Women, Digital Politics, and the Dynamics of Hateful Extremism: Reassessing Indonesia's 2019 Election in the Contemporary Era

Perempuan, Politik Digital, dan Dinamika Ekstremisme Penuh Kebencian: Menilai Kembali Pemilu Indonesia 2019 di Era Kontemporer

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Abstract

This article reassesses women's political participation, digital mobilization, and hateful extremism during Indonesia's 2019 presidential election, arguing that these dynamics remain relevant in the contemporary digital-political environment. Using Critical Discourse Analysis supported by interviews with politicians, journalists, and activists, alongside field observations from 2014 to post-2019, the study shows how e-political campaigns mobilized conservative women through religious narratives, familial values, and gendered emotional appeals. Women's involvement in the 212 Movement and related Aksi Bela Islam mobilizations positioned them as key actors in amplifying identity-based grievances and online hate speech, contributing to political polarization and the May 2019 post-election riots. To contextualize these findings, the article integrates evidence from Indonesia's 2024 election cycle, marked by rising disinformation and the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political communication. While mobilization in 2019 relied on viral messaging and moral panic, the 2024 elections reveal a technological shift toward AI-generated images, synthetic personas, and automated content that intensify narrative manipulation and accelerate hate speech circulation. The study concludes that Indonesia's democratic vulnerabilities are shaped by the intersection of gendered mobilization, religious identity politics, and evolving digital technologies, demonstrating continuity rather than rupture in digital extremism patterns

Keywords: *Women's political mobilization, Digital extremism, Hate speech, E-political campaigns, and Artificial intelligence in Indonesian elections*

Abstrak

Artikel ini meninjau kembali partisipasi politik perempuan, mobilisasi digital, dan ekstremisme kebencian selama pemilihan presiden Indonesia 2019, dengan berargumen bahwa dinamika ini tetap relevan dalam lingkungan politik digital kontemporer. Menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis yang didukung oleh wawancara dengan politisi, jurnalis, dan aktivis, bersama dengan observasi lapangan dari tahun 2014 hingga pasca-2019, studi ini menunjukkan bagaimana kampanye e-politik memobilisasi perempuan konservatif melalui narasi keagamaan, nilai-nilai keluarga, dan daya tarik emosional berbasis gender. Keterlibatan perempuan dalam Gerakan 212 dan mobilisasi Aksi Bela Islam terkait menempatkan mereka sebagai aktor kunci dalam memperkuat keluhan berbasis identitas dan ujaran kebencian daring, yang berkontribusi pada polarisasi politik dan kerusuhan pasca-pemilu Mei 2019. Untuk mengkontekstualisasikan temuan ini, artikel ini mengintegrasikan bukti dari siklus pemilihan Indonesia 2024, yang ditandai

dengan meningkatnya disinformasi dan meningkatnya penggunaan Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) dalam komunikasi politik. Sementara mobilisasi pada tahun 2019 mengandalkan pesan viral dan kepanikan moral, pemilu 2024 mengungkapkan pergeseran teknologi menuju citra yang dihasilkan AI, persona sintetis, dan konten otomatis yang mengintensifkan manipulasi naratif dan mempercepat peredaran ujaran kebencian. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kerentanan demokrasi Indonesia dibentuk oleh persimpangan mobilisasi berbasis gender, politik identitas agama, dan teknologi digital yang berkembang, menunjukkan kontinuitas daripada perpecahan dalam pola ekstremisme digital.

Kata Kunci: *Mobilisasi politik perempuan, Ekstremisme digital, Ujaran kebencian, Kampanye e-politik, dan Kecerdasan buatan dalam pemilu Indonesia*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped Indonesia's political sphere, transforming not only how political messages are produced and circulated but also how citizens—particularly women—engage in political mobilization. Earlier research shows that the rise of internet usage increased civic engagement by 14–20 percent globally (Howard, 2005; Jackson, 2007; Rohlinger & Brown, 2009) and significantly boosted voter participation in Indonesia's 2014 election (Yuliatiningtyas, 2017, 2022). However, the widening digital ecosystem has also intensified the circulation of disinformation, black campaigns, and hate speech, creating new vulnerabilities for Indonesian democracy (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018; Lynch, 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

These dynamics were most visible during the 2019 presidential election, in which digital platforms amplified religious identity politics and moral panic. Women played a central yet often overlooked role in this process. Their participation in the 212 Movement, "Aksi Bela Islam," and various online mobilizations demonstrates how female networks became instrumental in legitimizing and amplifying narratives of threat, religious victimhood, and social polarization. These gendered mobilization strategies contributed to the normalization of hateful extremism and culminated in mass protests and the May 2019 riots.

Yet, the mechanisms that emerged in 2019 have not dissipated but have evolved within more advanced technological infrastructures. Drawing on theories of political communication and computational propaganda (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018; Woolley & Howard, 2017), new findings from Indonesia's 2024 election cycle demonstrate how digital extremism is increasingly shaped by automation, algorithmic amplification, and data-driven persuasion. According to recent data, Indonesia recorded more than 1,292 verified disinformation cases ahead of the 2024 elections, representing a significant escalation compared to the 2019 cycle (ANTARA, 2024; BPS, 2024). From a computational propaganda perspective, this surge reflects the systematic use of artificial intelligence, automated accounts, and synthetic content to manufacture political

narratives, manipulate public sentiment, and intensify identity-based polarization. Rather than merely increasing the volume of misleading information, AI-driven political communication restructures how messages are produced, circulated, and personalized, reinforcing what scholars describe as platform-driven politics and algorithmic persuasion. Consequently, digital extremism in the 2024 election should be understood not as a rupture from earlier practices, but as a technologically intensified continuation of the discursive strategies first consolidated during the 2019 electoral cycle. Simultaneously, political actors increasingly deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) to produce persuasive content—including AI-generated campaign images, synthetic personas, and chatbot-driven engagement—to shape public sentiment, particularly among young voters (WIR Group, 2024). Rather than introducing entirely new forms of political mobilization, these AI-driven tools intensify existing identity-based strategies by automating and personalizing narratives that were already effective in 2019. AI enables religious, nationalist, and moralized messages to be reproduced at scale, rapidly tailored to specific demographic and ideological audiences, and circulated through platform algorithms that privilege emotional and identity-laden content. In this way, AI strengthens familiar patterns of mobilization—such as moral panic, in-group/out-group framing, and affective polarization—by increasing their speed, reach, and perceived authenticity. While these technologies expand campaign visibility, they simultaneously lower the cost of disinformation production and accelerate the diffusion of hate speech, reinforcing the gendered and religious identity politics that characterized the 2019 election rather than transforming them.

By integrating insights from gender studies, political communication, and digital media analysis, this article argues that the sociopolitical mechanisms identified during the 2019 election—women's mobilization, identity-based extremism, and digital amplification—continue to shape Indonesia's contemporary political landscape. Analytically, women emerge as pivotal actors not simply because of their numerical participation, but due to their structurally embedded roles within religious, familial, and community-based communication networks. Gendered norms that position women as moral guardians of family, faith, and social cohesion confer symbolic authority on their political expressions, making identity-based narratives appear ethically legitimate rather than overtly ideological. Within trusted spaces such as religious study groups and WhatsApp family networks, women function as high-trust intermediaries who translate elite political and religious messages into everyday moral discourse, significantly enhancing their credibility and circulation. The evolving use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the 2024 election further reinforces these dynamics by algorithmically amplifying emotionally resonant, gendered content and personalizing political messages within women-dominated digital networks. Consequently, the lessons of 2019 should not be understood as historical remnants, but as foundational dynamics in which gendered moral authority, identity politics, and digital technologies interact to shape Indonesia's ongoing democratic trajectory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Political Communication and Socio-Demographic Intersections

The expansion of Indonesia's digital ecosystem, with internet penetration exceeding 77 percent in 2022 (APJII 2022), has reconfigured the landscape of political communication. Digital media has transitioned from a tool for civic engagement (Howard 2005; Jackson 2007) into a primary arena for political persuasion and computational propaganda (Bradshaw & Howard 2018). However, the impact of digital communication is not uniform across the population. It is heavily mediated by the intersection of socioeconomic status, education, and geographic location. While urban women are often more exposed to algorithmic microtargeting and influencer-driven narratives, women in rural areas tend to navigate political information through localized, community-based social networks, influencing their susceptibility to disinformation and modes of participation (Yuliatiningtyas 2017).

2.2 Gendered Agency, Conservatism, and Social Class

Contrary to traditional portrayals of women as passive participants, recent developments reveal that conservative Muslim women have become active agents in digital mobilization (Sperling 2019). Female-led religious networks, such as *majelis taklim*, serve as vital conduits for political diffusion, where political participation is framed as a religious and familial duty. This agency is further stratified by class and education: women with higher educational attainment often act as "discursive multipliers" who curate and produce digital content, whereas those with lower formal education levels are frequently more involved in the physical labor of offline mobilization (Yuliatiningtyas 2020). Geographic disparities also manifest in these dynamics, where urban networks utilize social media for broader reach, while rural networks rely on traditional religious authority to legitimize political narratives.

2.3 Hate Speech, Moral Panic, and Geographic Dynamics

The proliferation of hate speech has become a defining feature of Indonesian elections since 2014, eroding institutional trust and deepening social polarization (Lynch 2015). During the 2019 election, hate speech was strategically used to invoke "moral panic," portraying political opponents as threats to Islamic identity and family values. These narratives resonate strongly with conservative women, who view political action as integral to protecting their faith. These dynamics are mediated by geographic factors: in digitally connected urban centers, disinformation spreads rapidly through viral social media content, while in rural areas, moral panic is often amplified through high-trust, offline social interactions and closed messaging platforms (Yuliatiningtyas 2020; Lynch, Freelon & Aday 2016).

2.4 The Technological Turn: AI, Synthetic Content, and the 2024 Elections

The 2024 Indonesian elections represent a "technological turn" in political communication, where computational tools, algorithmic personalization, and synthetic media have fundamentally upgraded the infrastructure of mobilization (Bradshaw & Howard 2018; Kreiss & McGregor 2020). Statistical data confirms a dramatic escalation in disinformation, with over 1,292 verified hoaxes—nearly double the previous cycle—

reflecting a global trend where Artificial Intelligence (AI) lowers the cost of manipulation while heightening the emotional resonance of political messaging (Hwang 2020; West 2021; Kominfo 2024).

AI-driven innovations in 2024 introduced new modalities of influence through:
- Synthetic Political Aesthetics: The use of AI-generated avatars, such as the "gemoy" persona, to construct affective candidate identities (Wells et al. 2023).
- Computational Intimacy: Hyper-personalized engagement via synthetic media (e.g., *FotoBer2.ai*), allowing voters to simulate personal proximity to candidates (Bucher 2021; Epp 2022).
- Algorithmic Microtargeting: Psychographic profiling and automated bots—termed "computational propaganda"—used to manufacture consensus and distort public discourse among digital-native voters (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2018; Woolley & Howard 2017).

Scholarship suggests that AI-generated content, particularly deepfakes and synthetic imagery, possesses a heightened capacity to simulate credibility, making it increasingly difficult for citizens to distinguish between organic and manipulated communication (Chesney & Citron 2019; Vaccari & Chadwick 2020). In Indonesia, these narratives were rapidly disseminated through TikTok and WhatsApp, penetrating networks historically dominated by conservative women. Ultimately, this technological evolution does not replace the identity-driven extremism of 2019; instead, it amplifies and automates it. The religious and emotional frames that mobilized women in the past now operate within sophisticated technological architectures capable of hyper-personalization. As noted by Tapsell (2023), AI-driven persuasion in Southeast Asia builds upon existing socio-cultural cleavages, intensifying the structural vulnerabilities of Indonesia's digital political culture without fundamentally transforming its underlying sectarian roots.

3. Methodology
This study employs a qualitative approach that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in-depth interviews, and longitudinal field observations. To ensure the robustness of the findings, the research utilizes *methodological triangulation*, where digital evidence from the 2014–2024 election cycles is cross-referenced with lived experiences and performative actions. This integrated design allows the study to trace the evolution of political narratives, gendered mobilization, and digital extremism over a decade.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Analyzing the Discursive Layer
This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Fairclough (2000) to examine how language, visual symbols, and semiotic structures mediate the relationship between ideology and power. CDA is used to interrogate the multilayered discourses in social media posts within conservative women's networks, viral hoaxes, and the "technological turn" of AI-generated content in 2024 (Fairclough 1995; Wodak & Meyer 2016). By analyzing linguistic and visual architecture—such as moral symbols

and algorithmically optimized messaging—CDA identifies the ideological mechanisms that legitimize political positions and manufacture "moral panic" (Chesney & Citron 2019).

3.2 In-Depth Interviews: Capturing Interpretive Frames

To contextualize the discursive patterns found in CDA, the study incorporates semi-structured interviews with key actors, including female activists from the 212 networks, political journalists, digital strategists, and conservative voters. Following Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), these interviews serve as a "reality check" for the discourse analysis, revealing the emotional resonance and religious worldviews of the participants. This stage is crucial for understanding how top-down political propaganda is internalized, reinterpreted, and transformed into personal identity by women in everyday life.

3.3 Field Observations: Mapping Performative Action

Longitudinal field observations (2014–2024) provide the spatial and performative dimension of the research. Rooted in ethnographic sensibilities (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 2011), observations were conducted during major rallies (e.g., *Aksi Bela Islam*), *majelis taklim* sessions, and post-election protests. These observations allow the researcher to witness how digital narratives are translated into collective physical action. It bridges the gap between what is said online (CDA) and what is felt (Interviews), revealing the offline consequences of digital extremism and gendered leadership in public spaces.

3.4 Methodological Integration and Triangulation

The integration of these three methods ensures a comprehensive triangulation of data. **CDA** provides the "what" and "how" of political messaging; **In-depth interviews** explain the "why" behind women's engagement; and **Field observations** capture the "so what" by documenting the real-world impact of these discourses. By synthesizing digital evidence with ethnographic data, this study moves beyond mere textual analysis to a holistic understanding of how technological innovation and gendered identity intersect to shape Indonesia's contemporary electoral landscape.

3.5 Integration of 2024 Digital Data

In recognition of the profound technological developments shaping Indonesia's 2024 election cycle, the methodology incorporates digital data capturing AI-driven political communication. This includes the analysis of official reports from ANTARA and the National Cyber and Encryption Agency (BSSN) documenting sharp spikes in disinformation, alongside systematic examination of synthetic political content produced via tools such as *FotoBer2.ai*.

The study also evaluates AI-influenced messaging patterns on TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, drawing on emerging scholarship on computational propaganda and algorithmic persuasion (Woolley & Howard 2017; Kreiss & McGregor 2020). Campaign strategies targeting younger voters through AI-powered personalization tools are assessed to determine how digital infrastructures shape political engagement. Integrating these contemporary data sources situates the 2019 findings within a

technologically advanced phase of Indonesia's digital political landscape, enabling comparison across two distinct but continuous cycles of electoral communication.

Critical Reflection on Digital Sources and Bias Mitigation

While official data from state-affiliated bodies like ANTARA and BSSN provide essential statistical benchmarks on the volume of disinformation, the researcher acknowledges their inherent limitations. Official reports often focus on "verified hoaxes" that meet legalistic criteria, potentially overlooking subtler forms of AI-driven sentiment manipulation or "grey propaganda" that circulate in private, encrypted spaces like WhatsApp. Furthermore, state-sanctioned data can be influenced by the prevailing political climate, which may result in a reporting bias toward certain types of narratives while under-representing others. To mitigate these biases and ensure a balanced analysis, the study employs data triangulation. Official reports were cross-referenced with independent monitoring data from civil society organizations (e.g., MAFINDO) and scholarly observations of digital campaign aesthetics (Wells et al. 2023). Additionally, by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the actual content of synthetic media, the research shifts the focus from purely quantitative state-reported figures to a qualitative understanding of the *power dynamics* and *gendered narratives* embedded within the technology. This multi-layered approach ensures that the analysis remains critical of state-defined categories of "truth" and "disinformation."

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All interviews followed ethical protocols for informed consent and participant confidentiality. Sensitive political content was anonymized to avoid potential risk to participants.

4. Gendered Digital Mobilization and the Contemporary Dynamics of Hateful Extremism

This section presents the main findings of the study by employing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how gendered discourses, digital political practices, and socio-religious structures intersected to shape women's mobilization during the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. Through detailed analysis of linguistic, visual, and multimodal data, the findings reveal how moralized narratives, Islamic identity politics, and emotionally charged digital infrastructures collectively contributed to the normalization and diffusion of hateful extremism. Drawing from social media content, interview testimonies, ethnographic fieldnotes, and updated 2024 data on AI-driven political communication, the analysis demonstrates that women were not passive recipients of digital narratives; rather, they served as key agents who amplified and legitimized political messaging within conservative religious networks. The patterns observed in 2019—rooted in affective piety, moral panic, and communal duty—did not dissipate in the years that followed. Instead, they evolved within a rapidly transforming technological environment, marked by the rise of synthetic content, algorithmic amplification, and AI-mediated persuasion.

Accordingly, the findings trace both continuity and transformation: while the ideological foundations of women's digital political engagement remain grounded in religious identity and gendered moral expectations, the communicative tools and technological infrastructures that support these dynamics have become significantly more sophisticated. This dual movement offers a critical lens through which to reassess the enduring impact of the 2019 election in shaping Indonesia's contemporary digital-political landscape.

4.1 Textual Dimensions: Constructing Moral Threats and Gendered Religious Duties

4.1.1 The Discursive Framing of Crisis and Sacred Obligation

A close textual reading of the 2019 campaign materials reveals that the discourse is saturated with crisis-framing—language that constructs the election as a moral and religious emergency. Statements urging citizens to *"save Islam," "defend the ummah," "stand against tyranny,"* and *"protect our children's future"* were distributed extensively within female religious networks (Yuliatiningtyas, 2020). These linguistic formulations are not merely rhetorical flourishes; they operate ideologically by reframing electoral participation as an act of spiritual warfare. From a CDA perspective, such language constitutes a classic example of what Fairclough describes as ideological hegemony through discursive naturalization. By invoking existential threat and moral urgency, these phrases position political alignment not as one option among many but as a mandatory expression of Islamic piety. The reader—particularly women embedded in conservative religious circles—is *interpellated* as a moral guardian whose faith and maternal responsibilities are contingent upon political loyalty.

This crisis discourse narrows the interpretive horizon. The framing of opponents as threats to Islam delegitimizes alternative political perspectives, collapsing democratic plurality into a binary of salvation versus destruction. The effect is a discursive foreclosure: women are not asked to vote; they are instructed to *protect*. This reframing converts political choice into an obligatory form of moral labor. Thus, the discourse subtly colonizes women's emotional and spiritual identities, transforming them into political instruments.

Critically, this crisis-framing lays the groundwork for permissive attitudes toward hate speech, as the construction of an existential threat legitimates hostility and moral condemnation. When political opposition is cast as *anti-Islamic* or *immoral*, hateful expressions become reinterpreted as acts of religious defense rather than transgressions of civic ethics. This ideological move is essential for understanding how extremism becomes normalized within everyday women's digital communication.

4.1.2 Visual Semiotics: The Sacred Female Body as Political Symbol

Visual analysis of the dataset further shows how meaning is produced through semiotic embodiment. The imagery includes conservative Muslim women wearing long syar'i hijabs, mothers carrying infants at protests, and women holding religious banners in

crowded streets (Yuliatiningtyas, 2020). These images are not incidental visual documentation but *semiotic enactments* of political ideology.

Photo 1. Women in Syar'i Hijab at the 212 Rally

As seen in the mass media image above, this photo shows women wearing syar'i attire participating in the mass rally, representing the construction of the female body as a symbol of piety and moral virtue.

Photo 2. & 3. Women Treating the Protest as a "Fun Event" (selfies & smiling)

Many women treated the mass rally as a "fun event." These two photos illustrate how political mobilization blends with selfie culture and enjoyment, normalizing political activism as part of a religious lifestyle.

Photo 4. Women supporting *Aksi Bela Islam* (the "Defend Islam Action" movement)

http://www.kabarselebes.com/2016/12/beginilah-caraperempuan-berhijab-syari   dukung-aksi-bela-

This photo reinforces the analysis of how piety is visualized as a form of political legitimacy. The image shows that women's religious appearance—such as syar'i

dress—is used not only as a sign of personal faith but also as a visual tool to legitimize political movements.

Photo 5. Women were holding banners

Source: tribunnews.com

This image positions women as moral communicators, where their bodies and the symbols they hold function as instruments of social meaning. Through visual representation, the image constructs femininity in relation to ethical authority, signaling how gender and morality are intertwined in societal discourse.

Through Fairclough's CDA lens, these visuals represent a semiotic intensification of moral discourse. The female body becomes a symbolic vessel of religious legitimacy, morality, and communal purity. The strategic emphasis on maternal imagery—women with children at rallies—amplifies emotional resonance and projects a narrative that the political struggle is not merely ideological but generational. The presence of children visually communicates that the stakes of political contestation extend into the future of the Muslim family.

Critically, such imagery reinforces patriarchal expectations surrounding female virtue. Women's religious virtue is visually encoded as synonymous with conservative political positions. The political message thus gains credibility through the visual display of piety. This dynamic represents what feminist scholars identify as gendered performativity: women's bodies serve as a moral canvas upon which political agendas are inscribed.
The critique here is that women's agency is not expanded but instrumentalized. Their physical presence is deployed as symbolic capital—legitimating political narratives while masking the male-dominated leadership structures behind the movement. The visual discourse appropriates piety and motherhood to authorize exclusionary political agendas, thereby transforming women's moral authority into a political currency.

4.1.3 Textual Normalization of Hostility and Hate Speech
Another key textual finding concerns the normalization of hate speech. The dataset contains widespread derogatory labeling, accusations of blasphemy, insinuations of religious betrayal, and moral vilification (Yuliatiningtyas, 2020). The textual forms are often brief, affectively charged, and accompanied by provocative visuals.

In CDA terms, this reflects the discursive routinization of hostility. Through repetition and circulation, hateful expressions transition from marginal or extremist discourse to socially accepted communicative practices within conservative women's networks. Because the earlier crisis discourse frames political conflict as a sacred struggle, hate speech becomes reinterpreted as morally justified resistance rather than aggression.

Critical analysis also shows how platform affordances shape this normalization. The brevity and emotive intensity of the messages align with the communicative constraints of WhatsApp and Instagram, where short, visually enhanced messages travel far more efficiently than nuanced argumentation. Thus, the technological structure of platforms enhances the ideological potency of hate speech.

This represents a core CDA insight: discourse is never neutral; it is shaped by the material conditions of communication technologies, and in turn, shapes social relations. The normalization of hostility is therefore both an ideological and infrastructural phenomenon, facilitated by digital architectures that reward sensationalism and emotional extremity.

4.2 Discursive Practices: Circulation Across Platforms, Communities, and Algorithms
4.2.1 Women as Discursive Multipliers, Not Primary Producers
Interviews and ethnographic observations reveal that conservative Muslim women were rarely the original authors of political narratives; instead, they acted primarily as discursive multipliers—agents who reproduced, validated, and intensified content created by religious elites, political operatives, and online influencers (Yuliatiningtyas, 2020). This dynamic is central to understanding the gendered distribution of discursive labor. Women's social networks—WhatsApp groups, study circles, and family-based chat clusters—serve as high-trust environments where external political messages become recontextualized into religious and emotional vernaculars. Through this recontextualization, the political content gains legitimacy and resonance.
Critically, this process reveals a paradox. While women are often positioned as passive recipients of patriarchal religious authority, their communicative labor is indispensable to the political movement. Their role as multipliers sustains the circulation of discourse, enabling narratives to penetrate deep into domestic and community spaces that male-led political campaigns cannot easily reach. Women's agency thus operates within a constrained ideological framework—simultaneously empowered as communicators and constrained by gendered expectations.

4.2.2 The 212 Movement as a Coordinating Discursive Infrastructure
The 212 Movement was primarily organized to protest against Ahok, who was accused of making blasphemous comments regarding the Quran during his campaign for re-election as Jakarta's governor. Here are the chronology:
- In 27 September 2016, Governor of DKI Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purrnama (Ahok), gave speech at 'Pulau Seribu' regarding the guidelines for choosing a leader/president in

the 2017 governor election (Debora, Y. 2016). He stated:

"don't be deceived and fooled by those who use the Qur'an, Surah Al-Maidah: verse 51 to say that you must not choose me again because I am not a Muslim!".

- 6 October 2016: His speech was spread via video through social media owned by Buni Yani. Shortly after the video went viral, Ahok was reported by Habib Novel Chaidir Hasan to the police. It was confirmed by MUI (Indonesia Ulama Council: Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body) that Ahok absolutely had insulted the Qur'an and Islam. This phenomenon led to a huge mass protest called 'Action 212' meaning the social movement on 2nd December 2016 (Debora, Y. 2016). Below is the photo taken by journalist.

Photo 6. The 212 Action in Jakarta on December 2, 2016

Then, on 2 December 2016: A large number of Muslims participated in a mass demonstration at the National Monument Indonesia, Monash-Jakarta, lead by the GNPF-MUI (The National Fatwa Guard Movement- Indonesia Ulema Council) and FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) which was led by Habib Rizieq Shihab. These organisations are well-known as groups of Islamic Radical. Ahok was jailed for 2 years since 9 May 2017 (Debora, Y. 2016).

Photo 7. The 212 Action

Ilustrasi aksi 212. (CNN Indonesia/Adhi Wicaksono)

Another role of "212" into Indonesia political life was *Religious Conservatism*. The movement represented a segment of the Indonesian population that identifies with conservative Islamic values. It highlighted concerns about the protection of Islamic faith and values in the country. It proven by a huge *Mass Mobilization* at the end of 2016.

The 212 Movement demonstrated the ability of conservative Muslim groups to mobilize large numbers of people for protests and rallies. The initial protest on December 2, 2016, attracted hundreds of thousands of participants. This mass mobilization led to riots unfortunately. The 212 riots in Indonesia, particularly the mass protests that occurred in December 2016 and the subsequent demonstrations, did result in casualties, including deaths and injuries. The protests, marked by their scale and intensity, led to confrontations with the authorities and raised concerns about public safety. Here is some information about the victims of the 212 riots (Kompas.com, 2020; CNN Indonesia, 2022)

This image demonstrates the scale of the 212 mobilization and its role as a moral and symbolic communicative platform. The movement functions as a powerful discursive infrastructure: its chants, slogans, visual aesthetics, and ritual performances create a familiar moral-political vocabulary that was later repurposed in the 2019 campaign (Yuliatiningtyas, 2020). Through these symbols, the 212 Movement shapes how political authority and collective morality are represented and understood

In Faircloughian terms, the 212 Movement produced a discursive reservoir: a pool of symbolic resources that political actors could draw upon to mobilize women. Images of women marching with veiled faces and children in hand become *interdiscursive devices*—symbolic forms that carry historical affect and can be redeployed to legitimize contemporary political actions. Critically, this reflects the sedimentation of protest culture. Earlier mobilizations (2016–2017) established a repertoire of moral performance that became foundational for later mobilization. This explains why political narratives in 2019 found such fertile ground: the discursive infrastructure was already built, emotionally familiar, and ideologically resonant.

Taken together, these findings illustrate how gendered religious identities, affective political narratives, and evolving digital infrastructures have become mutually reinforcing engines of political mobilization and hateful extremism in Indonesia. As you can see in Photo 1 above, women's embodied piety—expressed through uniform syar'i dress and disciplined collective presence—functions as a powerful semiotic resource that legitimizes moralized political claims and anchors them within everyday religious life. Through Fairclough's CDA lens, such images are not merely representations but discursive acts that position women as active carriers of ideological meaning, enabling them to reproduce and authenticate narratives that frame political participation as sacred duty and political opposition as moral threat. What began as emotionally charged textual and visual appeals in 2019 has since evolved into a technologically amplified ecosystem in which AI-driven personalization, algorithmic circulation, and platform affordances intensify the reach and emotional force of these discourses. The continued resonance of conservative moral narratives among female communities therefore cannot be viewed as a temporary anomaly; it reflects a durable socio-discursive structure that bridges offline religious authority, gendered moral symbolism, and contemporary digital technologies—creating conditions for the continuity and escalation of polarizing, and at times extremist, political communication in Indonesia.

4.2.3 Viral Logics and Platform Affordances

The discursive circulation of 2019 relied heavily on the viral dynamics of WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms reward emotional intensity, visual simplicity, and shareability. As a result, complex political arguments were translated into simplified, emotive, and religiously charged content.

Critically, this creates a structural asymmetry in political communication. Messages favoring fear, outrage, or religious identity circulate more efficiently than messages promoting nuance, pluralism, or policy detail. This asymmetry indicates that digital infrastructures inherently amplify certain ideological tendencies, particularly those rooted in emotional or identity-driven mobilization.

The viral logic also exacerbates epistemic vulnerability. Since WhatsApp groups are closed, intimate, and trusted environments, disinformation gains authority through relational proximity. This produces what CDA scholars call ideological echo formations, where repeated exposure solidifies belief despite lack of evidence.

4.2.4 The Transition from Organic to Automated Discursive Circulation (2024)

The 2024 electoral cycle marks a significant transformation with the integration of AI-driven communication technologies. AI-generated images depicting Prabowo–Gibran as "gemoy" and youthful, synthetic selfies via FotoBer2.ai, chatbot imitation of candidate speech, automated sentiment analysis, and bot-generated content illustrate a shift toward computational persuasion (Yuliatiningtyas et. all, 2024).

Critically, these tools *do not replace* earlier women-led networks—they augment them. The emotional narratives that circulated organically in 2019 now circulate algorithmically, with greater speed and personalization. Fairclough's concept of the technologization of discourse becomes fully evident: political meaning-making is now engineered through data-driven optimization rather than interpersonal trust alone.

This raises new democratic vulnerabilities. AI allows political actors to simulate authenticity and emotional intimacy at scale, blurring the boundaries between genuine human communication and synthetic persuasion. The extraction of women's emotional labor is now paralleled by the extraction of their data, enabling political messaging to target them with unprecedented precision.

4.3 Socio-Cultural Practices: Political Identity, Religion, and Gendered Agency
4.3.1 The Moralization of Politics Through Gender

The socio-cultural dimension reveals that women's political participation during the 2019 election was systematically framed through religious and maternal obligations rather than through civic agency. As seen in Photo 2 earlier, where groups of women in uniform syar'i dress gather at mass rallies, the female body becomes a symbolic site through which moral legitimacy is constructed and communicated. The visual homogeneity of their dress acts as a semiotic strategy that signals purity, discipline, and

collective piety—qualities discursively linked to the idea that women are guardians of Islamic morality. This visual coding is not neutral: it embeds women's participation within a gendered moral order that equates female religiosity with political righteousness.

In Photo 3 above, women smiling, socializing, and taking selfies during the protest illustrate how political participation is naturalized through everyday gendered practices. Their relaxed and joyful presence does not weaken the political message; instead, it demonstrates how activism is blended with female-coded sociality, making moral-political participation feel familiar, acceptable, and even desirable. Under Fairclough's CDA, this illustrates how discourse becomes lived practice—where ideology is reproduced not only through words but through routinized social behaviors that reinforce communal identity and shared moral purpose.

Critically, these visual discourses also reveal a deeper ideological mechanism: the patriarchal appropriation of women's moral authority. While the images suggest empowerment, the underlying discourse positions women primarily as vessels of moral legitimacy, not as autonomous political subjects. They are mobilized as mothers, wives, and protectors of religious purity—roles that reinforce gender hierarchy rather than challenge it. Their emotional labor, social cohesion, and embodied piety are harnessed to strengthen political narratives crafted largely by male religious and political elites. Thus, although women appear prominently in public activism, their visibility is carefully regulated by conservative gender ideology that expands their participation only insofar as it serves broader patriarchal and identity-political goals.

This tension—between visibility and ideological containment—illustrates how gender operates not as a peripheral factor but as a strategic discursive resource. Women's bodies and social practices, as shown vividly in Photo 2 and Photo 3, are deployed to moralize political claims, sanctify collective grievances, and anchor extremist narratives in intimate domains of religious duty and maternal responsibility. This framing makes political mobilization emotionally resonant, socially accepted, and morally unquestionable, thereby deepening its persuasive power within conservative female communities.

4.3.2 Hate Speech as a Social Practice Enabling Violence

Hate speech functions not merely as offensive language but as a social practice that reinforces power imbalances, legitimizes discrimination, and creates conditions conducive to violence. By framing certain groups as morally, culturally, or politically inferior, hate speech shapes social perceptions and normalizes hostility, providing a discursive foundation that can translate into real-world aggression. This section examines how hate speech operates within broader social and political contexts to enable and justify acts of violence.

Photo 8. Uncovering the Role of a Mother and Her Children in the Surabaya Suicide Bombings

https://jambi.tribunnews.com/2018/05/14/mengungkap-peran-teroris-wanita-di-balik-bom-bunuh-diri-surabaya

It is the honest confession of the mother (Jambi Tribun News 2018):

"I strengthened my husband's resolve to jihad and joining ISIS in Syria. I said 'do not be afraid of Umi and children, the provision of Allah is arranged'. I told my husband 'Allow Umi and children to smell heaven through Abi, hopefully Abi but if I don't, I'm sincere, I'm grateful that with my husband becoming a syahid, my children and I will be taken to heaven "

The interconnection between online hate speech and offline violence becomes unmistakably visible when examined through Fairclough's CDA framework, which posits that discourse is not merely representational but constitutive of social action. In the Indonesian context, hateful and morally charged discourses circulated during the 2019 election created ideological conditions in which antagonism—and ultimately physical confrontation—became socially permissible. The May 21–22, 2019 post-election riots, which resulted in multiple deaths and hundreds of injuries, illustrate how political opponents framed as *threats to Islam*, *betrayers of the ummah*, or *enemies of morality* become legitimate targets of aggression. Hate speech here operates as a social practice, embedding hostility within everyday communication until it crystallizes into material force.

The dynamics of hateful discourse enabling violence are further illuminated by the Surabaya suicide bombings of May 13–14, 2018—a case that, although predating the election, reveals the broader ideological ecosystem in which hate, moral panic, and religious absolutism circulate. In these coordinated attacks, entire families—including a mother and her two daughters aged 9 and 12—carried out suicide bombings against churches and a police station. As depicted in Photo 8, the aftermath of these attacks underscores the deadly transformation of discourse into violent action. The family's ISIS affiliation and the explicit justification of their actions in the mother's confession demonstrate how extremist ideology is naturalized within domestic and maternal discourse. In CDA terms, this is the point at which intimate registers (motherhood, sacrifice, religious duty) are appropriated to legitimize lethal violence.

Crucially, both the 2019 electoral violence and the 2018 Surabaya attacks expose the central role of women in sustaining and legitimizing violent discourses. Far from being passive or peripheral, women in these contexts act as emotional anchors, moral legitimizers, and ideological transmitters. During the 2019 election, women were mobilized through narratives that framed defending Islam as an extension of their maternal and religious responsibilities; in Surabaya, these same gendered moral obligations were weaponized within a radical milieu, pushing a mother to involve her own children in suicide attacks. This demonstrates how gendered moral authority, when embedded in rigid religious-political discourse, can be recontextualized across a spectrum—from conservative identity politics to violent extremism.

This continuity reveals that hateful extremism in Indonesia is not simply an aberration or an unfortunate byproduct of digital misinformation. Rather, it is produced through deliberate discursive constructions that define enemies, moralize conflict, and position violence as both necessary and sacred. Hate speech becomes a cultural resource: a set of shared narratives that justify hostility, sanctify sacrifice, and erode psychological barriers to violence. Within this discursive regime, the boundary between "defending Islam" in political protests and "fighting for Islam" in extremist attacks becomes dangerously thin.

Thus, when viewed through the socio-cultural lens, hate speech is not a digital pathology but an ideologically embedded practice that traverses online platforms, religious networks, domestic spaces, and ultimately, physical landscapes of violence. The Surabaya bombings and the 2019 riots together illustrate the full arc of this process: discourse → identity formation → moral legitimation → embodied violence. It is this continuum that underscores the urgent need to understand, rather than merely condemn, the discursive mechanisms through which hate becomes action and political mobilization crosses the threshold into extremism.

4.3.3 Women at the Heart of Religious-Political Mobilization

As shown across Photo 1, Photo 2, Photo 3, Photo 4, and Photo 5, women have been consistently present—and highly visible—within Indonesia's major religious-political mobilizations. Photo 1 captures the vast scale of the 212 rally, within which women form a significant and organized segment of the crowd. Photo 2 further illustrates their disciplined visual presence through uniform syar'i dress, signaling collective piety and reinforcing the moral tone of the mobilization. Meanwhile, Photo 3, depicting women taking selfies and interacting casually during the same demonstrations, shows how political participation is seamlessly integrated into everyday female sociality. This blending of activism and familiar social interaction helps normalize political engagement and ensures that mobilization persists beyond formal protest spaces.

Photo 4 and Photo 5, showing women supporting Aksi Bela Islam with banners, posters, and public expressions of devotion, reveal how female participants contribute to the emotional and symbolic infrastructure of Islamic political movements. Their bodies,

attire, and performative religiosity collectively operate as semiotic resources that strengthen the movement's claim to moral legitimacy. Across these images, women embody the fusion of religious duty and political engagement, enabling the movement to project itself as morally grounded, emotionally resonant, and socially authentic.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, these photos reveal that women fulfill three intertwined ideological functions within these mobilizations.

First, *legitimacy*: their presence visually certifies the moral righteousness of the cause, allowing political actors to frame mobilization as an act of religious virtue rather than political contestation.

Second, *emotional resonance*: maternal and feminine imagery heightens affective appeal, strengthening the sense of communal duty and deepening participants' emotional investment. Third, *discursive reproduction*: women's dense social networks—visible in their group interactions and shared rituals—facilitate the continuous circulation of political messages.

Together, these visual cues show that women are not merely supporters on the margins; they are the symbolic and communicative core of religious-political mobilization. Their embodied moral authority is instrumentalized to extend the movement's reach, stabilize its ideological claims, and embed its discourses within everyday religious and social life.

4.3.4 Continuity and Technological Expansion in 2024

The patterns visible in Photos 1–5—women's embodied piety, their symbolic role as moral guardians, and their centrality in circulating religious-political discourse—do not dissipate in 2024; rather, they are technologically intensified. The socio-cultural structures that mobilized women in the 212 Movement and the 2019 election continue to shape contemporary political behavior, but the communicative environment has fundamentally transformed. With more than 1,292 disinformation cases recorded in 2024 and the widespread use of AI-generated personas, synthetic images, and algorithmically engineered narratives, the discursive mechanisms documented earlier have migrated into a more computational, less visible terrain.

From a CDA perspective, the continuity is not simply thematic but structural. The gendered moral authority that animated women's participation in earlier mobilizations—visually evident in their disciplined presence (Photo 2), affective collectivism (Photo 3), and public enactments of piety (Photos 4 and 5)—remains a powerful cultural resource. What changes in 2024 is the mode of circulation: instead of relying primarily on organic interpersonal networks, political actors now deploy AI-driven tools that infiltrate those same networks with unprecedented speed, personalization, and emotional precision. In effect, the moralized gender discourse previously reproduced through women's daily social interactions is now algorithmically automated, making it more pervasive and less traceable.

Critically, this technological expansion does not disrupt patriarchal discursive hierarchies; it deepens them. AI-generated religious content, synthetic preachers, and

personalized "Islamic moral reminders" replicate and reinforce the same ideological messages once transmitted through women-led WhatsApp groups and majelis taklim. The difference is that these narratives now bypass human intermediation, entering domestic and intimate spaces with a veneer of authenticity manufactured by machine learning models. Women—long positioned as custodians of religious morality—find their roles subtly redefined: they remain the symbolic subjects of moral discourse, but the agency of producing and circulating that discourse increasingly shifts to automated systems.

The escalation of hateful extremism in 2024 must therefore be understood as a technologized continuity rather than a rupture. The discursive foundations laid during the 212 Movement and amplified in the 2019 election—crisis framing, moralized antagonism, gendered piety, and identity-based fear—form the ideological substrate upon which AI now operates. The Surabaya bombing case (Photo 7), demonstrating how moralized hate can translate into embodied violence, becomes an even more urgent warning in this context: when discursive hostility is algorithmically scaled, the conditions for radicalization intensify.

Thus, the core ideological structures remain intact, but their capacity for diffusion expands exponentially. Gendered religious discourse continues to operate as the backbone of conservative mobilization, yet it is now embedded within AI-enhanced ecosystems that personalize outrage, automate hostility, and obscure the origins of influence. The result is a political environment in which the speed, scale, and opacity of discourse far exceed human comprehension—creating fertile ground for extremist narratives to flourish while appearing socially organic.

4.4 Synthesis: Gender, Religion, and AI as Interlocking Engines of Digital Extremism
A synthesis of the textual, discursive, and socio-cultural layers reveals that gender, religion, and technology have converged into an integrated system of political meaning-making that sustains Indonesia's evolving landscape of digital extremism. Across Photos 1–5, women's moralized visibility becomes a central symbolic anchor for religious-political mobilization, demonstrating how gendered piety and collective female embodiment serve as legitimizing resources for both moderate and extremist discourse. These visual forms, combined with crisis-framing language and emotionally charged narratives, produce a powerful ideological configuration in which political participation is recast as sacred duty and hostility toward opponents is framed as moral necessity.

In this system, gender operates as the moral grammar of political discourse: women's religious identities—performed through dress, comportment, and maternal symbolism—carry the weight of ethical authority, enabling political actors to moralize grievances, sanctify antagonism, and mobilize communities with minimal resistance. Religion provides the ideological architecture, supplying the metaphors of crisis, purity, threat, and divine duty that animate political behavior. And technology functions as the

accelerant, converting these narratives into rapidly circulating, emotionally charged, and increasingly personalized forms.

The 2019 election thus established a discursive blueprint: a model of mobilization rooted in religious identity, gendered moral authority, and affective contagion. This blueprint did not dissipate; it migrated into new technological environments. The rise of AI-generated personas, synthetic religious content, and algorithmic amplification in 2024 represents not a departure but a technologized expansion of earlier practices. The ideological core remains intact—still grounded in moral panic, identity binaries, and sacred obligation—but the mechanisms of diffusion have become faster, more opaque, and less reliant on human gatekeepers.

Fairclough's CDA helps clarify this evolution. The textual level shows how crisis language and hate speech encode ideological antagonism; the discursive level reveals how women's networks circulate these narratives through trusted interpersonal channels; and the socio-cultural level exposes the gendered and religious structures that give these messages meaning. When amplified by AI-driven personalization and platform algorithms, these layers form a self-reinforcing discursive ecosystem in which moralized hostility spreads with unprecedented efficiency and emotional intensity.

Thus, Indonesia's contemporary digital extremism cannot be understood merely as a byproduct of technological innovation. It is the continuation of a gendered religious discourse regime, now extended through machine-enabled intimacy and algorithmic acceleration. What began in 2016 and 2019 as embodied mobilization—women in uniform *syar'i* dress marching, chanting, praying, and sharing—has evolved into a technologically mediated phenomenon in which the same moral narratives circulate with greater speed, reach, and persuasive power. Digital extremism in 2024 is therefore not new; it is the digitally intensified afterlife of earlier socio-religious mobilizations, now automated and embedded within the rhythms of everyday digital life. However, the implications of this technological turn extend far beyond communication efficiency. The systematic normalization of hate speech—disguised as religious duty or maternal protection—has profound socio-political consequences.

Firstly, it fosters the *legitimization of symbolic and physical violence*. When political opponents are persistently framed as existential threats to faith and family through AI-driven narratives, the threshold for social conflict lowers, potentially justifying post-election unrest as a "moral necessity."

Secondly, this digital intensification deepens *social polarization* by creating impenetrable "filter bubbles" where gendered and religious identities are weaponized. This fragmentation erodes the communal trust essential for a pluralistic society. Finally, the integration of AI in disseminating extremist narratives contributes to the *erosion of democratic substance*. As public discourse becomes saturated with synthetic content and manufactured consensus (computational propaganda), the capacity for rational deliberation diminishes. In this landscape, democratic legitimacy is no longer built on policy or performance but on the algorithmic manipulation of identity and fear, threatening the long-term resilience of Indonesia's democratic institutions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion: Theoretical Reflections on the Discursive Blueprint
This study demonstrates that Indonesia's contemporary political landscape is defined by a persistent intersection of gender, religion, and digital technology. Applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research reveals that women's roles in the 2019 and 2024 elections were not merely participatory but foundational to the construction of political meaning. By weaving together textual narratives of "sacred obligation" with the visual semiotics of piety, political actors utilized gender performativity (Butler 1990) to position women as moral guarantors of legitimacy. In this context, women's dress, maternal symbolism, and public presence were not neutral; they were "performed" discursive resources that sanctified political claims and intensified affective politics—where emotional identification supersedes rational-deliberative engagement.

The findings suggest a path dependency in Indonesia's digital extremism. The 2019 election established a "discursive blueprint" where religious-moralized hate speech became a normalized social practice. This blueprint was not replaced but "technologized" in 2024. The transition from organic social networks to computational propaganda (Woolley & Howard 2017) reflects a shift where AI-generated personas and algorithmic microtargeting now replicate the affective labor previously performed by women's networks. Consequently, Indonesia's digital extremism is not a mere byproduct of new technology; it is the digitally amplified continuation of long-standing gendered and religious power structures. Rather than a disruption, the 2024 cycle represents the discursive institutionalization of polarization, where extremist narratives are now embedded within the very algorithms that shape everyday digital life.

5.2 Recommendations
To address these deep-seated vulnerabilities, the following strategic interventions are proposed:
1. Strengthen Intersectionally-Targeted Digital Literacy: Digital literacy programs must move beyond technical skills to address the affective resonance of disinformation. Programs should be specifically tailored for mothers and religious women's groups (*Majelis Taklim*), focusing on the deconstruction of "moral panic" and the identification of algorithmic manipulation that exploits gendered religious identities.
2. Collaborative Counter-Discourse with Female Religious Authorities: Given the weight of religious legitimacy, engagement with *Ustadzah* (female preachers) and moderate Muslim women educators is critical. Counter-narratives must offer alternative interpretations of "religious duty" that emphasize civic pluralism over exclusionary identity politics, effectively challenging the "sacred obligation" frame without delegitimizing faith.
3. Governance of AI and Synthetic Political Aesthetics: The 2024 "technological turn" necessitates robust electoral regulations. Transparency mandates must require the labeling of AI-generated content, particularly synthetic personas that

impersonate religious authority or fabricate moral endorsements, to prevent the "computational intimacy" from deceiving vulnerable demographics.

4. Platform Accountability for Gendered Hate Speech: Social media platforms must improve moderation capacities for local-language and context-specific gendered hate speech. Algorithmic transparency is essential to ensure that narratives of "moral degradation" or "religious threat" are not prioritized by engagement-based ranking systems.

5. Future Research Agenda on Agentic Resistance: Scholarship should shift from viewing women solely as "amplifiers" to exploring their roles as potential disruptors. Future research should utilize ethnographic methods to examine how women navigate, negotiate, or resist extremist discourse, particularly in the era of AI-mediated communication.

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