

Conference Paper

The Role of Fiqh Ikhtilaf in the Implementation of Congregational Prayers During COVID-19

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Abstract.

Fiqh Ikhtilaf is the diversity of views on fiqh as a result of the differences in the methodology of mujtahids in issuing laws that are understood from the Islamic nas. These differences are influenced by the background of thinking, the level of mastery of knowledge and the current needs. In this phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, society is faced with new issues that require a re-evaluation of Islamic law. The main objective of this concept paper is to explain the role of Fiqh Ikhtilaf in the implementation of SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) of Congregational Prayer in the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature review methodology was used to answer the research questions by analysing the debate on Fiqh Ikhtilaf and SOP of Congregational Prayers. The findings of the study showed that Fiqh Ikhtilaf facilitates the affairs of human life, becomes the basic reference for the Ulama in ijthad, opens the minds of the community towards the expanse of fiqh and helps realize Hifz Al-Din and Hifz Al-Nafs in Maqasid Shariah.

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Published: 13 September 2022

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICASI Conference Committee.

Keywords: Fiqh Ikhtilaf, Maqasid Sharia, COVID-19

1. introduction

The pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 has transformed people's daily lifestyles into new norms that leaves a huge impact in societies around the world. For a Muslim, one of the daily activities that is affected is the congregational Fardu Prayer. The strict setting of SOPs in the implementation of congregational prayers raises oddity and doubts towards the Muslim community. This concept paper explains the role of Fiqh Ikhtilaf in the SOP implementation of Congregational Prayers that was set to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

2. Definition of Fiqh Ikhtilaf

The term Fiqh Ikhtilaf is a combination of two terms that forms a specific concept, namely Ikhtilaf and Fiqh. Ikhtilaf is a word in Arabic taken from the root word kha la fa.

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The definition of Khalafa in terms of language is to place an object in place of another object in a location (Faris, 1979). For example, the reason the government is named as Khilafah is because the new leader replaces the position or post of the previous leader. According to Fairuzabadi, Ikhtilaf is an antonym to the term agree, in other words it means to disagree (Al-Fairuzabadi, 2005)

In terms of Terminology, Ikhtilaf is a debate between two or more parties with different views to determine the truth and avoid falsehood (Al-Jurjani, 1983). According to Al-'Asimi, ikhtilaf is a situation in which each mujtahid who has a different opinion adheres to their respective views and then debates and argues with each other to disclose the truth and remove what is wrong in an issue (Al-Asimi, 2009).

The word Fiqh in terms of language means a deep understanding while in terms, Fiqh has a very famous definition that is the knowledge of Islamic laws related to the act of mukallaf through the process of istinbad from the daleel which are juz'i (Al-Zarkasyi, 1994).

Fiqh Ikhtilaf is the phenomenon of the existence of various different views of fiqh among the mujtahids when extracting Islamic law from the *nas* by using different usuliyah methods (Arief Salleh Rosman, 2016). In simple language, Fiqh Ikhtilaf is a distinction of ijtehad issued by qualified scholars.

3. Fields of Fiqh Ikhtilaf

Islamic *fiqh* is based on the revelation of Allah, namely the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ which was revealed in Arabic. Phrases in Arabic sometimes have more than one meaning and contribute to differences of opinion. Even so, Fiqh Ikhtilaf only occurs in matters of ancillaries (*furu'*) and *ijtihadiyyah*, does not involve the basic matters of aqeedah and policy in the shariah. Therefore, Fiqh Ikhtilaf that occurs in ancillary matters are not dangerous because Islam has the basis of aqeedah and shariah which is able to strengthen the unity of Muslims (Az-Zuhaili, 1985).

In general, Fiqh Ikhtilaf can occur in two situations; 1) on issues with *Nas* and 2) issues without *Nas*.

3.1. Fiqh Ikhtilaf on issues with *Nas*

Since the revelation has ended and Rasulullah ﷺ has passed away, the ummah depended on the Ulama who are the successor of the Prophet in solving daily problems according to the Islamic daleel. But due to the factor of human weakness itself, there is a difference

of opinion as a result of their respective *ijtihad* in understanding the will of the *Nas*. *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* only occurs in *Nas* which is *Zanni* either in terms of *Thubut* or *Dilalah* or both.

The position of the *Qur'an* is final in terms of *Qat'ie Thubut*, i.e., the validity of the source of the *Qur'an* cannot be doubted of its truth. But there are some verses of the *Qur'an* that contain *Zanni* in terms of *Dilalah* that give rise to various views of scholars in understanding it. A famous example is the Quranic verse regarding menstruation in the word *Quru'*. The word *Quru'* in Arabic has two meanings, which are; sacred and menstruation. As a result, there are two *Ulama's* views on the issue of the *iddah* period of women who divorce before remarrying are; 1) three times holy period, or 2) three menstrual periods.

As for the Hadith of *Rasulullah* ﷺ the *Zanni* can occur in the aspect of *Thubut* or the aspect of *Dilalah* or both simultaneously. According to Imam *An-Nawawi*, the hadith that *Zanni* on *Thubut* is the hadith of *Ahaad* which does not meet the requirements of the hadith of *Mutawatir* because the hadith of *Mutawatir* status is considered as *Qat'ie Thubut* (*An-Nawawi*, 1985). The Companions of *Radiallahu 'anhum* once differed in understanding *Dilalah* the *Zanni* from the command of *Rasulullah* ﷺ who instructed them not to perform *Asr* prayers except in the villages of *Bani Quraizah* (*Al-Bukhari*, 2001)

3.2. *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* on issues without *Nas*

On the issue that there is no Islamic *nas*, namely the *Al-Quran* and the Hadith of *Rasulullah* ﷺ *Islam* opens space for scholars to make *ijtihad* based on the hadith of *Rasulullah* ﷺ when they wanted to send *Muaz bin Jabal* to *Yemen*.

He ﷺ asked *Muaz*: By what will you judge? *Muaz* replied: I will judge by the Book of Allah. *Rasulullah* ﷺ asked: If you do not find it in the Book of Allah? *Muaz* replied: Then with the *sunnah* of *Rasulullah* ﷺ (I judge) *Rasulullah* ﷺ asked again: If you do not find it in the *sunnah* of *Rasulullah* ﷺ and also not in the book of Allah? *Muaz* replied: I will make *ijtihad* with my point of view. So *Rasulullah* ﷺ said: Praise be to Allah who has given *tawfeeq* to the messenger of *Rasulullah* ﷺ (*Abu Daud*, 2009).

The *fiqh Ikhtilaf* on the matter of new *ijtihad* is due to the differences in the scholars' acceptance of arguments that are not agreed upon among the scholars such as *istihsan*, *istishab*, *urf*, *masalih mursalah*, *qaul sahabi*, *amal ahli madinah*, *syar'u man qablana* and so on (*Az-Zuhaili*, 1986). All these propositions are among the instruments used in *ijtihad*. Differences in *ijtihad* instruments contribute to *fiqh Ikhtilaf* in a problem (*Arief Salleh Rosman*, 2016).

4. Congregational Prayer

Prayer is the pillar of religion and is the second pillar of Islam. The obligation to perform obligatory prayers five times a day can be seen in many daleel, including the words of Allah SWT;

“Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon believers a decree of specified times” (al-Nisa: 103)

The Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ also explains about the obligation of obligatory prayers;

“From Ibn Abbas RA that the Prophet ﷺ had sent Muadz RA to Yemen, then he said to them “Invite them (the people of Yemen) to testify that there is no god but Allah and indeed I am the messenger of Allah, if they obey, then tell them Allah obligates them five prayers in a day.”

The obligation of obligatory prayers is accompanied by the encouragement to perform them in congregation. The great reward awaiting the performer proves that congregational prayer is one of the demands of the shara'. In a hadith Rasulullah ﷺ clearly states the advantages of praying in congregation;

“Prayer in congregation is better than praying alone by 27 times.” (riwayat by: Muslim, No. 1509)

Among the things which completes the congregational prayers is to bring the *Saf* closer. Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ

“Straighten your saf, because straightening the saf is included in the part of enforcing prayers (in congregation)”. (riwayat by: Bukhari, No. 690)

However, the authorities have set physical distancing as one of the conditions that must be complied with the Standard of Procedure (SOP) for suraus and mosques to curb the spread of COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, every individual who prays in suraus and mosques is unable to pray in close proximity during this time of pandemic.

4.1. SOP Implementation of Congregational Prayer

The government has announced the first Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18th 2020. Following the announcement, the Muzakarah of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia on March 20th 2020 agreed to suspend all mosque and surau activities including Friday prayers and congregational prayers throughout the period of MCO implementation.

As the daily case statistics gradually recovered, flexibility was given to mosque and surau activities with adherence to the SOP of Congregational Prayer. SOP Congregational prayer is the result of discussions with Muslim scholars, experts in related fields, especially the field of medicine (Ministry of Health Malaysia) and the government (National Security Council). The stipulation of SOP for the implementation of congregational prayers during the Pandemic is indeed different from the time before the COVID-19 epidemic outbreak. There are several rules that must be adhered if an individual wants to attend prayers at religion centres such as suraus and mosques.

TABLE 1

No.	Before COVID-19	During COVID-19
1	No need to bring your own prayer mat	Mandatory to bring your own prayer mat
2	No body temperature checks, sanitation processes and registration	Mandatory body temperature checks, sanitation process and registration
3	No need to perform ablution at home	Compulsory to perform ablution first at home
4	Cannot cover face & nose	Mandatory to wear a face mask
5	Children and women can attend congregational prayers at the mosque.	Children under the age of 15 & women are not allowed to attend the mosque
6	Close <i>saf</i> position.	Mandatory distance of 1 meter between congregations.
7	No limit to the number of congregations	Very limited number of congregations.
8	Able to shake hands	Unable to shake hands
9	Mosque is open indefinitely	Mosque is open for a limited time

The two main essences of the SOP ruling on congregational prayer are social distancing and cleanliness. Both of them established an arrangement between the *saf* that are at least 1 meter apart and the obligation to wear face masks while in the mosque area. This differs immensely from the norm that it brought doubts among the people to implement it. Thus, the contemporary ulama explained the arguments used to justify the implementation of SOP of congregational prayer.

4.2. Daleel for the SOP Implementation of Congregational Prayer

In dealing with COVID-19, two main aspects need to be considered namely the treatment and prevention. Overall, the SOP of Congregational Prayer is a preventive measure based on the evidence from the Qur'an, Hadith and Qawaid Fiqhiyah as follows:

4.2.1. Qur'an

“And do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining”.
(Al-Baqarah:195)

Negligence in complying with the SOP of Congregational Prayer can result in the risk of COVID- 19 infection. Since this pandemic has claimed millions of lives, it is our duty to preserve our lives from the elements capable of destroying them.

“Take your precautions”. (al-Nisa’:71)

The suggestion of this verse is evidenced by the guidance of Rasulullah ﷺ when He asked us to avoid sitting near a sloping wall, to take medicine when sick and wear the armour when fighting as a measure of preparedness and precaution.

4.2.2. Hadith

“Must not (do) harm and must not (do deeds) harm others”.

“Flee from leprosy as you flee from a lion”.

4.2.3. Qawaid Fiqhiyah

“Rejecting harm is more important than attracting good”

“The government’s decision on the people is based on benefits”.

Saf distancing in prayer is included in things that are makruh. However, it is not included in the things that can invalidate the prayer. Physical distancing carried out in mosques and suraus is included in Qadaya al- Mu’asirah (new problems) to ensure Hifz al-Nafs (life preservation) can be achieved during the spread of infectious diseases. This saf or physical distancing can be categorized as an emergency matter and the method has to be done to coincide with a few fiqh:

“Emergency matters require prohibited matters.”

“The law of makruh voids when there is a need”

4.3. Change justification in number of congregation limit

When referring to the preventive measures of COVID-19, it requires a systematic and monitored management as well as taking into account the current status of its infection. Furthermore, the emergence of various variants of COVID-19 makes its prevention

strategy more stringent. The determination of the number of congregations allowed to attend the mosque or surau is subject to the situation of COVID-19 outbreak in certain areas. This is in line with the method of *fiqh*:

“The state of emergency is determined according to its degree”.

When the number of positive COVID-19 cases recorded a decrease and the area changed from red zone to yellow zone or green zone, then on the advice of the Ministry of Health, permission to increase the number of congregations to the mosque is given in compliance with the SOP of congregational prayer.

The determination of limit on the number of congregations has caused dissatisfaction among the public, especially for the ‘hardcore’ mosque congregation so much so till unpleasant words arise. The Mufti of the Federal Territories in a discourse on Radio Jamek FM stated that the strict SOP ruling in mosques and suraus is a preventive effort to minimize the risk of infection among the congregation. Although some have compared the SOP of congregational prayers with social activities in other places, he replied that mosques are under their jurisdiction, hence they carry out the trust as best they can.

The change in the number of congregations was not decided at will without any study. Dr Wahbah Zuhaili in his book *Fiqh Al-Islami Wa Adillatuh* quotes the views of the four main sects (madhhab) of Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah in setting a minimum limit on the number of congregations to meet the legal requirements of Friday Prayers. There are 3 *Qaul* in this issue as below:

TABLE 2

No.	Sect (Madhhab)	Friday Prayer Minimum Limit
1	Hanafi	3 people besides the Imam
2	Maliki	12 people
3	Syafie & Hanbali	40 people

Apart from the 3 famous *Qauls* above, there are several other opinions of the Ulama that differ in the minimum limit of the Friday prayer congregation. Based on the book *Syarh Bulugh Al-Maram* states that there are twenty *Qaul* in this debate including the three *Qaul* above. There are views that state that Friday prayers alone are valid as normal Fardu prayers, there are those who state that the minimum number of congregations is 2 people, 3 people, 4 people, 10 people, 12 people and 20 people (Salim, no date).

In addition, in the phase of MCO 3.0, only those who have completed the 2-dose vaccine can attend the mosque according to the rules and rotation arranged by the

mosque committee. Relaxation is given to those who have received 1 dose of vaccine if there is a vacancy in the number of congregations allowed.

Each ruling that is enforced is in line with the application of *Siyasah Syar'iyah* in realizing *Maqasid Shariah* and rejecting harm after arbitrating *maslahat* and *mafsadah* has gone through three important processes of *ijtihad* namely *fiqh nas*, *fiqh waqi* and *fiqh tanzil* (Mahaiyadin and Samori, 2020).

5. The Role of Fiqh Ikhtilaf

The debate and justification for the SOP implementation of congregational prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* in matters of sharia living. The following are the four roles of *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* in the SOP implementation of congregational prayer:

5.1. Facilitate matters in unusual circumstances.

Allah SWT has made *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* among the learned scholars as a blessing to mankind. *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* are essential to resolve contemporary *fiqh* issues that arise at all times and places (Arief Salleh Rosman, 2016). This is because *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* results from differences in background and mastery of *mujtahids*, access to Islamic texts, *usuliyyah* methods practiced and the reality of current and local needs faced (Mohd. Saleh Bin Haji Ahmad, 2007; Al-Asimi, 2009). Not everyone experiences the same condition. The law of *fiqh* and the form of practice for a healthy person is not the same as for a patient. For example, view A is suitable to be practiced when healthy, however in certain circumstances such as chronic pain, view B may be more appropriate to be chosen.

Umar Abdul Aziz once quoted beautiful words about the differences of opinion among the companions of *Radiallahu 'anhum* as follows:

“I would not be happy if the Companions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not *ikhtilaf*, because if they did not *ikhtilaf*, there would be no *rukhsah*”.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government banned all social activities including mosque enliven activities during high positive cases. When positive cases recorded a decrease in infection rates, mosque enliven activities were allowed again with the implementation of strict SOPs referring to the recommendations of health experts.

The SOP of congregational prayers issued refers to the debate on *Fiqh Ikhtilaf* among *ulama'* around the world. Among those referred to is *Dar Al-Ifta' Misiriyyah*. Through the

official website of Dar Al-Ifta 'Misriyyah, the law of *Taba'ud As-Sufuf* (*saf* distancing) must be based on the arguments mentioned earlier (Dar Al-Ifta' Misriyyah, 2020).

Thus, with the need to distance the *saf* on the side of the ulama', the government requires that the *saf* of the congregation be spaced at least 1 meter to avoid further serious harm. With the existence of Fiqh Ikhtilaf, the Muslim community is able to perform congregational prayers in the mosque which is a form of convenience to the people.

5.2. To be the basic reference of the Ulama' in ijtiḥad.

Knowledge of Fiqh Ikhtilaf is important for the Ulama'. Imam Qatadah says that anyone who does not know the Ikhtilaf Ulama' their nose is yet able to whiff the scent of Fiqh (Al-Baghdadi, 2000). Moreover, 'Ato' Ibn Rabah mentioned: It is not proper for a person to give a fatwa to a human being until he knows the ikhtilaf of the scholars' (Al-Namri, 1994).

The COVID-19 plague has created a growing landscape of ijtiḥad around the world and opened up new topics of debate (Mohd Farid Ravi Abdullah and Musa, 2020). Regarding the SOP of congregational prayer, contemporary Ulama have had various opinions of Ulama before issuing specific fatwas to curb the spread of COVID-19 epidemic. For example, Dar Al-Ifta 'Misriyyah explains in detail in the official website by quoting the views of scholars from each sect of jurisprudence that are authoritative in several issues of fatwas issued accurately as well as the conditions of ijtiḥad (Dar Al-Ifta' Misriyyah, 2020).

In addition, Rabitah Al-Alam Al-Islami has organized Fiqh Al-Tawari' seminar on 18 and 19th of July 2020 to discuss important resolutions in facing the pandemic. Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah explained that Fiqh Tawari' in short is Fiqh Taisir wa Takhfif (simplify and ease) which is inferred from the Islamic text and the understanding of ulama' based on the current reality of COVID-19 (Abdullah bin Bayyah, 2020).

5.3. Opening the minds of the community to the expanse of fiqh.

Adherence to a particular *fiqh* of a sect without understanding the basic knowledge of the practice of the sect itself can give rise to fanaticism towards the sect held especially when encountering things that are different from their usual. Fanaticism is an extreme attitude in choosing a stance, rejecting different views and not inclined to accept change (Arief Salleh Rosman, 2016; Ahmad et al., 2017).

Asfa Widiyanto in her study stated that the existence of conservative groups has rejected the Indonesian government's directive in the SOP implementation of congregational prayer. They claim Allah is more important to be feared than COVID-19 and the mosque is a place protected by Allah compared to other places. Refusal to comply with the SOP of congregational prayer due to its fanatical nature can result in great and real hazard. Significant because the impact can be seen on the emergence of new clusters such as the Tabligh cluster and can affect other sectors such as education, economy, politics and religion. To solve this understanding, new spirituality and a culture of knowledge must be nurtured in society (Widiyanto, 2020).

Among the understandings that need to be clarified is the importance of Fiqh Ikhtilaf in human life. Ikhtilaf Ulama is a blessing for the ummah while their agreement is an argument. This understanding is ultimately able to make society more open and willing to accept change. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi states that studying the differences of scholars' views can build an open nature in the souls of those who understand it (Al-Qaradawi, 2001).

5.4. Helping to fulfil Hifz Al-Din and Hifz Al-Nafs and in Maqasid Sharia.

Among the specific features that make the Islamic Sharia always relevant in every time and place are the characteristics of *waqi'iyyah* (realistic) and the characteristics of *murunah* (flexible). According to Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, celebrating an emergency is one of the factors of flexibility in Islamic Sharia (Al-Qaradawi, 2002). COVID-19 was a state of emergency until it was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization as it spread around the world and has claimed millions of human lives to date.

This emergency situation opens up space for *ijtihad* for the scholars in an effort to preserve Hifz Al-Nafs and Hifz Al-Din which are *daruriyyat* which is the basic matter in Maqasid Sharia. Dar Ifta' Misriyyah states that taking care of the health of individual is a priority because with it, human beings are able to carry out the commands of Allah SWT. Thus, with the preservation of Hifz Al-Nafs only it will realize Hifz Al-Din in accordance with the constraints during the pandemic. Steps to achieve these two basics require a solution in terms of treatment and prevention (Dar Al-Ifta' Misriyyah, 2020).

The scholars of *fiqh* try to research various views or Fiqh Ikhtilaf of the Islamic Scholars and their experience starting from the time of the Companions of Prophet SAW until the present to produce new *ijtihad*. For example, the Grand Mosque was once closed in 1814 due to the Cholera outbreak which killed 8000 Hajj pilgrims (Zaman, 2020). The

arguments of the dissenting scholars of the past, their experiences and the decisions of the government at that time were a valuable source of reference in the effort to deal with the COVID-19 epidemic.

Fiqh Al-Tawari' seminar held at Rabitah Alam Islami to discuss the issue of COVID-19 has achieved success that Fiqh Al-Tawari' is a joint venture of 3 main groups of *fiqh* scholars, experts in related fields and the government (Mohd Farid Ravi Abdullah and Musa, 2020). The integration between scientific studies by medical experts, the *ijtihad* of world scholars and the government (*siyasah syar'iah*) has issued a guideline on COVID-19 and law enforcement. Among them are the SOP of congregational prayers issued in order to preserve *Hifz Al-Nafs* and *Hifz Al-Din* in *Maqasid Sharia*.

6. Conclusion

The firmness of, *fiqh ikhtilaf* is not a calamity for human beings. It is a manifestation of *Maqasid al-Syariah* through the door of *ijtihad*. We need to realize that *fiqh ikhtilaf* has occurred since the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW with the companions, the time of *tabiin* and *tabi al-tabiin*. From the era of the *salaf* to the era of the *khalaf* and continues to the present. It signifies the existence of wisdom and flexibility in religious affairs. It also signifies that the scope of Islam is becoming expanse. *Fiqh ikhtilaf* opens space to the potential of the intellect to think which illustrates the flexibility of mercy in Islam. For example, Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz was happy to see the companions who disagreed in the matter of *fiqh*. If there is a misunderstanding, then there is an open door of friendship or tolerance to respect the opinions of others. It is a blessing for us to be open-minded. *Fiqh ikhtilaf* should be thought in good intentions and celebrated in harmony. It is not a calamity that causes division and destruction. Generally, COVID-19 and in particular SOP in congregational prayer is a situation that urges us to return to *Fiqh Ikhtilaf*. It is an opportunity for the public to get acquainted with the richness of the Treasures of *Fiqh* inherited from the scholars of the time.

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