

Between Partnership and Critical Autonomy: Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian State in Historical Perspective

Ibnu Ghifarie

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia.
ibn_ghifarie@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article examines the changing relationship between Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian state from the late colonial period to 2022. Using qualitative historical-conceptual document analysis, it compares organizational doctrines, political guidelines, congress decisions, constitutional interventions, and scholarship on Indonesian Islam and civil society. The findings reject both the image of Muhammadiyah as an apolitical service organization and the opposite image of a permanent political opposition. Its relationship with the state has moved among legal accommodation, indirect political participation, defensive adaptation, service partnership, moral criticism, and constitutional contestation. These shifts were shaped by regime structure, organizational interests, ideological debates, and the need to protect institutional autonomy. The concept of Pancasila as Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah consolidated a post-Islamic-state orientation: the republic is accepted as a binding national covenant but remains an arena in which justice must be demonstrated. The article characterizes Muhammadiyah's position as critical civic partnership. This position enables policy influence and public-service provision, yet it also creates risks of co-optation, elite personalization, regulatory dependence, and weakened accountability to citizens.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah; state-society relations; civic Islam; Pancasila; political autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah has occupied an unusual position in Indonesian political history. Founded in Yogyakarta in 1912 as a movement of Islamic reform, education, preaching, and social welfare, it did not define itself as a political party. Nevertheless, the organization has never existed outside politics. Colonial regulation shaped its legal status and territorial expansion; nationalist and Islamic parties recruited its leaders; postcolonial regimes attempted to discipline its public influence; and its schools, hospitals, universities, charities, and disaster-response bodies became deeply entangled with public policy. The state has therefore been simultaneously a regulator, partner, source of resources, object of moral criticism, and arena of constitutional struggle (Alfian, 1989; Nakamura, 2012; Noer, 1973).

This complexity is often reduced to two competing narratives. The first describes Muhammadiyah as politically neutral and primarily concerned with education, health, and da'wah. The second presents it as an influential Islamic political force whose members and leaders have repeatedly participated in parties, elections, cabinets, constitutional debates, and public controversies. Both narratives contain evidence, but neither captures the organizational distinction between partisan competition and politics in a broader sense. Muhammadiyah has generally sought to avoid transformation into a party while continuing to shape law, citizenship, public morality, welfare, and the

direction of the republic. Its political history is thus less a history of withdrawal than a history of boundary management (Jung, 2014; Syamsuddin, 1995).

The conceptual problem is also obscured when 'the state' is treated as a single and stable actor. The Dutch colonial state, the Japanese occupation administration, parliamentary democracy, Guided Democracy, the New Order, and the post-1998 democratic state offered radically different opportunity structures. Government institutions, ruling regimes, political parties, bureaucracies, courts, and public-service systems are related but not identical. An organization may cooperate with a ministry, criticize a president, challenge a statute in court, and deliver state-funded services at the same time. A historical analysis must therefore distinguish the state as a legal-institutional order from temporary governments and ruling coalitions.

Muhammadiyah's own vocabulary has changed in response to these transformations. Early nonpartisanship protected a reform movement operating under colonial surveillance. In the independence era, many Muhammadiyah figures worked through Masyumi and participated in constitutional debates over Islam and the state. After the dissolution of Masyumi and the rise of authoritarian rule, documents such as *Kepribadian Muhammadiyah*, the *Matan Keyakinan dan Cita-cita Hidup Muhammadiyah*, and successive *Khittah* formulations clarified the organization's distinction from political parties. Under the New Order, this distinction supported an 'allocative politics' that sought to insert Islamic values into development without direct control of the state (Syamsuddin, 1995). After Reformasi, political openness produced renewed elite involvement, but organizational documents reaffirmed nonpartisanship and emphasized civic or moral politics (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2002).

The 2015 formulation of Indonesia as *Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah* represented an important conceptual consolidation. Pancasila was framed as a national covenant that binds citizens of different backgrounds and as an arena of testimony in which Muslims must demonstrate the ethical and social contribution of their faith (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2015a). This formulation moved beyond the old binary between an Islamic state and a secular state. It accepted the constitutional republic while refusing passive loyalty. The legitimacy of the state was connected to justice, welfare, dignity, democracy, and the substantive realization of Pancasila. By 2022, this position was incorporated into the broader language of *Islam Berkemajuan*, which linked religious reform to civilization, citizenship, and public responsibility (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2022).

This article asks three questions. First, how has the relationship between Muhammadiyah and the state changed across major political periods? Second, what concepts have the organization used to justify cooperation, autonomy, participation, and criticism? Third, what institutional tensions arise from its simultaneous roles as religious movement, civil-society organization, service provider, and policy actor? The article argues that Muhammadiyah's most enduring position is neither separation from the state nor incorporation into it. It is critical civic partnership: an attempt to cooperate in public welfare, preserve organizational autonomy, influence national direction, and contest state action when it violates constitutional or moral commitments.

This argument matters beyond Muhammadiyah. Scholarship on religion and democracy often contrasts state control with autonomous civil society or secular politics with religious mobilization. Muhammadiyah demonstrates a more hybrid configuration. Its institutional power depends partly on state recognition, regulation, professional licensing, public financing, and policy cooperation. At the same time, its legitimacy depends on maintaining an independent moral identity and the capacity to criticize power. Understanding this relationship helps explain how large faith-based organizations can stabilize public institutions while also reproducing political inequality, negotiating patronage, or failing to protect vulnerable groups (Brown, 2019; Hefner, 2000; Menchik, 2016).

METHOD

This study uses qualitative historical-conceptual document analysis. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive retrieval of all publications concerning Muhammadiyah and politics. The objective is interpretive: to reconstruct major changes in the movement's relationship with the state and to identify the concepts through which those changes were justified. The temporal scope begins with the movement's foundation in 1912 and ends in 2022. No source published after 2022 is used in the analysis or reference list.

The documentary corpus combines organizational and external sources. Primary organizational materials include the *Matan Keyakinan dan Cita-cita Hidup Muhammadiyah*, the *Khittah Ujung Pandang*, the *Khittah on National and State Life* adopted in Denpasar, the statement on Muhammadiyah's second century, *Negara Pancasila sebagai Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah*, *Indonesia Berkemajuan*, and the 2022 *Risalah Islam Berkemajuan*. These texts were selected because they define official institutional positions rather than individual opinions. Constitutional materials include the 1945 Constitution and the Constitutional Court's decision on the Water Resources Law, which illustrates Muhammadiyah's post-Reformasi strategy of constitutional litigation.

Secondary sources include historical studies of colonial Muhammadiyah, works on Indonesian political Islam, studies of civil Islam and democratic politics, and research on electoral behavior, philanthropy, public service, and state-religion relations. Classic studies by Noer (1973), Peacock (1978), Alfian (1989), and Nakamura (2012) provide historical interpretation. Later scholarship on civic Islam, democratic decline, electoral politics, and organizational pluralism provides concepts for the post-authoritarian period (Brown, 2019; Burhani, 2018, 2020; Jung, 2014; Menchik, 2019; Mietzner, 2020).

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, events and documents were organized into six political periods: late colonial rule; occupation and national revolution; parliamentary and Guided Democracy; the New Order; early Reformasi; and democratic consolidation up to 2022. Second, each period was coded according to five relational mechanisms: legal accommodation, political participation, organizational protection, service co-production, and public contestation. Third, recurring concepts were traced across periods, including

nonpartisanship, amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, high politics, allocative politics, civil society, constitutional jihad, and Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah.

The study distinguishes between formal doctrine and organizational practice. An official declaration of neutrality does not prove that leaders or members are politically neutral. Similarly, the participation of prominent Muhammadiyah figures in a party does not automatically convert the organization into a party actor. The analysis therefore treats Muhammadiyah as a differentiated institution containing central boards, councils, regional branches, autonomous organizations, charitable enterprises, elites, cadres, and ordinary members. Their political behavior may diverge even when formal rules remain stable.

The method has several limitations. Documentary sources privilege institutional elites and may underrepresent local bargaining, informal patronage, women's political work, and the experiences of citizens receiving Muhammadiyah services. The article evaluates modes of relationship rather than measuring causal policy impact. Some historical interpretations remain disputed, particularly regarding the movement's political role during regime transitions. These limitations require restraint: the article identifies a durable institutional logic, not a perfectly coherent organizational consensus.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of Muhammadiyah-state relations

Dimension	Core question	Typical organizational practice	Principal risk
Legal accommodation	How does the movement secure recognition and operating space?	Registration, permits, compliance, negotiation with authorities	Dependence on discretionary state approval
Political participation	How are religious interests represented in political institutions?	Leaders in parties, elections, cabinets, assemblies, or advisory bodies	Personal political projects being attributed to the organization
Organizational protection	How is autonomy preserved under political pressure?	Nonpartisanship, Khittah, internal discipline, strategic adaptation	Political caution becoming moral silence
Service co-production	How do movement institutions perform public functions?	Schools, hospitals, welfare, disaster response, public programs	Mission drift, regulatory capture, unequal access
Public contestation	How does the movement oppose harmful state action?	Statements, advocacy, coalitions, judicial review, moral criticism	Selective opposition and partisan polarization

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Colonial Rule: Legal Accommodation and Defensive Autonomy

Muhammadiyah emerged under a colonial state that regulated association, education, religious administration, and territorial organization. It needed legal recognition and administrative permission to expand, yet its religious legitimacy depended on remaining independent of colonial authority. This produced an early pattern of legal accommodation without ideological identification. The movement used available legal forms, negotiated recognition, and established schools and charitable activities, but it did not become an instrument of the colonial state (Alfian, 1989; Noer, 1973).

The organization's apparent political restraint was strategic as well as doctrinal. Its principal energies were directed toward education, preaching, religious reform, women's organization, health, and social assistance. These activities had political effects even when they did not take the form of electoral or anti-colonial mobilization. Modern schools challenged colonial and traditional monopolies of knowledge; associations cultivated disciplined Muslim publics; and charitable institutions created autonomous social capacity. The movement expanded the infrastructure through which Muslims could participate in modern society without surrendering religious identity (Nakamura, 2012; Peacock, 1978).

Muhammadiyah did not prohibit political activity by its members. Ahmad Dahlan and later leaders interacted with broader nationalist and Islamic networks, while individual members participated in Sarekat Islam, Partai Islam Indonesia, and other organizations. The organizational boundary was therefore functional rather than absolute: Muhammadiyah concentrated on religious-social reform, while political representation could occur through separate bodies. This division reduced direct repression and helped preserve internal diversity, but it also created recurring ambiguity over whether political actors spoke for themselves or for the movement.

The colonial period established two lasting principles. First, state recognition could be used instrumentally without granting the state moral supremacy over religion. Second, public power could be accumulated through institutions rather than through control of government. These principles later supported Muhammadiyah's survival under authoritarian regimes and its ability to negotiate with democratic governments from a position grounded in social service rather than electoral representation.

2. Occupation, Independence, and the Expansion of Political Participation

The Japanese occupation and the struggle for independence altered the relationship between Islamic organizations and political authority. The occupation administration sought to mobilize Muslim organizations, and Masyumi became an umbrella through which Islamic leadership was coordinated. After independence, Masyumi became a major political party, and Muhammadiyah held a special institutional relationship with it. Muhammadiyah leaders and cadres entered parliamentary politics, cabinets, and constitutional debate, while the movement itself retained a distinct organizational identity (Feith, 1962; Nakamura, 2012).

This period brought the question of the Islamic state to the center of national politics. Modernist Muslim politicians argued for a stronger formal role for Islam, while nationalist and other groups defended Pancasila-based arrangements. Muhammadiyah figures participated in these debates, but the organization did not reduce its mission to constitutional design. Its educational and welfare institutions continued to grow, creating a dual strategy of political representation and social institutionalization. The combination revealed both the strength and vulnerability of close party affiliation: access to national decision-making increased, but partisan conflict could consume organizational attention.

Parliamentary democracy also demonstrated that Muslim political representation did not produce a unified Islamic bloc. Differences among modernists, traditionalists, nationalists, and regional interests complicated the project of an Islamic political majority.

The withdrawal of Nahdlatul Ulama from Masyumi in 1952 and the wider fragmentation of party politics weakened the assumption that religious organizations could translate social constituencies directly into a common state project (Feith, 1962). For Muhammadiyah, this experience later informed the distinction between organizational mission and party competition.

The dissolution of Masyumi in 1960 under Sukarno's Guided Democracy ended the principal channel through which many Muhammadiyah leaders had pursued national politics. Muhammadiyah had already ended its special membership relationship before the party's dissolution, but the political repression of Masyumi figures created a difficult environment. The movement had to preserve its institutions while maintaining solidarity with leaders who were marginalized or imprisoned. The result was not simple capitulation. It was a defensive redefinition of organizational identity under a regime that concentrated political authority.

3. Guided Democracy: Defensive Adaptation and Doctrinal Clarification

Guided Democracy reduced autonomous party competition and brought Islamic organizations into an increasingly centralized political order. Muhammadiyah sought to avoid the fate of Masyumi by emphasizing its identity as a religious and social movement. Relations with President Sukarno included public accommodation, symbolic recognition, and cautious communication, even while many members opposed the regime's authoritarianism and its alliance with the Indonesian Communist Party. This divergence between institutional diplomacy and individual political sentiment illustrates the importance of distinguishing organizational survival from ideological approval (Nakamura, 2012).

Kepribadian Muhammadiyah, formulated in the early 1960s, helped restore a movement identity that had been blurred by intense political involvement. Its emphasis on *da'wah*, social action, cooperation in virtue, and independence from improper political attachment provided a conceptual response to the Masyumi experience. The document did not declare politics irrelevant. It redirected political responsibility toward the moral and social purposes of the organization. This was a form of institutional learning: close party involvement had provided influence but also exposed Muhammadiyah to external conflict and internal distortion.

The political crisis of 1965 and the transition to the New Order further transformed the relationship. Muhammadiyah members participated in anti-communist mobilization, as did many Muslim and nationalist groups. The violence of the period, however, cannot be morally normalized as a simple organizational victory. The anti-communist alignment increased the political space available to Islamic organizations after Sukarno, but it also connected them to a coercive state transition whose mass violence remained insufficiently acknowledged. A critical historical account must separate opposition to communist authoritarianism from justification of collective punishment.

The Guided Democracy period therefore strengthened a pattern of defensive autonomy. Muhammadiyah accommodated enough to protect its institutional existence, clarified its non-party identity, and retained room for future engagement. The cost was ambiguity: pragmatic diplomacy could be read as loyalty, while institutional caution could limit

public defense of political victims. This tension would recur whenever state power constrained dissent but offered space for social and religious activity.

4. The New Order: Depoliticization, Allocative Politics, and Institutional Expansion

The New Order initially appeared to offer Muslims relief from Guided Democracy and communism, but it soon established an authoritarian system that subordinated parties and civil society to state-led development. Attempts to rehabilitate Masyumi failed. Muhammadiyah figures helped establish Parmusi, yet state intervention in the party's leadership and the disappointing 1971 election revealed the narrow limits of autonomous Islamic politics. The Khittah Ujung Pandang of 1971 formally separated Muhammadiyah from organizational affiliation with political parties, including Parmusi (Suwarno, 2019, 2020).

This separation did not eliminate political action. It changed its form. Syamsuddin (1995) described Muhammadiyah's New Order strategy as allocative politics: rather than competing directly for state power, the movement sought to allocate Islamic values and interests into the development process. Schools, universities, hospitals, publications, professional associations, and religious councils became channels of influence. The organization produced citizens, experts, bureaucrats, and professionals who entered state institutions individually while Muhammadiyah maintained formal distance from parties.

The Matan Keyakinan dan Cita-cita Hidup Muhammadiyah, adopted in 1969 and later refined, expressed acceptance of the Republic founded on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution while calling for a just and prosperous country blessed by God (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 1969). This formulation did not endorse a secular exclusion of religion. It interpreted national development as a field of Islamic ethical responsibility. The movement's public theology increasingly focused on the substantive quality of the state rather than the formal label of an Islamic state.

The benefits of this strategy were substantial. Muhammadiyah expanded its institutional network during the New Order, contributed to education and health, and maintained a nationwide organizational structure despite authoritarian control. State development programs, accreditation, professional regulation, and public resources created opportunities for service growth. The organization acquired forms of social power that were more durable than parliamentary seats. Its graduates and professionals also entered the expanding bureaucracy and middle class (Hefner, 2000; Nakamura, 2012).

The same relationship generated dependence. Educational and health institutions required state licenses, curricula, civil-servant cooperation, subsidies, and political stability. The New Order's corporatist system rewarded compliant organizations and restricted those that challenged the regime. Muhammadiyah's access to public space could therefore encourage self-censorship. The state benefited from services provided by Islamic organizations without surrendering political control, while the organizations gained institutional scale without democratic accountability over national policy.

By the 1980s and 1990s, prominent Muhammadiyah intellectuals increasingly articulated moral or high politics. The language of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* justified criticism of

corruption, inequality, and authoritarianism while preserving organizational nonpartisanship. Amien Rais became a prominent critic of the New Order and later a leader of the Reformasi movement. His activism demonstrated the productive ambiguity of Muhammadiyah's political boundary: personal leadership could draw moral authority from the movement even when the organization did not formally become an opposition party.

Table 2. Historical transformation of Muhammadiyah-state relations

Period	Dominant relation	Institutional expression	Conceptual consequence
1912-1942: colonial rule	Legal accommodation with social autonomy	Recognition, schools, welfare, separate individual political participation	Public power can be built institutionally without becoming a party
1942-1959: occupation and early republic	Indirect organizational participation through Islamic politics	Masyumi links, parliamentary and constitutional participation	Political access expands but risks absorbing movement priorities
1959-1966: Guided Democracy	Defensive adaptation under centralized authority	Withdrawal from party linkage, identity clarification, cautious diplomacy	Survival requires distinction between institutional accommodation and ideological consent
1966-1998: New Order	Depoliticization and allocative politics	Khittah, service expansion, professional networks, moral criticism	Influence shifts from electoral control to social institutions and elite mediation
1998-2014: early Reformasi	Democratic participation with renewed nonpartisanship	PAN involvement by elites, Khittah Denpasar, advocacy and elections	Political freedom intensifies tension between personal and organizational politics
2015-2022: covenantal and constitutional engagement	Critical civic partnership	Dar al-'Ahd wa al-Shahadah, judicial review, public-service cooperation	State legitimacy is accepted constitutionally but judged by justice and public welfare

5. Reformasi: Political Opening and the Reassertion of Nonpartisanship

The fall of Suharto in 1998 opened electoral and associational space. Amien Rais, then chairman of Muhammadiyah, played a visible role in opposition to the regime and became a founder of the National Mandate Party (PAN). The party attracted many Muhammadiyah cadres and networks, but it was not formally established as Muhammadiyah's party. This distinction was tested by elections, elite competition, and the practical overlap between organizational constituencies and party mobilization (Jung, 2014; Suwarno, 2019).

Post-authoritarian political learning reinforced organizational caution. Muhammadiyah leaders and members were free to participate in parties, but the movement resisted formal endorsement of a single party. Jung (2014) argues that this behavior reflected institutional logic: religious and social missions were prioritized over partisan interest, and disappointing political experiences strengthened the perceived need for organizational protection. Nonpartisanship did not eliminate political preferences; it prevented one preference from acquiring permanent organizational ownership.

The Khittah Denpasar of 2002 provided the clearest post-Reformasi statement. It affirmed that politics is part of social and religious life and that Muhammadiyah must contribute to national affairs, while maintaining distance from practical party politics as an institution (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2002). Members were encouraged to act ethically in

political life, but parties could not use Muhammadiyah as an organizational vehicle. This formulation institutionalized a dual commitment: active citizenship and partisan independence.

Reformasi also diversified the state's points of contact with Muhammadiyah. Decentralization created relationships with provincial and district governments; direct elections encouraged politicians to seek endorsement from religious leaders; and regulatory reforms intensified cooperation in education, health, philanthropy, and disaster response. Muhammadiyah became a partner in governance at multiple levels, not merely an interlocutor of the central government. This increased policy access but also multiplied opportunities for patronage and uneven local accommodation.

The post-1998 environment revealed that formal democracy does not automatically produce liberal or egalitarian outcomes. Muhammadiyah, like other major religious organizations, contains plural currents ranging from inclusive civic orientations to conservative and Islamist tendencies (Burhani, 2018, 2020). Political elites may selectively mobilize these currents. Arifianto (2021) shows that relations among the state, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama became entangled with political sectarianism during the Jokowi period. Therefore, organizational nonpartisanship alone cannot guarantee democratic moderation; internal authority, public rhetoric, and coalition choices also matter.

Muhammadiyah's relationship with the democratic state was consequently neither uniformly cooperative nor oppositional. It supported elections, constitutional government, and public programs while criticizing corruption, oligarchy, economic inequality, religious policy, and government performance. Some senior figures participated in opposition mobilizations, while other leaders maintained working relations with the government. The central organization attempted to preserve a broad institutional position that could survive changes in administration.

6. Constitutional Jihad, Service Partnership, and Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah

A distinctive post-Reformasi development was the use of constitutional litigation. Muhammadiyah supported judicial-review petitions against statutes considered inconsistent with constitutional justice, particularly laws governing natural resources. The successful challenge to the 2004 Water Resources Law became the best-known example. The Constitutional Court invalidated the law in 2015, and Muhammadiyah framed this strategy as *jihad konstitusi*: a disciplined struggle through legal institutions rather than extra-constitutional confrontation (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015).

Constitutional jihad changed the locus of political engagement. Instead of demanding control of the state or relying solely on elite negotiation, Muhammadiyah used the constitution to hold legislation accountable. This strategy accepted the legitimacy of the legal order while contesting government policy. It translated religious concepts of justice and protection of the public good into constitutional argument. The court became an arena where civic organizations could challenge state-market arrangements without rejecting the republic.

At the same time, Muhammadiyah's charitable enterprises increasingly functioned as partners in public governance. Its schools and universities implemented national education standards; hospitals participated in health regulation and social insurance; Lazismu worked within zakat governance; and disaster and health bodies coordinated with ministries and local governments. During COVID-19, Muhammadiyah mobilized hospitals, universities, volunteers, religious guidance, and community networks in cooperation with public authorities (Rachmawati et al., 2022; Rahmawati & Wulan, 2022). The relationship was one of co-production: the state depended on civil-society capacity, and Muhammadiyah depended on public regulation and financing.

This service partnership complicates claims of independence. A hospital may criticize health policy while relying on reimbursement from the national insurance system. A university may defend academic autonomy while depending on accreditation and government grants. A disaster-response body may act from religious commitment while entering command structures established by the state. Independence is therefore not institutional isolation. It is the capacity to retain mission, governance, and critical judgment within networks of interdependence.

The 2015 concept of Pancasila as *Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah* supplied a theological-political framework for this interdependence. *Dar al-'ahdi* describes the republic as a national agreement produced through historical compromise. *Dar al-shahadah* describes it as a field of witness or constructive proof, requiring citizens to realize justice, prosperity, dignity, and moral public life (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2015a). The formulation rejects both the attempt to replace Pancasila with an exclusive religious state and the idea that acceptance of Pancasila requires religion to withdraw from public affairs.

The concept is best understood as covenantal constitutionalism. The state is legitimate because citizens have entered a binding political agreement embodied in Pancasila and the Constitution. Yet the covenant does not sanctify rulers or policies. Governments can violate the purposes of the agreement through corruption, inequality, repression, exploitation, or discrimination. Loyalty to the republic may therefore require opposition to a government measure. This logic connects cooperation with criticism rather than treating them as mutually exclusive.

Indonesia Berkemajuan and Risalah Islam Berkemajuan broadened this position. They emphasized the state as an instrument for advancing knowledge, welfare, justice, democracy, human dignity, and ecological responsibility (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2015b, 2022). Muhammadiyah's political goal was no longer primarily formal Islamization of the constitution. It was the ethical transformation of public life through institutions, citizenship, law, and social action. This represents a significant historical shift from debates over the name of the state toward evaluation of the state's substantive performance.

Discussion

1. Critical Civic Partnership as an Institutional Logic

The historical evidence supports the concept of critical civic partnership. Muhammadiyah is a partner because it recognizes the constitutional state, provides public services, supplies expertise, cooperates with government agencies, and contributes to national integration. It is critical because it preserves a separate organizational identity, articulates moral standards, mobilizes public opinion, and contests laws or policies. It is civic because its authority is grounded primarily in voluntary association and social institutions rather than coercive power or electoral office.

This concept avoids three misleading classifications. Muhammadiyah is not apolitical, because education, welfare, religious regulation, litigation, and public criticism shape power and policy. It is not a party organization, because its institutional mission and membership extend across partisan divisions. It is not simply incorporated into the state, because it can organize resources and legitimacy outside government. Its distinctive power lies in crossing these boundaries without fully occupying any one of them.

Critical civic partnership also explains historical continuity beneath changing doctrines. Colonial legal accommodation, New Order allocative politics, Reformasi nonpartisanship, constitutional jihad, and Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah appear different, but each seeks a workable relation between public influence and organizational autonomy. When direct political participation threatened the movement's mission or survival, influence shifted toward social institutions and moral discourse. When democratic and legal opportunities expanded, the movement used parties indirectly, courts, advocacy, and policy networks.

The relationship resembles what civil-society scholarship describes as mediated or co-governed public authority. Civil society is not located outside the state in a pure sphere of voluntary action. Large organizations negotiate rules, receive public resources, deliver services, and help construct public norms (Casanova, 1994; Hefner, 2000). Muhammadiyah's institutional scale makes it both a counterweight to government and part of the infrastructure through which government functions. This duality is a source of resilience but also of compromised accountability.

2. From the Islamic-State Question to Covenantal Constitutionalism

The conceptual trajectory from Masyumi-era constitutional politics to Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah is not a simple abandonment of Islamic political aspiration. It is a change in the object of reform. Earlier modernist politics invested heavily in the constitutional recognition of Islam. Later Muhammadiyah documents increasingly evaluated the state through substantive principles: justice, welfare, knowledge, morality, participation, and protection of human dignity. Islamic commitment was relocated from the formal identity of the state to the ethical quality of institutions and citizenship.

This shift was produced by political learning. The failure of constitutional Islam to secure majority agreement, the dissolution of Masyumi, authoritarian management of parties, and the expansion of Muhammadiyah's social institutions demonstrated the limits of

party-centered Islamization. At the same time, Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution became durable components of national identity. Accepting them as a covenant enabled Muhammadiyah to resolve a recurrent legitimacy problem without endorsing secular exclusion or government infallibility.

Covenantal constitutionalism is more demanding than rhetorical nationalism. A covenant imposes obligations on both citizens and state institutions. Citizens must sustain the republic, respect plural membership, and contribute to public welfare. State officials must govern constitutionally and pursue justice. The language of shahadah adds a performative requirement: Islamic claims gain credibility through demonstrable social benefit, not through symbolic dominance. Hospitals, schools, anti-corruption work, environmental advocacy, and legal challenges become forms of political testimony.

However, the formula does not automatically settle conflicts over pluralism. Menchik (2016) shows that Indonesian religious tolerance has often been organized through communal rather than liberal assumptions, and major organizations may defend democracy while accepting restrictions on unpopular minorities. Muhammadiyah's support for Pancasila must therefore be evaluated through concrete treatment of religious, ideological, gender, and sexual minorities. A covenant that protects only recognized majorities remains incomplete.

3. Benefits and Risks of Institutional Interdependence

Partnership with the state provides clear public benefits. Muhammadiyah's network extends the reach of education, health care, welfare, philanthropy, and emergency response. Its organizational trust can improve policy communication and mobilize citizens faster than bureaucratic systems alone. Its universities and councils produce expertise, while its national structure connects central policy with local communities. During crisis, these capabilities become part of national resilience.

The first risk is co-optation. Governments can reward compliant elites with positions, access, projects, or symbolic recognition. Because Muhammadiyah's institutions depend on licenses, accreditation, reimbursement, and public cooperation, criticism may carry material costs. Co-optation need not involve explicit instruction; it can operate through anticipatory caution and the selection of issues that do not threaten institutional interests.

The second risk is elite personalization. Charismatic leaders can convert Muhammadiyah's moral capital into support for personal parties, candidates, or government roles. Formal disclaimers may not prevent the public from interpreting a leader's action as the movement's position. The problem is not that members enter politics, which is a legitimate form of citizenship. The problem is unequal access to organizational symbols, facilities, and networks. Transparent conflict-of-interest rules are therefore necessary for credible nonpartisanship.

The third risk is mission displacement through service contracts. Public financing can expand access, but managerial survival may gradually dominate the al-Ma'un commitment to the poor. Hospitals may prioritize profitable services; universities may pursue scale and status; and schools may become inaccessible to lower-income families. In such cases, partnership strengthens institutional assets without necessarily

strengthening public justice. Measuring contribution requires data on access, quality, outcomes, and distribution, not only the number of facilities.

The fourth risk is fragmented accountability. Muhammadiyah is decentralized, and local institutions negotiate with different government offices. This flexibility supports adaptation but makes consistent oversight difficult. A central moral statement may not control local patronage or partisan alignment. Conversely, excessive centralization could weaken local initiative. The appropriate response is not uniform command but transparent standards, independent audit, disclosure of political conflicts, and mechanisms through which service users and communities can raise complaints.

Finally, critical partnership can become selective. Organizations may challenge economic laws through constitutional litigation but remain cautious on civil liberties, minority protection, or past state violence. Selectivity is unavoidable, but it should be justified through public criteria rather than partisan convenience. A credible civic actor must be willing to apply its moral standards to governments and coalitions with which its leaders have personal affinity.

Table 3. Critical civic partnership: strengths, tensions, and institutional safeguards

Relational feature	Public value	Recurring tension	Required safeguard
Nonpartisanship	Preserves a broad social constituency and long-term mission	Informal party capture by prominent elites	Conflict-of-interest rules and equal access to organizational resources
Service partnership	Expands education, health, welfare, and crisis capacity	Financial and regulatory dependence on government	Mission-based performance indicators and diversified financing
Policy access	Allows expertise and community experience to inform government	Elite bargaining can replace public participation	Transparent advocacy positions and consultation with affected communities
Constitutional contestation	Channels opposition through law and protects public goods	Litigation may be selective or symbolic	Clear case-selection principles and follow-up monitoring
Covenantal nationalism	Links Islamic commitment with plural constitutional citizenship	Majoritarian interpretations may marginalize minorities	Rights-based interpretation and consistent defense of equal citizenship

4. Implications for the Study of Muhammadiyah and the State

The findings suggest that future research should avoid treating Muhammadiyah as a unified voter bloc or a purely normative institution. Its relationship with the state operates through multiple organizational fields: party politics, courts, ministries, local governments, professional regulation, education, health, philanthropy, and religious authority. Research that examines only leadership statements will miss the contractual and administrative relations embedded in charitable enterprises. Research that examines only service delivery will miss the ideological and political conflicts that shape cooperation.

Comparative subnational study is especially important. Decentralization means that a Muhammadiyah hospital, university, school, or regional board may have a different relationship with government in Yogyakarta, West Sumatra, East Java, Papua, or a minority-Muslim province. Local political competition, religious demography, economic

capacity, and leadership networks affect both partnership and autonomy. The national Khittah provides a boundary, but practice is negotiated locally.

Greater attention should also be given to 'Aisyyah and women's political agency. Much of the conventional history centers male leaders, parties, and constitutional debate. Yet women's organizations have shaped maternal health, education, family policy, child protection, and social welfare. These fields are deeply political even when they are not described as state politics. A gendered analysis would broaden the meaning of Muhammadiyah's public engagement.

Finally, the organization needs stronger public data on its relationship with government. Disclosure of public funding, regulatory partnerships, political appointments, policy submissions, litigation outcomes, and service performance would improve both scholarship and accountability. Critical autonomy cannot rest solely on doctrinal declarations. It must be demonstrated through institutional practices that prevent political capture and preserve the rights of citizens who use Muhammadiyah services.

CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah's relationship with the state has never been adequately described by the categories of political neutrality, opposition, or incorporation alone. From colonial rule to 2022, the movement moved among legal accommodation, indirect party participation, defensive adaptation, allocative politics, democratic engagement, public-service partnership, and constitutional contestation. These changes reflected shifts in regime structure, but they also reflected organizational learning about the costs of party dependence and the value of autonomous social institutions.

The movement's central achievement has been to preserve a distinction between organizational mission and the pursuit of government power while refusing withdrawal from public affairs. Its schools, hospitals, universities, charities, and emergency institutions create public capacity; its leaders and councils shape political discourse; and its constitutional interventions challenge policies considered harmful to the common good. This combination gives Muhammadiyah influence that cannot be measured by electoral votes alone.

The formulation of Pancasila as *Dar al-'Ahdi wa al-Shahadah* consolidated this historical trajectory. Indonesia is accepted as a binding constitutional covenant, but acceptance does not mean unconditional loyalty to rulers. The republic remains an arena in which citizens and institutions must prove their commitment to justice, welfare, dignity, and plural coexistence. Muhammadiyah's appropriate position is therefore critical civic partnership: cooperation without surrender, criticism without anti-system politics, and religious contribution without monopolizing the state.

This position remains fragile. Regulatory dependence can mute criticism, political elites can personalize organizational authority, and service growth can displace social mission. The durability of Muhammadiyah's contribution will depend on transparent political boundaries, rights-based citizenship, measurable public-service accountability, and willingness to scrutinize both allies and opponents. Critical autonomy is not a status

achieved once through a Khittah. It is a continuing institutional practice.

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