

Criticism of the Politicization of Religion: Islam as a Source of Ethics, Not a Tool of Power

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ABSTRACT

The politicization of religion, particularly Islam, has become an important focus in contemporary academic and political discourse. In many Muslim-majority countries, religion is no longer viewed solely as a moral guide and social value, but is increasingly used for electoral interests, policy manipulation, and legitimization of power. The politicization of religion has become a prominent phenomenon in social and political activities. The politicization of religion is prevalent in Indonesia, resulting in religious values often being used as a tool of power. This has triggered conflict and caused deviations from the essence of Islamic teachings. This background forms the basis for research on the theme of the phenomenon of Islamic politics. This study aims to critique the politicization of religion in practice by emphasizing Islam as a source of ethics, not as a tool of power. The method used in this study is a literature review of several relevant previous scientific journals on the politicization of religion and its political ethics. The ethical dimension of Islam offers a framework for promoting inclusive governance and combating authoritarianism. This article highlights how the politicization of religion can destroy social harmony and weaken the legitimacy of religious institutions and democratic structures. Therefore, a reorientation is needed to restore the moral power of Islam in civil life, while maintaining political autonomy from sectarian and populist influences. This study concludes with a call to build an ethical Islamic discourse that encourages critical engagement, democratic participation, and the protection of human dignity.

Keywords: Criticism, Politicization of Religion, Islam, Ethics, Political Power, Islamic Thought.

INTRODUCTION

In world political history, religion has often been used as a moral and ethical guide believed to be capable of driving social change and the struggle for justice for society. Religion is not only a source of spiritual values, but also serves as a foundation of legitimacy in various political processes and decision-making. In the context of Islam, the relationship between religion and politics is very close and complementary,

so that the two cannot be completely separated. Islam without politics has the potential to pose a risk to the freedom and independence of Muslims in practicing Sharia law in a holistic and contextual manner (Setyawan et al., 2024; Nisya & Nasrung, 2024)

Take a good example, without effective political involvement, Muslims may face restrictions in practicing their religion collectively in public spaces, such as bans on congregational prayers on religious holidays. In addition, the emergence of debates or rejections of certain religious practices, such as the use of loudspeakers for the call to prayer, shows how important politics is in guaranteeing religious freedom while maintaining social harmony. Therefore, the integration of Islam and politics is not only necessary as a form of expression of faith, but also as a means to create a just social order that respects the religious rights of all citizens (Ernawati et al., 2024).

This will be regulated by the government through political policies by establishing rules on how to worship in public spaces. These aspirations of the people are obtained through political channels, both through organizations and representatives of the people. This policy can reflect the state's attitude towards religious freedom and pluralism. Likewise, politics without Islam will only produce people who are crazy for power, position, and other worldly pleasures. Without Islam, society, especially the elite, will justify all means to achieve personal interests and ignore the fate of the lower-middle class (Malik & Rahim, 2023; Nisya & Nasrung, 2024).

This is certainly not in line with the philosophical understanding of politics, in which politics has a very fundamental dual role and function. On the one hand, politics is required to do good to fellow human beings by upholding the values of justice, virtue, and respect for individual dignity. On the other hand, state policies must be able to consider and accommodate the broader common good, thereby producing fair and sustainable governance for the entire community without exception (Ernawati et al., 2024; Setyawan et al., 2024). Thus, politics is not merely an arena for power struggles or the fulfillment of the interests of certain groups, but rather a collective effort to realize the common good and broader social welfare.

The politicization of religion is a phenomenon that occurs not only in the Western world, but also in Muslim-majority countries. In many countries, especially those with large Muslim populations, religion has become a tool used to achieve certain

political goals (Pradana et al., 2022; Widiatmaka et al., 2024). This is very evident in the use of religious symbols in political campaigns, policy-making, and in the dynamics of inter-state relations. Islam, as a religion with comprehensive teachings on morality, ethics, and social justice, is often narrowly understood when used in a political context (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021).

In many cases, Islam is no longer understood as a moral guide that guides public life, but is often used as a tool to achieve political goals. This shift in function has sparked various responses and debates among academics, political practitioners, and the wider community (Akmaliah, 2020; Ningrum, 2024). Islam, with its teachings rich in values of justice, social responsibility, and ethics of communal life, has a strong binding force in building a sense of togetherness. It is precisely because of this social power that religion is often exploited by certain groups as an instrument to rally support and strengthen their political position (Hasan, n.d.; Pradana et al., 2022).

However, when religion is used strategically for the sake of power alone, the noble values it embodies are often pushed aside and neglected. Islam's function as a driver of public ethics and social cohesion is transformed into a tool for creating social divisions that widen the gap and differences between groups in society (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021; Ridwan & Pababbari, 2025). Instead of strengthening social relations, the politicization of religion actually increases the potential for conflict, especially when religion is used as a basis to justify exclusive claims to truth and to reject diversity of views and differences that exist in a pluralistic society. This condition not only threatens social cohesion, but also undermines the foundations of democracy, which demands respect for plurality and open dialogue (Pradana et al., 2022).

This makes it a political commodity that is exploited by certain groups. Religious identity is often used as a political force and a tool of legitimacy for the interests of the elite (Widiatmaka et al., 2024). Ideally, sensitive issues that have the potential to threaten plurality should not be used as political tools. Unfortunately, in political reality, this hope often clashes with the ambition for power, so that all means are pursued, including those that contradict the principle of diversity (Akmaliah, 2020; Supriyadi, 2014). Islam is essentially a religion that teaches universal human values, such as

justice, brotherhood, compassion, and social responsibility. However, in practice, these teachings are often manipulated by certain parties for political interests.

Interesting to note that, the use of religious symbols in the context of elections or political campaigns, as well as claims that a policy, candidate, or political party exclusively represents the voice of Muslims, often mislead Muslims' understanding of the true teachings of their religion (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021; Ningrum, 2024). Such practices not only obscure the original meaning and purpose of religion as a moral and spiritual guide, but also exploit religious sentiment for political gain. In many cases, this politicization of religion has the potential to cause tension and conflict, because religion, which should be a unifying force for the people and a source of universal values, is instead used as a tool to divide society based on certain political interests (Pradana et al., 2022; Ridwan & Pababbari, 2025).

The phenomenon of the politicization of religion is not new in human history. From the era of the caliphate to the modern era, the relationship between religion and politics has undergone complex and winding dynamics. During the caliphate, for example, religion was indeed the main foundation of government, but it was not uncommon for political disputes and intrigues to arise in the name of religion in order to maintain power. The politicization of religion was often used as a strategy to gain mass support, which ultimately disrupted political stability and social harmony (Pradana et al. (2022). Therefore, it is important for society to have a critical understanding so as not to be easily trapped in narratives that obscure the noble values of religion for the sake of short-term political interests.

Islam in its early days developed in a highly political context. However, there is a fundamental difference between the use of religion for political interests at that time and what we see today (Suhadi, 2019). In the early period of Islam, political and religious leadership were inseparable, as political leaders were considered bearers of revelation and determiners of religious laws. However, as Islamic civilization developed, there were efforts to separate political and religious authority, although in practice this line of separation was often blurred.

One of the most striking illustrations of the dangers of politicizing religion can be seen in the political dynamics that have occurred in a number of Middle Eastern

countries in the aftermath of the Arab Spring Revolution. In countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, the wave of political reform that was originally aimed at building a more open democratic order was instead exploited by a number of religious-based political parties, particularly those claiming to represent Islam, to gain power through the electoral process. They won elections by promoting populist promises oriented towards the implementation of Islamic law in the government system (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021; Pradana et al., 2022).

In practice, these parties often failed to truly realize the values of social justice that are at the core of Islamic teachings. Instead, they became trapped in the strategic use of religious symbols to consolidate power and strengthen the political dominance of their groups. As a result, not only has there been public disappointment, but also increased social tension and horizontal conflict caused by religious-based political exclusivism (Suhadi, 2019; Widiatmaka et al., 2024). Furthermore, such practices contribute to the oppression of minority groups, both structurally and culturally, and narrow the space for freedom of religion and expression for individuals who do not align with the mainstream religious politics in power (Akmaliah, 2020; Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021). This phenomenon shows that when religion is politicized without strong ethical controls, what emerges is not a religious and just government, but a regime that uses religious legitimacy to perpetuate power.

Religion, especially Islam, is often exploited by the political elite, highlighting how religion, especially Islam, is often used by the political elite as a tool for power that causes divisions in society and triggers conflicts between groups (Pradana et al., 2022) including politicization, betrays the core values of religion, which should be the basis of ethics and moral foundations. Given this, criticism of the misuse of religion in politics is essential.

Politics is not solely aimed at power, but also at achieving general welfare. Upon closer observation, politics and ethics have an inseparable relationship. The two are like two sides that need each other. When one floats, the other sinks. Therefore, politics in Islam is very important in reminding us of our freedom to practice Islamic law, which is embodied by politics. Political thought in Islam has developed in line with the times. However, religion is also often politicized and used as a tool to gain or maintain power.

In Indonesia, as a country with a Muslim majority, the phenomenon of the politicization of Islam has become a particular focus. When religious values are used not to build public ethics and social justice as taught by religion, but for electoral interests, there is a deviation from the essence of Islamic teachings themselves. Islam, as a religion rich in ethical and spiritual values, should be the moral foundation of national and state life, not an exclusive and discriminatory tool of political legitimization. The politicization of religion not only has the potential to divide society, but also undermines universal values in Islam such as justice, compassion, and brotherhood. The use of religion in politics can cause a major distortion in the understanding of religious teachings themselves (Nisya & Nasrung, 2024).

In the context of Islamic politics, religion is often manipulated to justify policies that are not in line with Islamic teachings on justice and humanity. This politicization of religion can cause tension between different groups in society and lead to radicalization, as seen in several extremist groups that use Islam to achieve their political goals (Pradana et al., 2022).

Given the prevalence of the politicization of religion in various social and political contexts, it is crucial for us to reexamine and explore in depth the basic principles contained in Islamic teachings. This step is necessary so that religion, especially Islam, is not continuously misused as a tool of power by interested parties. Islam, as a religion rich in universal moral values such as justice, compassion, equality, and social responsibility, has great potential to be a source of inspiration in building a more just, peaceful, and civilized society. However, this noble potential can only be realized if Muslims constantly refer back to the essence of religious teachings, rather than getting caught up in superficial religious symbolism or rhetoric. As the next generation, we have a historical and moral responsibility to protect the purity of Islamic teachings from misuse that could damage the dignity of the religion itself. This can be done by promoting public ethics in social and political life, as well as developing a critical attitude towards various forms of religious manipulation aimed at electoral interests or power alone. Returning to the roots of Islamic teachings means fostering a collective awareness to make religion a guideline for life that leads to the common good, not an instrument of domination or exclusion. Thus, rejecting the politicization of religion is not a rejection of the role of religion itself, but rather an effort to honor religion so that

it remains within the corridor of ethics, spirituality, and social responsibility, which are its true essence.

On the other hand, the globalization of information and social media has also accelerated the spread of the politicization of religion. Digital platforms have become an effective medium for spreading political messages cloaked in religion, often without adequate academic or theological clarification. Such messages tend to be populist, easily accepted, but dangerous because they can trigger social segregation based on religious identity. This poses a serious challenge to democracy and national life, because when religion is framed exclusively and used to delegitimize other groups, what happens is polarization, not integration (Akmaliah, 2020).

We must also recognize that this phenomenon cannot be separated from the historical context of colonialism and modernization. In many Muslim countries, the colonial legacy shaped a secular political system that was later considered incompatible with the religious identity of the people. The reaction to this system often takes the form of efforts to return religion to the public sphere, sometimes not through academic or cultural channels, but directly into the realm of power. The danger reaches its peak when religion is claimed as the only legitimacy for power, without any reflective process on the essence of the spiritual values it contains (Wahid & Zulkifli, 2021).

This kind of process actually pits the spiritual goals of religion against pragmatic political calculations. In Indonesia, this challenge is even more complex because of the high level of religious and ethnic diversity. In a multicultural democracy like Indonesia, the politicization of religion carries a high risk of dividing the nation. When one religious group feels it has more right to power or feels it is most correct in determining the direction of public policy, the social unity that should be protected is threatened. Therefore, the role of progressive Islamic thinkers is very important in offering an alternative interpretation of the relationship between religion and politics, not as a tool for mobilizing power, but as a moral inspiration for the creation of a fair, equal, and civilized social system (Suhadi, 2019).

Islam should not be treated solely as a tool for mobilizing the masses or as a strategic means of achieving short-term political goals (Supriyadi, 2014). Exploiting religion for the sake of power tends to reduce Islamic teachings to mere political

symbols that can be exploited, thereby obscuring the substantial values contained within them. In fact, Islam has great potential as a source of public ethics capable of fostering collective awareness of the importance of social justice, respect for human rights, and the development of a peaceful and inclusive society.

In this context, it is crucial to critically examine and evaluate various practices of politicizing religion that are developing in the public sphere. Such practices not only risk tarnishing the sanctity of religion itself, but can also cause social tension, weaken social cohesion, and create polarization that jeopardizes the democratic process. Therefore, restoring Islam's position as a source of ethics is a crucial step that must be taken by all elements of society. Islam must be positioned as a moral and spiritual guide that directs political and social behavior towards greater justice, not as an instrument of power used to legitimize the interests of certain groups.

Political ethics does not only revolve around the behavior of individual politicians, but also encompasses practices that take place in social institutions, legal systems, communities, and social, political, and economic structures. The behavior of politicians is only one dimension of the overall framework of political ethics. In this context, good intentions in political practice require the support of fair institutions. Good will serves to deepen the meaning of moral responsibility, while good institutions in the form of laws, norms, customs, and social institutions are tasked with organizing and channeling this responsibility systematically (Ernawati et al., 2024).

Upon further examination, political ethics does not have the authority to establish individual moral systems, specific moral attitudes, or norms that form the basis of the state. Political ethics is also not developed based on utopian or purely rational moral principles. Instead, political ethics is based on empirical reality, particularly that which has been analyzed through a political science approach. In this case, political ethics plays a role in providing normative justification for concepts that have been formulated by political science (Malik & Rahim, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Amidst increasingly complex modern political life, we often see how religion, especially Islam, is used as a tool to gain public sympathy and even to legitimize power. Religion, which should be a moral guide and source of spiritual inspiration, has instead

been reduced to a campaign slogan, a tool for stigmatization, and an instrument of power. The politicization of religion is not merely a political strategy, but a social phenomenon that carries great risk, especially when religion is used to divide society into "right" and "wrong" groups. In this context, the politicization of religion can be understood through the lens of identity politicization, where religious symbols are used manipulatively to build exclusive political loyalty, often at the expense of social tolerance and diversity (Suhadi, 2019).

However, if we look back at the essence of Islam as a religion that grew from reason and conscience, we will find that Islam is not just a set of rules or formal symbols, but an ethical path that guides humans to live justly, honestly, and lovingly. Islam can serve as a source of inclusive public morality, with universal values such as social justice, equality, and concern for vulnerable groups. In this understanding, Islam does not stop at the rhetoric of politicians, but lives in concrete actions that reflect social responsibility and ethical transformation (Wahid and Zulkifli, 2021).

The tendency to politicize religion also indicates a degradation of the substantial spirituality of Islam. The politicization of religion in Indonesia exacerbates social fragmentation, reduces trust in political institutions, and diverts attention from substantive issues (Ridwan & Pababbari, 2025). In many cases, religion is used as a tool to strengthen positions within the power structure, rather than as a liberating force that glorifies human values. In this context, it is important to promote an approach that places Islam as an ethical inspiration in democracy, a religion that does not impose itself as a state ideology, but is present as a driving force for a just, open, and peaceful civilization.

Thus, criticism of the politicization of religion is not actually a rejection of the presence of religion in the public sphere, but rather a profound call to restore religion to its most noble and true position as a light of morality that guides every human behavior towards a life full of goodness and justice. Islam, as a source of ethics and morality, teaches noble values such as empathy in viewing fellow human beings, perseverance in building social justice, and mutual respect in maintaining a public sphere that is inclusive and friendly to diversity of beliefs and views on life.

The existence of religion in the public sphere should ideally be a foundation that strengthens social solidarity and fosters harmony among citizens, not a political tool that exacerbates divisions. Therefore, placing religion in its proper place in the life of the state and society is a crucial step in creating a healthy public space, where spiritual and humanitarian values can flourish together for the welfare and peace of all people.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative methods with a library research approach and critical discourse analysis (CDA). This method was chosen because it is in line with the main objective of the study, which is to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning and dynamics of the politicization of religion in Indonesia and to explore how

Islam can be used as a source of ethics in public life. The literature study was conducted by collecting, reading, and analyzing relevant academic literature, such as scientific journal articles, books by contemporary Islamic thinkers, and research reports discussing the relationship between religion and politics. Literature studies in a qualitative approach allow researchers to explore the construction of meaning from various documents and understand the narratives and ideologies inherent in the text (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2016).

Data analysis was conducted using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach developed by Fairclough and expanded (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). CDA was used to examine how the discourse of the politicization of religion is formed, disseminated, and used in the Indonesian socio-political context.

This approach helps researchers uncover the dimensions of power in the use of religious symbols and narratives by political actors, as well as highlighting how religion, especially Islam, is often reduced to a tool for legitimizing power. The analysis was conducted on three main layers, namely text, discursive practice, and social practice. All three are critically examined to see the relationship between language, ideology, and power structures in religious political narratives.

The research context focuses on post-reform Indonesia, especially since the strengthening of the use of Islamic symbols in the political process, such as in election campaigns, the discourse on Sharia law, and the mobilization of religious identity in the public sphere. To enrich the perspective, the study also involves comparisons with

international case studies, particularly in countries with Muslim majorities such as Turkey and Pakistan.

The validity of the data in this study is obtained through the method of literature triangulation, namely by matching and comparing findings from various credible academic sources, as well as approaching them reflectively and critically. This approach allows the research to not only be descriptive in describing existing phenomena, but also to provide in-depth analysis and constructive criticism of how religion often loses its ethical dimension when it is overly politicized. With literature triangulation, the research results become stronger and more reliable because they are based on data consistency from various perspectives and a solid theoretical foundation.

This research aims to encourage a more ethical and inclusive understanding of the role of Islam in the public sphere. In the spirit of progressive Islamic thought, as raised by Wahid and Zulkifli as well as Suhadi, Islam should not be positioned as a tool of exclusivist power, but rather as a source of public morality that promotes social justice, tolerance, and humanity. Thus, this methodology is expected to bridge the understanding between religion as a value and religion as a political discourse, as well as open up space to reposition Islam in its noble function as a light of ethics, not a tool of power domination.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the most obvious forms of the politicization of religion is the emergence of religious-based political parties that make Islam not only a source of inspiration, but also the dominant ideology in the legal and governmental systems. In many Muslim countries, these parties do not merely fight for Islamic values in an ethical sense, but seek to institutionalize religious doctrines into the structure of the state, which often results in discrimination against minority groups and ignores the diversity of interpretations within Islam itself. In this case, the politicization of religion blurs the line between the private sphere (faith) and the public sphere (power), thereby narrowing the space for democracy and religious freedom.

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, presents a highly relevant case study. In the last two decades, the use of Islamic symbols in politics has increased dramatically, especially during election periods. The most

striking example is the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, where religious issues became an explosive campaign tool for the (No Sharia in Jakarta) campaign. In this context, Islamic values have been reduced to political slogans used to stir up religious sentiment among the masses, rather than to broaden ethical awareness in the life of the nation and state. The narrative of a "Muslim leader" has become the absolute standard in choosing leaders, overshadowing the capacity, track record, and integrity of candidates.

However, it is important to note that the politicization of religion does not always come from institutional actors such as political parties or the state. In many cases, social groups, including mass organizations and religious leaders, play a role in spreading religious discourse that is exclusive, intolerant, and political. They often mobilize Islamic identity as a means of consolidating influence, even at the expense of fundamental Islamic values such as rahmatan lil 'alamin, social justice, and brotherhood among humankind (Velida, 2024). This is where the importance of criticizing the way religion is practiced in the public sphere lies, whether it truly reflects the spiritual and ethical values of Islam, or whether it is merely a vehicle for power.

The politicization of religion also shows how Islam is reduced to a cultural identity or political symbol, without deep reflection on its spiritual and transformational meaning. In this context, religion becomes part of an exclusive and defensive political identity project, rather than a source of inspiration for building an inclusive and just social order (Tusadia & Khoiri, 2023). Religious identity is used as a tool to distinguish "us" from "them," thereby creating sharp social polarization in society. From this explanation, it is clear that the main problem is not the presence of Islam in the public sphere, but the way Islam is presented.

Islam as a source of ethics should encourage clean, inclusive, and responsible political participation, not merely serve as empty rhetoric to gain support. Therefore, criticism of the politicization of religion is important to maintain the purity of Islam's message and prevent social damage caused by the manipulation of religion. This effort is not only the duty of academics and activists, but also the moral responsibility of every Muslim to place their religion in proportion to society. The dynamics of the politicization of Islam do not only appear at the national level, but also on a global

scale. The discourse of "political Islam" has developed in many countries as a response to modernization, colonialism, and the failure of state institutions to provide social justice.

The politicization of religion also has serious implications that affect education and the wider public sphere. In some regions, religious education curricula are often reduced to a series of dogmatic, textual, and rigid memorizations, without being balanced by the development of critical awareness, contextual understanding, or the instilling of deep social ethics. As a result, Islamic messages that are rich in wisdom and universal values are simplified into rigid and inflexible normative prohibitions, which ultimately distance students from reflective and open-minded thinking.

In the long term, this type of education has the potential to produce a young generation that views Islam solely as a closed and exclusive identity, rather than as a way of life that inspires moral responsibility, social concern, and empathy for fellow human beings. In fact, Islam actually teaches values of compassion, justice, and openness that should be able to encourage the development of a harmonious and inclusive society. Therefore, it is very important for the education system and public spaces to prioritize a holistic and progressive approach in conveying religious teachings, so as not to get caught up in narrow politicization that actually undermines the main objectives of religious education itself.

Religion is actually a source of moral and spiritual values that strengthen the foundation of public ethics in the life of the nation and state. As a foundation of ethics, religion plays a role in providing inspiration to develop policies that are just, inclusive, and in the common interest, not as a rhetorical machine used to justify repressive, discriminatory, or exclusive policies that actually harm certain groups in society. Such instrumental use of religion not only damages the image of religion itself, but also threatens social harmony and the integrity of democracy.

In the context of a country that upholds the principles of freedom of religion and equal rights, the government must be able to maintain a balanced distance from the influence and dominance of certain religious groups. The state has a responsibility to create a neutral and fair public space for all citizens regardless of their religious, ethnic, or other social backgrounds. Thus, social justice can be upheld and all citizens feel

valued and have equal rights in social and state life. The state's neutral and inclusive attitude towards religion is also a key prerequisite for peace, political stability, and sustainable development.

The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election is a clear example of how religion can be used as a tool for political mobilization. The campaign against the non-Muslim incumbent, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, politicized verses from the Qur'an for electoral gain. The massive mass movement known as Aksi 212 shows how religion can easily be used as a tool for political provocation when linked to issues of identity (Ali, 2020). Ironically, this movement, which claimed to uphold Islamic morality, actually resulted in prolonged social tension, with the growth of intolerance and discrimination against minorities.

Similar things often happen in a number of regional head elections in various regions, where religious rhetoric is often not used as a means to improve the quality of governance, but rather as a political tool to weaken and bring down political opponents. This practice ultimately erodes the spirit of deliberative democracy, which should be the foundation for inclusive and rational political decision-making. When a person's faith or religious identity is used as the sole measure of political eligibility, it indirectly reduces the political rights of citizens, which should be guaranteed equally without discrimination.

In this kind of mindset, fundamental values such as honesty, integrity, competence, and the professional abilities of a prospective leader are marginalized and overshadowed by religious symbols that tend to be superficial and easily manipulated. This condition not only harms the democratic process itself, but also has the potential to cause social injustice, where citizens who may not have access to or influence over these religious symbols become alienated from their political rights. Thus, this unhealthy politicization of religion poses a major challenge to the development of a just and inclusive democracy in Indonesia.

Indonesia also has no shortage of progressive Islamic intellectual traditions. The Islamic thought of the archipelago developed by Nahdlatul Ulama and the inclusive Islam of Muhammadiyah have become important bastions in maintaining social harmony. Both organizations essentially affirm the importance of separating political

authority from religious authority, while still making Islam a source of ethical inspiration in building public civility. However, the biggest challenge is how to make these views mainstream, rather than just an alternative discourse that is drowned out by simplistic religious populism.

Restoring Islam as a source of public ethics does not mean removing it entirely from the political sphere, but rather placing religion in a proportional and balanced position. Islam, with its rich moral values and teachings, can serve as an inspiration and ethical foundation in formulating public policies that are fair, oriented towards common welfare, and respectful of human dignity. However, the presence of Islamic values in the public sphere must be realized through open and democratic mechanisms, namely through constructive dialogue, rational argumentation, and sincere respect for the diversity of views and beliefs that exist in society.

In a democratic society, truth should not be imposed in the name of God or a particular religious authority, but should be formulated and agreed upon through a deliberative process involving the active participation of all elements of society. This process not only upholds the principle of freedom of expression, but also ensures social accountability for every decision made. Thus, Islam as a source of public ethics can contribute to building inclusive, transparent, and just governance, without losing the noble values of religion that form the basis of the morality of the people.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that resistance to the politicization of religion is not a rejection of religion itself, but rather an effort to honor and preserve the noble values contained within it. When Islam, or any religion, is used as a tool to justify acts of violence, discrimination, or corrupt practices in politics, then indirectly the spiritual and ethical values that are at the core of these teachings are damaged and lose their true meaning (Setyawan et al, 2024). Therefore, criticism of the politicization of Islam is part of an effort to maintain the sanctity of religion so that it remains on the right moral path and free from worldly interests that can obscure its messages of goodness.

As emphasized in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 177, true virtue is not merely a symbolic display or outward ritual, but includes honesty in intentions and actions, compassion for others, and a firm commitment to social justice. By understanding and practicing these

values, religion can become a source of moral strength that unites society and encourages the creation of a harmonious, just, and civilized way of life.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the politicization of religion, especially Islam, has blurred the line between religious moral values and political interests. Islam, which should be a source of public ethics and spiritual guidance for society, is often reduced to an exclusive and manipulative tool of political legitimization. This phenomenon is evident in various contexts, from political campaigns and public policy to media narratives that target the religious emotions of the public. When religious symbols and teachings are used to strengthen power, what happens is not a strengthening of values, but a narrowing of the meaning of religion itself.

Islam should not be used as a tool for political mobilization or electoral interests, but should be placed as an ethical foundation that encourages the creation of an inclusive, just, and dignified social and political life. The politicization of religion not only endangers plurality and social harmony, but also damages the integrity of religious institutions and degrades the quality of democracy itself. The disproportionate use of religion in a political context can encourage social polarization, strengthen identity fanaticism, and open the door to discriminatory and intolerant practices.

This study also highlights the importance of reintroducing Islam as a moral force that is integrated with the principles of social justice, empathy, and responsibility towards others. Criticism of the politicization of religion does not mean rejecting the role of religion in the public sphere, but rather an effort to remind us that religion must not lose its ethical dimension. The presence of religion in state affairs must be realized through inclusive dialogue, respect for diversity, and the awareness that virtue does not arise from symbols alone, but from attitudes and concrete actions that uphold human values. Therefore, a reorientation of the perspective on the relationship between religion and politics is needed. Islam needs to be reinterpreted as a source of moral inspiration in building a just and peaceful civilization, not as a tool for control or domination. Only by placing religion in its proper perspective and respecting its spiritual values can democracy and national life flourish within a framework of ethics, solidarity, and public civility.

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