

**FORTRESSES OF IDENTITY UNDER
THE STATE'S SHADOW:
A Comparative Study of Madrasas in Preserving Islam in
Indonesia and The Republic of Tatarstan, Russia**

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This study explores how Islamic educational institutions preserve identity under the shadow of the modern state by comparing madrasas in Indonesia and Tatarstan (Russia). Both operate under vastly different political skies, Indonesia as a Muslim-majority democracy with a state-recognized Islamic education system, and Tatarstan as a Muslim republic within a secular federation still marked by Soviet legacies. Yet both share a common calling: to defend faith, culture, and community within the constraints of power. Using comparative historical and policy analysis, the research draws from national laws, ministerial decrees, official curricula, and scholarly literature to uncover how madrasas negotiate survival. Findings reveal two distinct paradigms of resilience. In Indonesia, the madrasa functions as a fortress of integration: protected and regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it balances Islamic authenticity with national pluralism through a tripartite curriculum and institutional alignment. In Tatarstan, by contrast, the madrasa emerges as a fortress of cultural survival: rebuilt after Soviet repression, it preserves Islam by fusing faith with Tatar ethnic identity and aligning with the state's notion of "traditional

Islam.” Despite their differences, both models show that the madrasa is not a relic but a living institution, adaptive, political, and deeply rooted in the moral imagination of its people. The study concludes that the preservation of Islamic identity is less about isolation than negotiation: a dynamic process shaped by how institutions read, respond to, and sometimes repurpose the state’s shadow.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Madrasa, Indonesia, Tatarstan, Identity Preservation, State and Religion, Comparative Policy, Cultural Resilience.

Across the Muslim world, the madrasa has always been more than a school. It is a memory, a sanctuary, and, when history turns harsh, a fortress. For over a millennium, madrasas have stood as guardians of Islamic knowledge and community identity, preserving religious scholarship during times of empire, colonization, and secular modernization (Gabdrakhmanova, 2025). To reduce them to institutions of rote learning would miss their deeper meaning: they are vessels of cultural continuity, transmitting not only theology and law but also a sense of belonging, dignity, and collective purpose. In regions where Muslim identity has been challenged, whether by colonialism, communism, or the tides of globalization, the madrasa has often become the last refuge of a people’s moral language (Garaev, 2025).

This dual role, educational and civilizational, makes the madrasa a fascinating subject of study. It teaches not only the *‘ulūm al-dīn* (religious sciences) but also how to live as a Muslim within changing political orders. In times of stability, it nurtures scholars; in times of repression, it nurtures resilience (Toulouze, 2024). Its classrooms, sometimes modest, sometimes monumental, have served as sites where identity is negotiated as much as knowledge is transmitted. The madrasa, then, is not a relic of medieval Islam but an

institution that continues to absorb and reinterpret modernity in its own vernacular.

Yet no madrasa exists in a vacuum. Every one of them lives under the shadow of the state, sometimes sheltered by it, sometimes suffocated. This brings us to the central analytical idea of this study: the “state’s shadow.” The state, whether in Muslim-majority or minority contexts, shapes the landscape in which madrasas define themselves. Its shadow is not always coercive; sometimes it protects, sometimes it disciplines, often it simply defines the boundaries of what is possible (Musaev, 2024). In Indonesia, that shadow takes the form of bureaucratic incorporation, madrasas are recognized, funded, and standardized by the state through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). In Tatarstan, within the Russian Federation, the shadow is different: more watchful, more restrictive, a secular framework inherited from Soviet atheism but now reframed as a policy of “traditional Islam” (Bayamonte et al., 2025).

Understanding this shadow is essential because it reveals the paradox of madrasa survival. To endure, madrasas must negotiate power: they must appear loyal enough to avoid repression, yet autonomous enough to preserve their distinct religious mission (Mukhametzaripov & Gafiyatullina, 2023). This negotiation takes many forms, curricular compromise, rhetorical adaptation, even quiet resistance. Some fortresses survive by integrating into the system; others by hiding within culture, language, or ethnicity. What unites them is the shared condition of operating under the gaze of a state that both fears and needs them.

To explore these dynamics, this study turns to two sharply contrasting contexts: Indonesia and the Republic of Tatarstan in Russia (Almazova & Shamsutov, 2020). The comparison may seem unlikely at first glance, a Southeast Asian democracy with the world’s largest Muslim population, and a small republic in the Russian Federation with a Muslim

minority, but it is precisely this asymmetry that makes the parallel illuminating (Suleymanova, 2015).

In Indonesia, madrasas are woven into the national fabric. They are legally recognized, state-funded, and part of a long institutional dialogue between Islam and the nation-state. The system's pluralism, embodied by organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, has allowed Islamic education to flourish without falling into open conflict with secular governance (Gainullin et al., 2023). The Ministry of Religious Affairs manages more than 50,000 madrasas, overseeing their curricula through a delicate balance between religious and national education standards. Within this framework, madrasas act as fortresses not of isolation, but of integration, preserving Islamic identity while aligning with Indonesia's inclusive ideology, *Pancasila*.

Tatarstan, on the other hand, offers a strikingly different story, a tale of destruction and resurrection (Ruslanov, 2023). Under Soviet rule, nearly all madrasas in the region were closed, their teachers imprisoned or silenced (Galimov, 2023). Religion was driven underground, surviving only through private memory and domestic teaching circles. Yet with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tatarstan experienced a remarkable Islamic revival. Madrasas reopened, often in modest settings, their founders inspired by both historical memory and renewed national pride (Ivanova et al., 2022). Here, Islamic education became deeply entwined with ethnic identity, the Tatar language, culture, and Islam fused into one narrative of cultural survival. But this revival unfolded under the shadow of the Russian secular state, which, wary of extremism, tightly controls religious expression through federal laws and local muftiates (Kemper, 2022).

In short, Indonesia and Tatarstan present two versions of the same struggle: how to preserve Islamic identity in the presence, and under the pressure, of state power (Kravtsova, 2022). One operates in a context of official pluralism; the

other in a context of cautious tolerance . Indonesia's madrasas negotiate with a friendly but bureaucratic state; Tatarstan's with a secular but surveilling one. Each reveals a different architecture of the "fortress", one built through integration, the other through cultural endurance (Giniyatullina, 2022).

By placing these two cases in conversation, this study aims not to idealize one or lament the other, but to understand how Islamic education adapts to different forms of power. The madrasa, in both places, continues to be a living testament to resilience, a reminder that identity, when nurtured in faith and community, can survive even the longest shadow (Garipova, 2022).

Every comparative inquiry begins with a simple curiosity that grows complicated the moment it meets reality. The madrasa, as both school and symbol, provokes that kind of curiosity (Sitnikov et al., 2022). It survives in different worlds, one where Islam is the majority's moral anchor, another where it is a cultural memory under watchful eyes (Sitnikov et al., 2021). To make sense of how these institutions endure, adapt, or quietly resist, we must ask questions that are not only institutional, but existential (Benussi, 2021b).

The first and most central question is this: How do madrasas in Indonesia and Tatarstan conceptualize and operationalize their role in "preserving Islamic identity"? In Indonesia, that identity is plural, intertwined with the national project of *Pancasila*, the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), and the social dynamism of Muslim civil society. Indonesian madrasas do not stand outside the state, they stand within it, claiming the right to define Islamic education while accepting the legitimacy of state oversight. But what does "preserving identity" mean in such a context? Is it the transmission of doctrine, the cultivation of ethics, or simply ensuring that religion remains visible in the nation's educational landscape? In Tatarstan, the meaning shifts dramatically. Here, preserving Islamic identity is closer to

cultural survival, to remember, to teach, to exist without erasure. After decades of Soviet repression, the madrasa became both a symbol and a strategy of revival: to be Tatar was to be Muslim, and to be Muslim was to protect a heritage the state once tried to extinguish.

The second question asks: How do state policies in each context enable or constrain these identity-preserving roles? In Indonesia, the state's shadow is long but not cold. Through MORA's regulatory framework, madrasas receive funding, accreditation, and legitimacy, yet they also absorb the pressures of bureaucratic rationality, standardized curricula, measurable outcomes, national exams. The very system that secures their survival also risks diluting their distinctiveness. In Tatarstan, by contrast, the Russian state's secular architecture places clear boundaries on religious expression. Federal education laws, such as the 2012 "Yarovaya Law," define religion as a private affair, permitting Islamic education only under strict supervision. Here, the madrasa's survival depends on delicate negotiation, aligning with "traditional Islam," cooperating with the state-approved Muftiate, and framing faith as cultural rather than political.

Finally, the third question brings both cases together: What strategies of negotiation, adaptation, or resistance do madrasas in each region employ under the "state's shadow"? Do they conform, subvert, or transform? Do they hide their religious intensity behind administrative compliance, or use the language of the state to advance their own spiritual projects? In Indonesia, adaptation often takes the form of strategic alignment, embracing integration to secure autonomy. In Tatarstan, survival means subtlety, embedding religion within ethnicity, framing it as heritage rather than ideology. Together, these questions aim to uncover not just policies, but *postures*, the lived ways in which Islamic institutions endure within structures of power.

Literature Review

At first glance, the metaphor of a *fortress* might suggest stillness, thick walls, guarded gates, a posture of resistance. But in the realm of Islamic education, especially under the shifting pressures of modern states, the fortress lives. It breathes, adapts, negotiates. To understand madrasas in Indonesia and Tatarstan, we must imagine them not as relics guarding a frozen tradition, but as dynamic fortresses, institutions that evolve to defend identity while adjusting their strategies to changing political and cultural winds.

This section builds a theoretical framework for such an understanding. It does so by weaving together three lines of thought: first, the sociology of identity preservation; second, the state–society perspective on power and regulation; and third, the reinterpretation of the “fortress” metaphor as a form of adaptive resilience. Each allows us to move beyond the simple binaries that often dominate discussions of madrasas, piety versus progress, autonomy versus control, faith versus modernity, and instead see them as sites of negotiation within ongoing historical struggles (Mas’ud, 2002).

Identity Preservation in Minority and Majority Contexts

Identity, sociologically speaking, is not a possession but a process, a continuous effort to define “who we are” in relation to “who governs.” For religious institutions, this process is intensified. In majority-Muslim societies, Islamic education often carries the dual responsibility of cultivating faith and serving the state’s moral legitimacy. In minority contexts, it functions more defensively, as a vehicle of cultural survival. Both situations demand resilience, but of different kinds.

In Indonesia, where Islam shapes the moral fabric of society yet coexists with a secular, pluralist state, the madrasa plays a balancing act (Munawwaroh, 2001). It anchors Islamic identity while aligning itself with national education goals,

adapting religious curricula to coexist with civic values. Sociologically, this reflects what Pierre Bourdieu might call a *habitus of moderation* (Robbins, 2019), an institutional disposition formed through long engagement with pluralism.

In Tatarstan, the story reverses. Here, madrasas exist as minority institutions within a non-Muslim state still haunted by the memory of Soviet atheism. Their mission is not integration but endurance. They preserve Islam as both religion and ethnicity, a fusion of faith and nationhood. This resonates with Anthony Giddens' idea of *ontological security*: the need for continuity in self-identity amidst disorienting social change (Giddens, 1979). In this sense, Tatar madrasas do not merely transmit religious knowledge; they offer existential reassurance, a way of remembering what it means to be Muslim and Tatar at once.

The State as a Field of Power: Recognition, Regulation, and Resistance

The state's role in this story cannot be simplified into friend or foe. It is a *field of power*, a shifting terrain where cooperation and coercion coexist. Joel Migdal's *state-in-society* approach reminds us that states are not monolithic; they are networks of actors and institutions engaged in constant negotiation with social forces (Migdal, 2018). Madrasas, in this framework, are not passive recipients of policy but active participants in shaping it, even when their agency appears constrained.

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) exemplifies this ambivalence. It integrates madrasas into the national system, providing funding, curriculum, and legitimacy, yet through the same instruments, it disciplines them. Standardized curricula, accreditation procedures, and teacher certification schemes both empower and domesticate religious education. The madrasa's identity work, therefore,

unfolds within the paradox of recognition: to be acknowledged by the state is to risk losing autonomy.

In Tatarstan, the dynamic is sharper, more precarious. The Russian Federation's secular-legal framework places religion under tight surveillance. Islamic education is mediated through *muftiates*, semi-official religious bodies that act as intermediaries between the state and the faithful. The Tatarstan Muftiate, while granting madrasas some operational freedom, also enforces state-approved boundaries of "traditional Islam." Here, regulation doubles as containment. Yet even within such boundaries, madrasas find small spaces for agency, by emphasizing civic loyalty, linguistic heritage, or cultural education. Their resilience lies in subtlety, not confrontation.

The "Fortress" Metaphor: From Static Defense to Dynamic Adaptation

The term "fortress" can mislead if taken literally. It evokes medieval imagery, moats, towers, seclusion. But in this study, the fortress is reimagined as a living metaphor: a structure of protection that learns to move. A fortress can expand, camouflage, or even open its gates strategically when the environment demands. The madrasa's walls, in this sense, are intellectual and cultural, the boundaries of faith, language, and pedagogy that protect identity while allowing selective permeability.

In Indonesia, the fortress integrates by design. It survives not by isolation but by participation in the state's educational ecosystem. Its defensive strength lies in its adaptability, the ability to speak both the language of Islam and that of civic nationalism. In Tatarstan, the fortress is cultural. Its defense is quieter, based on the fusion of Islam with Tatar ethnicity and memory. It deflects state pressure not by confrontation but by reframing Islamic education as

cultural heritage, a contribution to social stability rather than a challenge to authority.

Thus, in both contexts, the fortress metaphor captures the tension between defense and adaptation. The madrasa does not simply endure the state's shadow; it learns to live within it, sometimes using that shadow as shelter, sometimes stretching beyond it.

In short, this theoretical framework treats the madrasa as a fortress in negotiation, a site where identity is neither surrendered nor sealed off, but continuously redefined through interaction with political power. It is a fortress built less of stone than of memory, curriculum, and faith. And it is precisely in its capacity to adapt, without dissolving, that the madrasa's endurance can be understood as one of the most remarkable forms of Islamic resilience in the modern world.

Method

Methodology, in a study like this, is never just a matter of procedure; it is a stance toward complexity. We are not measuring efficiency or testing hypotheses. We are tracing the survival of meaning, the subtle ways institutions hold on to faith and identity under the long reach of the state. That requires methods flexible enough to listen to both history and policy, to the letter of the law and the silences between its lines.

This research, therefore, employs a comparative historical and policy analysis. The comparative lens allows us to see how two very different contexts, Indonesia and Tatarstan, negotiate similar dilemmas under dissimilar political skies. History provides depth; policy provides structure. Together they form a dialogue between time and power, between what madrasas have been and what they are becoming.

Comparative study here means more than juxtaposition. It means tracing *connections of difference*: how distinct political systems and social histories create alternative vocabularies of survival. Indonesia, with its democratic pluralism and deep Islamic heritage, and Tatarstan, with its post-Soviet Islamic revival under Russian secularism, serve as ideal contrasts. The historical method lets us recover the layered experiences, colonial legacies, ideological regimes, and reformist movements, that still echo in current madrasa policies.

Policy analysis, in turn, translates those histories into institutional realities. It looks at how ideas about religion, education, and citizenship are encoded in state documents, laws, decrees, curricula, and how madrasas respond through adaptation or quiet resistance. The method assumes that policy is both an instrument of control and a mirror of anxiety: states legislate not only to govern but to manage what they fear might escape governance, in this case, autonomous religious identity.

The study draws on a mix of primary and secondary materials. For Indonesia, primary data include the *National Education System Law (Sisdiknas)*, ministerial decrees from the *Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA)*, and key curriculum frameworks defining the madrasa's triple orientation: *religious, national, and local*. Documents from the *Directorate of Islamic Education* provide insight into how the state envisions "integration", a blending of Islamic and civic education under one institutional umbrella.

For Tatarstan, the analysis relies on Russian federal laws on education and religion (notably the *1992 Law on Freedom of Conscience* and its later amendments), the *2007 Unified State Exam* policy, and the *2012 Yarovaya Law* on extremism and religious activity. These are supplemented by decrees of the *Republic of Tatarstan* related to national-cultural development and religious affairs, as well as statements and reports issued by the *Muftiate of Tatarstan*.

Across both contexts, secondary sources, academic works, historical monographs, policy reports, and ethnographic studies, serve to contextualize official narratives. They help decode how state language, often bureaucratic and dry, conceals tensions between ideology and identity. Scholarly works on Southeast Asian Islamic education, post-Soviet religious revival, and theories of state-society relations form the interpretive scaffolding.

The study employs thematic analysis within a critical comparative policy framework. Documents and narratives are read as cultural texts, repositories of meaning, symbols, and anxieties. Thematic coding focuses on three recurring motifs: (1) how the state defines the legitimate space for religion in education, (2) how madrasas articulate their mission in response, and (3) how both sides narrate the idea of identity, whether as integration, tolerance, or national security.

By examining these themes, we can trace the grammar of negotiation. The analysis looks not only for what policies claim, but for what they avoid saying: the quiet absences that hint at deeper conflicts. In Indonesia, this might be the tension between bureaucratic rationality and spiritual authenticity. In Tatarstan, it might appear in the careful distinction between “traditional” and “nontraditional” Islam, a linguistic shield for state control.

The method also remains attentive to discourse, the language of legitimacy that shapes how both the state and madrasas present themselves to the public. By reading policy through the lens of social meaning, we uncover how power is naturalized, how compliance is framed as partnership, and how resistance hides behind politeness.

In essence, this methodology is a hermeneutic of endurance. It treats documents as testimonies of survival, laws as negotiations between belief and authority. The goal is not to expose hypocrisy or celebrate defiance, but to understand

how Islamic education endures within, and sometimes because of, the very systems that seek to contain it.

Results and Discussion

The Historical Legacy: From Independent Pesantren to State-Recognized Madrasah

Indonesia's madrasa system presents one of the most striking examples of how Islamic education can survive, even thrive, not by resisting the state but by learning to inhabit its architecture. It is a story of adaptation, sometimes uneasy, sometimes inspired, between faith and bureaucracy, tradition and reform. To understand Indonesian madrasas is to understand a long process of negotiation between the *ummah* and the *negara*, between the moral authority of Islam and the administrative power of the modern nation-state.

Before the Republic of Indonesia ever existed, Islamic learning already had deep roots in the archipelago. The *pesantren*, often founded around charismatic *kyai* and rural mosques, were autonomous micro-worlds of moral education, teaching Qur'an, *fiqh*, and adab through oral transmission and close mentorship. Colonial authorities alternated between tolerance and suspicion, seeing these institutions as both spiritual schools and political seeds of anti-colonial consciousness.

When independence came in 1945, the new state faced a delicate choice: how to modernize education without alienating the Muslim majority. The compromise was institutional. The government recognized the *madrasah*, essentially reformed *pesantren* that had adopted modern classrooms and partial secular subjects, as legitimate parts of the national education system (Chonitsa et al., 2022). This gradual recognition culminated in the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), an unprecedented body

designed to bridge the sacred and the civic. MORA's mandate included overseeing Islamic education, managing religious courts, and shaping national morality. In doing so, it brought Islamic schooling into the bureaucratic fold without erasing its soul.

MORA's shadow stretches across every madrasa in the country. It funds teacher salaries, approves textbooks, accredits curricula, and by doing so, defines what counts as "Islamic education." But the relationship is not purely one of control. It is also a system of protection. Madrasas under MORA gain legitimacy, financial stability, and access to national examinations. Yet this inclusion comes at a price: compliance with national standards and participation in the state's project of pluralistic nation-building.

The modern madrasa curriculum is famously tripartite, a blend of *religious*, *national*, and *local* components. The religious segment covers *Aqidah Akhlak*, *Fiqh*, *Qur'an-Hadith*, and *SKI* (Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam), forming the moral foundation of the institution (Bruinessen, 1994). The national segment mirrors public schools, mathematics, science, languages, civics, aligning madrasas with state education benchmarks. The local component reflects community heritage and regional identity, allowing some flexibility and cultural rootedness. This "triple curriculum" ensures that students emerge both pious and employable, capable of navigating mosques and ministries alike.

Still, integration is a delicate art. State accreditation demands quantifiable quality, test results, teacher certifications, standardized syllabi. Madrasas, traditionally defined by moral formation rather than metrics, must now speak the language of outcomes and competencies. Some have adapted with remarkable creativity; others struggle to reconcile spiritual depth with bureaucratic formality. The shadow of MORA, while benevolent, can feel heavy.

Despite bureaucratic pressures, Indonesian madrasas have developed subtle and resilient strategies to preserve their Islamic ethos.

1. The Curriculum as a Bulwark

Even within the standardized system, Islamic subjects remain the fortress walls protecting moral identity. Teachers often infuse national subjects with ethical and theological reflection: mathematics as evidence of divine order, biology as a study of God's signs in creation. The curriculum becomes not merely a schedule of lessons but a moral narrative, ensuring that secular knowledge enters through the gate of faith.

2. Institutional Identity

Madrasas cultivate a distinctive ethos that sets them apart from public schools. Morning prayers, Qur'an recitations, modest uniforms, and Arabic calligraphy on classroom walls create an atmosphere of sacred discipline. These embodied practices transmit identity more powerfully than any policy. Many madrasas also maintain ties with *pesantren* networks or Islamic organizations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, reinforcing spiritual legitimacy within state-aligned structures.

3. Negotiation Tactics

Madrasas have learned to speak the language of the state to safeguard their autonomy. By emphasizing their contribution to national unity, moderation (*wasatiyyah*), and civic education, they present themselves as partners rather than subjects. This rhetorical adaptation has been strategic: it secures funding and legal protection while leaving room for religious authenticity. Some madrasas even use state audits as opportunities to reaffirm their community role, showcasing social programs, charity work, and environmental projects as expressions of Islamic responsibility.

In this sense, Indonesian madrasas represent fortresses of integration. They defend Islam not by retreating behind walls but by expanding those walls to include the nation itself. Their strength lies in adaptability, the ability to internalize the state's modernizing impulses without losing the moral grammar of faith. The madrasa thus stands as a quiet but enduring symbol of how Islamic identity can survive, and even flourish, under the shadow of a pluralist state.

Tatarstan: Fortresses of Cultural Survival

Tatarstan's madrasas tell a different kind of story, one marked by silence, loss, and astonishing rebirth. If Indonesia's madrasas are fortresses that learned to live *with* the state, those in Tatarstan are fortresses that survived *despite* it (Brileva, 2021). They embody a form of faith that has endured decades of repression, erasure, and cautious revival under an uneasy secular order (Benussi, 2021a). To study them is to trace how religion, culture, and memory intertwine in the shadow of a state that alternates between suspicion and strategic tolerance.

Tatar Islam has long been defined by education. From the 18th to early 20th century, the Volga-Ural region was home to some of the most vibrant Muslim reformist thought in Eurasia (Ryzhova, 2020). The *Jadid* movement, founded by intellectuals like Ismail Gasprinski, reimagined Islamic learning through the lens of modernity. Madrasas introduced history, geography, and natural sciences alongside Qur'anic studies, using new pedagogical methods (*usul-i jadid*, "the new method"). For the Tatars, education was not only about religious piety but about national awakening (Benussi, 2020a).

Then came the Soviet era, which sought to erase that awakening entirely. In the 1930s, most madrasas were shuttered, their teachers executed or exiled, their libraries burned or scattered. Religious learning went underground; Qur'an recitation moved into private homes, whispered

rather than proclaimed. By the 1970s, Tatar Islam survived only as a cultural echo, woven into folk songs, moral sayings, and language (Akhmetkarimov, 2020).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 changed everything. In the atmosphere of post-Soviet openness, hundreds of mosques and dozens of madrasas reopened almost overnight (Benussi, 2020b). Some were rebuilt from ruins; others were improvised in basements or village houses. This revival was both educational and existential: it was about reclaiming memory, rediscovering God, and restoring a sense of being Muslim after seventy years of silence. In this rebirth, the madrasa once again became a *fortress*, not of resistance to modernization, but of survival through it (Malashenko, 2020).

Yet even in this revival, the madrasa's freedom is bounded by the shadow of the Russian state. The post-Soviet constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but Russian secularism is a managed one: it recognizes certain faiths as "traditional" while tightly regulating their institutions. Islam, especially in regions like Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, is officially tolerated but closely monitored (Müller, 2019).

Two developments exemplify this surveillance. The first is the 2007 Unified State Exam, which effectively standardized secondary education across Russia, making it difficult for religious schools to operate independently (Karimova, 2019). The second is the 2012 "Yarovaya Law", framed as anti-extremism legislation, which restricts unregistered religious education and subjects all religious instruction to state oversight. Both laws signal the state's determination to keep religion within politically safe boundaries (Yusupova, 2018).

In this environment, the Muftiate of Tatarstan, the state-approved Islamic administrative body, acts as both mediator and gatekeeper (Gibadullin & Nurullina, 2018). It represents the Muslim community to the authorities, supervises madrasa curricula, and issues certifications. This intermediary

structure ensures survival but limits autonomy. While madrasas can teach Qur'an, fiqh, and Arabic, their activities must align with the Muftiate's definition of "traditional Islam", a domesticated, apolitical, ethnically Tatar Islam that supports civic harmony and rejects global Islamist narratives (Benussi, 2018).

The state's "shadow," then, is neither outright persecution nor genuine partnership; it is a vigilant watchfulness that demands compliance under the guise of cooperation. Madrasas exist within this shadow by mastering the art of appearing harmless. Under such conditions, Tatar madrasas have crafted distinctive strategies for preserving Islamic identity, strategies that blend faith, culture, and diplomacy.

1. Ethno-Religious Fusion

For Tatars, Islam and ethnicity are inseparable. To teach religion is to teach language, literature, and memory. Many madrasas teach Tatar alongside Arabic, emphasizing Islam as part of Tatar national identity rather than as a transnational ideology (Schmoller, 2018). This fusion serves both to protect the community from assimilation into Russian secular culture and to present Islam as an indigenous, "safe" faith aligned with patriotism. In practice, this means students memorize both Qur'anic verses and the poetry of Gabdulla Tukay, the national poet, learning to see themselves as heirs of a faith that is also a culture.

2. The Jadidist Legacy

Echoes of the old reformers still guide Tatar religious educators. The *Jadidist* principle of *ilm* (knowledge) as both spiritual and civilizational empowerment underpins modern madrasa pedagogy (Lyausheva et al., 2018). Teachers encourage reasoning, literacy, and cultural pride as defenses against both radicalism and assimilation. In a sense, this is an

updated Jadidism, modernity on cautious terms. The madrasa becomes a site of ethical modernity, not a retreat from it.

3. Negotiation through Legitimacy

Perhaps the most subtle survival strategy is rhetorical. Tatar madrasas frame Islamic education not as resistance but as contribution, to civic stability, moral order, and interethnic peace. By adopting the language of “traditional Islam,” they reassure the state while quietly maintaining religious continuity (Bustanov, 2017). The state sees moderation; the community sees preservation. It is a delicate performance, one that ensures the fortress remains standing, even if its banners must sometimes be muted.

Tatarstan’s madrasas, then, are fortresses of cultural survival. Their walls are built not of defiance but of memory, language, and cautious diplomacy. They survive through ambiguity, faith presented as culture, tradition recast as civic virtue. And within that ambiguity lies their genius (Kovalskaya, 2017). For every generation that enters their classrooms, even under watchful eyes, learns a quiet truth: that identity, once recovered, can no longer be fully erased.

Comparative Analysis – The Anatomy of Two Fortresses

Comparing Indonesia and Tatarstan is like watching two fortresses built from different materials yet standing against the same storm. Both were erected to guard the soul of a community, both learned to survive beneath the long shadow of the state, and both continue to negotiate what it means to be Muslim in a world defined by politics as much as by piety. Yet their blueprints could not be more distinct.

1. The Nature of the “Shadow”

In Indonesia, the state’s shadow is *pervasive but incorporating*. It stretches across the entire educational landscape, but rather than seeking to extinguish religion, it

enfolds it. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) functions as both the guardian and the governor of Islamic education, providing financial support, recognition, and institutional integration (Hazyimara, 2024). Madrasas live under regulation, yes, but also under protection. The state's gaze here is administrative, not adversarial; it aims to manage diversity, not suppress it. This creates a form of soft discipline: madrasas internalize the language of civic harmony and pluralism, translating Islamic ethics into bureaucratic fluency.

In Tatarstan, the shadow is *vigilant and restrictive*. It is the shadow of a secular federation still marked by the memory of atheism and the fear of political Islam. The Russian state does not embrace religion, it permits it, cautiously. Madrasas must operate within clearly demarcated limits defined by federal law and mediated through the Muftiate. The watchword is "traditional Islam," a euphemism for loyalty: religious education that supports the state's vision of national stability. The shadow here is not a canopy but a ceiling, protective from above, but always pressing down.

2. Defensive Architectures

The structure of defense in each context follows the contour of the shadow above it. Indonesia's madrasas form an integrated fortress. Their defense lies in openness, the deliberate choice to merge Islamic and secular curricula, to blend piety with citizenship. This architecture is built on negotiation rather than separation. By embracing state recognition, madrasas ensure survival and legitimacy while still anchoring themselves in the sacred sciences. Integration becomes both shield and strategy: it deflects accusations of insularity while embedding Islamic moral reasoning within national education. The risk, of course, is dilution, when identity preservation becomes so bureaucratically normalized that it loses its prophetic edge. Yet it is precisely this integrationist architecture that allows Islam to remain visible and influential within Indonesia's plural democracy.

Tatarstan's madrasas, conversely, are cultural citadels. Their walls are thick with memory, built from the twin stones of ethnicity and faith. Rather than seeking integration into a secular system that mistrusts religion, they embed Islam within Tatar identity. Religion here hides in culture, safeguarded by language and heritage. By fusing faith with national pride, the madrasas avoid confrontation with the state while ensuring that Islamic consciousness continues to live in the hearts of Tatars. Their curriculum, modest and cautious, shelters a subtle resistance: the insistence that to be Tatar is already to be Muslim.

3. Agents and Actors

Each fortress has its own guardians. In Indonesia, the agents of resilience are diverse and institutionalized. MORA bureaucrats draft policies that translate Islamic ideals into state language; mass organizations like *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* mediate between local communities and the bureaucracy; individual madrasa teachers and principals become cultural brokers, fluent in both the Qur'an and government circulars. Power is dispersed, negotiated through networks rather than decrees. The result is a dynamic ecosystem where identity preservation happens through collaboration and careful balance.

In Tatarstan, the guardians are fewer but more symbolic. The Muftiate of Tatarstan stands at the crossroads between religious aspiration and political constraint, constantly negotiating the permissible boundaries of faith (Almazova, 2017). Tatar intellectuals, historians, and poets also play a crucial role, reviving the *Jadidist* legacy and infusing cultural production with religious meaning. Their power is moral rather than institutional; their influence circulates through language, memory, and the quiet dignity of cultural continuity.

4. A Tale of Two Fortresses

At heart, both systems demonstrate that survival under power is an art of translation. Indonesia translates Islamic authenticity into the idiom of pluralism; Tatarstan translates it into the idiom of heritage. Both strategies carry trade-offs. Integration risks conformity; cultural fusion risks containment. Yet both succeed, in their own ways, in keeping the flame of Islamic identity alive within the state's shadow.

The contrast between them offers a broader insight: there is no single model for how religion endures within modernity's bureaucratic empires. Each madrasa, each fortress, learns to read the light and the limits of its shadow. Some open their gates and invite the state inside; others keep their lamps burning quietly behind thick cultural walls. Both remind us that faith, when embodied in education, does not vanish, it adapts, translating survival into pedagogy, and pedagogy into hope.

Conclusion

In the end, both Indonesia and Tatarstan reveal that the story of the madrasa is not simply about resistance or compliance. It is about endurance, that quiet, creative endurance that allows faith to survive the cold gaze of the state. Whether the state is accommodating or suspicious, pluralist or authoritarian, the madrasa finds ways to inhabit the space it is given and, somehow, to expand it from within.

This study has traced two different ways of building a fortress under the shadow of power. In Indonesia, the madrasa has evolved into a *fortress of integration*. It thrives by becoming part of the national system, translating Islamic ethics into the vocabulary of civic education. Supported and regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it has learned to wear the garments of the state without losing its spiritual

pulse. Its strength lies in participation, in turning regulation into legitimacy and pluralism into a form of religious resilience.

In Tatarstan, the madrasa has become a *fortress of cultural survival*. It does not integrate so much as it endures. Emerging from the ruins of Soviet atheism, it has rebuilt itself as a keeper of collective memory, not only of Islam, but of what it means to be Tatar. Here, identity preservation depends less on institutional recognition than on cultural fusion: Islam as language, Islam as history, Islam as the quiet continuity of peoplehood. Its defense is subtle, hidden in poetry and tradition, sustained by the careful art of seeming harmless in a watchful state. Both models succeed, though differently. The Indonesian madrasa survives by embracing the bureaucratic embrace of pluralism; the Tatar madrasa survives by embodying the quiet dignity of a faith reborn in exile.

The comparison illuminates a central truth: *identity preservation is never static*. It is not a single defensive act, but a spectrum of responses to political opportunity and constraint. The “fortress,” far from being a sealed structure, is an adaptive system, its walls shifting with each regime, each policy, each historical turn. In theoretical terms, this study situates madrasas within the state-in-society framework, seeing them not as passive recipients of power but as actors that reshape power’s boundaries through everyday negotiation.

Indonesia’s model reveals how religion can inhabit the state without being domesticated by it, a form of *bureaucratic faith*, where regulation becomes a medium of moral influence. Tatarstan’s model, meanwhile, exposes how minority Muslim communities reframe religious survival through cultural nationalism, transforming piety into heritage, and heritage into protection.

Each fortress faces its own storms. For Indonesia, the challenge is *depth*. As the madrasa becomes more professionalized and standardized, it risks losing the very moral intimacy that once defined it. How long can it sustain its spiritual authenticity within an increasingly data-driven, globalized education market? The task ahead is to ensure that integration remains epistemological, not merely administrative. For Tatarstan, the challenge is *space*. The Russian state's tightening control over civil society and religious life leaves little room for independent initiative. As federal oversight expands, madrasas must continue their delicate dance of visibility, neither too quiet to disappear nor too bold to provoke suspicion. Their survival may depend on a renewed commitment to the *Jadidist* vision: education as enlightenment, Islam as culture, piety as public virtue.

This study has looked at madrasas through the lens of policy and history, but deeper insight could come from the ground. Future research might turn to micro-level ethnography, observing classrooms, teacher-student relations, and the lived pedagogies of identity that unfold in everyday practice. How do students internalize the language of moderation in Indonesia? How do young Tatars experience the dual consciousness of being Muslim and Russian citizens? Another path lies in tracing madrasa graduates, following how they carry their hybrid identities into the world. Do they become teachers, bureaucrats, cultural mediators? Or do they, too, build new fortresses in other domains of social life?

Ultimately, both Indonesia and Tatarstan teach us that the madrasa endures not because it resists change, but because it changes intelligently. It bends, absorbs, reframes. It learns to make use of the very shadow that might have destroyed it. Under different suns and systems, it continues to whisper the same lesson: that education, when rooted in faith and memory, can outlast empire, ideology, and even the silence of repression. The fortress, then, is not a monument of stone but

a living architecture of faith, rebuilt in every generation, under every shadow, by those who still believe that knowledge and devotion can coexist.

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