subsequent coverage became clearer in the January 10, 1986, edition of *Berita Yudha*. After the case of Irfan Suryahardi appeared in a *Tempo* report, media attention then shifted to Ahmad Zonet Sumarlan, a student who was named as a defendant for distributing

the bulletin. In a story titled “*Pengedar Bulletin Al-Risalah Dituntut 8 Tahun Penjara*” (*Al-Risalah Bulletin Distributor Faces 8 Years in Prison*), *Berita Yudha* noted how this case was directed not only at those deemed involved in publication but also at individuals deemed to be distributing the material. The article stated:

Terdakwa AZS (23 tahun) mahasiswa di perguruan swasta yang cukup terkenal di Yogyakarta, yang diajukan dimuka persidangan oleh Jaksa Penuntut Umum Hartadi Widodo, SH atas dakwaannya bahwa terdakwa telah dengan sengaja mengedarkan dan memperjualbelikan beberapa buletin yang seluruh isinya sangat membahayakan masyarakat.

[The defendant, AZS (23), a student at a well-known private university in Yogyakarta, was brought before the court by Public Prosecutor Hartadi Widodo, SH, on charges that the defendant had intentionally distributed and sold several bulletins whose contents were highly harmful to the public] (*Berita Yudha*, 1986).

The news report shows that from the very beginning of the coverage, Zonet was positioned not merely as a reader or owner of reading material, but as a distributor of texts deemed dangerous. The phrase “extremely harmful to society” became the benchmark because it shifted the bulletin’s status from that of a religious media outlet or religious reading material to an object of legal suspicion. In other words, this struggle did not only unfold through court rulings but had already begun through the language of news coverage that framed the bulletin as a social threat.

In his indictment, the prosecutor not only emphasized the act of distribution but also linked it to criminal provisions related to the dissemination of false news and incitement to unrest. A report by Yudha noted that Public Prosecutor Hartadi Widodo found Zonet guilty of violating Article 14, paragraphs (1) and (2), of Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 1946 in conjunction with Article 155 of the Criminal Code (Lawan, 2019). The report stated that:

Jaksa penuntut umum Hartadi Widodo, SH dalam tuntutanannya sebanyak 14 lembar pada pokoknya menyatakan bahwa AZS mahasiswa kelahiran Tanjungkarang tersebut telah terbukti secara sah dan meyakinkan memenuhi rumusan Pasal 14 ayat (1), (2) UURI No. 1 Tahun 1946 yo Pasal 155 dari Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana

[In his 14-page indictment, Public Prosecutor Hartadi Widodo, SH, essentially stated that AZS, a student born in Tanjungkarang, had been proven legally and convincingly to have violated Article 14, paragraph (1), (2) of UURI No. 1 of 1946, as amended by Article 155 of the Criminal Code] (Berita Yudha, 1986).

The article on false news and public disorder allows the state to interpret a written text as an act that could disrupt public order. In this case, the law functions not only to assess actions but also to assign political meaning to a text. Margiyono notes that criminal provisions of this kind are often used to restrict the expression of information when the state deems a text to be detrimental to the public interest (Margiyono, 2009).

The legal case against Ar-Risalah was further bolstered by witness testimony. In the same news report, *Berita Yudha* stated that the witness, Drs. H. Achmad Mukhsin, Secretary of the Yogyakarta MUI, explained that Muslims had accepted the single principle. According to the report, the witness stated that Muslims had accepted this single principle and that it did not cause concern among Muslims (Berita Yudha, 1986).

This statement shows that the trial not only addressed the defendant's actions but also determined which interpretation of Islam is considered valid. In the courtroom, the form of Islam that accepts the principle of unity is presented as the true and orderly form of Islam, while discourses on Islam that are seen as rejecting this principle are portrayed as a cause for concern.

The defendant's response to the prosecutor's case was reported in *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on January 18, 1986. The article, titled "*Terdakwa Pengedar 'Ar Risalah': Tuntutan Delapan Tahun Hal yang Berlebihan*" (*Defendant Accused of Distributing 'Ar Risalah': Eight-*

Year Sentence Is Excessive), portrayed Ahmad Zonet Sumarlan not only as the defendant but also as someone who challenged the severity of the sentence. In the article, Zonet stated:

Tuntutan hukuman delapan tahun bagi saya sangat tidak sesuai. Saya geli mendengar tuntutan Jaksa itu, dia tidak bisa membedakan pencuri sepeda dengan pencuri pesawat terbang

[The eight-year prison sentence sought for me is completely inappropriate. I was amused to hear the prosecutor's demand; he couldn't tell the difference between a bicycle thief and an airplane thief] (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 1986).

Zonet's statement revealed a challenge to the proportionality of the law. Zonet not only denied the charges but also questioned why the distribution of reading material was subject to such severe punishment. From this, it is evident that the courtroom became a meeting ground for two differing interpretations. The prosecutor viewed the distribution of the bulletin as a threat, while the defendant saw it as the act of reading and disseminating religious reading material. In this context, Zonet's defense is significant not only as a personal response but also as an indication that the state's legal interpretation is not simply accepted at face value by the accused.

In the same news article, *Kedaulatan Rakyat* also reported on Zonet's explanation of why he read the bulletin. The article was published:

Menurut terdakwa, dirinya tidak mengetahui buletin Al-Ikhwan berisi berita bohong atau memutarbalikkan fakta. Terdakwa tertarik membaca buletin tabloid terbitan Yogyakarta itu, karena banyak berisi ilmu pengetahuan, dakwah, resensi buku

[According to the defendant, he was unaware that the Al-Ikhwan newsletter contained false news or distorted facts. The defendant was interested in reading the Yogyakarta-based tabloid because it contained a great deal of scientific knowledge,

religious preaching, and book reviews] (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 1986).

This defense demonstrates that, for the defendant, the Al-Ikhwan bulletin—which is identical to Ar-Risalah because it is managed by the same team—falls within the realm of scholarship and da’wah. However, in the prosecutor’s framing, the bulletin is categorized as fake news that endangers society. This difference in interpretation was at the heart of the struggle over Islamic discourse during the New Order era. A text that one side understood as a da’wah publication was, by the other side, used as evidence in a criminal case.

Translated with DeepL.com (free version) A report in the January 18, 1986, edition of *Kedaulatan Rakyat* also highlighted Zonet’s protest against the prosecutor’s stance, which he accused of never having made an effort to call mitigating witnesses (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 1986). The climax of the case against Zonet was reported by *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on February 3, 1986, in the article “*Terbukti Edarkan Bulletin ‘Al Ikhwan’: Divonis 6 Tahun, Minta Hukuman Mati*” (*Found Guilty of Distributing the ‘Al Ikhwan’ Bulletin: Sentenced to 6 Years, Asks for the Death Penalty*). In that report, the Yogyakarta District Court sentenced Ahmad Zonet Sumarlan to six years in prison after he was found guilty of distributing Ar-Risalah and Al-Ikhwan. *Kedaulatan Rakyat* reported: “The Yogyakarta District Court, which held a hearing on Saturday (February 1), sentenced Ahmad Zonet Sumarlan (23) to six years in prison after he was found guilty of distributing the banned bulletins Al-Ikhwan and Ar-Risalah” (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 1986).

^ In the same news report, *Kedaulatan Rakyat* noted that the panel of judges agreed with the prosecutor that Zonet was guilty of broadcasting false news or reports that could cause unrest among the public—specifically among readers of the Al-Ikhwan and Ar-Risalah newsletters. (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 1986) The term “public unrest” in this news report is significant because it links the text to its social consequences. A piece of writing is not judged solely on the basis of its content, but.

The article also included Zonet's response, which was a protest against the court's ruling, which he considered irrelevant. *Kedaulatan Rakyat* reported: "*Enam tahun terlalu tanggung, saya minta hukuman mati saja. Sudah lama saya ingin mati syahid*" (six years is too lenient; I'd rather have the death penalty. I've wanted to die a martyr for a long time), (Kedaulatan Rakyat, 1986).

Zonet's statement of protest can be interpreted as a dramatic expression in the courtroom. Zonet was not merely expressing a desire to be sentenced to death, but was also demonstrating the defendant's disappointment with the severity of the sentence and the court's interpretation of the distribution of the bulletin. A few weeks later, the February 22, 1986, edition of *Tempo* reported on the case of Irfan Suryahardy under the headline "*Pengadilan Subversi: Irfan, Ingin Dihukum Mati*" (Subversion Trial: Irfan Wants the Death Penalty). In that report, Irfan was sentenced to thirteen years in prison by the Sleman District Court on February 13, 1986. Irfan was found guilty of a series of acts deemed to subvert the state ideology of Pancasila or the legitimate state (Tempo, 1986). This news story marked the culmination of the legal case against Ar-Risalah, as the articles in the newsletter were directly linked to subversive acts.

The *Tempo* report also noted that the prosecutor had previously sought a fifteen-year prison sentence for Irfan, while the panel of judges handed down a thirteen-year sentence. In the article, the defense attorney compared Irfan's case to that of H.R. Dharsono, which also involved charges of subversion. The defense argued that the sentence against Irfan was too harsh, while the prosecutor contended that Irfan's actions had far-reaching consequences because they could incite the masses to oppose the government (Tempo, 1986).

Certainly, this statement shows that the state views writing not only as text, but also as a tool capable of shaping political consciousness and mobilization. From this sequence of news reports, it appears that the struggle over Islamic political discourse faced by Ar-Risalah unfolded in stages. First, in 1983, *Kiblat* portrayed the area around the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque and the "Anak-Anak Sudirman" group as a space for Islamic preaching that was beginning

to be shrouded in a negative image due to the arrest of youth activists deemed to be disrupting national stability. Second, in October 1985, *Tempo* placed Irfan Suryahardi and Ar-Risalah in the context of a subversion trial.

Third, *Berita Yudha* in January 1986 expanded the case to include Ahmad Zonet Sumarlan as a distributor of the newsletter. Fourth, *Kedaulatan Rakyat* on January 18, 1986, featured Zonet's rebuttal to the prosecutor's charges. Fifth, on February 3, 1986, *Kedaulatan Rakyat* reported Zonet's six-year sentence. Sixth, on February 22, 1986, *Tempo* reported Irfan's thirteen-year sentence. This sequence demonstrates that the political discourse surrounding Ar-Risalah did not unfold as a single isolated event, but rather through a series of news reports and legal proceedings.

The evolution of Islamic political discourse in Ar-Risalah illustrates how Islamic discourse originating from the realm of da'wah can shift in meaning when it enters the news coverage and legal language of the New Order. The bulletin, which was initially understood as a medium for da'wah by young mosque-goers living in the MJS community, came to be viewed as dangerous reading material, linked to fake news, unrest, subversion, and threats to Pancasila. In this process, media outlets such as *Kiblat*, *Tempo*, *Berita Yudha*, and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* not only reported on events but also revealed how the image of Ar-Risalah was shaped in the public sphere.

The series of events covered in these news reports shows that the struggle over Islamic political discourse does not only take place within political parties or large organizations. It also unfolds in smaller spaces such as mosques, newsletters, reading groups, and court proceedings. Ar-Risalah serves as an example of how the New Order regime drew the line between da'wah deemed legitimate and Islamic discourse considered a threat to stability. From being a da'wah medium for MJS, Ar-Risalah subsequently shifted to becoming a text that was scrutinized, labeled, and framed within the context of national security.

CONCLUSION

During the New Order era, the Jenderal Sudirman Mosque served not only as a place of worship but also as a space for Muslim youth activism in Yogyakarta. Through religious study sessions, discussions, book fairs, reading groups, and da'wah activities, the mosque became a socio-religious space where Islamic ideas were shaped and disseminated. It was from this environment that the Ar-Risalah Bulletin emerged as a da'wah medium for the mosque's youth, which later intersected with the discourse on Islamic politics.

The Ar-Risalah Bulletin case demonstrates that the criminalization of Islamic discourse during the New Order era did not occur solely through court rulings, but also through a gradual process of meaning-making. As it entered the news cycle and the legal process, Ar-Risalah underwent a shift in meaning: from a medium for Islamic preaching to a publication associated with fake news, unrest, subversion, and threats to Pancasila. This struggle highlights the differing interpretations between the mosque-based youth da'wah community and the New Order state in defining the boundaries between legitimate da'wah and Islamic discourse deemed dangerous.

Academically, this study contributes to the historical analysis of political Islam during the New Order from a local perspective, particularly through the General Sudirman Mosque and the Ar-Risalah Bulletin. Practically, this study demonstrates that mosques and da'wah media play a significant role in shaping ideas, but can also become targets of control when state stability is at stake. The author suggests that future research should examine the original archives of Ar-Risalah, expand interviews with historical witnesses, and compare the General Sudirman Mosque with other mosques in Yogyakarta to identify patterns of Muslim youth activism during the New Order era.

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