

SHIA MINORITY IN MEDAN CITY: THE EARLY EMERGENCE, MOVEMENT AND RESPONSE OF SUNNI GROUPS

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Abstract: This article studies the Shia community movement in the city of Medan during the Reform Era. Specifically, the study aims to reveal the emergence, development, and activities of the Shia groups in Medan, the response of the Sunni majority group toward the Shia minority community, and the dialogue between Sunni-Shia leaders. This study employs Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to analyze Shia community dynamics, and Sergey Melnik's theory of interreligious dialogue to analyze Sunni-Shia dialogue. The findings reveal that the Shia community began to emerge and develop in the 1990s in the city of Medan, influenced ideologically by Iranian clerics through a group of local figures, including alumni of Iranian Islamic educational institutions. This community established foundations and organizations focusing on religious outreach and social activities. The presence of the Shia community elicited various reactions from Sunni groups; some figures opposed Shi'ism, while others did not see it as an issue. Evidence shows that dialogue occurred between Sunni and Shiite leaders, with some advocating for unity while others emphasized the fundamental differences between the two sects. In addition, this article argues that the Shia group in Medan has been relatively successful in introducing Shia traditions due to their effective use of economic, cultural and social capital, which strengthened their sectarian identity while also increasing acceptance from some Sunni figures. Sunni and Shia dialog includes polemical, cognitive, peacemaking, and partnership dialogue.

Keywords: Shia; Sunni; Minority group; Interreligious dialogue; Capital theory.

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Introduction

Islam is practiced by most of the Indonesian population. Unfortunately, the Muslim community comprising of Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyah has a different perception of this religion. Sunni Muslims in Indonesia is affiliated with diverse organization scattered in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah, Persatuan Islam, Mathla'ul Anwar, Nahdlatul Wathan, al-Khairat, and Al Ittihadiyah. The trend shared by Muslims in this country is divided into two broad groups, namely traditional and modernist Islam. Followers of Islamic organizations such as NU, Al-Ittihadiyah, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (Perti), and Al Washliyah are representatives of traditional Islam, while those belonging to Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam (Persis) Persis are representatives of modernist Islam. To some extent, the madhhab groups in Indonesia have had their ups and downs.

Indeed, majority of Muslims in the country adhere to the Sunni school of thought, especially Ash'arīyah and Shāfi'īyah.¹ However, recently Sunni had exhibited an anti-attitude towards minority groups such as the Ahmadiyya and Shia. Several cases have shown that these groups have experienced acts of persecution and intimidation.² Fortunately, followers of the Shia group, continues to increase despite being persecuted and intimidated by the intolerant factions in the country. This led to the emergence of an anti-Shia organization named Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah (ANNAS or the Anti-Shia National Alliance) which already has branches in various parts of the country.³ Seminars were held, and books were written by Sunni figures to mislead the Shia. The polemic attitude of this sect towards the Shia minority needs to be discussed. None of these organizations have been largely banned by the government. This differs from the case of Ahmadiyah, where related groups have been prohibited from operating in Indonesia.⁴ Shia groups are free to convey their teach-

¹ Deliar Noer, *The Rise and Development of the Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia during the Dutch Colonial Period (1900-1942)* (Michigan: Cornell University, 1963).

² Al Makin, "Homogenizing Indonesian Islam: Persecution of the Shia Group in Yogyakarta," *Studia Islamika* 24, no. 1 (2017): 1-32.

³ Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al., "Conflictual and Peaceful Sunni-Shia Relations: Study on Various Factors of State Policy Formation in Sampang and Yogyakarta," *ESENSLA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 2 (2020).

⁴ Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Torn between Muhammadiyah and Ahmadiyah in Indonesia: Discussing Erfaan Dahlan's Religious Affiliation and Self-Exile," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48, no. 140 (2020): 60-77.

ings, as well as establish Islamic organizations, foundations, and educational institutions that contributes to its strengthening.⁵

The history of the emergence and development of the Shia minority in Indonesia, as well as the influence of Iranian Shia on Muslim communities in the archipelago, has been extensively documented by various researchers. From a historical perspective, for instance, Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad has highlighted the work of scholars who have studied the presence and impact of Shia in Aceh from the early arrival of Islam in the region to the present day.⁶ Majid Daneshgar, for example, has demonstrated the influence of Persian Shia figures and elements on the history of the archipelago.⁷ Similarly, Ja'far et al.⁸ and Husain Heriyanto⁹ have illustrated the contributions of Iranian scholars to the intellectual tradition of Islam in Indonesia, particularly in the field of philosophy. Beyond historical studies, some researchers have also examined the reactions of Sunni Muslims in Indonesia toward the Shia minority. Dicky Sofjan has shown that the Shia community in Indonesia has been subjected to marginalization and criminalization by religious authorities.¹⁰ Likewise, Al Makin has revealed that the Shia community in Yogyakarta has faced persecution

⁵ Wahyu Iryana, Nina Herlina Lubis, and Kunto Sofianto, "The Existence of Shia in Indonesia Between Tradition," *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* 28, no. 2 (2018): 125-36; M. Khusna Amal, "Anti-Shia Mass Mobilization in Indonesia's Democracy: Godly Alliance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Exclusion," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 25-48.

⁶ Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "From Power to Cultural Landscapes: Rewriting History of Shi'ah in Aceh," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 2 (2017): 509-530.

⁷ Majid Daneshgar, "The Study of Persian Shi'ism in the Malay-Indonesian World: A Review of Literature from the Nineteenth Century Onwards," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2014).

⁸ Ja'far, Dahlia Lubis, and Muhammad Iqbal, "Persian Philosophy in the Archipelago: The Transmission of Persian Islamic Intellectual Tradition to Indonesia in the Contemporary Era," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1.

⁹ Husain Heriyanto, "The Role and Contribution of Iranian Scholars to the Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Indonesia from the Past to the Present," in *The Civilisational and Cultural Heritage of Iran and the Malay World: A Cultural Discourse*, eds. Syed Farid Alatas and Abdolreza Alami (Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur: Gerakbudaya Enterprise and the Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2018), 39-57.

¹⁰ Dicky Sofjan, "Minoritization and Criminalization of Shia Islam in Indonesia," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (2016): 29-44, <https://mse.jhu.edu/pub/340/article/779587/summary>

from anti-Shia groups.¹¹ On the other hand, the study by Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al. presents a different interpretation, suggesting that the Shia minority has received varying treatment from Sunni groups. In Sampang, Madura, the Shia minority experienced discrimination and even violence, while in Yogyakarta, they were treated more favorably.¹² Other researchers have focused on exploring ideas and instances of Sunni-Shia dialogue in Indonesia, both at the national and local levels. Thus, studies on the history of Shia in the archipelago, as well as on the dynamics of dialogue and conflict between Sunni and Shia in Indonesia, have been carried out extensively by scholars.¹³

In the context outside of Java, studies on the relationship between Sunni and Shia communities in the city of Medan have received little attention from researchers. Thus far, the relationship between these two groups has never escalated into discrimination or physical violence. Persecution against the Shia minority has been virtually nonexistent. Dialogues between the two groups have been held on several occasions, although this does not imply the absence of resistance toward the Shia minority. Many Muslim communities in North Sumatra Province particularly in Medan City, identify themselves as adherents of traditional Islam. Researches by Dja'far Siddik,¹⁴ Al Rasyidin,¹⁵ Abbas Pulungan,¹⁶ and Ja'far¹⁷ show that Muslim

¹¹ Makin, "Homogenizing Indonesian Islam: Persecution of the Shia Group in Yogyakarta."

¹² Abidin et al., "Conflictual and Peaceful Sunni-Shia Relations: Study on Various Factors of State Policy Formation in Sampang and Yogyakarta."

¹³ Fiqh Vredian Aulia Ali, "Intra-Religious Dialogue in Post-Sectarian Violence: Assessing Sampang Sunni-Shiite Relation in Indonesia," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 18, no. 2 (2019): 243; Ahmad Saefudin and Fathur Rohman, "Building Social Harmony in the Jepara Shi'ite Minorities," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 49; Makhfud Syawaludin, "Harmoni di Pasuruan: Titik Temu Ulama Syiah dengan Ulama Pesantren," *Multicultural Islamic Education* 7, no. 1 (2023): 67-77; Asfa Widiyanto, "Rapprochement Between Sunnism and Shiism in Indonesia," *Epistémé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 16, no. 1 (2021): 31-58.

¹⁴ Dja'far Siddik, "Dinamika Organisasi Muhammadiyah di Sumatera Utara," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2017).

¹⁵ Al Rasyidin, "Organisasi Islam di Tanah Melayu: Ideologi dan Gerakan Al-Ittihadiyah Sebelum Era Reformasi," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 1 (2018).

¹⁶ Abbas Pulungan, "Nahdlatul Ulama di Luar Jawa: Perkembangan di Tanah Mandailing," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 91-217.

¹⁷ Ja'far, "Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah dan Pelestarian Akidah Ahl Sunnah Wa Al-Jama'ah di Indonesia," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (2019): 54-81.

communities in the region are affiliated with three traditional Islamic organizations namely Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah, NU, and Al-Ittihadiyah, and one modernist organization namely Muhammadiyah. Al Washliyah and Al-Ittihadiyah are two Islamic organizations established in Medan City. Some people are also adherents of tarekat, especially the Naqsyabandiah tarekat based in Basilam, Langkat Regency.¹⁸ Al Washliyah is the most influential organization in the region.¹⁹ A limited number of people are not affiliated with Islamic organizations or tarekat. By the majority group as revealed by Ramli Abdul Wahid (d. 2020), a Chairman of the Fatwa Commission at the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) of North Sumatra Province, the latter group is claimed to be a heretical group in Islam.²⁰ Thus, in terms of religious ideology, the majority of Muslim communities in Medan City adhere to the schools of Shāfi'iyyah and the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* Islamic legal thought.

Recent developments show that the Shia community is emerging as a new group within the Muslim community in Medan City. They established an Islamic Foundation or also certain organizations with the focus of activities in the fields of education, da'wah and social. The presence of the Shia group as a minority has also elicited varied responses from the Sunni community as the majority group. Incidentally, other research were carried out in Medan by Zainul Fuad²¹ and Dja'far Siddik.²² The research specifically focused on a particular Shia foundation and failed to capture the response of Sunnis as the majority group and the dialog between the two groups in the city. This study examines the Twelve Shia movements in North Sumatra. First, its development nationally is captured, followed by a discussion of its growth at the local level. Secondly, the Sunni group's response to the Shia, and the dialog between the two groups is examined. This essentially centers on the case of North Sumatra as a pluralistic region

¹⁸ L. Hidayat Siregar, "Tarekat Naqsyabandian Syaikh Abdul Wahab Rokan: Sejarah, Ajaran, Amalan, dan Dinamika Perubahan," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 35, no. 1 (2011): 59-77.

¹⁹ Dja'far Siddik and Rosnita, "Gerakan Pendidikan Al-Washliyah di Sumatera Utara," *Ulmunna* 18, no. 2 (2014).

²⁰ Ramli Abdul Wahid, "Aliran Minoritas dalam Islam di Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 2 (2018).

²¹ Zainul Fuad, *Perkembangan Komunitas Ahlul Bait di Sumatra Utara* (Medan: Pusat Penelitian IAIN Sumatera Utara, 2006).

²² Dja'far Siddik, *Gerakan Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib Bagi Pengembangan Mazhab Syi'ah Itsna 'Ayyariyah di Kota Medan* (Medan: Pusat Penelitian IAIN Sumatera Utara, 2010).

where there has never been conflict between and within religious communities.

Thus, in addition to studying the Shia community movement, researchers also study the Sunni community's response to the Shia minority in Medan City. First, the researchers did not discuss the Sunni community's response to the Shia community in Medan City, so the study in this article can complement the scarcity of studies on the Sunni response to Shia in Medan City, as well as the journey of dialog between the two groups. Secondly, this study needs to be conducted to portray the religious tolerance displayed by both groups, especially since the data shows that there is no social conflict between the two groups that leads to acts of violence, so this study can contribute to the strategy of strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia.

This study is library-based research that heavily relies on documentary sources concerning the Shia movement in the city of Medan. Nevertheless, to enrich the data, the researcher conducted limited interviews with several individuals affiliated with the Shia community and carried out periodic observations from 2006 to the present. Documents were analyzed using the data analysis method.²³ Field data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman and Saldana model of data analysis.²⁴ This article argues that the success of Shia groups in Medan City in introducing and developing their teachings is rooted in the strategic utilization of intellectual and social capital. Intellectual capital is realized through the mastery of Islamic knowledge and narratives that strengthen the legitimacy of their beliefs, while social capital is seen in the ability to build a solid network among internal circles and harmonious relationships with some Sunni groups. This approach not only strengthens religious identity within the Shia community, but also encourages some Sunni groups to accept their existence. This synergy is the key to their success in maintaining the sustainability of the community amid social dynamics. This study employs Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital²⁵ to analyze Shia community dynamics, and

²³ Klaus H. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis* (California: Sage Publication, Inc., 1980).

²⁴ Matthew B Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 2024).

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), 241-58.

Sergey Melnik's theory of interreligious dialogue to analyze Sunni-Shia dialogue.²⁶

Shia Community Beyond North Sumatra Province

Several Islamic organizations founded during the colonial period such as—Muhammadiyah, NU, Al Washliyah, and Al Ittihadiyah—served as agents that spread and strengthened the Sunni school of thought in the archipelago.²⁷ The academic institutes, madrasas, and Islamic boarding schools owned by these organizations is perceived as the foundation of the Sunni tradition in the country. Therefore, Indonesian Muslims adhere to this school of thought, while a small proportion practices that of Shia.

The Shia community has inhabited the archipelago since the emergence of Islam. According to A. Hasjmy, the first Islamic kingdom in the country was the Peureulak Sultanate founded by the Shia community in Peureulak.²⁸ Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, reported that it continued to spread to various regions of the archipelago such as Samudera Pasai, Kutaraja (Banda Aceh), West Sumatra, Bengkulu,²⁹ Java, and Ternate.³⁰ It has existed in the archipelago for a long time as detected from its several influences on the local culture. For example, the tradition of celebrating Ashura is extremely extensive.³¹ Unfortunately, information on how Shia developed in later eras are scarce. Several studies have reported that its influence in the archipelago is evident in innumerable cultures and traditions. Kamaruzzaman

²⁶ Sergey Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Interreligious Studies* 31, no. November (2020): 48-72, <https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/download/499/521/>

²⁷ Al Rasyidin, "Islamic Organizations in North Sumatra: The Politics of Initial Establishment and Later Development," *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 10, no. 1 (2016): 63-88; Martin van Bruinessen, "Overview of Muslim Organizations, Associations and Movements in Indonesia," in *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013), 21-59.

²⁸ A. Hasjmy, *Syi'ah dan Ahlussunnah Saling Berebut Pengaruh dan Kekuasaan Sejak Awal Sejarah Islam di Kepulauan Nusantara* (Surabaya: Bina Ilmu, 1983).

²⁹ Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, *Kafilah Budaya: Pengaruh Persia Terhadap Kebudayaan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Citra, 2006).

³⁰ Smith Alhadar, "Sejarah Tradisi Syi'ah Ternate," *Al-Huda* 1, no. 1 (2000).

³¹ Harapandi Dahri, "Tradisi Syi'ah Memperkuat Kearifan Lokal Nusantara," *Syi'ar*, n.d.; Ahmad Baso, "Perayaan Asyura dan Karakter Islam Nusantara," *Syi'ar*, n.d.

Bustamam-Ahmad³² stated that Shia elements are found in the Aceh's political and cultural history, this sect alongside the Persians also contributed to the formation of its identity. Iqbal gave a detailed explanation of the actual impact of Persian, even Shia doctrines and traditions on Islamic culture.³³ It is evident that the culture and traditions of the Muslims in the archipelago were influenced by that of Shia and Persian Islam. This is irrespective of the fact that other foreign cultures and traditions, such as India helped shape the Muslim identity in Indonesia.

Shia is one of the religious groups in Indonesia, and until recently, they lived among the Sunni majority. This sect is at least divided into two types, firstly those who are Shia by birth and secondly those who were originally Sunni adherents before converting to Shia. From the ethnic aspect, some of them are of Arab descent, while the others are indigenes. It can be emphasized that it is still an urban and educated phenomenon, in the country. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, several Indonesian students continued their studies at diverse universities. Majority studied religious sciences, especially in the fields of theology, Islamic philosophy, Islamic mysticism, and Islamic law. After graduation, the students returned to the archipelago and became a Shia leader, thereby being responsible for developing a school of thought amongst the Sunni group.

To promote Shia in Indonesia, the leaders of this group set up organizations, foundations, and educational institutions. These three media served as a means of disseminating knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to this sect. The number of organizations, foundations, and educational institutions affiliated with Shia is quite large. Based on *Laporan Kegiatan Silaturahmi Ahlul Bait Indonesia III* in 2006, Ahl al-Bayt organizations already exist in most parts of the archipelago. There are not less than 131 Shia foundations operating in various parts of the country, like Sumatra, Kalimantan, Bali, Sulawesi, Central Java and Yogyakarta, East Java, West Java and Banten, as well as Jakarta, respectively. Various establishments have held diverse activities to preserve the tradition of Shia ideology.

Ahl al-Bayt organizations hold a National Gathering (Silatnas) annually. By 2006, three such gatherings had been organized: the first

³² Bustamam-Ahmad, "From Power to Cultural Landscapes: Rewriting History of Shi'ah in Aceh."

³³ Iqbal, *Kafilah Budaya: Pengaruh Persia Terhadap Kebudayaan Indonesia*.

Silatnas in 2004 in Yogyakarta, the second in 2005 in Purwokerto, and the third in 2006 in Bogor. It is usually organized to achieve three goals. First, it establishes a stronger bond between the foundation and all its followers through Recitation as well as Prayer and Dhikr Assembly groups. Second, it provides a better way of communication, coordination, and consolidation among its members. Third, it promotes the Ahl al-Bayt community as a new social force in Indonesia. In Sumatra, several Ahl al-Bayt foundations and organizations have been established by the Shia community, namely Garda Madina Institute in Banda Aceh, Ikatan Jamaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia (IJABI) Province Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Az-Zahra di Medan, Komunitas Ahlul Bait Medan, IJABI Province Sumatera Utara/Kota Medan, Ikatan Pemuda Ahlul Bait Indonesia (IPABI) Province Sumatera Utara, Yayasan Makna 12 in Bengkulu, Yayasan Pintu Ilmu in Palembang, Yayasan Al-Bayan in Palembang, Majelis Kumail in Palembang, Perpustakaan Kasyful Gita in Bandar Lampung, Yayasan Al-Hakim in Lampung, Yayasan Abu Thalib in Medan, and Yayasan Al-Furqon in Lampung.³⁴

From Silatnas III, the activities of various Ahl al-Bayt foundations in the country are categorized into five aspects, namely education, religion, society, economy, and health. The educational sector involves the establishment of different types of institutions and libraries, as well as organizing training sessions in the fields of Islam, linguistics, and philosophy. Meanwhile, activities performed in the religious field include the Commemoration of Islamic Holidays and the formation of recitation, and prayer groups such as *kumail* and *tawassul*. The social sector involves the establishment of orphanages and slaughtering of sacrificial animals (*qurbān*). Activities performed in the economic field includes establishing agricultural kiosks and Bank Perkreditan Rakyat Syariah (Syariah Rural Bank), as well as empowering its followers with fund aids. In the health sector, there is a foundation that organizes breathing exercises. All these phenomena show that various Shia foundations pay attention to the welfare of the community. It is an undeniable fact that the Ahl al-Bayt foundation has contributed greatly to the preservation and strengthening of Shia in the country.

³⁴ Yayasan IPABI, *Laporan Kegiatan Silaturahmi Nasional (Silatnas) Ahlul Bait Indonesia III* (Bogor: Yayasan IPABI, 2006).

This group is indeed not banned from establishing an organization in Indonesia considering that the law allows every citizen, regardless of religion, to establish a union. Furthermore, Shia groups utilize this rule to enact Islamic organizations, foundations, and formal educational institutions. At least, there are two Shia Islamic organizations, namely Ikatan Jamaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia (IJABI) and Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI). These are a means of uniting the diverse Shia groups in the country. IJABI was founded by, among others, Jalaluddin Rakhmat or *Kang Jalal*, during the reform era, precisely on July 1, 2000, at Gedung Asia Afrika, Bandung, West Java.³⁵ ABI was announced at the Marine Soldier Hall Building, Cilandar, Jakarta, on Wednesday, June 15, 2011. It was developed at the Ahlul Bait Indonesia national gathering forum, on July 24 and 25, 2010, where a team of nine members ultimately determined its establishment. These two organizations are active in the fields of education, *da'wah*, and social work.

Several groups have also established formal educational institutions. For example, Yayasan Mutahhari in Bandung, West Java manages four of such institutes, namely Senior and Junior High School Plus Mutahhari in Cicalengka Bandung, Bahtera Junior High School, and Smart Mutahhari School (SCM), both in Bandung.³⁶ Yayasan Pesantren Islam (YAPI) in Bangil, East Java, manages the Putra Islamic Boarding School which coordinates three other educational institutions, namely Junior, and Senior High School Plus, as well as Madrasah Diniyah. YAPI also manages the Women's Islamic Boarding School which supports three educational institutions, namely al-Ma'hadul Islami Junior High School, al-Ma'hadul Islami Senior High School, Madrasah Diniyah al-Ma'hadul Islami, and Hawzah Imam Sadiq.³⁷ The Shia group also established universities, including Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS) in Jakarta and Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Islam (STFI) Sadra. ICAS at the Indonesia branch was established in 2003, while STFI Sadra was inaugurated on July 12, 2012, in Jakarta. The effort of these groups towards the educational sector is

³⁵ Nunu Ahmad An-Nahidhl, "IJABI dan Pendidikan Ahlul Bait: Studi Kasus pada Yayasan Muthahhari Bandung," *EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama dan Keagamaan* 12, no. 1 (2014).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Muhammad Andi Isya', "Pendidikan dan Konflik (Potret Konflik Sunni-Syiah dan Imbasnya terhadap Pendidikan di Bangil Kabupaten Pasuruan)," *Progressa: Journal of Islamic Religious Instruction* 2, no. 1 (2018).

supported by Shia leaders who have studied in Iran and have received assistance either directly or indirectly from the Iranian government or Islamic organizations affiliated with Shia.³⁸

The establishment of these organizations, foundations, and educational institutions has indeed boosted the understanding of the Shia community about the Ahl al-Bayt school as well as increased their followers. The leaders who had studied in Iran teach their community members new ideas and works by Shia scholars in the country. Many books written by Shia scholars have been translated and circulated freely in the country. The leaders also published certain views in respect to the Shia sect. The books written by the scholars are easily found in bookstores or libraries. There is no rule that prohibits them from being published and circulated in the country. Academic freedom in Indonesia is indeed the main driving factor for the progress of the Shia community.

As a minority sect with several differences, are usually discriminated by the majority group. Incidentally, four years after the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the Fatwa Commission of MUI once issued a recommendation that Muslims in the country are wary of Shia.³⁹ The appeal reached at the MUI national working meeting in 1984 was “Given the main differences between Shia and *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* as earlier mentioned, especially the difference regarding ‘Imāmah’ (government), MUI pleaded with the Indonesian Muslims who believe in *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* to boost their awareness concerning an ideology related to Shia teachings.”⁴⁰

The decision of the MUI Fatwa Commission failed to state that Shia is a deviant sect. However, this differs from that of East Java MUI decision made in 2012, thereby emphasizing that Shia is a deviant and misleading sect. The East Java MUI further asserted that “(1) the confirmed and stipulated decisions of the regional MUI presumed that Shia teachings, especially Imāmīyah Ithnā ‘Asharīyah or those using the pseudonym madhhab Ahl al-Bayt and the likes, have certain similarities with Shia Imāmīyah Ithnā ‘Asharīyah, which is heretical and misleading; (2) stated that the use of the term “Ahl al-Bayt” by

³⁸ Dahlia Lubis and Syarifah Rahmah, “Education Movement of Shia Group in Contemporary Indonesia,” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 224.

³⁹ Wahid, “Aliran Minoritas dalam Islam di Indonesia.”

⁴⁰ Sofjan and Dicky, “Minoritization & Criminalization of Shia Islam in Indonesia.”

Shia followers is a form of piracy to respect Ahl al-Bayt, a Messenger of Allah.”⁴¹

The Central MUI also published a book entitled *Mengenal dan Mewaspadai Penyimpangan Syiah di Indonesia*, written in 2013 by Gema Insani Press and a special team from the Fatwa and the MUI Study Commissions. Another refusal was accomplished by organizing seminars and publishing books and articles. Even on April 20, 2014, it was founded by an organization called Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah (ANNAS) whose mission was to protect the people from the Shia faith and anticipate its movements in the country.⁴² Some mass organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, have no problem with this group. Uniquely, although there are many anti-Shia movements in Indonesia, the Shia ideology and movement cannot be contained by the Sunni group. However, by establishing lawful educational institutions, this group has been successfully developed, especially after the fall of the New Order.

The MUI's attitude towards Shia groups in Indonesia was strengthened by the emergence of ANNAS, Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah in the country. Its declaration was on April 20, 2014, in Bandung, West Java. ANNAS has five main missions, first it provides information about the heresy of Shia teachings to the public and Muslims throughout the nation. Second, it increases awareness and anticipation of various patterns of Shia heretical movements and awakens the affected Muslims and encourages them to embrace the teachings of Islam according to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Third, it mobilizes the Muslim ummah together with organizations, institutions, and community groups to fight against the Shia movement. Fourth, it boosts cooperation and partners with the government in terms of preventing and cracking down the spread of Shia heretical teachings. Fifth, urges the government to dissolve all organizations affiliated with developing Shia teachings in Indonesia. Based on these five missions, ANNAS is a Sunni or anti-Shia group.

Indeed, the existence of the sect has been rejected by some Sunni groups. Some figures of Islamic organizations from NU and Al

⁴¹ Moh. Kamaluddin, *Telaah Kritis Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) Tentang Kesesatan Ajaran Syiah Dan Implikasi Hukumnya Terhadap Perlindungan Hak Kebebasan Beragama Di Indonesia (Studi Terhadap Fatwa MUI Propinsi Jawa Timur No.Kep-01/SKF-MUI/JTM/I/2012)* (Malang: University of Muhammadiyah Malang, 2015).

⁴² Ali Makhsum, “Stigmatisasi dan Propaganda Anti-Syiah: Sorotan Deskriptif Gerakan ANNAS,” *Jurnal CMES* 12, no. 2 (2019): 182-91.

Jam'iyyatul Washliyah circles exhibited an anti-Shia attitude towards its school of thought. Opposing groups often hold seminars on Shia, while many scholars write about its dangers and misguidance. However, the criticism of some of the Sunni groups has received counter-criticism from Shia leaders, who have written books to explain its actual teachings. This is in response to the emergence of books about Shia written by Sunni leaders in Indonesia. The attitude of mutual criticism resulted in a dialogue between schools. It is largely evident that the discourse between Sunni and Shia usually takes place in various regions in the country, especially in North Sumatra.

Shia Community in Medan City

The early existence of the Shia community in North Sumatra, is not known for certain. A recent study only reported that it developed significantly in the 90s. The descendants of Prophet Muḥammad are the pioneers in North Sumatra. This sect has flourished since 2000 when several Shia intellectuals held theological and philosophical discussions on several campuses.⁴³ However, this community has inhabited the archipelago since the emergence of Islam in the country.

The Shia community in North Sumatra has ideological ties to Iranian scholars ('ulamā'). It is believed that followers need to be submissive to living mujtahids, and not the deceased. The decree of *Rahbar* (the current leader of the Shia community, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) binds all Shia, without exception. The fatwa of a *mujtahid* absolutely binds all his *muqallid* (followers). This is because Indonesia does not have an absolute mujtahid with the title "Ayatollah" (Arabic: *Āyat Allāh*), therefore Shia Muslims especially those residing in North Sumatra usually takes all religious matters to an ulama who has reached the stage of an absolute mujtahid in Iran. Every new problem in the field of law needs to be taken to the absolute *mujtahid*. It is a known fact that the followers of Shia madrasas in the country are now adhering to the fatwa of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who served as *Rahbar* in the Shia world. Therefore, the fatwa book of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is easily found in Indonesia. In North Sumatra, this community is subjected to religious fatwas from the foremost and most influential clerics in Iran.

⁴³ Fuad, *Perkembangan Komunitas Ahlul Bait di Sumatra Utara*.

Majority of the Shia in North Sumatra are found in Medan City, although some of them inhabit the Deli Serdang, Serdang Bedagai, Pematangsiantar, and Asahan areas. According to Dja'far Siddik,⁴⁴ it has several foundations in Medan City. First, Yayasan Amali, engaged in education, *da'wah*, and social activities, which was founded by *Sayyid* Saiful Watton in 1998. After the founder died, the foundation experienced a setback, even though it had engaged in innumerable religious guidance and counselling of young people, both high school, and college students. The training was filled by Shia scholars from *hawzah* Qom alumni, Iran.

Second, Yayasan Ahlul Bait Indonesia (YABI) was founded by Habib Ubaidal al-Habsyi. It engaged in *da'wah*, education, library, and social activities. The foundation suffered a setback after the death of its founder. There has been no attempt to reactivate the existence of the two foundations, although both have succeeded in producing followers and maintainers of the Shia school of thought in North Sumatra.

Third, Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib was founded by Ahmad Parwez, Nafaro Affandi Lubis, Candiki Repantu, and Samsul Bahri Ritonga. Its inauguration was held on Monday, January 26, 2006, in Medan. The ceremony was interspersed with an international seminar themed "*Merajut Ukhwah dan Menatap Masa Depan Umat Islam* (Knitting Ukhwah and Looking to the Future of Muslim)." The event was attended by Ayatollah Ramazani (Shia scholars from Iran), M. Yasir Nasution (at that time, Chancellor of North Sumatra State Islamic Institute/IAIN Sumatera Utara), Ramlil Abdul Wahid (at that time, Dean of the Faculty of Ushuluddin, IAIN Sumatera Utara), and Ahmad Zuhri (Lecturer of the Faculty of Ushuluddin IAIN Sumatera Utara).⁴⁵ Interestingly, the inauguration of the Shia foundation was attended by its educational community and leaders of the Sunni schools of thought. The Shia's activities were mainly centered on this foundation.⁴⁶ Since its establishment, Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib has aggressively promoted the idea of *ukhwah Islamiyah* between these two sects. On the other hand, this foundation is the pioneer of a new

⁴⁴ Siddik, *Gerakan Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib bagi Pengembangan Mazhab Syi'ah Itsna 'Ayariyah di Kota Medan*, 56.

⁴⁵ See *Analisa* (January 25, 2006); *Analisa* (January 27, 2006).

⁴⁶ Interview with Nafaro Affandy Lubis on February 14, 2019 in Medan. He is an entrepreneur and was the Leader of the Abu Thalib Islamic foundation in 2006-2008.

era of Sunni and Shia dialogue in Medan City, North Sumatra. It was concluded that Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib is the driving force of the Shia movement in this region.

Fourth, Ikatan Pemuda Ahlul Bait Indonesia, called IPABI, operates as a national organization with its head office in Bogor. It has several regional and regency leaders in numerous provinces, including North Sumatra and Medan. In 2009, IPABI North Sumatra was led by Akmil Riza (Chairman) and Didi Rahmadi (Secretary General).

Fifth, Ikatan Jamaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia, known as IJABI, is also a national Shia organization. Some of its administrators still adhere to the Sunni school of thought. The Executive Board of IJABI for the period 2008 to 2011 are Furqon Buchari (Chairman) and Emilia Renita AZ (General Secretary). The Chairperson of the Central Board of IJABI of Trustees is Jalaluddin Rakhmat, and it was established in North Sumatra, especially in Medan. IPABI and IJABI administrators are mainly youths and students of Medan City. It is a known fact that these organizations continue to consolidate to spread the teachings of Shia ideology. These establishments have been relatively successful in introducing, preserving, developing, and increasing the total number of their supporters.

These organizations manage several activities that are often carried out around the world. For example, the National Seminar in commemorating 'Āshūrā' 1428 AH which was held on Saturday, January 27, 2007, at the Student Hall of the University of North Sumatra. The board of committee comprised of Abraham Tarigan (Chairman) and Syaiful Azhar (Secretary). This 'Āshūrā' commemoration was presented by Muhsin Labib Assegaf (from Al Huda Foundation) and Henry Saragih (President of La Via Campessina). On January 29, 2007, the commemoration of 'Āshūrā' 1428 AH was again held at the BP-LSPP Hall, Medan. The sequence of events includes poetry recitation, religious lectures, *magtal* readings, Husain singing, and pilgrimage prayers, and the preacher was Husain Al-Kaff, a Shia scholar from Java. Furthermore, IPABI North Sumatra held a *tabligh* and Ramadan discussion from September 4-13, 2009. This activity was headed by a Shia scholar from Java Island and was attended by some organizations and followers in Medan City.

Another activity of the Ahl al-Bayt community in North Sumatra is the commemoration of the world al-Quds day every Friday at the end of Ramadān. For example, this activity was held on Friday, Sep-

tember 18, 2009, and the gathering point was at the Medan Grand Mosque and the office of the United States Consul General. It was initiated by IPABI North Sumatra and supported by several other Shia organizations in this city, such as Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, IJABI, and Garda Asyura. It is a known fact that all Shia sects work together to realize a common goal, namely the da'wah.

The group did exist before 2006, but their presence has not really been felt in Medan City. The emergence of Shia is evident in the establishment of Yayasan Amali, founded by *Sayyid* Saiful Watton, who is a businessman, and holds the title “*Sayyid*” meaning he is a descendant of the Prophet. This foundation is engaged in social, educational, and religious fields.⁴⁷ After Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib was established, the presence of these groups was felt in public. In this era, the concept of *taqiyah* is irrelevant. Some organizations have indeed been established such as the Komunitas Ahlul Bait, IJABI, and IPABI, however the activities of these groups are less prominent, and presently, they are inactive.⁴⁸ Some congregations set up educational institutions but hide their identity as Shia. The group's activities are majorly centered on Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib.⁴⁹ It was concluded that this establishment became the driving force of the Shia movement in North Sumatra. The community is in Medan City, Pematangsiantar, Serdang Bedagai, Asahan, and Deli Serdang. Religious and social activities are performed in groups in this city. In the religious field, they often hold recitation programs, daily rituals (*Kumail* and *Tawassul* prayers), interfaith discussions, and theological and philosophical trainings.⁵⁰ Considering the social field, they usually provide material assistance to orphans and the poor.⁵¹

The Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib was the pioneer of a new era of Sunni and Shia dialogue in North Sumatra. The acquired data shows that the Shia group in Medan City aggressively carried out the theme

⁴⁷ Interview with Nafaro Affandy Lubis, 14 February 2019.

⁴⁸ Interview with Heru Heriyanto, 14 February 2019. He was the Chair of the Medan City IJABI, and an alumnus of IAIN Sumatera Utara, Medan.

⁴⁹ Interview with Nafaro Affandy Lubis, 14 February 2019.

⁵⁰ Interview with Yudarwin, February 14, 2019. He was a member of the Abu Thalib Islamic Foundation. He teaches at the State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UIN Sumatera Utara), Medan.

⁵¹ Interview with Bob Friyandi, administrator of the Abu Thalib Islamic Foundation, on 14 February 2019. He studied in Qom, Iran, and is currently a member of the KPU Tanjungbalai City, Nort Sumatera.

of *ukhuwwah islāmiyah*. Since its establishment, Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib has been the most aggressive group in terms of promoting the idea of *ukhuwwah* between the two sects both theoretically and practically. At the theoretical level, Shia groups often organize seminars on the theme of Sunni and Shia dialogue. Several previous descriptions have proven that the Shia group initiated several seminars that highlight the theme “Muslim unity.” Meanwhile, on a practical level, they hold social activities where they provide material assistance to the weak in Medan. For example, during the month of Ramadān in 2015, Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib donated three tons of rice to 300 families and distributed food items before breaking the fast. Its essence is dependent on at least two objectives, namely building brotherhood and eradicating differences as well as supporting government programs to boost community welfare.⁵²

The Shia group in Medan City is a minority group that emerged at the end of the New Order regime and became a new social force in the Reformation era. This group is relatively successful in strengthening their religious identity, increasing the number of members of the sect, and gaining sympathy and even support from several figures. The success of the Shia community is because they have and develop cultural capital effectively. Based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, it can be explained why the Shia community in Medan City can develop and be well accepted by some Sunni groups,⁵³ According to Bourdieu, capital is a resource that can be used to gain power, social status or profit in a society. The Shia group in Medan City utilizes three capitals (economic, cultural and social) to achieve the above successes. Based on Bourdieu's theory of capital, Shia groups own and utilize all three capitals effectively. First, economic capital is material resources (money, property and financial assets). Some Shia leaders in Medan City are entrepreneurs who support the activities of the group and the foundation from a financial perspective. Second, cultural capital which refers to nonmaterial assets (knowledge, skills and cultural values), which is divided into three forms: incorporation (knowledge), objects (material artifacts such as books and artworks) and institutionalization (formal recognition such as academic degrees). The Shia group in Medan City, in this case, has

⁵² This activity was published in the local daily, “Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib Serahkan Tiga Ton Beras ke Masyarakat,” *Medan Bisnis*, July 2015.

⁵³ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 241-258.

and is supported by a group of scholars from the millennial generation, and some of them are alumni of several Islamic universities in Iran. They also have a library that collects many references on the Shia school of thought. Third, social capital is a network of social relationships that provides access to collective resources, and includes trust, support and social influence. Several Shia leaders have and utilize their good relationships with several influential people, activists of youth and student organizations, and Muslim scholars. These various parties allow the Shia community to gain trust and support. Thus, it is based on the meaning and forms of cultural capital above that lead the Shia community in Medan City to make various achievements.

The Responses of Islamic Organizations to Shia Groups

The presence of the Shia in Medan City received various responses from the Sunni community. Incidentally, North Sumatra has diverse ethnicities and religions. From the religious aspect, the Muslim group is not too dominant, because the number of Christian organizations is quite significant. Sunni Muslim groups are also represented in several Islamic sects. Al Washliyah and Al-Ittihadiyah are two Islamic organizations founded by North Sumatran scholars before the independence era.⁵⁴ Muhammadiyah and NU were also established in North Sumatra⁵⁵ along with some others such as Persaudaraan Muslimin Indonesia (Parmusi), Perti, and Persis. Moreover, MUI has also been established by the North Sumatran scholars since the New Order and is a communication forum for Islamic organizations affiliated with the Sunni school of thought in this region. Regardless, the Salafi-Wahabi community has also begun to emerge in this region. This group already has two higher education institutions, namely STAIS As-Sunnah and Ma'had Abu Ubaidah in Deli Serdang and Medan, respectively. The existence of various Islamic and Salafi-Wahabi organizations is certainly perceived as an obstacle for the Shia community in North Sumatra.

The presence of Shia in Medan, and North Sumatra, has indeed led to the emergence of an anti-movement, although there has never

⁵⁴ Ja'far et al., "Discovering the Legacy of Mandailing Ulama: Education, Intellectuals, and Politics in North Sumatra in the Early 20th Century," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 26, no. 2 (2022): 296-336.

⁵⁵ Abbas Pulungan, *Perkembangan Islam di Mandailing* (Bandung: Citapustaka Media, 2008).

been any physical contact between Sunni and Shia followers. Majority of Muslims in North Sumatra are Sunni followers, while those that belong to the Shia groups are minimal. The extent of rejection is still at the level of an intellectual movement where Sunni leaders hold seminars and recitations. In some circumstances a Shia leader is also invited. This is irrespective of the fact that in the end, the seminar or recitation usually discredited the Shia sect, and the dialogue turns out judgmental.

In Medan, the Salafi-Wahhabi group has a higher education institution called Ma'had Abu Ubaidah. This campus once organized a seminar which was held on January 11, 2014, at the Pharmacy Building, University of North Sumatra. It was centered on the theme "*Alian Syiah: Di Antara Problematika antara Politik dan Aqidah*" (Shia School: Among the Problems between Politics and Aqeedah). Interestingly, it was attended by *Habib Muhammad Baharun*, *Ustadh Muhammad Idrus Ramli* (NU expert from East Java), and *Ramli Abdul Wahid* (MUI of North Sumatra). The Shia group represented by *Candiki Repantu* (Chairman of the Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib) was invited. The seminar did not become a forum for a soothing Sunni-Shia dialogue but turned into a judgment spearheaded by the majority (Sunnis) against the minority groups. During the closing ceremony, *Ustadh Ramli Abdul Wahid* finally stated that "since inception, Sunnis have never been at peace with Shia."

Another anti-movement was detected from the recitation program organized by Majelis Ta'lim al-Ittihad. It was held at the Nur Khadijah Mosque in Medan. This *majlis taklim* was performed for the first time on October 18, 2009. The main informant for this recitation was *Ustadh Hafiz Yazid* (Al Washliyah scholar). The program once raised the theme "Shia", on Saturday, January 11, 2014. It was delivered by *Habib Muhammad Baharun* and *Ustadh Muhammad Idrus Ramli*, both of whom are known as anti-Shia figures in Indonesia. Uniquely, this recitation did not invite the Shia groups at all, irrespective of its title. Finally, it depicts more Shia heresy, and some of the scholars who often delivered this recitation are KH. OK Mas'ud, KH. Hafiz Yazid, *Ustadh Ramli Abdul Wahid*, and *Ustadh Ardiansyah*. Virtually, all the speakers are from the Al Washliyah ulama.

The rejection in North Sumatra also emerged from ANNAS group which already has several representatives in the country. In Medan, this organization was established on February 14, 2016. The

theme at the time of the declaration and inauguration of the ANNAS board was “*Islam Bersatu Melawan Syiah*” (Islam united against Shia). Among the figures present were Athian Ali M. Da'i and M. Rizal Fadillah who represented the Central Board of ANNAS from Jakarta. The inaugurated leadership of ANNAS North Sumatra is Sofyan Saha, a lecturer at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UIN Sumatera Utara) and an alumnus of Jamia Millia Islamia, India. This declaration concluded that the urgency of maintaining the faith, Shia is not Islam, and cannot coexist with Sunnis.⁵⁶ However, there is a slight error in the statement made by the North Sumatran ANNAS leader that the Shia (Iran), have cooperated with Israel, even though they are enemies.

Leaders of Islamic organizations in North Sumatra once held discussions about Shia. This meeting was held in Medan, on May 15, 2015, and was attended by leaders of NU, Muhammadiyah, Al Washliyah, Persatuan Islam, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Ikatan Dai Indonesia (IKADI), and several Islamic boarding schools. The discussion resulted in a recommendation asking the government to protect the creed of Indonesian Muslims and prohibit the spread of Shia in the country. During the discourse, Ramlan Yusuf Rangkuti, Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of the North Sumatra MUI, considered the fact that many Shia teachings were contrary to Islam and were troubling Indonesian Muslims.⁵⁷ Rejection also emerged from several religious leaders affiliated with NU. Nationally and locally, NU administrators rejected Shia which is called a deviant sect. However, several figures who joined the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* of North Sumatra expressed their rejection of this faction as well as Wahhabis. Among the leaders of this organization is KH. Syafi'i Umar Lubis, a figure that often criticizes both groups.

In the context of mainstream Islamic organizations, of the four largest groups in North Sumatra, namely Al Washliyah, NU, Muhammadiyah, and Al-Ittihadiyah, only Muhammadiyah has ever held a seminar on Shia. The committee even invited a Shia scholar from Ja-

⁵⁶ “Pernyataan Sikap ANNAS Provinsi Sumatera Utara,” February 15, 2016, <https://www.annasindonesia.com/read/202-pernyataan-sikap-annas-provinsi-sumatra-utara-> (accessed November 29, 2022).

⁵⁷ Irwan Arfa, “Ulama Sumut Minta Pemerintah Larang Penyebaran Syiah,” *Antaranews.com*, May 14, 2015, <https://sumut.antaranews.com/berita/148193/ulama-sumut-minta-pemerintah-larang-penyebaran-syiah> (accessed on November 29, 2022).

karta named *Ustadh* Abdullah Beik. Muhammadiyah Central Leadership even held an international conference inviting virtually all Islamic countries, and this activity was held in collaboration with Lembaga Hubungan dan Kerjasama Internasional (LHKI) Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah and the Islamic Embassy of Iran. However, it was expected to unite Sunni and Shia. Nationally, Muhammadiyah encouraged intra-Muslim dialogues, to improve mutual understanding, as well as prevent Sunni and Shia conflicts in the country, due to the outcome of the Tanfidz Decision during the 47th Muhammadiyah Congress held in 2015.⁵⁸

Al Washliyah is indeed claimed to be the largest Islamic organization in North Sumatra.⁵⁹ In matters of religion, it has a sharia institution called the Al Washliyah Fatwa Council.⁶⁰ Furthermore, its scholars are actually divided into two groups.⁶¹ The first group does not question the difference between Sunni and Shia, and it was represented by Buya Ovied, who was the Secretary of the Al Washliyah Fatwa Council for 2010 to 2015. It is emphasized that Sunni scholars in the Middle East have long ignored the differences as well as rejected physical war between these two schools of thought, despite claiming that there are deviant Shia sects. Buya Ovied does not question the difference between Sunni and Shia (especially Shia *Imāmīyah*).⁶² The second group, rejects the Shia sect, and asserts that it is impossible for Sunni and Shia to unite. This was reported by *Ustadh* Ramli Abdul Wahid who was the chairman of the Al Washliyah Fatwa Council (2015 to 2020) and the North Sumatra MUI Fatwa Commission. Not only Shia, but he also rejected the Ahmadiyyah sect and others that were misled by the North Sumatra MUI. As a scholar, *Ustadh* Ramli

⁵⁸ Divisi Fatwa Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid and Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, “Bagaimana Pandangan Muhammadiyah Tentang Syiah, HTI, dan Tarekat Shiddiqiyah?” *Suara Muhammadiyah*, 2021.

⁵⁹ Mhd. Syahnar, Ja’far, and Muhammad Iqbal, “Ulama and Radicalism in Contemporary Indonesia: Response of Al Washliyah’s Ulama on Radicalism,” *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2021): 89-110.

⁶⁰ Mhd. Syahnar and Ja’far, “Examining Religious Moderation of Al Jam’iyatul Washliyah Fatwa Council,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, no. 1 (2021).

⁶¹ Ja’far, “Respons Dewan Fatwa Al Jam’iyatul Washliyah terhadap Isu Akidah dan Syariah di Era Global,” *Al-Manabij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 10, no. 1 (2016): 97-118.

⁶² Ovied Rangkuti, “Petaka Syiah di Indonesia,” December 7, 2013, <https://kabar-washliyah.com/2013/12/07/petaka-syiah-di-indonesia/> (accessed November 29, 2022).

Abdul Wahid intensely observed the emergence and development of heretical beliefs in North Sumatra.⁶³ The Fatwa Council of Al Washliyah⁶⁴ for the 2010 to 2015 tenure did issue the following recommendations “calling on Indonesians to respect and tolerate the different teachings of Shia and Sunni sects.”⁶⁵ The management referred to the legal opinions of Egyptian scholars such as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd, Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, Shaykh Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, and Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qardāwī. Several other Al Washliyah scholars questioned the outcome of the meetings held with the leadership.⁶⁶

The North Sumatra Provincial Ulama Council has never issued a fatwa on Shia.⁶⁷ However, not all leaders of the North Sumatran MUI like the chairman, Professor Abdullah Syah, rejects this sect. In an interview, he asserted that “... during worship, they (Shia) had no problem, in fact it is like that of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*... It is hoped that the Shia or Sunni congregations can worship together... and live with each other in peace and harmony without conflict.”⁶⁸ In the other hand, Irwansyah, Deputy Secretary of the North Sumatra MUI Fatwa Commission, stated that Shia is differs from Sunnis. Although, not all sects have deviated from Islam, for example, the Zaidiyah Shia is similar to the Shafi'iyah school. On the other hand, Ismā'īlī and Imāmī Shia does not align with Sunnis.⁶⁹ In 2015, several Islamic organizations in North Sumatra Province held a discussion on Shia. In the discussion, the Chairman of the Fatwa Commission of MUI of North Sumatra, Ramlan Rangkuti, has asserted that quite a few teachings in the Shia sect are contrary to Islam, causing unrest among Muslims. Several scholars from various Islamic organizations have also

⁶³ Ramli Abdul Wahid, “Paham Sesat dan Sempalan Serta Antisipasinya,” in *Second Rapimwil 2016 PW IPHI North Sumatra* (Medan: PW IPHI North Sumatra, 2016).

⁶⁴ Ja'far, *Dewan Fatwa Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah*, eds. Imam Yazid and Irwansyah Irwansyah (Medan: Perdana Publishing and Dewan Fatwa Al Washliyah, 2020).

⁶⁵ Dewan Fatwa Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah, “Hasil Rekomendasi Rapim Dewan Fatwa Al Washliyah,” December 7, 2013, <https://kabarwashliyah.com/2013/12/07/hasil-rekomendasi-rapim-dewan-fatwa-al-washliyah/> (accessed November 29, 2022).

⁶⁶ Ramli Abdul Wahid and et al., *Keputusan-Keputusan Dewan Fatwa Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah (1933-2020)*, eds. Ja'far, Imam Yazid, and Irwansyah Irwansyah (Medan: Perdana Publishing and Dewan Fatwa Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah, 2020).

⁶⁷ Interview with Irwansyah, February 12, 2019, in Medan.

⁶⁸ Aidi Yursal, “Persamaan Aliran Sunni-Syiah,” *Waspada*, November 12, 2012, https://issuu.com/waspada/docs/waspada__rabu_12_september_2012 (accessed November 29, 2022).

⁶⁹ Interview with Irwansyah, February 12, 2019.

asked the government to ban the spread of Shia in Indonesia because it is considered contrary to Islamic teachings.⁷⁰

Irrespective of the fact that it did not issue a fatwa, the North Sumatran MUI held a *mudhākarah* with the theme “Shia” in Medan, on May 25, 2014. Two ulamas were the resource persons for this activity, namely *Ustadh* Ramli Abdul Wahid and *Ustadh* Husnel Anwar Matondang. During their presentation, it was emphasized that Shia is a deviant sect that opposes Sunnis. *Ustadh* Ramli Abdul Wahid is a scholar who is quite intense in opposing the growth and development of heretical sects in the country as well as an anti-Shia. In the article entitled “Kedudukan Hadis dan al-Qur'an Menurut Syiah” (The Position of Hadith and the Qur'an according to the Shia),⁷¹ some of the heresies of this sect were put forward. First, the Shia consider that the Qur'an currently being circulated is not authentic. Second, they believe that revelation still came after the Qur'an. Third, the Shia insulted the wives and companions of the Prophet, accepted *taqiyah*, *mut'ah*, and believed in reincarnation.

In the other hand, *Ustadh* Husnel delivered an article entitled “Mengenal Syiah dari Lintasan Sejarah” (Knowing Shia from Historical Trajectory), which uses the term *Rāfidah* for all Shias, including the *Imāmiyah*. Furthermore, he reported that it is a deviant sect in Islam. The Shia emerged from a political issue, then it became a theological school with the support of the Jews, and then cooperated with the enemies of Islam to gain political power in the Islamic world. It was further stated that “the issue of Sunni and *Rāfidah* is not only a matter of differences in teachings but of faith, politics, and history.”⁷² In essence, the Shia have interpreted the Qur'an in a distorted manner. Despite, not issuing a special fatwa, the North Sumatra MUI accepted a book published by the Central MUI entitled *Mengenal dan Mewaspada Penyimpangan Syiah di Indonesia* (Recognizing and Beware of Shia Deviations in Indonesia).

⁷⁰ Arfa, “Ulama Sumut Minta Pemerintah Larang Penyebaran Syiah.”

⁷¹ Ramli Abdul Wahid, “Kedudukan Hadis dan Al-Qur'an Menurut Syiah” (MUI North Sumatra, 2014).

⁷² Husnel Anwar Matondang, “Mengenal Syiah dari Lintasan Sejarah” (Medan: MUI Sumatera Utara, 2014).

Sunni-Shia Dialogue in Urban Contexts

Medan is a metropolitan city with a heterogeneous population in terms of religion, ethnicity and race. In the context of Islam, many Muslims in this city adhere to Sunni school, and only a small number adhere to the Shia school. There was a dialogue between Sunni and Shia in the mass media, and it was double faced, from trying to find a common ground to less-than-cool polemics. *Waspada*, a daily news in Medan City, published the outcome of a journalist's interview held with Profesor Abdullah Syah, the chairman of North Sumatran MUI, and Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib in which both figures supported the unity of Sunni and Shia. The outcome was also reported in an article entitled "Persamaan Aliran Sunni-Syiah" (Sunni-Shia Stream Equation) published by *Waspada*, on September 12, 2012. This report was also republished on Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib website on November 7, 2012, under the title "Persamaan Sunni-Syiah." Based on the interview, the two figures made a soothing statement, and Professor Abdullah Shah drew four conclusions. First, the way of worship between Sunnis and Shia are presumed to be similar. Second, these groups are expected to worship together. Third, the sects in North Sumatra must live in harmony and avoid internal conflicts between religious communities by eliminating existing differences. Fourth, heretical sects can be found in both Sunni and Shia groups. The Sunnis just need to be careful with the deviant Shia sects. He has emphasized "What is clear is that Sunnis and Shias need to establish a peaceful and harmonious coexistence without conflict."⁷³

Meanwhile, Candiki Repantu, the head of the Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, also promotes the unity of Sunnis and Shias. First, he recognizes that there are differences between the two madhhabs. According to him, "basically the difference between Sunni and Shia is about leadership after the Prophet Muhammad. But for the Shia themselves, it does not cause someone to leave Islam or disbelieve." Secondly, according to Repantu, there are many similarities between the two madhhabs. "The fundamental similarity is found in the pillars of Islam, namely between Shia and Sunni both recognize the five pillars of Islam, namely believing in Allah and the Messengers, praying five times a day and night, fasting in the month of Ramadan, zakat, and making the pilgrimage to Mecca." Thirdly, he acknowledged the con-

⁷³ Yursal, "Persamaan Aliran Sunni-Syiah."

flict between the followers of the two madhhabs, but according to him “the Sunni-Shiite conflict is due to a misunderstanding. There have been international political interests to destroy the unity of Muslims. Because if the Muslims are united, the enemies of Islam, namely America and Zionist Israel and their minions, will lose power.”⁷⁴

On several other occasions, Repantu has also put forward the idea of Sunni and Shia unity. During the 10th anniversary celebration of the Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib in 2016, he reiterated:

The difference between Sunni and Shia is not a problem anymore, because more than 500 Muslim scholars at the Amman Conference in Jordan in 2005 stated that the Shia school is a recognized school of thought in Islam. So, if there are those who still think that Shia is outside the Islamic madhhab, then scholars like this are scholars who do not keep up with developments in Islam.⁷⁵

Thus, the statement of Abdullah Syah (d. 2021), a Professor at IAIN Sumatera Utara and for several periods the Chairman of the MUI in North Sumatra Province, is the statement of a Sunni leader who supports the unity of Sunni and Shia. This is different from the religious opinions of several Al Washliyah leaders in North Sumatra Province, such as *Ustadh* Ramli Abdul Wahid, *Ustadh* M. Nasir and *Ustadh* Fachrurrozy Pulungan. Professor Abdullah Syah has made various statements in support of Sunni and Shia unity, as has Candiki Repanti as Chair of Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib. The statements of the two figures above were published in *Waspada*, a well-known and influential newspaper in Medan City.

Likewise, the writings of *Ustadh* M. Nasir and *Ustadh* Fachrurrozy Pulungan, two Al Washliyah figures who oppose Shia ideology and movement in North Sumatra Province, were published in *Waspada*. *Ustadh* M. Nasir, a prominent Al Washliyah scholar a regular writer for *Waspada*, wrote an article entitled “Perbedaan Prinsipil Antara Sunni dan Syiah” (Principal Differences Between Sunnis and Shia) which was published in *Waspada*, on September 7, 2012. It was con-

⁷⁴ Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, “Persamaan Sunni-Syiah,” 2012, <https://abuthalib.wordpress.com/2012/11/07/persamaan-sunni-syiah/> (accessed November 29, 2022).

⁷⁵ Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, “Dasa Warsa Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib,” January 23, 2016, <https://www.abuthalib.wordpress.com/2016/01/23/dasa-warsa-yayasan-islam-abu-thalib/> (accessed November 29, 2022).

cluded that the difference between Sunni and Shia is not a matter of the branch of religion, rather it is the basis. Additionally, differences in beliefs are intolerable. *Ustadh* M. Nasir's article emphasizes the falsehood of the Shia school rather than finding common ground. He said:

The differences of belief between *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* and the *firqahs* that occur in the Islamic world cannot be said to be “*khilāfiyah furi'iyyah*” of Islamic teachings or fiqh disputes... Differences in fiqh issues can be forgiven according to the nature of the Shariah-the Shariah varies according to place and time. However, the issue of ‘*aqidah*’ cannot be tolerated ... The differences between Shia and Sunni are matters of principle that are difficult to reconcile, can they be said to be brothers of *Ahl al-Sunnah*, of the same faith, or of the same religion? Or are they of the same religion with different ‘*aqidah*’ or different ‘*aqidah*’ and religion?⁷⁶

Similarly, *Ustadh* Fachrurrozy Pulungan, the Secretary of the Da'wah Council of the Regional Leadership of Al Jam'iyyatul Washliyah North Sumatra Province, wrote four articles entitled “Apa, Mengapa Syiah” (What, Why Shia), which was published in *Waspada*. Third part of article published September 21, 2012, reported that Sunnis and Shia do not share the same beliefs about the Qur'an, hadith, pillars of Islam, and faith. The article reiterated that “Sunnis must reject Shia teachings and understandings. Anyone who insults the companions and wives of the Prophet Muhammad is also insulting the Prophet, and that is against the ‘*aqidah*’.” Like *Ustadh* M. Nasir's article, *Ustadh* Fakhrurozy's article emphasizes the wrongness of the Shia sect rather than trying to be a meeting point for the two madhhab, as he said:

The Shia of the early Islamic period were not like the Shia of today. In the early days of Islam, the Shia group was still together with Muslims in general ... Subsequently, Shia experienced development and even division especially after the death of their Imams. The further the schism arose, the further understanding and teachings were practiced. Their understanding and teachings are increasingly deviant, no longer in ac-

⁷⁶ M. Nasir, “Perbedaan Prinsipil Antara Sunni Dan Syiah,” *Waspada*, September 7, 2012, https://issuu.com/waspada/docs/waspada_jumat_7_september_2012 (accessed November 29, 2022).

cordance with the teachings of Islam which are sourced in the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet.⁷⁷

The two authors tend to highlight the different teachings between the two sects. However, their view was addressed in an article by Candiki Repantu titled "Belajar Syiah, Merajut Ukhwah: Tanggapan Tulisan M. Nasir dan Fakhrurrazi Pulungan tentang Syiah" (Learning Shia, Knitting Ukhwah: Responses to M. Nasir and Fakhrurrazi Pulungan's writings about Shia), where their statements were refuted on the grounds that they misunderstood the teaching of Shia. This article published in *Waspada*, September 28, 2012. Candiki Repantu responded to the opinions of the two Al Washliyah figures on the issues of 'Abd Allāh b. Saba', worship, creed, Companions and 'Ā'isha, Ḥadīth, the Qur'an, and al-Mā'idah [5]: 55. He emphasized that the opinions of the two figures are not in accordance with the opinion of the Shia Imāmīyah Ithnā 'Asharīyah school. Repantu also said:

Reading the writings of *Ustadh* M. Nasir and *Ustadh* Fakhrurrozy Pulungan, one can see prejudice and misunderstanding without evidence or without knowing well one's arguments, for example their accusations that Shia have three creeds (*shahādah*), declare the Qur'an is not authentic, revile the Companions, and disbelieve Aisha. This is a hasty generalization, a thinking error in assessing someone's argumentation. To avoid thinking errors due to the wrong meaning or use of words, I limit the meaning of Shia in this article to Shia Imāmīyah Ithnā 'Asharīyah.⁷⁸

Repantu's opinion in his article was criticized by *Ustadh* M. Nasir through an article entitled "Belajar Syiah Berarti Mendukung Gerakan Tasykik" (Learning Shia Means Supporting the Tashkik Movement) published in *Waspada*, October 5, 2012. *Ustadh* M. Nasir rejected Candiki Repantu's rebuttal, and even reiterated:

⁷⁷ Fachrurrozy Pulungan, "Apa, dan Mengapa Syiah," *Waspada*, September 21, 2012, https://issuu.com/waspada/docs/waspada_jumat_21_september_2012 (accessed November 29, 2022).

⁷⁸ Candiki Repantu, "Belajar Syiah Merajut Ukhwah," *Waspada*, September 28, 2012, https://issuu.com/waspada/docs/waspada_jumat_28_september_2012 (accessed November 29, 2022)

If the Shia want to establish brotherhood with the Sunnis, why is it that while Iraq, Libya, and other Sunni-dominated Islamic countries are being destroyed by the United States and its allies, Iran is only a spectator, and even the Shia are participating in “slaughtering” the Sunnis? ... Shia and Sunni have a principled difference or difference in creed. In other words, the Shiites can be classified as *ahl al-qiblah* but not necessarily *ahl al-millah* (same *qiblah* but not necessarily the same creed).⁷⁹

Likewise, *Ustadh* Fakhrurrazy Pulungan wrote an article entitled “Lebih Jauh tentang Syiah” (More about Shia) in response to an article by Candiki Repantu. The article was published in *Waspada* on October 12, 2012. In his article, *Ustadh* Fachrurrozy rejects and questions many of Candiki Repantu’s statements. He explains the various Shia teachings around *Ahl al-Bayt*, prayer, fasting, zakat and hajj, and closes the discussion about the development of Shia in Indonesia, then closes the description with the sentence “the development of Shia in Indonesia is also due to the publication of Shia books by several publishers. Basically, the books are just a promotion of Shia teachings and do not show any differences let alone attacks on *Ahl al-Sunnah*, only a few discredits the companions of the Prophet in a very subtle way.”⁸⁰ The discussion between Candiki Repantu and *Ustadh* M. Nasir and *Ustadh* Fakhrurrozy Pulungan tended to be polemical, and did not lead to harmony and common ground.

Thus, the emergence of the Shia community in Medan City, at least since 2006 marked by the inauguration of the Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, has received various responses from several Sunni groups, and ultimately led to Sunni and Shia dialogue. The Shia group promoted the unity of the two schools and gained the support of some Sunni leaders. On the other hand, the presence of Shia groups has received a negative response from some other Sunni leaders, and although dialog between the two madhhabs is often carried out, it does not encourage unity. Some Sunni groups tend to highlight differences, even criticizing the beliefs of Shia groups. In contrast, Shia leaders clarified Sunni criticism of Shia doctrine, but the clarification

⁷⁹ M. Nasir, “Belajar Syiah Berarti Mendukung Gerakan Tasykik,” *Waspada*, October 5, 2012, https://issuu.com/waspada/docs/waspada_jumat_5_oktober_2012/28 (accessed November 29, 2022).

⁸⁰ Fachrurrozy Pulungan, “Lebih Jauh Tentang Syiah,” *Waspada*, October 12, 2012, https://issuu.com/waspada/docs/waspada_jumat_12_oktober_2012 (accessed November 29, 2022)

was criticized again. The dialogue eventually turned into an unproductive polemic. Each group feels the most righteous.

The Sunni and Shia dialogue above can be explained based on Sergey Melnik's opinion that there are four main types of interfaith dialogue, namely polemical, cognitive, peacemaking, and partnership.⁸¹ Some of the Sunni and Shia dialogues in Medan City are more polemical dialogues that, among other things, aim to "propagate one's beliefs and urge the opponents and audiences of the disputing parties to admit the error of their beliefs, and eventually the losing party will convert to the new belief." This can be seen, for example, in the dialog of some Al Washliyah (Sunni) scholars with Shia leaders in the newspaper. In addition, some Sunni and Shia dialogs also fall into three other categories. First, cognitive dialog, which is dialog based on intellectual understanding and aims to increase understanding of other beliefs, for example through academic research and discussion. Both Sunni and Shia groups repeatedly hold seminars, public discussions and trainings on Sunni and Shia teachings. The speakers and participants in seminars, public discussions and training courses come from both groups. These academic activities certainly increase the religious understanding of each group. Not infrequently, there are also debates between speakers who want to show the truth of their respective madhabs. Second, peacemaking dialogues that aim to address conflicts, promote conflict resolution and create harmony between the two sects, and partnership dialogues that are based on cooperation to achieve common goals by strengthening cooperation in various aspects of human life. These two dialogs are usually held by Shia groups and supported or participated in by liberal-minded and moderate Sunni groups. Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib often organizes discussions by inviting a group of moderate Sunni scholars.

Conclusion

The discussion above confirms that the Shia community in North Sumatra, especially in Medan City, has grown significantly since the 1990s, although its existence in the archipelago dates to the early days of Islam. Various Islamic foundations such as Yayasan Amali, Yayasan Ahlul Bait Indonesia, and Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, and several organizations such as IJABI and IPABI, have become

⁸¹ Melnik, "Types of Interreligious Dialogue," 48-72.

centers of proselytization, educational, and social activities of the Shia group. The Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib, inaugurated in 2006, has been the most prominent organization and is the pioneer of Sunni-Shia dialogue, promoting *ukhuwwah Islamiyah* through seminars and holding various social activities. Of course, the presence of Shia in Medan City has triggered mixed responses from the Sunni community, the majority of which dominates the region. Some leaders of Islamic organizations, especially Al Washliyah, reject Shia through seminars and recitations. Salafi-Wahabi groups and the ANNAS also oppose the presence of Shia, accusing them of deviating from Islamic teachings. Nonetheless, there are moderate views that call for tolerance, albeit in the minority. The discussions held often do not result in constructive dialogue, but rather reinforce the stigma against Shia, with issues such as deviation of faith and theological differences considered troubling to the local Muslim community. The debate between Sunnis and Shias in Medan City reflects a sharp divergence of views. Professor Abdullah Syah as one of the Sunni leaders, and Candiki Repantu as one of the Shia leaders, support unity between the two sects by emphasizing similarities in the pillars of Islam and avoiding conflict. However, four Al Washliyah scholars such as *Ustadh* Ramli Abdul Wahid, *Ustadh* Husnel Anwar Matondang, *Ustadh* M. Nasir and *Ustadh* Fachrurrozy Pulungan emphasized differences in principles that are difficult to reconcile, considering Shia teachings deviant. Although dialogue is often conducted, the different views between the scholars of these schools of thought regarding the basic teachings of Islam have led to unproductive debates, which can even create polarization among Muslims in North Sumatra Province, especially in Medan City.

Based on Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, the Shia group in Medan City, although a minority group, managed to strengthen its religious identity, increase the number of members, and gain support through the effective utilization of economic, cultural, and social capital. With financial support from business figures, academic and cultural knowledge from Iranian-educated scholars, and social networks involving influential figures, the community was able to establish a position that was accepted by some Sunni groups in the Reformation Era. On the other hand, Sunni and Shia dialog in the region includes four types, as theorized by Sergey Melnik, namely polemical, cognitive, peacemaking, and partnership. In addition to polemical dialogue that focuses on spreading each other's beliefs, there is cognitive dia-

logue through academic discussions, peacemaking dialogue to encourage harmony, and partnership dialogue that involves cooperation across schools of thought.

This article highlights the emergence and movement of the Shia community in Medan, North Sumatra, since the 1990s, with organizations such as Yayasan Islam Abu Thalib playing an important role in promoting Sunni-Shia dialogue. Despite these efforts, the Shia community still faces resistance from many Sunni groups, particularly from several prominent Al Washliyah scholars as well as Salafi-Wahabi groups, who consider Shia teachings deviant. This ongoing tension illustrates the challenge of establishing a constructive dialog between the two sects. The implications of this article are important as it reveals the difficulties in inter-mazhab dialogue and the potential for further polarization within the Muslim community in Indonesia, particularly in Medan City.

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2. Interviews

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Nafaro Affandy Lubis, an entrepreneur and the Leader of the Abu Thalib Islamic foundation in 2006-2008, February 14, 2019.

Heru Heriyanto, Chairman of the Medan City IJABI and alumnus of the State Institute for Islamic Studies of North Sumatra, February 14, 2019.

Yudarwin, a member of the Abu Thalib Islamic Foundation and a lecturer at UIN Sumatera Utara, Medan, February 14, 2019.

Bob Friyandi, administrator of the Abu Thalib Islamic Foundation and a member of the KPU Tanjungbalai City, February 14, 2019.