

Research Article

# The Role of Islamic Religious Extensions as Street-Level Bureaucrats in The Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policies in Batang Regency

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**Abstract,** This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic Religious Counselors as *street-level bureaucrats* in implementing Islamic Community Guidance policies in Batang Regency. The study used a *mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, beginning with the collection and analysis of quantitative data and then deepening with qualitative data*. Quantitative data were obtained from 53 respondents using a questionnaire that was tested for validity and reliability. In contrast, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation with religious counselors, Ministry of Religious Affairs officials, the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs), and the community. Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically using Michael Lipsky's *street-level bureaucracy theory* as an analytical framework. The study's results indicate that the role of Islamic Religious Extension Workers as street-level bureaucrats is positively and strongly associated with the successful implementation of the Islamic Community Guidance policy ( $r = 0.826$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Qualitative findings revealed that extension workers exercise discretion in the form of community assistance, adjustments to extension methods, strategic flexibility, and responsiveness to socio-religious issues at the local level. This study confirms that the effectiveness of Islamic Community Guidance policies is not determined solely by formal policy design but is highly dependent on the capacity, flexibility, and discretion of Islamic Religious Counselors, the implementing actors at the field level. These findings provide theoretical contributions to the development of *street-level bureaucracy studies* in the context of religious policy, as well as practical implications for formulating more contextual and responsive policies.

**Keywords:** Guidance for the Islamic Community; Islamic Religious Counselors; Michael Lipsky's; Policy Implementation; *Street-Level Bureaucracy*.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Islamic Community Guidance policy is an integral part of the state's efforts to foster the religious life of the community in line with the values of religious moderation, social harmony, and order in society. The Ministry of Religious Affairs implements this policy through various instruments, one of which is by optimizing the role of Islamic Religious Counselors as technical implementers at the community level. In the context of socio-religious development, Islamic Religious Counselors hold a strategic position as an extension of the state in providing religious services, education, and direct assistance to the community. (Kementerian Agama RI, 2018)

Strategically, Batang Regency is a region with heterogeneous socio-religious characteristics, both in terms of levels of religious understanding, socio-economic conditions, and local cultural dynamics. This situation requires implementing Islamic Community Guidance policies that are not only normative-administrative but also contextual and adaptive to community needs. Islamic Religious Counselors are required to bridge the interests of government policies with the social realities faced by communities at the grassroots level.

However, in practice, the implementation of these policies does not always align with the ideal goals formulated. (Rohman & Nugraha, 2022)

The phenomenon of Islamic religious instructors acting as street-level bureaucrats in implementing Islamic community guidance policies is evident in the gap between the design of Islamic Community Guidance policies and their implementation in the field. The limited number of instructors, the vast area covered, the diversity of socio-religious issues, and the high administrative burden often impact the effectiveness of Islamic religious instructors. This situation demonstrates the difference between policy as a formal document and policy as a social practice. (Wahab, 2016)

As a result, achieving policy objectives depends heavily on individual extension workers' ability to interpret and implement the policy in the context at hand.

In public policy studies, this reality can be explained through the *street-level bureaucracy theory* introduced by Michael Lipsky. Lipsky states that government officials who interact directly with the public have significant discretion in implementing policies, so that the individual decisions of lower-level implementers often shape policy practice. (Giosa, 2021). This discretion arises in response to limited resources, work pressures, and the complexity of problems faced in public service. Islamic Religious Counselors can be positioned as *street-level bureaucrats* because they are the bureaucratic actors who interact directly with the community in implementing Islamic Community Guidance policies. In carrying out their duties, counselors not only convey religious material but also interpret policies, determine service priorities, and adapt guidance methods to the community's social conditions. Thus, policy implementation is heavily influenced by the perceptions, values, and capacities of Islamic Religious Counselors in the field. (Ratih, Koeswara, Kasmira, & Zein, 2025)

Unlike previous studies that tended to position Islamic Religious Instructors as normative da'wah actors or agents of community religious development, this study positions Islamic Religious Instructors as public policy actors operating within the state bureaucratic structure. Several previous studies have emphasized the effectiveness of outreach and da'wah methods, as well as the socio-religious role of Islamic Religious Instructors in the community, without explicitly linking these to public policy implementation theory. (Ridlwani, 2015). On the other hand, studies on *street-level bureaucracy* in the context of public policy in Indonesia generally focus on the education, health, and social services sectors, such as teachers, health workers, or administrative service personnel. (Purwanto, 2018). Studies applying *street-level bureaucracy theory* to the religious policy sector, particularly the role of Islamic Religious Counselors in implementing Islamic Community Guidance policies, remain very limited. Thus, there is a gap in research on policy implementation analysis.

Islamic Community Guidance views Islamic Religious Counselors as *street-level bureaucrats* who have discretion, strategy, and subjective considerations in implementing policies at the local level. (Hupe, 2019). This study aims to fill this gap by empirically examining how Islamic Religious Counselors in Batang Regency interpret, adapt, and implement Islamic Community Guidance policies in address the socio-religious complexities of the local community. Thus, this study is entitled "The Role of Islamic Religious Counselors as Street-Level Bureaucrats in the Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policies in Batang Regency."

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, namely, the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative in-depth analysis. This design was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of Islamic religious instructors as street-level bureaucrats in implementing Islamic community guidance policies in Batang Regency.

A quantitative approach was used to identify the pattern of Islamic religious instructors' role as street-level bureaucrats in the implementation of Islamic community guidance policies in Batang Regency. Furthermore, a qualitative approach was used to interpret, explain, and contextualize the quantitative findings and explore the experiences and roles of Islamic religious instructors as street-level bureaucrats in the implementation of Islamic community guidance policies in Batang Regency. A *sequential explanatory* design allows the systematic integration of empirical findings and administrative interpretations, so that this research does not stop at statistical measurements but also explains the institutional dynamics behind the quantitative patterns observed.

This research was conducted in Batang Regency, Central Java Province. The research location was selected based on the consideration that Batang Regency has heterogeneous socio-religious characteristics and is a working area for Islamic Religious Extension Workers who are active in implementing Islamic Community Guidance policies. The research was conducted over time, encompassing preparation, data collection, data analysis, and the preparation of the research report.

The subjects of this study were Islamic Religious Extension Workers working in Batang Regency. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, selecting informants deemed to have relevant knowledge and experience related to the research focus. (Sugiyono, 2020) The research informants include Islamic Religious Counselors (PNS and/or non-PNS) in Batang Regency, Officials or staff in the Islamic Community Guidance Section of the Ministry of Religion Office in Batang Regency, and community or religious leaders who receive counseling services.

Data were collected through several techniques, including semi-structured interviews with informants to gather information on the roles, experiences, and practices of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in implementing the Islamic Community Guidance policy, including the forms of discretion exercised in the field. Observations were conducted to assess extension activities directly, interactions between extension workers and the community, and socio-religious conditions in the assisted areas. This observation aimed to obtain contextual data that supported the interview results. Documentation included data collection in the form of laws and regulations, technical extension instructions, extension worker activity reports, and other official documents related to the Islamic Community Guidance policy.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three main stages, namely: Data reduction, namely the process of sorting, focusing, and simplifying data according to the research focus, Data presentation, namely the arrangement of data in the form of narratives, matrices, or tables to facilitate understanding, Conclusion drawing and verification, namely the process of interpreting data to obtain valid and consistent research findings. The analysis linked empirical findings to the concept of street-level bureaucracy, focusing on discretion, implementation strategies, and factors that influence policy implementation. (Asipi, Rosalina, & Nopiyadi, n.d.)

To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques, both source and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from multiple informants, while technical triangulation was conducted by comparing results from interviews, observations, and documentation. (Moleong, 2018) .In addition, the researcher cross-checked the data with informants (member check) to ensure its accuracy and suitability.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Islamic Community Guidance Policy**

The Islamic Community Guidance Policy is part of public policy in the religious sector, aiming to improve the quality of religious life in the community, strengthen religious moderation, and foster social harmony. The Ministry of Religious Affairs implements this policy through various religious guidance, counseling, and mentoring programs that directly target the community. (Kementerian Agama RI, 2018). Within the framework of public policy, Islamic community guidance is understood not only as a da'wah activity but also as a form of public service provided by the state.

According to Wahab (2016), public policy does not end at the formulation stage; it takes on substantial meaning at the implementation stage. Policy implementation involves various actors, resources, and social contexts that influence a policy's success or failure. Therefore, the Islamic Community Guidance policy needs to be analyzed not only from a regulatory perspective but also from the perspective of how it is implemented by on-the-ground actors. (Wahab, 2016). In this context, Islamic Religious Extension Workers (IREs) are key actors in implementing Islamic Community Guidance policies, as they play a direct role in conveying, interpreting, and implementing them within the community. Therefore, the effectiveness of these policies is greatly influenced by the role and capacity of IREs as implementers of public policy at the local level.

#### **Islamic Religious Instructors as Policy Actors**

Islamic Religious Counselors are state officials mandated to provide guidance, counseling, and religious assistance to the community. Normatively, their role encompasses

informative-educational, consultative, and advocacy functions in fostering the community's religious life. (Purwanto, 2018). In practice, Islamic Religious Counselors are tasked not only with conveying religious teachings but also with mediating between the state and society on socio-religious issues.

Several previous studies have shown that Islamic religious instructors play a strategic role in community religious development, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. However, most of these studies still position instructors within a normative da'wah perspective and have not comprehensively analyzed their role as implementers of public policy within the state bureaucracy. (Raaphorst, Groeneveld, & Hupe, n.d.) In practice, however, Islamic Religious Extension workers face various limitations, such as limited personnel, extensive coverage areas, and the complexity of community socio-religious issues. These conditions require extension workers to make various adjustments in carrying out their duties, ensuring that their role cannot be separated from the policy and bureaucratic context in which they operate.

### ***Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory***

Michael Lipsky's *street-level bureaucracy* theory explains that government officials who interact directly with the public have a strategic role in determining how public policy is implemented in practice. According to Lipsky, limited resources, work pressures, and the complexity of public demands encourage lower-level officials to use discretion in implementing policies. This discretion makes *street-level bureaucrats* not merely passive implementers of policies but also actors who actively shape their substance through daily decisions. In other words, public policies perceived by the public are often the result of the interpretations and practices of field officials, not merely a reflection of formal policy formulations. (Ratih et al., 2025). *Street-level bureaucracy* theory has been widely used to analyze policy implementation in the education, health, and public administration sectors. However, the application of this theory to religious policy, particularly the role of Islamic Religious Instructors, remains relatively rare. (Giosa, 2021)

### ***Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats***

Given the nature of their duties and positions, Islamic Religious Extension Workers can be categorized as *street-level bureaucrats*. They interact directly with the community, provide religious public services, and have discretion in determining extension methods, materials, and strategies. This discretion is exercised in response to the community's diverse social, cultural, and religious conditions. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) emphasized that *street-level bureaucrats* often rely more on moral judgment and contextual considerations than on formal adherence to rules. This is relevant to Islamic outreach, where outreach workers must adapt their preaching and development approaches to the local community's characteristics so that religious messages are received effectively. (Hupe, 2019)

Thus, Islamic Religious Counselors function not only as technical implementers of policies but also as actors actively shaping the implementation of Islamic Community Guidance policies at the local level. This role demonstrates the close relationship among policies, implementing actors, and the community's social context.

### ***Concept Development and Inter-Concept Relationships***

Based on the literature review, this study develops a conceptual framework that connects the Islamic Community Guidance policy, Islamic Religious Counselors as *street-level bureaucrats*, and the community's socio-religious context. The Islamic Community Guidance policy is understood as a normative framework that provides direction and objectives for religious guidance. Islamic Religious Counselors serve as implementers who translate policy into religious service practices at the community level. In the implementation process, Islamic Religious Counselors use discretion to adapt the policy to the social realities they face.

This discretion is influenced by various factors, including the capacity of individual counselors, resource availability, and the socio-religious characteristics of the Batang Regency community. The interaction between the policy, implementing actors, and the social context determines how the Islamic Community Guidance policy is realized in practice. (Raaphorst et al., n.d.). Using a *street-level bureaucracy perspective*, this study positions Islamic Religious Counselors as a central element in policy implementation. This approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of Islamic Community Guidance policy implementation. It offers a conceptual contribution to the development of public policy studies in the religious field.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULT

##### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Quantitative analysis was conducted to test the instrument's reliability and identify relationships among research variables related to the Role of Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats in the Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policies in Batang Regency. The instrument's reliability test demonstrated a very high level of internal consistency. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.985 indicates that all questionnaire items consistently measure the constructs of E-KYC administrative governance and election administrative integrity.

**Table 1.** Results of Instrument Reliability Test Matrix.

Parameter	Mark
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.985</b>
<b>Number of Items</b>	20
<b>Interpretation</b>	Very high reliability

Based on the results of the validity test using Corrected Item-Total Correlation, all statement items had a correlation coefficient value of  $\geq 0.30$ . Thus, all items in the research instrument were declared valid and suitable for use. To identify the relationship between the main variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results showed a positive and significant relationship between Islamic religious instructors' role as street-level bureaucrats and the implementation of Islamic community guidance policies in Batang Regency.

**Table 2.** Correlation Between Research Variables.

	<b>The Role of Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats</b>	<b>Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policy</b>
The Role of Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats	1,000	.826 **
Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policy	.826 **	1,000

Note: \*\* significant correlation at  $\alpha < 0.01$  (*two-tailed*)

Based on Spearman's rank correlation test, there is a very strong positive relationship between the role of Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats and the implementation of Islamic community guidance policies ( $r = 0.826$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $N = 53$ ). A  $p$ -value  $< 0.01$  indicates that this relationship is statistically significant. In other words, increasing the role of extension workers in the field will be followed by an increase in the quality of policy implementation. These results confirm that the active role of extension workers is very influential in the successful implementation of Islamic community guidance policies in Batang Regency.

##### Qualitative Findings

The results of the study indicate that the role of Islamic religious instructors as street-level bureaucrats in the implementation of Islamic community guidance policies in Batang Regency, with 45 respondents, consisting of employees of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Batang Regency, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and religious instructors, has been running quite well. The community feels the benefits. Based on information from 5 community members, it is known that they obtained religious understanding, marriage guidance, and other religious services that help in daily life. However, there is still hope for more routine and equitable guidance activities.

Meanwhile, 16 Ministry of Religious Affairs employees stated that the religious guidance and service program has been implemented in accordance with applicable policies and regulations, but still faces obstacles in including limited human resources and the vast size of the supervised area. Interviews with 3 KUA employees revealed that KUA plays an important role as the spearhead of religious services at the sub-district level, especially in marriage services, family guidance, and religious administration. The general public included

5 respondents. The 20 religious instructors emphasized that their role is highly strategic in conveying religious messages directly to the community, both through formal and non-formal activities. However, there is still a need for additional support facilities and stronger instructor capacity to ensure the implementation of their duties is more effective.

First, Community Accessibility and Assistance. Extension workers play an active role in connecting with the community and ensuring that guidance reaches its intended audience. They not only convey information but also provide direct assistance to residents, especially those new to the guidance program. One extension worker explained, *"We accompany residents from the beginning until they understand the guidance material. This way, it is easier for them to implement the directions given."* This theme demonstrates that extension workers' accessibility is crucial for policies to be well-received and implemented by the community.

Second, regarding Competence and Policy Material Delivery, extension workers are required to have the ability to understand policies and convey them in a simple and easily understood manner to the public. This includes understanding regulations, guidance materials, and appropriate communication strategies. One extension worker stated, *"We must understand each policy so we can explain it clearly, especially to residents who are participating in guidance for the first time."* Extension worker competency plays a direct role in increasing the effectiveness of policy implementation in the field.

Furthermore, Flexibility and Strategy Adjustment: Extension workers often adapt their guidance methods and strategies to the social and cultural conditions and the community's level of understanding. Some residents find it easier to absorb material through group discussions than formal lectures. The extension worker explained, *"We adjust the extension method; for example, some groups understand the material more quickly through direct practice than through theoretical explanations."* This theme emphasizes that the flexibility of extension workers is key to the program's success, as it can bridge formal policies with real-world conditions.

Then, Responsiveness and Problem Solving: Extension workers also act as mediators and problem solvers in the field. They respond quickly to community inquiries and help resolve obstacles that arise during policy implementation. One resident said, *"If the extension workers are active and responsive, it is easier for us to understand the policy and follow directions. However, if they are rarely present, we often do not know what to do."* This theme emphasizes that extension workers' responsiveness increases community trust and ensures effective policy implementation.

Final Strategic Role as Street-Level Bureaucrats Based on the four themes above, it is clear that extension workers function as street-level bureaucrats, liaising between government policies and community needs. They not only convey information but also adapt policy implementation to real-world conditions. This demonstrates that the success of the Islamic community guidance program in Batang Regency depends heavily on the competence, flexibility, and responsiveness of extension workers.

**Table 3:** Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings.

Variables	Quantitative Findings	Qualitative Findings	Integrative Interpretation
The Role of Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.985 (very high reliability); item validity $\geq 0.30$	Theme 1: Accessibility and Community Assistance Theme 2: Competence and Delivery of Policy Material Theme 3: Flexibility and Strategy Adjustment Theme 4: Responsiveness and Problem Solving	Reliable and valid instruments support the understanding that extension workers play a significant role. Qualitative data demonstrate how extension workers interact with communities and adapt policies in the field.
Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policy	Spearman correlation $r = 0.826$ , $p = 0.000$ (very strong positive relationship)	Interviews show that the community easily understands policies if extension workers are active, responsive, and adapt their guidance methods.	Qualitative data reinforce the strong correlation: the success of implementation is greatly influenced by extension workers' active role in the field.

Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings makes it clear that the role of extension workers as street-level bureaucrats is crucial to the successful implementation of the Islamic community guidance policy in Batang Regency. Quantitative data demonstrates the statistical strength of the relationship. In contrast, qualitative data explains the mechanisms of

implementation in the field, from mentoring and material delivery to strategic adjustments and responsiveness to emerging issues. In other words, policy success is determined not only by administrative planning but also by the competence, flexibility, and active participation of extension workers in the field, ensuring effective and targeted implementation.

## DISCUSSION

### **The Role of Islamic Religious Instructors as Street-Level Bureaucrats**

The Islamic religious instructors in this study can be conceptually positioned as *street-level bureaucrats*, namely government officials who interact directly with the community and have discretionary authority in implementing public policy. Lipsky (1980) emphasized that frontline actors are not merely technical implementers, but also the primary determinants of how policies are translated into practice. In the context of Batang Regency, instructors play a dual role as policy communicators, community advocates, and managers of socio-religious dynamics at the local level.

The role of extension workers extends beyond administrative functions or the normative delivery of religious material. Extension workers are confronted with complex social realities, such as differences in educational levels, local religious traditions, and varying public understanding of Islamic teachings. These conditions require extension workers to adapt their approach so that Islamic Community Guidance policies can be accepted and understood contextually. The discretion used in selecting extension methods, communication language, and mentoring intensity reflects the practices of street-level bureaucracy as described by Lipsky (1980). Furthermore, the role of extension workers as liaisons between the state and the community demonstrates that public policy at the grassroots level is highly dependent on the quality of interpersonal interactions. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) state that frontline officials often act based on moral considerations and social empathy when dealing with citizens. Thus, the role of extension workers as street-level bureaucrats emphasizes that policy implementation is not a mechanical process, but rather a social practice fraught with interpretation and adaptation. This reinforces the view that the success of public policy is largely determined by the implementing actors at the community level (Hill & Hupe, 2014).

### **Implementation of Islamic Community Guidance Policy**

The implementation of the Islamic Community Guidance policy in Batang Regency is carried out through a relatively structured mechanism, primarily through routine guidance activities that directly involve the community. Normatively, this policy is designed to increase understanding, adherence, and practice of religious values in social life. However, research indicates that policy implementation does not proceed linearly from formulation to execution. In practice, extension workers face various implementation challenges, such as limited resources, community heterogeneity, and local social dynamics that are not fully accounted for in policy design.

Grindle (2008) emphasized that policy implementation is heavily influenced by the context and capacity of implementing actors. This is evident in how extension workers must adapt the content and guidance methods to remain relevant to the local community's needs. These findings suggest that the general Islamic Community Guidance policy requires adaptation at the local level. Extension workers act as policy translators, connecting formal state objectives with the social realities of the community. Hill and Hupe (2014) describe this process as an arena of interaction between policy structures and implementing agencies. Without the active role of extension workers, policies can stagnate at the administrative level and have no substantive impact. Thus, implementing the Islamic Community Guidance policy is a dynamic process of negotiation between formal regulations and real-world conditions. Successful implementation depends heavily on extension workers' ability to manage this complex context responsibly and respond appropriately.

### **Effectiveness of the Role of Extension Workers in Policy Implementation**

The effectiveness of implementing the Islamic Community Guidance policy largely depends on the quality of extension workers' role as implementers at the community level. Research findings indicate that active, competent, and adaptive extension workers are better able to ensure the policy is implemented effectively. Active extension workers are reflected in their guidance, activity monitoring, and support for communities that have difficulty understanding the guidance materials.

This approach aligns with the *bottom-up perspective* in policy implementation studies, which emphasizes the role of field actors in policy success (Matland, 1995). The discretion afforded to extension workers allows them to adapt policy implementation to community conditions, particularly when policies are general and lack flexibility. Lipsky (1980) described discretion as a rational response by frontline officials to resource limitations and the complexity of service demands.

The effectiveness of the extension worker's role is also closely related to professionalism, including communication skills and social sensitivity. Extension workers who build trust with the community tend to be more successful in conveying policy messages. Conversely, limited capacity among extension workers can reduce the effectiveness of policies, even when regulations are well designed (Hill & Hupe, 2014). Therefore, the effectiveness of implementing the Islamic Community Guidance policy results from the interaction between policy design and the capacity of implementing actors. Extension workers are the determining factor, bridging the policy's normative objectives with the realities of on-the-ground practice.

### **The Relationship between the Role of Extension Workers and the Success of Implementation**

The research results show a strong correlation between the quality of extension workers' roles and the successful implementation of the Islamic Community Guidance policy. Extension workers who can effectively carry out their communicative, educational, and supervisory roles directly contribute to increasing the program's effectiveness in the community. These findings confirm that public policy cannot be separated from the role of individual implementers at the grassroots level. Within the framework of street-level bureaucracy, policy success is measured by the tangible impact felt by the public, not simply by compliance with administrative procedures (Lipsky, 1980). Extension workers function as active mediators, bridging state interests and citizen needs. The daily interactions between extension workers and the public are the primary means by which policy meaning is formed (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

These findings suggest that the same policy can yield varying degrees of success depending on how extension workers implement it. Therefore, extension workers cannot be positioned as complementary factors, but rather as key actors in determining policy outcomes. This reinforces the argument that policy implementation is a social process influenced by power relations, interpretations, and discretionary practices.

### **Implications of Research Findings**

The findings of this study make an important contribution to the development of policy implementation theory, particularly within the framework of street-level bureaucracy. The results reinforce Lipsky's (1980) argument that public policy is ultimately not entirely determined by formal design, but rather reshaped through the discretionary practices of frontline officials. In the context of Islamic Community Guidance in Batang Regency, religious instructors play a key role in determining how policies are understood, implemented, and perceived by the community. This demonstrates that religious policy cannot be understood solely as a normative product of the state, but as a social practice that lives at the local level.

Policies need to be designed with the realities of street-level extension workers in mind, including resource limitations, workloads, and the community's social complexities. Thus, these findings challenge the *top-down approach* that remains dominant in religious policy formulation, which assumes that policies will be effective if regulations are designed in detail and uniformly. Thus, the implications of this research's findings emphasize that improvements in the implementation of Islamic Community Guidance policies must be undertaken holistically, integrating theoretical perspectives from street-level bureaucracy with a more contextual policy approach. Policies that are sensitive to field dynamics and supported by professional, empowered extension workers will be better able to bridge the gap between the state's normative goals and the community's actual needs.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the implementation of the Islamic Community Guidance policy in Batang Regency is a dynamic and contextual process, largely shaped by the role of

Islamic Religious Counselors as the implementing actors in the field. Islamic Religious Counselors not only implement policies administratively but also interpret and adapt them to the community's socio-religious conditions. In practice, Islamic Religious Counselors act as *street-level bureaucrats* with discretion in determining strategies, methods, and priorities for religious guidance.

The discretion exercised by Islamic Religious Instructors emerged in response to limited resources, administrative workloads, and the complex characteristics of the communities they serve. This discretion should not be understood as a deviation from policy, but rather as an adaptive mechanism to ensure effective implementation and community acceptance. These findings confirm the relevance of Michael Lipsky's *street-level bureaucracy theory* in analyzing religious policy at the local level.

Thus, the effectiveness of Islamic Community Guidance policies depends heavily on the capacity and role of Islamic Religious Counselors as field actors. This research emphasizes the importance of a policy implementation approach that considers the roles of actors, the social context, and discretionary practices in religious policy.

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