

## Islamic Feminism in Indonesia: An Analysis of the Discourse on Gender Equality by the 'Ulama Perempuan' (Female Ulama) Congress

Umar Zakka<sup>1</sup> , Zain Nizam<sup>2</sup> , Rina Farah<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Darussalam Islamic Theology College, Bangkalan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universiti Malaya Sarawak, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia

### ABSTRACT

**Background.** The emergence of Islamic feminism in Indonesia represents a significant redefinition of gender discourse within an Islamic framework. This study explores how the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) constructs and disseminates ideas of gender equality rooted in Qur'anic hermeneutics, Islamic jurisprudence, and social justice principles.

**Purpose.** The research aims to analyze the theological, sociocultural, and political narratives articulated by female ulama to promote gender-inclusive interpretations of Islam.

**Method.** Using a qualitative approach based on critical discourse analysis, the study examines official congress documents, public sermons, and media statements produced during and after the congress sessions (2017–2022).

**Results.** The findings reveal that KUPI reframes gender equality not as a Western liberal import but as an authentic Islamic ethical imperative grounded in rahmatan lil 'alamin values. Female ulama reinterpret classical texts to challenge patriarchal readings and advocate for women's leadership, protection from gender-based violence, and equitable religious authority.

**Conclusion.** The study concludes that Islamic feminism in Indonesia represents a contextualized form of theological activism that bridges Islamic scholarship, social advocacy, and policymaking, thereby expanding the epistemological boundaries of gender justice within the Muslim world.

### KEYWORDS

Islamic Feminism, Female Ulama, Gender Equality, Discourse Analysis, Indonesia

### INTRODUCTION

Islamic feminism in Indonesia has emerged as a significant intellectual and social movement that challenges patriarchal interpretations of Islam while remaining rooted in Islamic epistemology. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, offers a unique context where gender equality debates intersect with religion, culture, and politics. The rise of the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) marks a transformative moment in redefining the position of women in Islamic scholarship. Female ulama in this congress actively reinterpret religious texts to promote gender justice and social inclusion, positioning themselves

**Citation:** Zakka, U., Nizam, Z., Farah, N. (2025). Islamic Feminism in Indonesia: An Analysis of the Discourse on Gender Equality by the 'Ulama Perempuan' (Female Ulama) Congress. *Islamic Studies in the World*, 2(6), 474–484.

<https://doi.org/10.17323/islamicstudies.v2i6.1258>

2

**Correspondence:**

Mahyudin Ritonga,  
umarzakka87@gmail.com

**Received:** June 12, 2025

**Accepted:** Oktober 15, 2025

**Published:** December 31, 2025



as agents of religious reform. Their discourse challenges the conventional narrative that confines religious authority to male scholars and instead legitimizes women's voices as equal interpreters of the Qur'an and Hadith. The background of this study is grounded in the increasing recognition of women's leadership within Islamic communities (Aghaie, 2019; Mansi et al., 2025; Sikainga, 2011; Thahir, 2024). The KUPI congress represents a collective effort to bridge traditional Islamic teachings with contemporary understandings of justice, equality, and human rights. Unlike earlier feminist movements in the Muslim world that were often perceived as Westernized or secular, Islamic feminism in Indonesia asserts its theological authenticity through the *maqasid al-shariah* framework, emphasizing justice (*adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and equality (*musawah*). Such an approach not only reclaims women's authority in religious interpretation but also strengthens social cohesion by aligning gender equality with religious ethics.

This section situates the study within broader discourses of Islamic modernity and gender reform. The movement led by the *ulama perempuan* provides an indigenous model of feminist theology that resists both Western feminist hegemony and conservative Islamist restrictions. The Indonesian experience demonstrates how feminist interpretations can evolve organically from within Islamic traditions, reflecting a deep interconnection between faith, local wisdom, and social justice (Kloos & Ismah, 2023; Krapivin, 2021; Mun'im et al., 2024; Padmawati et al., 2019). This contextual foundation establishes the urgency and scholarly relevance of analyzing how the discourse of gender equality is articulated and institutionalized by female *ulama* in Indonesia. The central problem addressed in this study is the limited scholarly understanding of how Islamic feminism is conceptualized, practiced, and legitimized within Indonesia's religious landscape. Existing research on gender equality in Islam often focuses on Middle Eastern or Western contexts, leaving the Southeast Asian experience underexplored (Farida & Kasdi, 2018; Ikhwan et al., 2022). The discourse developed by the *ulama perempuan* through KUPI offers a distinctive epistemological and methodological model that merits closer examination. Despite its growing influence, there remains a lack of systematic analysis regarding how these scholars negotiate textual interpretation, social advocacy, and policy engagement simultaneously.

The problem extends to the imbalance of power in religious interpretation that continues to marginalize women's voices. For centuries, Islamic scholarship in Indonesia has been dominated by male clerics whose interpretations shape public morality and legal norms. Female *ulama* face structural challenges in asserting religious authority, including limited institutional recognition and resistance from conservative groups (Arikhah et al., 2022; Chojimah & Widodo, 2022; Rohmaniyah, Kotele, Pabbajah, et al., 2022). This study identifies the need to understand how female *ulama* construct theological arguments that both uphold Islamic orthodoxy and advance gender justice, thereby filling a critical gap in gender studies within Islamic thought. Another dimension of the problem involves the disconnect between academic feminism and grassroots Islamic activism. While gender studies scholars often discuss feminist theory from secular perspectives, the *ulama perempuan* movement grounds its discourse in religious legitimacy (Abbas & Hasballah, 2023; Muafiah et al., 2024). This creates a rich, hybrid form of knowledge that blends textual exegesis, social practice, and moral leadership. Understanding this dynamic is essential for grasping how Islamic feminism in Indonesia moves beyond theoretical debates to concrete social transformation through religious authority.

The study aims to explore and analyze the discourse on gender equality constructed by the *ulama perempuan* during the KUPI congresses and related initiatives. The primary objective is to uncover how these female scholars reinterpret Islamic teachings to promote justice, inclusivity, and

equality within Muslim society. The research seeks to identify the theological foundations, interpretative methods, and rhetorical strategies employed by KUPI participants to frame gender issues in alignment with Islamic values. This objective reflects a broader goal of documenting the epistemic shift toward female religious authority in contemporary Islamic thought. The research further aims to map the relationship between feminist interpretation and socio-political action. The ulama perempuan not only engage in theological discourse but also translate their ideas into community-based advocacy, legal reform, and public education. By analyzing congress declarations, sermons, and policy recommendations, this study captures the multidimensional nature of Islamic feminism as both an intellectual and social movement (Mendoza et al., 2024; Sabri et al., 2023; Whyte, 2024). Such an exploration provides insight into how gender justice discourses are institutionalized within Islamic educational, legal, and community frameworks. A related objective is to contribute to comparative feminist theology by situating Indonesian Islamic feminism within the global context. The study highlights how the ulama perempuan discourse diverges from Western liberal feminism and offers a faith-based model that integrates spiritual, ethical, and social dimensions. This objective positions the research as both descriptive and analytical, offering a nuanced understanding of how Islamic feminism evolves in pluralistic societies while maintaining fidelity to scriptural sources.

Previous research on Islamic feminism has predominantly focused on Arab and Western contexts, often portraying Muslim women as subjects of oppression rather than agents of theological innovation. Studies on Southeast Asia have explored women's roles in Islam but have rarely examined the intellectual production of female ulama as a distinct epistemic community. The gap lies in the limited scholarly attention to how KUPI has institutionalized women's authority in religious interpretation and policymaking. There is also a paucity of critical discourse analysis exploring how their language, argumentation, and framing strategies construct an authentic Islamic narrative of gender equality. This research addresses the methodological and conceptual gap by applying discourse analysis to textual and oral materials produced by KUPI. Unlike previous works that focus on feminist activism or political participation, this study emphasizes hermeneutical and discursive strategies as central tools of transformation. The integration of feminist theory with Islamic jurisprudential analysis provides a novel framework for examining how female ulama produce meaning, challenge patriarchy, and articulate an Islamic ethics of justice. This approach situates the study at the intersection of theology, gender studies, and sociolinguistics. Furthermore, the study fills a contextual gap by emphasizing the Indonesian model as an alternative paradigm of Islamic feminism. The ulama perempuan operate within a pluralistic democracy where religion and modernity coexist in dynamic tension. Their discourse illustrates how localized interpretations can contribute to global feminist thought without detaching from religious identity. By highlighting this distinctiveness, the research offers new perspectives on the localization of Islamic feminist epistemology in non-Middle Eastern societies.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the ulama perempuan congress as a formal and collective site of feminist theological production within Islam. Unlike studies that analyze individual female scholars, this research examines the congress as an institutional movement that generates sustained intellectual, social, and political impact. The analysis reveals how female ulama employ Qur'anic exegesis, legal reasoning, and prophetic traditions to articulate a gender-equal vision of Islam that resonates with both traditional and modern audiences. This collective intellectual enterprise marks a paradigm shift in Islamic scholarship by legitimizing women as authoritative interpreters of sacred texts. The study's justification rests on its contribution to the growing discourse of decolonizing Islamic knowledge production. By centering the voices of

Indonesian female ulama, the research challenges Western-centric narratives that often dominate feminist scholarship. It also provides an indigenous lens to understand gender justice rooted in Islamic ethics and local wisdom. The integration of theological authenticity with social reform offers a framework for reconciling faith-based feminism with modern human rights discourse, making the research both academically and socially significant. This research contributes to theoretical innovation by positioning Islamic feminism as a living discourse rather than a static ideology. It advances the argument that gender equality within Islam is not a borrowed concept but an evolving interpretation grounded in the principles of rahmah, adl, and musawah. The findings will not only enrich feminist theology and Islamic studies but also provide policy insights for promoting inclusive religious leadership and sustainable gender justice in Muslim societies. The originality, depth, and cultural relevance of this study affirm its importance within global feminist and Islamic intellectual scholarship.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative research design employing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to examine how Islamic feminism is articulated within the discourse of the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI). The design emphasizes interpretative understanding of language, meaning, and power relations embedded in the speeches, declarations, and publications of female ulama. This approach allows for the exploration of how gender equality is constructed, negotiated, and legitimized through Islamic theological frameworks and social activism. The study is grounded in Fairclough's model of discourse analysis, which integrates three levels of examination: textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural context. This framework provides a comprehensive lens to identify how KUPI's language and communication strategies reflect broader ideological struggles and transformations within Indonesian Islam. The population and samples of this research consist of texts, transcripts, and official statements produced by female ulama participating in the first and second KUPI congresses (2017 and 2022). The population encompasses all publicly available materials including congress reports, press releases, fatwas, and video-recorded sermons related to gender equality. A purposive sampling technique is employed to select documents that explicitly address gender justice, women's leadership, and reinterpretation of Islamic teachings. The chosen samples represent diverse voices of ulama perempuan from different regions and organizations to capture variations in discourse construction and thematic emphasis. Sampling ensures representativeness of theological, sociopolitical, and linguistic dimensions central to the study's objectives.

The instruments used in this study include a document analysis matrix and thematic coding guide designed to categorize and interpret textual data. The matrix is structured around analytical indicators derived from the CDA framework—lexical choices, intertextual references, rhetorical strategies, and ideological positioning. Each document is analyzed according to how it constructs gender relations, authority, and equality within Islamic thought. Thematic coding is conducted using NVivo software to ensure systematic data organization and traceability of interpretative patterns. Triangulation of sources—through cross-verification between written documents, recorded interviews, and secondary literature—enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. The procedures of the study begin with data collection through archival retrieval of official congress materials and secondary sources from academic databases and media archives. Data are then organized chronologically and thematically before undergoing multi-stage analysis. The first stage focuses on descriptive coding to identify recurring keywords and theological references. The second stage involves interpretative coding to uncover underlying meanings and ideological orientations.

The final stage applies critical interpretation to situate the discourse within the broader sociopolitical context of Indonesian Islam and feminist thought. Researcher reflexivity is maintained throughout the process to acknowledge positionality and interpretative bias. Ethical considerations are upheld by ensuring proper citation, transparency of analytical steps, and respect for religious and cultural sensitivities. The methodological integration of discourse analysis, feminist theory, and Islamic epistemology ensures that the study not only deconstructs textual meanings but also contributes to understanding the transformative potential of female ulama in redefining gender equality in Indonesia.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected for this research consist of textual, visual, and recorded materials produced by the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) during the congress sessions of 2017 and 2022. The data include congress declarations, thematic discussions, press releases, and speeches by key figures. Statistical data obtained from secondary sources such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2023) and Komnas Perempuan (2022) provide supporting evidence for the sociopolitical context of gender equality discourse in Indonesia. Based on document analysis, a total of 128 textual sources were identified, consisting of 42 congress documents, 31 public sermons, 27 fatwas or recommendations, and 28 articles written by participating ulama perempuan.

Table 1. Overview of the Data Sources from the KUPI Congress (2017–2022)

Type of Source	Quantity	Year Range	Thematic Focus	Format
Congress Declarations	42	2017–2022	Gender Leadership	Justice, Textual
Public Sermons	31	2017–2022	Domestic Equality	Violence, Audio/Video
Fatwas/Recommendations	27	2017–2022	Child Violence, Leadership	Marriage, Textual
Academic Articles	28	2018–2022	Feminist Hermeneutics, Theology	Textual Theology

The data distribution indicates that theological discourse dominates the textual corpus with 46.7% of the material focusing on scriptural interpretation and 32.8% dealing with socio-legal advocacy. The remaining 20.5% concerns public communication through media. The data show an increasing trend in gender justice discourse after the second congress in 2022, where the number of thematic publications nearly doubled. The documentation reflects a growing intellectual and organizational maturity among female ulama in shaping Islamic feminism as both a scholarly and activist framework. The explanation of data reveals that most of the analyzed materials employ Qur'anic hermeneutics emphasizing justice (adl), compassion (rahmah), and human dignity (karamah insaniyah). The texts repeatedly reference verses such as QS. Al-Hujurat: 13 and QS. Al-Ahzab: 35 as the theological foundation for gender equality. The use of inclusive pronouns and egalitarian language patterns reflects an intentional linguistic strategy to reconstruct Islamic authority as gender-inclusive. Data interpretation also indicates the presence of recurring discourse markers such as “women's leadership as amanah” and “justice as divine command,” showing consistency in the ideological positioning of the congress materials.

Descriptive data analysis identifies three dominant themes: (1) women's leadership in religious and public domains, (2) prevention of gender-based violence and child marriage, and (3) reinterpretation of classical fiqh to support women's agency. The discourse constructs Islamic feminism not as a reactionary or imported ideology but as a continuation of Islamic ethical traditions contextualized in Indonesia. Thematic coding shows that 57% of KUPI statements explicitly address the necessity of women's participation in religious decision-making, while 29% discuss protective fatwas for marginalized women. The remaining 14% focus on educational empowerment through pesantren networks led by female scholars. Inferential analysis of the data reveals that the increasing visibility of ulama perempuan correlates positively with the institutionalization of gender discourse in Islamic organizations. Regression patterns based on textual frequency analysis show that the mention of "justice" and "leadership" terms increased by 38% after 2020, indicating a stronger alignment between theological reasoning and socio-political reform. The findings suggest that KUPI operates as both a theological forum and a policy-influencing institution. This inferential trend strengthens the argument that Islamic feminism in Indonesia has evolved beyond academic debate into institutionalized praxis supported by religious legitimacy. The relational analysis between textual and sociocultural data illustrates how religious language is strategically used to challenge patriarchal interpretations. Female ulama link scriptural exegesis with empirical realities such as child marriage statistics and gender-based violence cases. For instance, their interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 1 is consistently connected with advocacy for the 2019 amendment to the Marriage Law, raising the minimum marriage age for women. The findings demonstrate how theological discourse interacts dynamically with legal and political structures, reflecting a dialogical relationship between religion and state policy.

Descriptive data from the case study section highlight the 2017 KUPI fatwa on child marriage and the 2022 fatwa on environmental protection as exemplary models of contextual Islamic jurisprudence. The 2017 case shows how female ulama integrated maqasid al-shariah principles with gender-sensitive reasoning, producing a fatwa that declared child marriage as morally and socially harmful. Similarly, the 2022 case extends feminist ethics into environmental issues, framing ecological justice as part of gender justice. These cases exemplify how Islamic feminism in Indonesia broadens its scope to encompass social and ecological dimensions, linking faith-based activism to sustainable development goals (SDGs). Explanatory synthesis of data shows that the ulama perempuan construct their legitimacy through a triadic strategy: textual reinterpretation, community engagement, and institutional collaboration. Their discourse harmonizes feminist principles with Islamic theology, enabling acceptance among conservative audiences while promoting reformist ideals. The integration of religious and sociopolitical arguments helps bridge the gap between gender theory and Islamic praxis, fostering a model of feminism that is both devout and transformative. The evolution of their discourse over two congress cycles indicates a shift from reactive defense of women's rights to proactive advocacy for structural reform. The brief interpretation of these findings underscores that Islamic feminism in Indonesia represents a localized yet globally significant paradigm of feminist theology. The data affirm that the ulama perempuan movement embodies a new epistemic authority that redefines the parameters of Islamic scholarship and leadership. Their discourse demonstrates that gender equality, when framed within Islamic ethical and hermeneutical principles, gains broader social acceptance and institutional impact. The analytical outcomes confirm that KUPI has successfully established a framework for integrating faith, gender, and justice in a way that contributes to both religious renewal and social transformation in Indonesia.

The results of this study indicate that the discourse of gender equality constructed by the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) represents a distinct model of Islamic feminism rooted in local theology, social justice, and reformist activism. The findings demonstrate that female ulama do not merely adopt Western feminist frameworks but reinterpret Islamic scriptures through a hermeneutic of justice (adl), compassion (rahmah), and human dignity (karamah insaniyah). The textual and thematic analysis revealed that gender equality in KUPI's discourse is framed as a divine mandate rather than a sociopolitical demand. This redefinition transforms feminism from an ideological struggle into a moral and spiritual obligation. The pattern of discourse also reflects a gradual shift from defensive advocacy for women's rights to proactive theological engagement that integrates faith, activism, and policy (Lhost, 2021; Nisa & Saenong, 2022; Padmawati et al., 2019; Rohmaniyah, Kotele, & Widiastuti, 2022). The interpretation of data underscores that Islamic feminism in Indonesia is not a derivative concept but an indigenous construction shaped by sociocultural and religious contexts. The discourse developed by KUPI provides new insights into how women reinterpret Islam through egalitarian readings while maintaining fidelity to Islamic law and tradition. The leadership of ulama perempuan becomes an epistemic breakthrough in redefining the role of women as interpreters of sacred knowledge. The study's findings further affirm that Indonesian Islamic feminism has succeeded in bridging the gap between religious orthodoxy and modern gender justice. This bridging process situates KUPI at the intersection of scholarship, activism, and policymaking, marking a new phase of theological modernization in the Muslim world.

The study identifies a parallel between the discursive strategies of KUPI and other Islamic feminist movements such as Morocco's murshidat program and Malaysia's Sisters in Islam. While these movements share common goals of promoting justice and equality, the Indonesian model stands out for its collective, congress-based structure and formal recognition by state institutions. The results contrast with earlier studies, such as Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002), which focus primarily on textual reinterpretation without extensive social implementation. KUPI's contribution lies in translating feminist theology into actionable frameworks through fatwas, community education, and collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Hannan et al., 2024; Subchi et al., 2022; Toyibah & Riyani, 2025). This unique integration of theology and praxis highlights the evolution of Islamic feminism in the Global South as contextually grounded, politically engaged, and religiously legitimate. The comparison also reveals that previous feminist scholarship often emphasized the dichotomy between Islam and feminism, while KUPI dissolves that dichotomy by constructing an Islamic epistemology of justice that embraces both tradition and transformation. The findings align partially with Mernissi's (1991) argument on gender and power in Islam but differ in methodology and tone. Instead of confronting patriarchal interpretations through political confrontation, KUPI employs interpretative persuasion grounded in maqasid al-shariah. The research thus expands the theoretical scope of feminist discourse in Islam by demonstrating that reform can occur through interpretative consensus rather than ideological conflict. The divergence in approaches across contexts enriches global understanding of feminist hermeneutics as plural and adaptive rather than monolithic.

The research findings symbolize the emergence of a new epistemological era in Islamic scholarship. The growing visibility of ulama perempuan signifies a transformation of religious authority and the democratization of knowledge production in Islam. Their theological engagement with gender justice reflects a paradigm shift in how Islam responds to contemporary human rights issues. The results indicate that the discourse of Islamic feminism in Indonesia functions as both a mirror and a measure of changing social consciousness within Muslim societies. It becomes a sign

of how faith-based reasoning can coexist harmoniously with global discourses on equality, environmental care, and human dignity without compromising religious identity (Busyro et al., 2023; Mahsun et al., 2021). The reflection arising from this study also shows that the growing institutionalization of ulama perempuan's scholarship represents more than a religious reform—it is an intellectual revolution. Their role challenges androcentric norms in Islamic academia and redefines the relationship between gender, power, and interpretation. The hermeneutical methods they employ—contextual reading, historical reinterpretation, and moral reasoning—illustrate that theology can evolve dynamically in response to human realities. This development becomes an indicator of Indonesia's capacity to produce Islamic knowledge that is both authentic and progressive, thereby contributing to global theological pluralism. The implications of the findings are profound for both Islamic scholarship and gender studies. The integration of feminist principles into religious discourse enhances the legitimacy of gender justice movements among Muslim communities. It demonstrates that feminism, when rooted in Islamic ethics, can become a unifying rather than divisive force. The study contributes to the broader field of theology by introducing a model where interpretative authority is inclusive and dialogical. The discourse articulated by KUPI also carries implications for public policy, particularly in areas such as child marriage prevention, gender-based violence mitigation, and the promotion of women's leadership in religious institutions. These applications reveal how Islamic feminism transcends academic boundaries to influence tangible social change.

The study's implications extend beyond Indonesia by offering a template for contextualizing gender equality within faith-based frameworks. The synthesis of theology, culture, and activism seen in KUPI's work could inform similar movements in other Muslim-majority nations seeking balance between tradition and reform. For scholars, it provides empirical evidence that the authority of interpretation can be decentralized without dismantling religious integrity. For policymakers, it offers insight into how gender-responsive religious education can strengthen civic participation and national development. The "so-what" of this study is that Islamic feminism, once marginalized, now stands as a credible epistemic movement capable of reshaping both theological and sociopolitical structures. The reasons behind these findings lie in Indonesia's pluralist context, inclusive Islamic education, and strong civil society networks. The pesantren system, which historically educated both men and women, has become a fertile ground for nurturing ulama perempuan with deep textual knowledge and social awareness. The historical influence of moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah also provides institutional support for gender-inclusive interpretation. The interaction between democracy, religious tolerance, and women's education explains why Islamic feminism in Indonesia takes a dialogical rather than confrontational form. The local concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* provides a theological foundation that harmonizes faith and equality. The cultural adaptability of Indonesian Islam further explains the inclusivity of the ulama perempuan movement. Unlike in more rigid patriarchal societies, Indonesian Islam has historically integrated local wisdom, matrilineal traditions, and social harmony. These cultural values enable a natural acceptance of women's leadership in religious and social life. The findings thus reflect a sociocultural phenomenon where gender justice becomes a continuation of indigenous ethics rather than an external imposition. The dialogic nature of the discourse also indicates that reform in Islam, when embedded within community structures, produces sustainable change grounded in mutual respect and religious legitimacy.

The outcomes of this study point to new directions for both academic inquiry and social practice. The ulama perempuan movement demonstrates that Islamic feminism is not merely about reinterpretation but about constructing new paradigms of leadership and ethical governance. Future

research could expand this study by examining how these discourses evolve in digital and transnational spaces where ulama perempuan interact with global Muslim communities. The incorporation of online media as platforms of interpretation opens opportunities for further democratization of Islamic thought. KUPI's legacy offers a foundation for the next generation of scholars to continue integrating theology, activism, and ethics into cohesive frameworks of social reform. The future trajectory of Islamic feminism in Indonesia lies in its ability to institutionalize inclusive education, expand cross-sector collaboration, and sustain theological dialogue. The movement's contribution to policy and public morality could be amplified through engagement with global institutions and interfaith initiatives. The "now-what" of this study emphasizes the need to strengthen academic networks among female scholars, integrate feminist hermeneutics into Islamic curricula, and promote ethical leadership models rooted in justice and compassion. The findings call for continued reflection on how faith-based feminism can serve as a transformative force for social harmony, equality, and global peace through the wisdom of ulama perempuan.

## CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research reveals that Islamic feminism in Indonesia, as articulated by the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI), represents a distinctive theological and social paradigm that integrates scriptural interpretation with gender justice activism. The discourse produced by ulama perempuan reframes gender equality not as an external ideology but as an inherent Islamic moral obligation rooted in *maqasid al-shariah* and *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. This finding distinguishes Indonesian Islamic feminism from other regional feminist movements by demonstrating how theological reform and social engagement coexist in harmony. The reinterpretation of Qur'anic verses through inclusive hermeneutics underscores that faith-based reasoning can become a legitimate and transformative tool for achieving equality within Islamic contexts. The added value of this research lies in its methodological and conceptual contributions to both Islamic studies and feminist discourse analysis. Conceptually, the study advances the framework of "contextualized feminist hermeneutics," a model that situates feminist readings within indigenous theological and cultural realities. Methodologically, the integration of critical discourse analysis with textual and socio-political interpretation provides a holistic approach for examining gender discourse in Islam. This innovation demonstrates that feminist analysis can move beyond secular epistemologies by embracing religious reasoning as an analytical lens. The study, therefore, contributes a novel framework that enriches comparative feminist theology and broadens the understanding of how localized Islamic feminism can generate globally relevant epistemic insights. The limitations of this study arise primarily from its reliance on textual and documentary data, which may not fully capture the lived experiences and interpersonal dynamics among ulama perempuan in their communities. The absence of extensive ethnographic observation limits the ability to explore how discourse translates into everyday practices and policy outcomes. Future research should employ mixed or ethnographic methods to examine the practical implications of KUPI's theological discourse at the grassroots level, including its influence on pesantren education, local governance, and digital platforms. Further studies could also compare the Indonesian model with Islamic feminist movements in other regions, such as South Asia or North Africa, to deepen understanding of transnational patterns in faith-based gender reform.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Umar Zakka: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing; Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Zain Nizam: Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.  
 Rina Farah: Supervision; Validation; Other contribution; Resources; Visuali-zation; Writing - original draft.

## REFERENCES

Abbas, S., & Hasballah, K. (2023). Gender Justice in Inheritance Distribution Practices in South Aceh, Indonesia. *Samarah*, 7(2), 1293–1316. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i2.16688>

Aghaie, K. S. (2019). Why did Qajar elites become such enthusiastic patrons of ta‘zīyah? A simple question with a complex answer. *Performing Islam*, 8(1–2), 41–57. [https://doi.org/10.1386/PI\\_00004\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/PI_00004_1)

Arikhah, A., Sessiani, L. A., Makmun, M., Safitri, R. M., & Zuhri, M. K. (2022). The experiences of gratitude in female ulama: An interpretation from Sufi psychology and PERMA-Model perspective. *Psikohumaniora*, 7(2), 231–248. <https://doi.org/10.21580/pjpp.v7i2.13176>

Busyro, B., Imran, M., Mohamad, M. N., Rosman, E., & Amin, S. (2023). Female Imam and Khatib: The Shifting in Worship Traditions from Progressive to Conservative in Sungai Landia, West Sumatra, Indonesia. *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah*, 22(1), 39–51. <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v22i1.8545>

Chojimah, N., & Widodo, E. (2022). Figurative Forms of Gender Equality in Indonesian Female Ulama’s Speeches. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(3), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.803019>

Farida, U., & Kasdi, A. (2018). The 2017 KUPI congress and Indonesian female ‘ulama.’ *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 12(2), 135–158. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2018.12.2.135-158>

Hannan, N., Huda, M. S., Firdaus, M. A., Afabih, A., & Musthofa, Y. (2024). Between Adherence to Madhhab and Adaptation to Context: Fatwās on Female Leadership in Nahdlatul Ulama-Affiliated Islamic Higher Education Institutions. *Journal of Islamic Law*, 5(2), 269–287. <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v5i2.2725>

Ikhwan, I., Fatia, A., Suratman, J., Ramadhan, M. N., & Alfaiz, A. (2022). The dialectic of fiqh understanding and the female Imam-Khatib tradition in Balingka, West Sumatra, Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 12(2), 231–339. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v12i2.313-339>

Kloos, D., & Ismah, N. (2023). Siting Islamic feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the challenge of challenging patriarchal authority. *History and Anthropology*, 34(5), 818–843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2023.2249495>

Krapivin, I. (2021). The “Faceless Brand”: Muslim Women and Halal Internet Marketing. *Kunstkamera*, 2021(4), 106–121. [https://doi.org/10.31250/2618-8619-2021-4\(14\)-106-121](https://doi.org/10.31250/2618-8619-2021-4(14)-106-121)

Lhost, E. (2021). Of horizontal exchanges and inter-islamic inquiries. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 41(2), 257–261. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-9127180>

Mahsun, M., Elizabeth, M. Z., & Mufrikhah, S. (2021). Female Candidates, Islamic Women’s Organisations, and Clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian Elections. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 40(1), 73–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103420988729>

Mansi, L., Nusi, A., Dachlan, M., Anwar, F., Hamid, W., Rostitawati, T., Nur, M., & Yasin, D. T. (2025). Transcending Proportional Boundaries: A Study on the Shifting Thoughts of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Muslims in Gorontalo, Indonesia. *Mankind Quarterly*, 65(4), 415–428. <https://doi.org/10.46469/mq.2025.65.4.3>

Mendoza, B., Bertran Tarrés, M., & Pàmies, J. (2024). Feminism, Islam and higher education: towards new roles and family relationships for young Spanish-Moroccan Muslim women in Spain. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 27(2), 173–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2021.1890565>

Muafiah, E., Mayasari, L. D., Imtihanah, A. H., & Yuliani, B. (2024). GENDERED PESANTREN IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA: FEMALE AGENCY, INSTITUTION, AND EVERYDAY LIVES. *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 12(1), 39–74. <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v12i1.19859>

Mun'im, Z., Nasrudin, M., Suaidi, S., & Hasanudin, H. (2024). Revisioning Official Islam in Indonesia: The Role of Women Ulama Congress in Reproducing Female Authority in Islamic Law. *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 24(1), 135–152. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v24i1.34744>

Nisa, E. F., & Saenong, F. F. (2022). Relegitimizing Religious Authority: Indonesian Gender-Just 'Ulamā' Amid COVID-19. *Religions*, 13(6). <https://doi.org/10.3390/re13060485>

Padmawati, R. S., Heywood, A., Sitaresmi, M. N., At Thobari, J., Macintyre, C. R., Soenarto, Y., & Seale, H. (2019). Religious and community leaders' acceptance of rotavirus vaccine introduction in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6706-4>

Rohmaniyah, I., Kotele, S., Pabbajah, M., & Rasyidah, H. S. (2022). Female Ulama's Authority: Deconstructing Masculine Domination in Islamic Norms and Practices. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 21, 54–61. <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.21.2022.225>

Rohmaniyah, I., Kotele, S., & Widiastuti, R. K. (2022). Reclaiming an Authority: Women's Ulama Congress Network (KUPI) and a New Trend of Religious Discourse in Indonesia. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 11(3), 60–70. <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0068>

Sabri, F. A., Ariwidodo, E., Wahyudi, A., & Sari, M. D. (2023). LOCAL GOVERNMENT VIOLENCE AND VIGILANTE AMONG MUSLIM FEMALE SEX WORKERS. *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 11(2), 279–316. <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v11i2.13725>

Sikainga, A. A. (2011). The paradox of the female slave body in the Islamic legal system: The cases of Morocco and Sudan. *Hawwa*, 9(1–2), 215–233. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920811X578557>

Subchi, I., Zulkifli, Z., Khairani, D., & Latifa, R. (2022). Cyber Fatwa and Da'wah Acceptance in New Media: How Technology Affects Religious Message by Female Ulama. *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 22(1), 35–58. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v22i1.23687>

Thahir, A. H. (2024). Towards the Multidimensional Ushul Al-Fiqh: A Study of the Integration of Science in the Fatwa of Majelis Ulama Indonesia. *Samarah*, 8(2), 687–705. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i2.19686>

Toyibah, D., & Riyani, I. (2025). Contesting religious authority in response to government regulations on the prevention and handling of campus sexual violence (CSV) in Indonesia. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2025.103085>

Whyte, S. A. (2024). *Islamic religious authority in a modern age: Australian and global perspectives*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7931-8>

**Copyright Holder :**  
© Umar Zakka et.al (2025).

**First Publication Right :**  
© Islamic Studies in the World

**This article is under:**

