



Transformation of Mosque Functions: From Religious Ritual Space to a Center of Participation and Political Leadership for Muslims in Bau-Bau City

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary Muslim society, mosques are no longer understood solely as places for performing ritual worship, but have developed into social institutions that play a strategic role in community development. This article aims to analyze the transformation of the mosque's function from a center of worship to a center of participation and political leadership for Muslims in the city of Bau-Bau. This study uses a qualitative approach with qualitative methods, and the data collection involves interviews and literature studies of various scientific works relevant to the themes of mosques, community empowerment, and political participation. The study results show that mosques function not only as centers for religious activities but also as spaces for social education, strengthening civic awareness, and forming political leadership among Muslims in a socio-civic sense, rather than in practical or partisan political activities. However, expanding the function of mosques requires governance that is professional and ethical so that the mosque remains a space that unites the community

INTRODUCTION

In the early phase of the formation of Islamic society, the mosque functioned as a central institution that integrated spiritual, social, and political dimensions within a single sphere of practice. In addition to performing ritual religious functions, the mosque served as a center for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, a venue for collective deliberation, and a means for organizing the social life of the community. In the context of modern society, attention to the social and political roles of the mosque has re-emerged alongside the expansion of democratic systems and growing public awareness of the importance of civic participation in the public sphere. Nonetheless, the development of the mosque's roles has not occurred uniformly. While some mosques continue to maintain a normative-ritual orientation focused on worship, others display a tendency to transform into social institutions that are more active in education, community empowerment, and socio-political participation. Empirical studies in Indonesia show that this transformation is generally supported by responsive institutional governance, the continuity of social programs, and systematic mechanisms of congregational cadre formation (Cahyanti & Yulia, 2024)

With in the landscape of local democracy in Indonesia shaped by the dynamics of identity politics and post-reformasi decentralization policies the mosque occupies a position that is inherently dilemmatic. On one hand, the mosque possesses strong social and symbolic capital, allowing it to act as a space for articulating political aspirations within society. On the other hand, there are normative demands for the mosque to avoid pragmatic political engagement that could erode its moral authority and diminish public trust in religious institutions. In this context, religious actors such as clerics and mosque administrators hold strategic roles as intermediaries between citizens' interests and local political processes. These roles are carried out through various mediums, including religious sermons, community discussion forums, and socio-religious networks that operate both formally and informally. Through these mechanisms, the mosque carries the potential to enhance civic participation grounded in ethical values, social solidarity, and religious morality. However, numerous studies also highlight the importance of clear institutional boundaries and regulatory frameworks so that the political involvement of mosques does not lead to social fragmentation, political polarization, or degradation of their religious function.

From a methodological standpoint, research on the transformation of mosque functions still exhibits several notable shortcomings. In the city of Baubau, for example, many mosque activities remain limited to ritual worship, with some mosques even confined to culturally Islamic celebrations, resulting in a portrayal of mosques as icons of transformation only in the sense of individual spiritual value. Many studies tend to focus narrowly on specific aspects such as social activities or the influence of individual religious actors without systematically linking them to structural dimensions such as institutional governance, regulatory frameworks, or their political outputs. Although a number of local case studies and participatory action research

(PAR) projects have successfully documented innovative practices in mosque management, these approaches have not fully captured the scale, mechanisms, and broader comparative impacts of mosque transformation. Consequently, there is a need for quantitative and comparative research capable of examining, more comprehensively, the relationship between changes in mosque functions, the quality of religious leadership, and processes of democratic consolidation at the local level. This analytical gap forms an important basis for developing more systematic and in-depth future research (Cahyanti & Yulia, 2024)

In modern society characterized by urbanization, social differentiation, and increasing complexity in everyday life the role of the mosque has expanded significantly. The mosque is no longer understood merely as a space for ritual worship, but also as a social institution with the capacity to promote community empowerment and strengthen the political participation of Muslims. Several studies assert that mosques possess strategic potential in fostering social awareness, reinforcing communal solidarity, and encouraging citizen involvement in public and national life in a more substantive manner (Suryorini, 2020)

The city of Baubau, as a region with a predominantly Muslim population, represents a context in which religious life is relatively active and diverse. Mosques in this city not only function as centers of worship, but also as social spaces that facilitate interaction among various groups with differing social backgrounds (Hidayatullah & Ardiansyah, 2022). Based on this context, the present research is directed at examining in-depth the transformation of mosque functions and their implications for political participation and the formation of political leadership within the Muslim community in Baubau.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Mosque as a Socio-Religious Institution

In contemporary societal development, the mosque has undergone a significant expansion of function from a purely ritual religious institution to a social institution oriented toward community service and empowerment. Various studies indicate that the mosque does not merely serve as a place of worship, but also as a space for non-formal education, a center for social services, and a medium for strengthening solidarity within the Muslim community. Through these activities, the mosque contributes to the cultivation of Islamic values that align with the social needs of modern society (Khikmawati, 2020). Accordingly, the mosque may be regarded as a strategic actor in social development grounded in moral and religious ethics.

In addition to performing educational and social functions, the mosque also acts as a center for the management of religious resources such as zakat, infaq, and sadaqah, which have direct implications for improving social welfare. As explained in (Oleh & Noviyanti, 2021), the management of these religious social funds is not merely charitable, but also has the potential to encourage economic self-reliance and enhance the social capacity of the Muslim community. Through such mechanisms, the mosque contributes to the development of social capital, the strengthening of trust networks, and the reinforcement of social bonds among community members in its surrounding environment.

2. Mosques and Political Participation of Muslims

The political participation of Muslims is not always fostered through formal education or direct involvement in practical politics. In many cases, socio-religious spaces play a crucial role in shaping political awareness within society. As one of the socio-religious spaces closest to the everyday lives of Muslims, the mosque holds a strategic position in shaping congregants' understanding of leadership, social justice, and civic responsibility. Through sermons, religious lectures, and community forums, social values, public ethics, and national consciousness are internalized and indirectly influence the political attitudes and orientations of congregants (Ilmi & Abdillah, 2023).

Within this context, the mosque can be understood as an arena of informal political education that contributes to cultivating citizens' awareness of public issues. The involvement of mosques in activities addressing social problems encourages congregants to become more attentive to political dynamics and public policy in their immediate environment. Moreover, mosque activities that engage youth groups play a vital role in the political socialization of young Muslims and serve as an initial medium for leadership formation grounded in religious and social values.

3. Previous Studies and Research Positioning

A number of previous studies have affirmed the contribution of mosques to community empowerment and the enhancement of social participation among Muslims. These studies generally position the mosque as a socio-religious institution that plays a role in community development and the strengthening of social cohesion. Nevertheless, studies that specifically link the transformation of mosque functions with the process of political leadership formation among Muslims at the local level remain relatively limited and insufficiently explored (Khikmawati, 2020).

Based on this condition, the present research positions itself to address this gap by examining the transformation of mosque functions and their implications for political participation and the formation of political leadership among Muslims in the local context. The city of Baubau is selected as the case study location because it represents an environment with active religious life and a high potential for mosques to participate in social and political life. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the understanding of mosques as socio-religious institutions within the context of local democracy (Hafsyah, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, designed to explore in depth the dynamics of mosque function transformation as well as the construction of social and political meanings produced by religious actors together with congregants. The qualitative approach is considered most relevant as it allows the researcher to capture the complexity of social reality holistically, particularly with regard to the interaction between religious values, social practices, and political dynamics at the local level. The research is conducted in several mosques that exhibit relatively intensive socio-religious activities in the city of Baubau. The selection of this location is based on the characteristics of an active religious environment in which mosques are not only understood as ritual worship spaces but also as arenas for social interaction and community activities. Accordingly, the study focuses on identifying the forms of transformation from religious-ritual institutions into socio-political institutions, analyzing the role of mosques in fostering political participation among Muslims, and examining their contribution to the formation of political leadership within the Muslim community at the local level.

The research subjects involve a range of actors directly engaged in mosque life and administration, including mosque administrators, religious leaders, active congregants, as well as community figures and youth groups. Informants are selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and level of involvement in mosque-based socio-religious activities. Data are collected through a combination of in-depth interviews to explore subjective perspectives and experiences, non-participant observation to capture interaction patterns and mosque activities, and documentation analysis of mosque archives and activity records. The collected data are analyzed using

thematic analysis through stages of data reduction, coding, and categorization of relevant thematic clusters. Conclusions are drawn by linking empirical findings with theoretical frameworks and previous research. To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, the study applies source and methodological triangulation, complemented with member checking and the comparison of field findings with relevant literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Transformation of Mosques as Contemporary Socio-Religious Institutions

Research findings indicate that mosques in the City of Baubau have undergone a substantial shift in function within the life of the Muslim community. Mosques are no longer narrowly understood as sacred spaces used solely for ritual worship, but have developed into socio-religious institutions that are more inclusive, open, and responsive to social dynamics. This transformation can be observed from the increasing variety of activities accommodated by mosques, ranging from non-formal educational programs, social services, to community forums involving congregants from diverse social backgrounds. This expansion of functions suggests that mosques have transformed into social spaces that enable interaction across groups, generations, and interests at the local level. In this context, the mosque does not merely serve as a religious symbol, but also as a social hub that strengthens community cohesion, solidarity, and integration. These findings confirm that contemporary mosques possess strategic potential for community empowerment based on Islamic values, collectivism, and social care, as stated by (Cahyanti & Yulia, 2024). Conceptually, the shift in mosque functions from ritual spaces to socio-religious spaces reflects the evolving orientation from individual worship to collective social activities. The increase in social, educational, and community-based activities reflects the mosque's capacity to respond to the real needs of its congregants. At the same time, the strengthening of the mosque as a center of social interaction positions this institution as an important actor in maintaining social solidarity and stability at the local level. Nevertheless, the core function of the mosque as a place of worship remains indispensable and continues to constitute its primary identity in the life of Muslims.

(Umah & Avif Alfiyah, 2023) further explain in their study that mosques continue to uphold several central functions known within Islamic tradition, including:

- a. as a space of worship, where Muslims draw closer to Allah SWT through various forms of religious devotion;
- b. as a site of i'tikāf, providing room for spiritual reflection and strengthening of inner equilibrium and personal integrity;
- c. as a venue for deliberation, functioning as a forum for resolving emerging social issues;
- d. as a place for consultation, where Muslims may present difficulties and obtain help or assistance;
- e. as a medium of social bonding, reinforcing community ties and cooperation to achieve shared welfare;

- f. as an educational institution, where religious literacy and knowledge are cultivated through majelis taklim activities;
- g. as an institution for leadership formation, providing space for developing future Muslim leaders;
- h. as a manager of religious funds, involved in collecting, storing, and distributing resources such as zakat from muzakki; and
- i. as a socio-religious venue for conducting public events such as marriage ceremonies, learning activities, seminars, discussions, and other religious gatherings.

These functions have been implemented in mosques in Baubau through operational activities aligned with the characteristics of public service spaces.

(Umah & Avif Alfiyah, 2023) also note that the role of mosques as public spaces in Baubau is currently directed toward strengthening several priority aspects of institutional development:

- a. optimizing mosque functions in the hissiyah dimension (physical/material). In terms of architecture, mosques in Baubau increasingly incorporate comfort, aesthetics, and cleanliness, making the physical appearance of mosques an attraction for congregants and adding value to both ritual (mahdhah) and non-ritual socio-religious activities;
- b. reinforcing mosque functions in the maknawiyah dimension (purpose). Within this dimension, the mosque remains a place of prostration before Allah SWT, a site for prayer, and the primary venue for worship. Muslims are encouraged to attend the mosque five times a day for congregational prayer. The mosque is also the place where the name of Allah is most frequently invoked through adhan, iqamah, tasbih, tahmid, tahlil, and istighfar;
- c. optimizing mosque functions in the ijtima'iyah dimension (social activities). In this context, the mosque is viewed as an institution with organizational structures capable of generating religious and social programs. These include da'wah and social services, financial and management bodies, as well as organizational structures of mosque administrators and congregants. Referencing the early history of the mosque during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, mosques served not only ritual worship (hablun minallah), but also social-communal activities (hablun minannas). Accordingly, mosques in Baubau hold the potential to function simultaneously as centers of spiritual development and centers of social dynamics.

B. Institutional Governance and Strengthening of Mosques' Social Roles

The transformation of mosque functions in Baubau cannot be separated from evolving institutional governance. Actively managed mosques demonstrate more structured, systematic, and participatory programming. Such programs include thematic religious studies, initiatives for strengthening economic welfare, and various social activities that engage congregants widely. This mode of governance signals a shift from administrative-traditional management toward modern governance that is more adaptive to social demands.

Within this context, (Hidayat & Pratama, 2024) emphasize that managerial capacity and leadership within mosque administration constitute a decisive factor in the success of functional transformation. Mosque administrators are no longer restricted to technical-ritual roles but emerge as social actors with a vision of community empowerment, sensitivity to social issues, and the ability to manage resources effectively and sustainably. This is supported by Syaifuddin (2024) in (Hidayat & Pratama, 2024), who asserts that strengthening mosque governance and leadership is a core prerequisite for optimizing the mosque's social role.

Mosques also play an important role in strengthening social cohesion and shaping communal solidarity. Within this setting, mosques serve not only as places of worship but also as centers of social engagement that reinforce relationships among community members. As stated by Dr. Ali Hasan, "The mosque is a space that connects the community, strengthens ukhuwah Islamiyah, and sustains the foundation of Muslim unity." Through routine religious activities such as congregational prayer, tadarus, and religious study groups, mosques offer platforms for gathering, interaction, and strengthening social bonds (Marlinda, 2024) in (Hidayat & Pratama, 2024). Social programs often involve all layers of society youth and elders alike and accommodate community empowerment initiatives such as social assistance, fundraising, or public health campaigns. Such efforts foster empathy, shared responsibility, and collective belonging, forming an integral foundation of successful local leadership.

Furthermore, systematic and participatory programming indicates congregation engagement in decision-making processes, strengthening collective ownership of the mosque. The shift from traditional to modern management demonstrates the mosque's ability to adapt to contemporary organizational demands. Within this framework, mosque administrators function as agents of community empowerment who occupy strategic positions in advancing socio-religious transformation at the local level.

C. Mosques, Political Participation, and Leadership Cadre Formation

In the domain of political participation, the study finds that mosques function as arenas of informal political education for Muslims. Through sermons, study circles, and religious forums, congregants are introduced to concepts of leadership, social justice, and civic responsibility. This mode of political education is normative and reflective, refraining from directing congregants toward specific political preferences while encouraging critical awareness of social issues and public policies affecting their lives.

Additionally, (Zevani & Sopa, 2024) demonstrate that mosques play a key role in leadership cadre formation through gradual and community-based processes. Congregational involvement particularly among younger participants in mosque administration, social programs, and communal discussion forums provides foundational learning experiences in leadership. These processes cultivate organizational, communication, and collective decision-making skills, which constitute essential assets for future social and political leadership.

Accordingly, the mosque can be understood as a social laboratory for producing leaders grounded in moral and religious ethics. This finding reinforces (Hidayatullah & Ardiansyah, 2022), who emphasize that local religious spaces hold strategic significance for political participation and leadership development among Muslim youth. The internalization of leadership values and civic responsibility through mosque-based activities shapes political attitudes among congregants in a normative and sustainable manner.

One major challenge for strengthening mosques as leadership training centers is the limitation of resources. Many mosques lack adequate facilities and funding to develop more systematic educational programs. Thus, collaboration between mosques, educational institutions, and community organizations is essential for creating effective programs for youth (Murad Daulay dkk., 2023). Leadership education in mosques must also include practical implementation, as argued by (Yuli Indah Sari & Bin Mislak Cokrohadisumarto, 2024), who stress that mosques must provide direct opportunities for youth participation in community empowerment projects. Such engagement ensures the development of leaders who are not only knowledgeable theoretically but also experienced in practical application.

As societal change accelerates, the challenges for mosque-based leadership development increasingly demand adaptability to social and technological transformation. Mosques therefore must cultivate environments conducive to youth development grounded in universal Islamic values such as compassion, humility, and sincerity. Through religious gatherings and social programs, youth refine their interpersonal skills including communication, teamwork, and leadership (Hidayat & Pratama, 2024). As emphasized by Ustadz Yusuf Mansur, "Good leadership is built upon compassion and sincerity, not merely the ability to command." Religious forums also train youth in emotional regulation and patience, traits crucial for leadership in crisis situations. Dr. Riza Muhammad notes, "A leader who can control himself in difficult circumstances

becomes an example for others, especially for younger generations undergoing character formation”.

D. Challenges to Mosque Neutrality and Their Implications for Local Democracy

Conceptually, mosque neutrality refers to the mosque’s position as a religious institution and public space that is not affiliated with, does not support, and is not directed toward practical political interests such as electoral campaigns, political propaganda, or endorsement of political candidates. This principle is rooted in the mosque’s religious authority, such that involvement in electoral processes risks instrumentalizing religious legitimacy for political power. Maintaining neutrality allows mosques to safeguard moral integrity, the sanctity of worship, and ensure that congregants with diverse political orientations may utilize the mosque as a safe, inclusive, and conflict-free space.

From the perspective of public space, mosque neutrality is significant in fostering social openness and preventing political exclusivity within Muslim communities. If mosques take partisan positions, their social functions may weaken, congregational relations may fragment, and religious spaces may evolve into arenas of political competition. Therefore, mosque neutrality pertains not only to theology but also to social stability and the ethics of public space within Muslim society.

Within democratic states, mosque neutrality also relates to the protection of free and fair political processes. Involvement of mosques in campaigns can distort electoral arenas due to the symbolic and moral influence mosques possess—far exceeding ordinary institutions. Religious authority and ritual practice may be used as tools of electoral mobilization influencing political preferences without rational deliberation. Therefore, electoral regulations delineate mosques as campaign-free spaces to preserve electoral fairness and prevent religious dominance.

Accordingly, mosque neutrality serves as a mechanism of protection across three dimensions: protection of sacred worship space, protection of social cohesion, and protection of democratic quality. These dimensions demonstrate that neutrality is not merely an ethical preference but a structural necessity within plural democratic societies.

1. Key Challenges in Maintaining Mosque Neutrality

(Fazlurrahman, 2024) identifies several challenges:

a. Politicization of mosques as worship spaces.

Mosques occupy a strategic position as religious centers and social hubs, rendering them vulnerable as channels for political messaging. Such politicization may occur explicitly or implicitly through sermons, religious symbols, or clerical endorsement of candidates. This tendency risks transforming mosques from neutral worship spaces into political arenas, blurring the line between da’wah and political propaganda, generating social tension, and undermining institutional moral legitimacy.

b. Utilization of mosques for electoral campaigns.

During elections, candidates and political parties often leverage mosques to expand voter support through religious events infused with political messaging, charitable donations, or political appearances. Consequences include erosion of sacredness, horizontal conflict among congregants or supporters, and distorted political decision-making driven by religious authority. The state enforces an explicit prohibition on campaigning in places of worship through electoral law reinforced by Constitutional Court decisions as a safeguard for democratic integrity and religious neutrality.

c. Obstacles in regulatory implementation and oversight.

Despite legal bans, campaign practices persist due to weak enforcement by electoral bodies, political preference among religious elites, conflicting interpretations between da'wah and political campaigning, and strong clerical authority resistant to state control. Communities also hesitate to report violations due to religious sensitivity, patronage, and fear of conflict, allowing mosques to operate as informal sites of political contestation. Studies emphasize that effective oversight depends on state capacity, civil society monitoring, and mosque governance that upholds moderation and neutrality.

2. Implications and Implementation for Local Democracy

Despite the strategic potential of mosques, transformation of their functions faces risks of religious politicization capable of producing congregational fragmentation, social polarization, and decreased religious legitimacy. These risks prompt mosque administrators to establish normative boundaries distinguishing value-based political education from direct electoral engagement to maintain inclusivity across political orientations. Broadly, findings indicate that mosques possess latent political capacity contributing indirectly to democratic consolidation by shaping social awareness, enhancing public participation, and forming value-based leadership. Therefore, the transformation of mosques in Baubau affects not only religious life but also the quality of local democracy (Cahyanti & Yulia, 2024)

(Hafsyah, 2024) further explains that the risk of congregational polarization underscores the need to restrict practical political engagement in mosques. Institutional neutrality sustains public trust and religious legitimacy. Within this perspective, mosque contributions to local democracy are substantive through value education, ethical cultivation, and community empowerment—not through direct electoral competition. The use of mosques as democratic spaces entails significant social and political implications: socially, mosques may unite diverse groups and enhance civic participation, but may also intensify polarization when religious identity enters political arenas; politically, mosques may influence electoral outcomes and local political dynamics, but may also provoke conflict among groups vying for congregational support; and in terms of legitimacy, inclusive political discourse may strengthen democratic processes, whereas exploitative use may weaken trust in democratic institutions. Therefore, cooperation among state actors, civil

society, and relevant stakeholders is essential to ensure that mosque-based democratic activities adhere to principles of democracy, religious freedom, human rights, and community aspirations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that mosques in Bau-Bau City have undergone a fundamental shift in function from spaces of ritual worship to socio-religious institutions that play an active role in community life. The mosque no longer serves solely as a sacred space for individual religious practices, but has developed into a social arena that is inclusive and adaptive to the dynamics of the ummah. This shift is reflected in the growing presence of non-formal educational activities, social services, and community forums that reinforce the mosque's position as a center of interaction, solidarity, and social cohesion at the local level.

In addition, the transformation of mosque functions is strongly supported by the strengthening of institutional governance, which has become increasingly participatory and oriented toward community empowerment. The leadership and managerial capacity of mosque administrators constitute key factors in optimizing the mosque's social and political roles in a normative manner. In this context, the mosque functions as a space for non-formal political education and leadership cadre formation that instills values of social justice, civic responsibility, and public ethics without engaging in practical politics. Despite facing challenges in the form of risks of politicization and congregational polarization, this research affirms that the mosque's contribution to local democracy is substantive and latent, insofar as institutional neutrality is maintained and the balance between religious functions and socio-communal responsibilities is preserved.

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