

## Transformation of Islamic Education Policy in Indonesia's Political Landscape: A Comparison Between the SBY and Jokowi Eras

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the transformation of Indonesia's national Islamic education policy in the context of political change between the administrations of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and President Joko Widodo (Jokowi). Using a qualitative approach with library research as its primary method, this study examines official policy documents, academic literature, and evaluation reports from national and international institutions. The findings reveal a shift in governance orientation from a centralized and standardized model during the SBY era to a more flexible and contextualized approach under Jokowi. Islamic education under SBY was strengthened through expanded access, regulatory support, and institutional integration into the national education system. In contrast, the Jokowi era emphasized educational quality, institutional autonomy, digital innovation, and character development, providing Islamic institutions with more space to adapt their curricula to local and religious values. While this shift offers opportunities, it also presents challenges such as disparities in infrastructure, teacher quality, and regional support.

**Keywords:** Curriculum Reform, Islamic Education Policy, Political Transformation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the fundamental pillar in nation-building, shaping the course of civilization and the quality of human resources in the future. In a democratic system like Indonesia, education policy is not solely determined by technical or professional considerations, but is significantly influenced by political dynamics and leadership transitions. Each change in government brings consequences for the direction, substance, and implementation of education policies. This affirms that education policy is essentially a political product shaped by the ideology, interests, and dominant power strategies of a particular regime (Dye, 2013; Flew & Ball, 1995). Consequently, political change is often accompanied by a transformation in the vision and approach to education, which in turn affects all aspects of governance and learning processes in educational institutions, including Islamic education institutions such as madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic higher education.

The transition of government from President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) to President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) serves as a crucial moment to examine how political changes contribute to the shift in Indonesia's education policy direction. The SBY administration (2004–2014) placed emphasis on strengthening institutional systems and regulatory frameworks that were stable and measurable. Programs such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS), teacher certification, and the reinforcement of compulsory education were flagship policies reflecting a technocratic and bureaucratic approach to education development (Hill & Negara, 2019; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007). This approach aimed to expand access and improve equity in education, particularly in disadvantaged areas, including traditional Islamic schools that had long faced disparities in funding and recognition.

Conversely, the Jokowi administration (2014–present) has taken a more pragmatic, flexible, and responsive approach in addressing global challenges and the digital disruption era. Initiatives such as the Indonesia Smart Card (KIP), industry-based vocational education, Merdeka Belajar, and Kampus Merdeka reflect a new paradigm in education policy, focusing on outputs, outcomes, and the enhancement of 21st-century competencies (Bappenas, 2020; Kemendikbudristek, 2021). These reforms have begun to touch the Islamic education sector as well, pushing madrasah and Islamic universities to adapt to new learning models and integrate digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and independent learning into their curricula while still maintaining Islamic values.

These shifts raise critical questions about the continuity and effectiveness of education policies in addressing the complexities of national education issues. This study is significant in exploring whether political change supports the continuity of education reform, or instead leads to fragmentation and disconnection between policies. This literature review seeks to answer these questions through a comparative analysis of the direction and character of education policies during the SBY and Jokowi administrations, including their implications for the Islamic education landscape.

The research questions addressed in this article focus on three main issues: first, what are the characteristics of education policy during the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono era; second, how are the approaches and directions of education policy shaped during the Joko Widodo era; and third, what are the implications of political change for the transformation of national education policy. The aim of this study is to describe and analyze the shift in education policy orientation between the two administrations, and to identify the socio-political implications within the context of long-term education development in Indonesia, particularly in ensuring inclusivity for Islamic educational institutions.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in public policy theory and political change theory. Dye (2013) explains that public policy is a series of strategic decisions made by the government in response to social issues, and the direction of policy is heavily influenced by the ruling political actors. In the realm of education, Flew & Ball (1995) emphasizes that education policy is the result of interactions among power, ideology, and dominant discourse. This framework is strengthened by Fullan (2007) approach to educational change, which asserts that policy transformation requires synergy among macro-level policies, educational actors, and local contexts. This study also refers to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018) perspective, which stresses the importance of sustainability and consistency in education policy to avoid disruptions and disparities in implementation across regions.

Using a qualitative approach based on literature review, this article not only captures the differences in political leadership styles but also maps out patterns of education policy changes as a reflection of ideological dynamics and differing development priorities. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the discourse on education reform that is more inclusive, sustainable, and not solely dependent on political leadership changes, but rather on the strategic needs of the nation in producing excellent and globally competitive generations. These insights are particularly relevant to Islamic education institutions, which must also navigate political-educational shifts while maintaining doctrinal integrity and educational relevance.

The relationship between politics and education has long attracted the attention of many social scientists and education scholars. Education cannot be separated from the context of power and prevailing ideologies within a society. According to Flew & Ball (1995), education policy represents an articulation of dominant ideology and power institutionalized through regulatory systems, curricula, and public funding. Therefore, understanding education policy requires an analysis of the political actors and power strategies behind it. In public policy literature, Dye (2013) defines policy as what governments choose to do or not to do. In the context of education, the selection of programs, funding models, and curriculum orientations clearly reflect the political direction of a government. Meanwhile, Fullan (2007) theory of educational change emphasizes the importance of synergy among macro-level policies, the involvement of local actors (such as teachers and principals), and adaptation to local socio-cultural contexts. If any of these elements are overlooked, policy implementation tends to stagnate or even face resistance.

A study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018) highlights the importance of continuity in education policy in order to achieve long-term goals. Frequent policy shifts, especially when they are driven by short-term political agendas, risk causing system fragmentation, lowering the quality of implementation, and creating confusion at the school level. This is supported by the findings of Chang et al., (2014), who analyzed teacher reform in Indonesia and found that policy interventions lacking evaluation and institutional capacity led to weak outcomes. Research by Rahmi Pertiwi, Yun Sari, & Saherawan (2024) on teacher certification during the SBY era found that while teacher welfare improved, the impact on learning quality was not significant. This indicates that financially-incentivized policies do not necessarily lead to improvements in education quality if not accompanied by supervision and pedagogical capacity development. Meanwhile, the Merdeka Belajar policy introduced during the Jokowi era (Kemendikbudristek, 2021) has been widely appreciated for offering flexibility to schools and students. However, it also faces implementation challenges, particularly in areas with limited infrastructure and digital literacy, including pesantren and madrasah in rural areas.

In the Indonesian context, the transition from the SBY to the Jokowi administration provides an interesting opportunity for study. SBY is known for his technocratic style, which emphasized stability and system strengthening. In contrast, Jokowi has adopted a pragmatic-populist approach, prioritizing results-oriented effectiveness and rapid responses to global changes. A comparative study of these two eras is essential to examine how education policy in Indonesia has transformed, and how political dynamics influence the sustainability, effectiveness, and adaptability of these policies on the ground, especially within diverse educational ecosystems such as Islamic education.

Thus, this literature review underscores the close and dynamic relationship between politics and education. Every education policy is inherently shaped by political processes that are influenced by ideology, power strategies, and social context. Therefore, understanding Indonesian education policy under these two different regimes requires more than a review of programs; it also necessitates a theoretical lens that places these policies within the broader framework of political and social change, including their impact on the Islamic education sector.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research as its primary strategy. This method was chosen to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the transformation of national education policy, particularly as it pertains to Islamic education institutions. The analysis focuses on relevant documents, theoretical perspectives, and previous research findings, without involving direct field data collection. Library research enables the researcher to explore and synthesize a variety of academic literature, official policy documents, and evaluation reports that reflect the direction and transformation of education policy from the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) to that of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), including their implications for madrasah, pesantren, and Islamic higher education institutions (George & Bennett, 2008; Riduwan, 2016).

The data sources in this research include academic books, national and international peer-reviewed journal articles, official government documents such as the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) and reports from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), as well as publications from international organizations including the OECD and the World Bank. Particular attention is paid to literature discussing Islamic education policy within the broader national education framework, including government regulations concerning madrasah and Islamic universities, integration of Islamic values in curriculum, and the digital transformation of Islamic educational institutions.

The literature analyzed was selected based on the following criteria: (1) relevance to the theme of education policy transformation with a particular emphasis on Islamic education; (2) explicit discussion of the SBY and/or Jokowi eras; and (3) publication between 2004 and 2024 to ensure contextual validity. Sources related to the Islamic education sector were prioritized to capture the extent to which political leadership affected the institutional development, curriculum orientation, and policy treatment of Islamic educational entities.

Data collection was carried out through systematic searches in databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SINTA, and government repository platforms, especially those from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), which oversees Islamic education in Indonesia. The data were analyzed using content analysis with a thematic approach, aiming to identify patterns, recurring themes, and shifts in policy orientation—particularly those affecting Islamic education governance, access, funding mechanisms, curriculum reform, and the integration of Islamic values in state-supported education frameworks (Bowen, 2009).

The analysis was conducted in a descriptive-interpretative manner, whereby the researcher compared data from various sources and organized the information into thematic categories such as: (1) policy orientation during SBY and Jokowi eras; (2) the state's role in managing Islamic education; and (3) challenges in implementing national policy within Islamic education institutions.

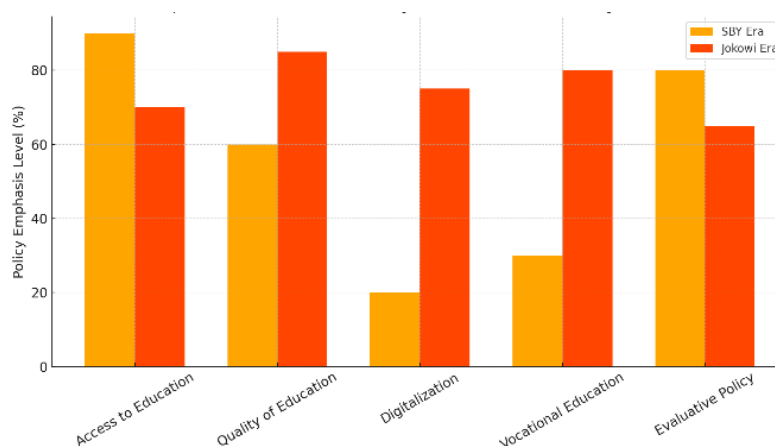
To enhance the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing data across different types of literature (academic and policy documents), and by checking consistency with public policy theories and educational change theories. Content validity was maintained through rigorous selection of literature that explicitly deals with the interface between political leadership and Islamic education transformation, and by strengthening arguments using relevant theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2016)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literature review reveals a significant transformation in Indonesia's national education policy between two presidential eras: Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–2014) and Joko Widodo (2014–present). This transformation includes changes in orientation, approaches, evaluation instruments, and program focus, reflecting a paradigm shift from a bureaucratic approach to an innovative-participatory one, which also had implications for the direction and implementation of Islamic education.

### Changes in Education Policy Focus

The differences in educational priorities between the two presidential eras can be further understood through a comparative visualization of key policy emphases.



**Figure 1. Comparison of Education Policy Focus in the SBY and Jokowi Eras**

Figure 1 illustrates the shift in education policy emphasis during the two presidential periods. During the SBY administration, education policy strongly emphasized expanding access to education, supported by initiatives such as the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program and the enforcement of nine years of compulsory basic education. Within the realm of Islamic education, this period was marked by increased attention to the development of madrasahs and Islamic higher education institutions, primarily through enhanced funding, infrastructure support, and teacher certification programs. This is consistent with findings by Sholihah, Ratnasari, Permatasari, Muawanah, & Fajri (2020), who noted that teacher certification policies during this period had a positive impact on improving the quality of educators, including those in Islamic schools. These measures helped establish a more equitable foundation for Islamic schools within the national education framework.



In the Jokowi era, the emphasis moved toward improving education quality, particularly through initiatives such as Merdeka Belajar and the strengthening of vocational education. For Islamic education, this shift provided opportunities to modernize curricula by integrating 21st-century skills while preserving core religious values. The rise of digitalization, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, further encouraged Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren and madrasahs to adopt online platforms and to develop innovative approaches to religious learning (Aisha, Firdaus, & Mulyana, 2022). Evaluation instruments also evolved significantly. While the SBY era relied heavily on the National Examination as a summative assessment tool, the Jokowi administration introduced the National Assessment, which emphasizes literacy, numeracy, and character education. This change aligns more closely with Islamic education's holistic philosophy, which aims to develop not only intellectual but also spiritual and moral dimensions of learners.

### **Policy Approach and Implementation**

The SBY administration employed a technocratic and centralized policy approach, focusing on top-down implementation and standardized systems. Islamic education during this period was integrated through national frameworks such as the National Education Standards (SNP) and teacher certification schemes. These programs provided structure and recognition to Islamic institutions, helping them to operate within the broader educational system (Ihsan, 2019). However, the centralized model limited the flexibility of madrasahs and pesantren to adapt their educational practices to local religious and cultural contexts. This occasionally created tension between national policy uniformity and the need for contextual religious education.

In contrast, the Jokowi administration promotes autonomy, participation, and local relevance. Through Merdeka Belajar, schools and universities, including Islamic institutions, are encouraged to develop curricula that reflect the needs and values of their respective communities. This more decentralized approach has enabled greater freedom in integrating Islamic teachings with contemporary knowledge and skills (Purwanti, 2021). However, the shift has not been without challenges. Islamic educational institutions in remote or underdeveloped regions (commonly referred to as 3T: terdepan, terluar, tertinggal) often face difficulties in accessing technological infrastructure, qualified educators, and consistent policy support. Despite these barriers, many madrasahs and pesantren have demonstrated resilience and innovation by incorporating entrepreneurship programs and developing digital dakwah platforms as part of their educational models.

### **Transformation of Evaluation and Education Outcomes**

Evaluation methods in Islamic education also evolved in line with national trends. Under SBY, the primary mechanism for assessing learning outcomes was the National Examination, a standardized test that measured cognitive achievement but provided limited insight into students' moral or religious development. While it ensured uniform assessment across the country, it lacked the depth to capture the character-building aspects emphasized in Islamic education.

The transition to the National Assessment during the Jokowi era represents a move toward a more formative and reflective evaluation system. This new model is more consistent with Islamic education's emphasis on adab (ethics), akhlakul karimah (noble character), and spiritual growth. Rather than focusing solely on results, the assessment emphasizes the learning process, creating space for educators to nurture holistic student development. This shift also echoes (Fullan, 2007) argument that educational reform must penetrate the classroom level to be

effective. For Islamic institutions, this means aligning pedagogical practices with character formation goals, not only academic performance.

### **Implications for Sustainability and Education Reform**

Both presidential eras have made valuable contributions to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. The SBY era established crucial regulatory and financial support systems that helped Islamic institutions gain legitimacy and operational strength within the national education framework. However, its top-down model limited innovation and responsiveness. The Jokowi era introduced progressive and adaptive reforms, granting greater autonomy to Islamic institutions. Yet, this autonomy comes with the responsibility of managing disparities in resources and teacher quality, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

For Islamic education reform to be sustainable, it requires continuity in policy direction beyond political cycles. Frequent policy shifts, especially those driven by short-term political agendas, risk undermining long-term institutional development and creating uncertainty among educators. A stable, long-term education policy that is inclusive of Islamic education needs to be designed based on empirical data, periodic evaluations, and stakeholder input. This includes systematic professional development for Islamic educators, robust collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and strengthening the capacity of local education governance.

Decentralization, while enabling context-based curriculum design in Islamic schools, also presents governance challenges. Variations in regional government support, infrastructure quality, and administrative capacity contribute to disparities in the implementation of education policies. For Islamic education to thrive across all regions, especially in 3T areas, these systemic issues must be addressed with targeted support, equitable resource distribution, and strategic planning.

### **CONCLUSION**

The transformation of Islamic education policy between the SBY and Jokowi administrations illustrates a clear shift in governance orientation, from a centralized and standardized model to a more flexible and contextualized approach. During the SBY era, Islamic education was strengthened through increased access, regulatory support, and institutional integration into the national education system. In contrast, the Jokowi era emphasized educational quality, autonomy, digital innovation, and character development, allowing Islamic institutions greater space to adapt their curricula to local and religious contexts. This shift has brought both opportunities and challenges, particularly in addressing disparities in infrastructure, teacher quality, and regional support. To ensure that Islamic education continues to progress and respond effectively to future demands, coherent policies, cross-sectoral collaboration, and sustained investment are essential for promoting equity, relevance, and long-term impact.

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