

## Role of Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA) in the Control and Supervision of Product Halal-ness

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### Abstract:

This study examines the role of the Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA) in controlling and supervising the halal status of products at the local level, using KUA Mendahara (Mendahara Ilir subdistrict) as a case study. Motivated by persistent implementation challenges in Indonesia's Halal Product Assurance system, the research aims to clarify how KUA contributes to ensuring that halal certification follows regulatory requirements and how it monitors certified products in practice. Employing a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct field observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal four principal functions performed by KUA: disseminating information and conducting outreach on halal certification; providing technical guidance and administrative assistance to MSMEs during the certification process; coordinating cross-institutional activities with BPJPH, MUI, and local health authorities; and carrying out post-certification monitoring through field visits and administrative checks. The study demonstrates that KUA operates as a critical institutional intermediary between national policy and local practice. Theoretically, the research extends institutional perspectives to religious local institutions in halal governance; practically, it offers evidence-based recommendations to strengthen KUA capacity and interagency collaboration to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of Indonesia's halal assurance system.

### Keywords:

*Halal Certification; Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA); Product Supervision; MSME facilitation; Institutional Intermediary.*



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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and economic integration, product halal-ness is now not only a religious issue, but also an important part of market competitiveness and consumer protection strategies. Countries with large Muslim populations are strengthening halal regulations to ensure products meet technical standards and sharia values, while building international market confidence (Zulfa, 2023). In Indonesia, Law Number 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Guarantee requires every product in circulation to have a halal certificate (BPJPH, 2024). The implementation is carried out through BPJPH and LPH in collaboration with MUI in issuing halal fatwa and product supervision. However, many studies have highlighted the weak post-certification supervision mechanism and coordination between institutions at the regional level (Rofi'ah, 2024), which has implications for the effectiveness of the national halal assurance system.

Although halal certification is required nationally, its implementation in the field still faces various obstacles. Empirical studies show that supervision of post-certification business actors has not been optimal, so that some people still doubt the consistency of the application of halal standards by business actors (Hidayat et al., 2025; Zulfa, 2023). Meanwhile, research on the role of local institutions such as the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in controlling and supervising halal products is still rare (Maliha & Devi, 2023; Ikhwan, 2024). In fact, local institutions have the potential to play an important role in bridging national policies with the practices of micro-enterprises. This void marks the need for empirical studies that explore the role of KUAs in ensuring the sustainability and validity of product halal-ness.

This research links the issue of halal-ness with institutional theory and public governance. According to Scott (2014), public organizations operate under external institutional pressures in the form of regulations, norms, and social legitimacy that influence organizational behavior. In the context of halal certification, regulatory pressure and consumer demand shape the motivation of institutions and businesses to maintain the legitimacy of halal products (Ab Talib et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Based on this framework, KUA is positioned as a local actor that has social and administrative legitimacy to carry out halal control and supervision functions at the sub-district level.

This article focuses on two main questions: first, what is the role of KUA in controlling halal certification through education, facilitation, and administrative verification; and second, what is the role of KUA in supervising product halal-ness through field monitoring and inter-agency coordination. The research objective is to assess the extent to which KUA contributes to regulatory compliance and the sustainability of halal practices in the community. Empirically, this study utilizes a qualitative approach with triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentation to describe the operational dynamics of KUA in the halal assurance system.

The contributions of this research are conceptual, empirical, and methodological. Conceptually, this study expands the application of institutional theory in the context of local religious institutions. Empirically, this study presents a micro picture of the role of KUA Mendahara in ensuring the halal-ness of products at the sub-district level. Methodologically, the qualitative case study approach provides a depth of analysis of local institutional practices that previous research has rarely touched (A Yong et al., 2020; Husna et al., 2025). Thus, this article fills a gap in the halal literature by asserting that the effectiveness of halal product supervision depends on institutional capacity, regulatory pressure, and inter-agency coordination. This contribution strengthens the academic and public policy discourse on the local institutional-based halal assurance system in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

The type of research adopted in this article is a qualitative case study that aims to explore in depth the role of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) in controlling and supervising halal products at the local level. This approach was chosen due to the contextual and complex characteristics of the phenomenon, where researchers need to understand the interaction of institutions, actors, rules and practices in the field within an institutional framework (Crowe, et al., 2011). Case studies as a

qualitative methodology allow for the investigation of contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, as well as the use of multiple data sources and triangulation to ensure the validity of findings. This approach is relevant when the boundary between phenomenon and context is unclear and when the researcher does not have full control over events (Crowe et al., 2011).

The data sources used consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, as well as field notes and documentation of KUA activities, business actors, and consumers. Secondary data included regulations related to halal product assurance, KUA, and BPJPH policy documents, and relevant academic literature. Data collection techniques include semi-structured interviews (guideline interviews), non-invasive participatory observation, and the collection of official institutional documents. Data collection instruments were developed based on predetermined indicators (information and socialization, guidance, inter-institutional coordination, monitoring mechanisms, and business participation). To ensure adherence to qualitative research quality criteria, researchers will apply source triangulation, audit trail, and member checking procedures. Inclusion criteria for primary data are actors directly involved in the halal certification or supervision process (KUA officials, certified MSMEs, consumers), while primary data from irrelevant actors (e.g., non-halal businesses) are excluded. For secondary data, the literature used must be open-access within the last five years or come from reputable or internationally indexed journals, and be directly related to the theme of halal assurance, the role of local institutions, or supervision of halal products. The unit of analysis of this research is the sub-district level KUA institutional actors, while the research subjects include KUA officials, MSME actors who have or are currently taking care of halal certification, related halal certification institutions, and consumers in the research area.

In the data analysis stage, a systematic thematic analysis technique was used to identify key themes from the interview transcripts and observation results (Thematic Analysis). The process includes data familiarization, initial coding, grouping of codes into themes, and elaboration and interpretation of themes according to the institutional conceptual framework. Researchers will use coding, data management, and visualization of relationships between themes. Triangulation between methods (interview, observation, documentation) and between sources (KUA, MSMEs, consumers) is applied to increase the credibility of the findings. In addition, to support the transparency of the analysis, the researcher compiled an audit trail documenting the traces of analysis and interpretative decision-making. With this methodological approach, the research aims to produce an in-depth, holistic, and valid understanding of the real mechanism of the KUA's role in controlling and supervising product halal-ness.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

Based on the results of field data collection and analysis through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation at the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) of Mendahara District, four main themes were found that describe the role of KUA in controlling and supervising halal products, namely: (1) informative and educative roles through socialization of halal certification, (2) coaching

and mentoring functions for business actors, (3) institutional coordination in the halal product guarantee system, and (4) mechanisms for controlling and supervising post-certification halal products. These four themes were obtained through a data reduction process from transcripts of interviews with KUA officials, extension workers, MSME players, and consumers, as well as the results of field observations of socialization activities, certification assistance, and supervision of local businesses in Mendahara Ilir.

### 1. Informative and educative role through socialization of halal certification.

KUA Mendahara plays an active role in disseminating information about the importance of halal certification to the community and local business actors. Based on observation data, socialization is carried out through counseling activities at religious events, community group meetings, and religious activities at local mosques. Interviews with business actors such as Mrs. WL and Mrs. TN showed that most of the initial information about halal certification, they obtained from counseling activities held by the KUA. This is reinforced by the statement of the KUA official (Mr. AL), who stated that counseling is carried out regularly as a form of moral responsibility of religious institutions towards the Muslim community to ensure the halal-ness of products in circulation. Based on field observation data, the socialization approach is carried out personally (door to door) by extension workers, as explained by Mrs. HD, who directly visits business actors to provide brochures and explanations of halal registration procedures. From the consumer side, respondents HS and SN claimed to be more aware of the halal label after receiving an explanation from KUA extension workers. This finding shows that the educative function of the KUA has contributed to increasing public awareness of the importance of halal-certified products, especially for micro-entrepreneurs in the regions.

### 2. The function of coaching and mentoring business actors.

The guidance provided by the KUA includes counseling on halal provisions, administrative assistance in the certification process, as well as simple technical checks on the production practices of business actors. From the interview results, business actors such as Mrs. TN and WL considered that the coaching provided helped them understand the halal certification process, including in the preparation of documents and the use of the SIHALAL online system. The KUA official (Mr. AL) explained that coaching is carried out through two mechanisms, namely mass education and direct assistance at the production site. This approach aims to make business actors understand halal practices in every stage of production, from the selection of raw materials to product packaging. However, there are also obstacles such as limited extension staff and budget, so that coaching activities cannot be carried out regularly and evenly. Based on observations, MSME actors in remote areas tend to be less reached by coaching programs, causing the level of understanding and compliance with halal procedures to still vary.

### 3. Institutional coordination in the halal product assurance system.

Field data shows that KUA Mendahara performs a coordinating function with several other institutions, such as BPJPH, MUI, and the Health Office. The forms of cooperation include

verification of certification documents, inspection of raw materials and production processes, and inspection of product cleanliness and hygiene. Business actors (Mrs. WL and Mrs. TN) revealed that cross-institutional cooperation facilitates the certification process because each institution plays its role according to its function. BPJPH handles administration, MUI conducts sharia verification, and the Health Office checks the sanitation aspect. The KUA counselor (Mrs. HD) added that the KUA is the coordinator in integrated coaching and setting the joint inspection schedule. However, the interview results show that this coordination has not been optimal due to limited human resources and schedules between institutions that are not always synchronized. Researcher observations of joint supervision activities at the production sites showed the involvement of cross-agency officers, although the implementation was not routine.

#### 4. Control and supervision mechanism for post-certification halal products.

Field findings indicate that the KUA not only plays a role at the socialization and certification stages, but also in the ongoing supervision of products that have obtained halal certificates. Based on interviews with KUA officials (Mr. AL), control is carried out through periodic field inspections with a joint team, as well as administrative monitoring of certification documents. Business actors (Mrs. TN and WL) mentioned that the KUA periodically inspects raw materials and production equipment to ensure there is no contamination of non-halal materials. Consumers (HS and SN) also confirmed that they often see KUA officers conducting site visits to ensure compliance with halal standards. However, from an internal perspective, KUA extension officers admit that post-certification supervision still faces obstacles in the form of limited human resources and a lack of technical measurement tools at the sub-district level. Nonetheless, forms of moral-based supervision and social communication are considered effective in improving small business actors' compliance with halal principles.

In addition to these four main themes, the field analysis also revealed several important sub-themes that strengthen the dynamics of KUA's role in halal supervision. First, the participation of business actors in the certification process is high, especially at the document collection and field audit stages. Second, the public perception of the credibility of the KUA in supervising halal products is relatively positive, because this institution is considered to have religious authority and social closeness to the community. Third, the success of supervision of halal products at the sub-district level is highly dependent on the synergy between the KUA, BPJPH, and MUI, as well as regional regulatory support. Field documentation data also shows that socialization and supervision activities have been carried out regularly during 2024-2025, including assistance to MSMEs "Kayu Api" and "Kletek Wulan".

Overall, the results showed that the KUA plays a strategic role as the spearhead of the implementation of the halal product guarantee policy at the local level. Despite structural and administrative barriers, KUA's function as a link between national policies and community practices is successfully realized through informative roles, technical guidance, cross-institutional coordination, and moral supervision of business actors. These results confirm that the sustainability of the halal assurance system in the regions is strongly influenced by institutional capacity and the effectiveness of collaboration between the parties involved. This empirical finding is in line with the

national trend that the effectiveness of halal assurance depends not only on central regulations, but also on the ability of local actors to carry out community-based supervisory functions (Fauzi et al., 2023; Hasan et al., 2025; Husna et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Ab Talib et al., 2016; Maliha & Devi, 2023; Rofi'ah, 2024; Ikhwan, 2024; Ab Mahmood & Fraser, 2023; A Yong et al., 2020).

## Discussion

The results revealed four main themes of socialization/ information, coaching/mentoring, institutional coordination, and post-certification supervision, which clearly answered the two research problems: what is the role of KUA in controlling halal certification, and what is the role of KUA in supervising certified halal products. The theme of socialization and education shows that KUA actively carries out the function of counseling to business actors and the community, which is in line with the first objective of the study to determine the contribution of KUA in ensuring that halal certification is implemented according to regulations. While the theme of post-certification supervision directly addresses the second problem formulation, namely, the extent to which supervision of halal products is carried out after the certificate is issued.

Within the theoretical framework of institutional theory, this finding can be interpreted as a manifestation of external institutional pressures (coercive, normative, mimetic) that are internalized at the local level through the role of the KUA. As an actor at the sub-district level, the KUA faces regulatory pressure (coercive) from the JPH Law and the Ministry of Religious Affairs PMA, which requires halal-certified products (Prasetyanti, 2025) as well as the norms of Muslim communities who demand halal certainty in product consumption (Agustiningsih, 2024). The response to this pressure is manifested in socialization and coaching activities as a norm internalization mechanism, while institutional coordination and post-certification supervision reflect efforts to maintain institutional consistency with the legitimacy expected by the community and regulators. In this context, the KUA, as a local institution, functions as an institutional mediator between central regulations and local practices, becoming a channel to bridge regulatory pressure and community expectations.

Comparison with previous studies shows both compatibility and interesting differences. Some studies emphasize the barriers faced by MSME businesses in the halal certification process, such as a lack of understanding and cost burden (Jasmien et al., 2024), which is in line with the findings that KUA coaching has not reached all businesses equally. However, some literature tends to highlight internal company factors (e.g., perceived benefits and technical readiness) as determinants of halal adoption (Agustiningsih, 2024), without exploring the role of local institutions in control and supervision. Strategic research on the halal certification ecosystem in Indonesia also emphasizes the need to strengthen institutional structures and stakeholders (Prasetyanti, 2025). This article then enriches the scope of the literature by presenting a more in-depth empirical study of local institutions - an aspect that is relatively rarely discussed in previous research.

The scientific contributions of this article are theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research extends the application of institutional theory to the level of local religious institutions in the realm of halal product assurance, showing that local actors such as KUA not only act as

administrative implementers but also normative agents in internalizing halal regulations. Practically, this finding provides an operational model of the KUA function in controlling and supervising halal products, which can be a reference for policymakers (Ministry of Religious Affairs, BPJPH, MUI) to strengthen institutional synergies in the regions. Thus, this article fills a void in the halal institutional literature and provides practical implications for improving the effectiveness of the halal assurance system in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations that need to be acknowledged proportionally. First, the focus on one case study in KUA Mendahara limits the generalizability of the findings to other sub-district contexts with different geographical, social, and institutional capacity characteristics. Second, qualitative data is retrospective and relies on informants' memories, so it may be prone to recall bias and subjectivity. Thirdly, limited access to technical documentation (e.g., internal audit or supervision reports) affects the depth of understanding of post-certification supervision. Fourth, this study does not measure the direct impact of KUA supervision on the quality of halal products technically (e.g., laboratory tests); hence, the emphasis of the study is more on institutional mechanisms and actors' perceptions.

Based on these findings and limitations, the implication for further research is the need for comparative studies among KUAs in various regions to test the transferability of the KUA role model, as well as quantitative research that measures the relationship between the intensity of KUA supervision and halal product quality compliance (e.g., raw material test or technical audit). For practitioners and policy makers, it is recommended: (1) strengthen the capacity of KUA extension workers through halal technical training and adequate budget allocation; (2) design a formal collaboration scheme (MOU) between KUA, BPJPH, and MUI to synchronize inspection and verification schedules; (3) develop a digital monitoring module (local supervision application) that allows KUA to monitor the compliance of business actors periodically; (4) encourage local regulations to require internal audit reporting by certified business actors periodically, as practiced by MUI in post-certification evaluation (Indonesian Ulema Council, 2021), see the audit mechanism and internal reports on MUI certification practices. Thus, this research not only emphasizes the theoretical position of the role of local institutions in the halal assurance system but also presents strategic recommendations to strengthen halal supervision practices in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) has a strategic and multifunctional role in the system of controlling and supervising halal products at the local level. Based on the results of the field study at the KUA of Mendahara Subdistrict, four main forms of the KUA's role were found, namely as a facilitator of halal information and education, implementer of guidance and certification assistance, coordinating liaison between institutions (BPJPH, MUI, and Health Office), and implementer of post-certification moral and administrative supervision. These four roles show that the KUA not only carry out administrative functions, but also directly contribute to ensuring the implementation of sharia values in products circulating in the community. Empirically, the role of the KUA has positive implications for increasing micro business actors'

awareness of the importance of halal certification and strengthening consumer confidence in local products that are guaranteed halal.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in developing the application of institutional theory in the context of religion and public services, by placing KUA as a local institutional actor that plays a role in internalizing halal regulations through educative, normative, and collaborative mechanisms. Practically, these findings provide an empirical basis for the formulation of policies to strengthen a more inclusive and community-based halal assurance system. This study shows that the successful implementation of national halal policies depends heavily on the capacity, legitimacy, and effectiveness of coordination of implementing agencies at the local level, so that the KUA role model in this study can be used as a reference for the development of halal supervision policies in other regions. As an implication, institutional strengthening and capacity building of human resources within the KUA are needed so that their role in the halal assurance system can be carried out sustainably and effectively. The government and related institutions are advised to expand technical and budgetary support for coaching, mentoring, and field inspection activities at the sub-district level. On the academic side, further research can be directed at comparative studies between regions to test the consistency of the effectiveness of the KUA role, as well as the development of evaluative models based on institutional performance indicators in monitoring product halal-ness. With these steps, the national halal assurance system will be stronger, more responsive, and rooted in the social and religious practices of the community at the local level.

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