

ISLAMIC EDUCATION POLICIES AND COUNTER-RADICALISATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDONESIA AND THE UK

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Abstract:

This comparative study evaluates how state authorities deploy Islamic education to counter radicalisation in Indonesia and the United Kingdom. Rooted in public policy analysis, the research examines how a Muslim-majority nation and a Muslim-minority state integrate religious instruction into security and educational frameworks. Through qualitative content analysis of legislative documents, policy guidelines, and empirical literature, the paper compares Indonesia's strategy of mainstreaming religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) with the British statutory Prevent duty across educational institutions. Findings indicate that Indonesia relies on soft-power curriculum reform, dialogic pedagogy, and institutional collaboration to build civic character. Meanwhile, the British model depends on statutory surveillance and safeguarding duties, which often stigmatises Muslim students as suspect populations. Both approaches face operational limits concerning teacher preparation, pedagogical autonomy, and the tension between national security imperatives and educational freedom. Effective counter-radicalisation requires moving away from securitised monitoring toward values-based pedagogical frameworks that support educators and build civic cohesion without alienating minority groups.

Keywords: Islamic education policy; counter-radicalisation; religious moderation; Prevent duty; comparative public policy.

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INTRODUCTION

State security, religious governance, and public education increasingly intersect within modern policy design (Jerome, 2019; Kundnani, 2012; Suhadi, 2022). Following global counter-terrorism developments, governments frequently use educational institutions to prevent violent extremism (Jerome, 2019; Kundnani, 2012). Yet policy

instruments and underlying philosophies vary sharply across political and socio-religious contexts (Balazard & Peace, 2023; Suhadi, 2022). A clear divide separates Muslim-majority states, where Islamic education forms part of public culture and civic formation, from Western Muslim-minority contexts, where state engagement with Islamic schooling often operates through security mandates (Aflahah, 2023; Kundnani, 2012).

In Indonesia, counter-radicalisation policy within education uses a soft-power, value-aligned strategy (Nurdin et al., 2025; Suhadi, 2022). Responding to concerns over religious intolerance, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education instituted religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a formal pillar of national education (KMA 183/2019; Suhadi, 2022). This policy aligns core Islamic principles, such as balance (*tawazun*) and moderation (*tawassuth*), with the pluralist state ideology of *Pancasila* across *madrasahs*, boarding schools (*pesantren*), and universities (Setiawan et al., 2026; Solihin et al., 2024). Instead of treating religious practice as a security threat, Indonesian public policy reformulates Islamic pedagogy from within, using dialogic teaching, inclusive curricula, and institutional partnerships to strengthen democratic citizenship (Prasetyo et al., 2025; Syam et al., 2024).

The United Kingdom has taken a statutory, security-driven approach to Islamic education and counter-radicalisation (Busher et al., 2019; Jerome, 2019). The Prevent duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 legally requires educators from early years to higher education to monitor and report students deemed vulnerable to radicalisation (Home Office, 2015; Jerome, 2019). Although framed as a safeguarding measure to protect young people, empirical evidence reveals that the policy binds educational settings to intelligence surveillance (Busher & Jerome, 2020; O'Donnell, 2016). Scholars observe that this framework relies on flawed definitions that conflate orthodox Islamic practices with violent extremism (Kundnani, 2012; Taylor, 2020). As a result, British Muslim students and teachers frequently face construction as a suspect community, encouraging self-censorship and deepening civic alienation (Awan, 2012; Balazard & Peace, 2023).

Despite growing scholarship on Southeast Asian religious moderation (Aflahah, 2023; Subandi et al., 2023) and European counter-extremism (Busher et al., 2019; Franken & Gent, 2021), comparative policy literature contains a distinct gap. Studies typically evaluate Indonesian moderation or British surveillance in isolation, rarely examining how these divergent governance models alter classroom dynamics, teacher agency, and student trust. Comparing Indonesia and the United Kingdom provides a clear analytical perspective: it contrasts a state deploying Islamic education as an inclusive mechanism for social harmony with a state subjecting religious practice to statutory surveillance (Jerome, 2019; Suhadi, 2022).

This article presents a comparative public policy analysis of counter-radicalisation strategies in Islamic education across Indonesia and the UK. Specifically, the study addresses three questions. First, how do the policy designs of Indonesian *wasathiyah* and the British Prevent duty conceptualise the relationship between Islamic pedagogy and state security? Second, what empirical consequences do these policies create for classroom interaction, teacher autonomy, and student engagement? Third, what comparative policy lessons can inform non-stigmatising counter-radicalisation frameworks in pluralistic societies? By investigating these questions, this paper contributes to debates on state governance, public education policy, and civil liberties.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The governance of religious education and counter-radicalisation policies sits at the critical intersection of political science, public administration, and educational sociology. To establish a rigorous analytical framework for comparing Indonesia and the United Kingdom, this literature review evaluates two contrasting theoretical paradigms: securitisation theory and soft-power religious governance through moderation (*wasathiyah*). By systematically comparing these models, this section outlines how state security apparatuses and educational institutions interact under differing constitutional arrangements.

Securitisation Theory and Counter-Radicalisation in Education: The UK Context

Securitisation theory, developed by the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998), provides a vital framework for understanding how public policy transforms routine social domains into national security imperatives. Securitisation occurs when a state authority uses speech acts to frame a specific issue or social group as an existential threat, justifying extraordinary measures outside standard political processes (Buzan et al., 1998). In educational policy, securitisation converts learning environments into surveillance sites, transforming educators into statutory monitors of student ideology (Busher & Jerome, 2020; O'Donnell, 2016).

In the United Kingdom, the enactment of the statutory Prevent duty under Part 5 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 represents an institutionalisation of educational securitisation (Home Office, 2015; Jerome, 2019). The policy legally obligates educational authorities to demonstrate 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (Home Office, 2015). While officially presented as a protective safeguarding duty akin to child protection, empirical research indicates that Prevent entangles schools, colleges, and universities in counter-terrorism policing (Busher et al., 2019; Thomas, 2016).

A central critique of the British securitised approach focuses on constructing Muslim communities as a 'suspect community' (Awan, 2012; Kundnani, 2012). By

operationalising indicator frameworks that link religious orthodoxy, political dissent, or conservative theological views with pre-radicalisation risks, Prevent relies on flawed behavioral assumptions (Kundnani, 2012). Research by Jerome (2019) and Balazard and Peace (2023) demonstrates that this statutory obligation induces a chilling effect in classrooms, leading Muslim students to practice self-censorship and avoid discussing sensitive geopolitical or religious topics. Furthermore, the mandatory promotion of Fundamental British Values (FBV), defined by the Department for Education (2014) as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect, frequently positions Islamic identity in opposition to national civic norms, deepening feelings of alienation among Muslim youth (Jerome, 2019; Thomas, 2016).

Religious Moderation (Wasathiyah) as Soft-Power Governance: The Indonesian Context

In contrast to the securitised paradigm, Indonesian public policy uses a soft-power governance model centered on religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) (Aflahah, 2023; Suhadi, 2022). Soft power, as conceptualised in public administration, relies on attraction, cultural alignment, and normative persuasion rather than statutory coercion or police surveillance. In Muslim-majority contexts, state stability depends heavily on maintaining harmony between Islamic values and national constitutional principles (Hafidz, 2021; Kymlicka, 1995).

Indonesian educational governance operates through a dual-system structure overseen by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag). Following the rise of conservative religious movements and radicalisation threats in the post-Reformasi era, Kemenag introduced the Masterplan of Religious Moderation 2020-2024 as a guiding policy framework (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2020). This policy is legally implemented through Ministerial Decrees KMA No. 183 and KMA No. 184 of 2019, which overhauled the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum across *madrasahs*, boarding schools (*pesantren*), and state universities (KMA 183/2019; KMA 184/2019; Suhadi, 2022).

Indonesian religious moderation is anchored in four core indicators: commitment to national identity (*al-wathaniyah*), tolerance (*at-tasamuh*), non-violence (*la al-unf*), and accommodation of local culture (*al-i'tiraf bi al-urf*) (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2020; Nurdin et al., 2025). Rather than policing student behavior through risk referrals, Indonesian policy reinterprets religious texts from within the Islamic tradition to foster critical thinking, contextual Hermeneutics, and civic engagement (Prasetyo et al., 2025; Setiawan et al., 2026). State authorities partner with civil society networks, notably Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, to build grass-roots legitimacy and embed moderate theological values within local communities (Solihin et al., 2024; Syam et al., 2024).

Comparative Theoretical Synthesis: Hard Surveillance versus Soft Pedagogical Alignment

Comparing securitised surveillance in the UK with soft-power moderation in Indonesia highlights fundamental differences in policy design, institutional roles, and socio-political outcomes. Table 1 synthesises these theoretical dimensions across six comparative pillars.

Table 1. *Comparative theoretical synthesis of the Prevent duty and wasathiyah mainstreaming*

Policy Dimension	United Kingdom (Prevent Duty)	Indonesia (Wasathiyah Mainstreaming)
Governance Philosophy	Hard securitisation, risk management, and statutory surveillance.	Soft power, pedagogical alignment, and values mainstreaming.
State Framing of Religion	Religion treated as a potential security risk requiring legal regulation.	Religion viewed as an ethical foundation for civic harmony and character.
Primary Mechanism	Statutory duty under CTSA 2015, reporting panels (Channel).	Curriculum integration, teacher training, and executive guidelines.
Role of Educators	Frontline safeguarding monitors reporting potential radicalisation indicators.	Facilitators of dialogic learning and mentors of religious moderation.
Pedagogical Climate	Risk of chilling effect, self-censorship, and suspect community dynamics.	Focus on inclusive dialogue, critical thinking, and <i>Pancasila</i> integration.
Policy Challenges	Stigmatisation of Muslim youth, erosion of trust, and Islamophobia concerns.	Varied teacher competencies and regional implementation gaps.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative comparative public policy design to examine how state governance frameworks in Indonesia and the United Kingdom employ Islamic education for counter-radicalisation. Comparative public policy analysis provides a rigorous approach for evaluating how differing socio-political contexts, constitutional arrangements, and state-religion dynamics shape policy formulation, pedagogical implementation, and institutional outcomes (Bereday, 1964; Kymlicka, 1995).

Research Design and Comparative Framework

The comparative methodology follows Bereday's (1964) four-stage model for comparative education: description, interpretation, juxtaposition, and comparison. The research systematically maps primary policy documents, evaluates contextual socio-political factors, establishes analytical equivalence across jurisdictions, and synthesises comparative policy insights.

Data Corpus and Primary Policy Sources

The primary data corpus comprises legislative statutes, official executive decrees, national curriculum guidelines, and statutory monitoring frameworks enacted between 2015 and 2025 across both jurisdictions:

Indonesia Corpus: Republic of Indonesia Law No. 18 of 2019 on *Pesantren*; Ministry of Religious Affairs Decrees (KMA) No. 183 and No. 184 of 2019; Masterplan of Religious Moderation 2020-2024 (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2020); and National Education Standards under Permendikbudristek No. 16 of 2022.

United Kingdom Corpus: Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA 2015, Part 5); Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales (Home Office, 2015); Department for Education Guidance on Promoting Fundamental British Values (DfE, 2014); and Ofsted School Inspection Frameworks.

Data Collection and Qualitative Content Analysis

Data collection and document analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis protocol. The textual corpus was subjected to iterative qualitative content coding across four analytical pillars: policy rationale, statutory governance, pedagogical autonomy, and socio-political community impact. Table 2 outlines the comparative policy analysis matrix.

Table 2. *Comparative analytical framework and key coding indicators*

Comparative Pillar	Analytical Focus	Key Coding Indicators
1. Policy Rationale & Framing	Conceptualisation of radicalisation threat and security philosophy.	Security risk vs civic harmony, <i>wasathiyah</i> vs FBV, pre-emption vs moral formation.
2. Statutory & Institutional Governance	Legal instruments, state apparatus involved, and monitoring mechanisms.	Statutory duty vs executive guidelines, Kemenag/Kemendikbud vs Home Office/DfE, Ofsted auditing.
3. Pedagogical Autonomy & Curriculum	Impact on classroom instruction, teaching methods, and curriculum content.	Dialogic learning vs surveillance reporting, teacher training, critical thinking vs compliance.

Comparative Pillar	Analytical Focus	Key Coding Indicators
4. Socio-Political Community Impact	Effects on student agency, identity formation, and trust in public institutions.	Stigmatisation, suspect community construction, chilling effect, civic integration, mutual trust.

Methodological Rigour and Limitations

Methodological rigour was maintained through source triangulation across legislative documents, official reports, and secondary empirical literature. Limitations include jurisdictional structural differences between Indonesia's decentralised dual system and the UK's centralised statutory framework, as well as regional implementation variations across both countries

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of counter-radicalisation policies in Islamic education across Indonesia and the United Kingdom reveals fundamental divergences in policy conceptualisation, pedagogical governance, and institutional outcomes. While both states aim to mitigate violent extremism among youth, they operate through contrasting governance models: Indonesia uses a soft-power, value-aligned strategy centered on religious moderation (*wasathiyah*), whereas the UK relies on a statutory security framework governed by the Prevent duty.

Policy Conceptualisation and Ideological Framing: Wasathiyah versus Statutory Safeguarding

The ideological framing of counter-radicalisation policy reflects distinct state philosophies regarding religion and national identity. In Indonesia, state policy conceptualises religious moderation as an internal theological resource for democratic stability (Aflahah, 2023; Suhadi, 2022). Ministerial Decrees KMA No. 183 and 184 of 2019 integrate *wasathiyah* principles such as balance (*tawazun*), moderation (*tawassuth*), and citizenship (*al-wathaniyah*) directly into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curricula (KMA 183/2019; Nurdin et al., 2025). Rather than treating Islamic schooling as a site of potential radicalisation, Indonesian policy treats moderate Islamic education as a foundation for national resilience under *Pancasila* (Setiawan et al., 2026; Solihin et al., 2024).

In contrast, the British policy framework under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 positions educational institutions as frontline security checkpoints (Home Office, 2015; Jerome, 2019). The statutory Prevent duty requires educators to identify early behavioral indicators of radicalisation and refer vulnerable individuals to local Channel panels (Busher et al., 2019; Thomas, 2016). Scholars observe that this framework relies on narrow conceptualisations of radicalisation that link conservative

Islamic theology with extremist risk (Kundnani, 2012; Taylor, 2020). Moreover, mandatory instruction in Fundamental British Values (FBV) often establishes a rigid binary between Western secular democracy and Islamic identity, leading Muslim students to feel culturally alienated (Awan, 2012; Jerome, 2019).

Pedagogical Autonomy, Classroom Dynamics, and Surveillance

Divergent policy designs produce contrasting classroom environments and affect teacher autonomy in distinct ways. In Indonesia, the mainstreaming of *wasathiyah* supports dialogic pedagogy and critical hermeneutics (Prasetyo et al., 2025; Subandi et al., 2023). Teachers are encouraged to facilitate discussions on religious diversity, historical context, and peacebuilding, framing religious instruction as an active tool for character development (Hafidz, 2021; Masturin, 2023).

Conversely, the UK's statutory reporting requirement creates a chilling effect across schools and universities (Balazard & Peace, 2023; Jerome, 2019; O'Donnell, 2016). Teachers report anxiety over their legal obligation to identify pre-radicalisation indicators, often resulting in risk-averse teaching and over-referral of Muslim students for expressing conservative religious views or political dissent (Busher & Jerome, 2020; Taylor, 2020). Consequently, classroom discussion on sensitive topics becomes constrained, as students practice self-censorship to avoid triggering formal security referrals (Awan, 2012; Balazard & Peace, 2023).

Institutional Governance, Stigmatisation, and Community Cohesion

The structural relationship between state agencies and religious communities heavily influences policy legitimacy and community trust. In Indonesia, Kemenag collaborates closely with major Islamic civil society organisations, including Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, as well as traditional *pesantren* networks (Solihin et al., 2024; Syam et al., 2024). This collaborative approach builds grass-roots co-ownership, allowing moderate curriculum reforms to achieve broad societal acceptance without triggering perceptions of state anti-religious bias (Setiawan et al., 2026; Suhadi, 2022).

In the United Kingdom, statutory enforcement has strained relations between the state and Muslim communities (Awan, 2012; Balazard & Peace, 2023). By embedding police-linked counter-extremism reporting within educational safeguarding, Prevent fosters widespread perception that Muslim students are treated as a suspect community (Kundnani, 2012; Thomas, 2016). This institutional suspicion undermines trust in educators and public authorities, creating barriers to genuine civic integration (Balazard & Peace, 2023; Jerome, 2019).

Comparative Synthesis and Policy Trade-offs

Table 3 presents a comparative synthesis of policy instruments, pedagogical roles, classroom climates, community impacts, and primary vulnerabilities across both jurisdictions.

Table 3. *Comparative synthesis of policy instruments in Indonesia and the United Kingdom*

Policy Dimension	Indonesia (<i>Wasathiyah</i> Mainstreaming)	United Kingdom (Prevent Duty Framework)
Primary Governance Mechanism	Soft-power curriculum reform, theological alignment, and state-civil society partnership.	Statutory legal duty (CTSA 2015), administrative compliance, and police-linked reporting.
Ideological Anchor	Religious Moderation (<i>wasathiyah</i>) integrated with national ideology (<i>Pancasila</i>).	Fundamental British Values (FBV) and secular safeguarding standards.
Teacher Role	Pedagogical facilitator, character mentor, and promoter of civic tolerance.	Frontline security monitor, risk assessor, and statutory reporter.
Impact on Classroom Climate	Open dialogic learning, contextual scripture interpretation, and interfaith engagement.	Chilling effect, student self-censorship, and risk-averse pedagogical boundaries.
Community Relations & Trust	High state legitimacy through co-ownership with NU, Muhammadiyah, and <i>pesantren</i> networks.	Widespread community mistrust, perception of surveillance, and stigmatisation as a suspect community.
Main Vulnerabilities	Regional implementation gaps, variable teacher capacity, and conservative political backlash.	Misidentification of religious orthodoxy as extremism, erosion of academic freedom, and alienation of Muslim youth.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study systematically examined state strategies in deploying Islamic education for counter-radicalisation across Indonesia and the United Kingdom. By contrasting a Muslim-majority nation where Islamic schooling forms a core component of civic culture with a Western Muslim-minority state where Islamic practices are regulated through counter-extremism mandates, this research demonstrates how differing governance paradigms shape policy effectiveness, classroom dynamics, and community trust.

Indonesia's framework relies on a soft-power, value-aligned strategy. Mainstreaming religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) across *madrasahs*, *pesantren*, and universities leverages Islamic values to support pluralist civic identity under *Pancasila*. Through dialogic teaching, curriculum integration, and partnership with civil society organisations, Indonesian policy frames religious instruction as a resource for cultivating democratic citizenship and social cohesion.

In contrast, the British approach under the statutory Prevent duty operates through a securitised safeguarding paradigm. Requiring educators to monitor and report students deemed vulnerable to radicalisation binds educational settings to state surveillance. While intended to protect youth, empirical evidence indicates that the policy disproportionately targets Muslim students. Conflating orthodox religious expression with extremist risk constructs a suspect community, fostering a chilling effect, self-censorship, and institutional alienation.

In summary, while Indonesia's value-aligned model succeeds in preserving pedagogical trust and community cohesion, it faces operational bottlenecks regarding teacher training and curricular standardisation. Meanwhile, while the British model provides a centralised mechanism for threat reporting, its securitised framing compromises educational autonomy and risks alienating the communities it aims to protect.

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