

Research Article

Religion as a Source of Legitimacy: Analyzing the Role of Religion in Political Power Across Cultures

Setiawan^{1*}, Muhammad Hatta², Alhuda³, Darmadi⁴

¹ Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Science, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, 24351

² Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, 24351

³ Nursing academy Kesdam IM, Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, 24355

⁴ Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab and Da'wah, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, 24351

*Corresponding Author: setiawan@iainlhokseumawe.ac.id | Phone Number: +6285260117104

ABSTRACT

Religion, which serves as a system of social beliefs and norms, is often used by leaders to acquire and maintain power. The study shows that legitimacy gained through religion can strengthen political control, as seen in the Iranian context after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. On the other hand, religion is also a tool for mass mobilization in social movements, such as Action 212 in Indonesia. While religion can strengthen social solidarity, it also has the potential to spark conflict, especially when associated with national identity, as in India. Qualitative methods are used to examine the complex relationship between religion and politics, including the influence of religious values in policymaking. The findings suggest that the relationship between religion and politics is dynamic, and can serve as a source of stability or conflict, depending on the existing social and cultural context.

Keywords: Religion; Legislation; Political Power; Mass Mobilization; Conflict; Identity National; Social Stability

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion is a belief that regulates all aspects of life, both individually, society, the environment and everything related to the three. According to Émile Durkheim (1912), religion is a social phenomenon that plays an important role in building solidarity and order in society. Furthermore, Parsons (1937), views religion as one of the subsystems in society that plays an important role in maintaining social stability and giving meaning to individual lives. In terms of functionalism, Parsons sees religion as an institution that helps society maintain balance through the regulation of norms, values, and behaviors. The change of the times towards the modernization of religious understanding is not just something spiritual that affects individuals and society, but (Turner, 1983) religion as a social phenomenon that is closely related to the relationship of power, institutions, and individual identities in modern society. In his view, religion is part of a complex social system and often interacts with political, economic, and cultural factors.

Politics is an activity related to the decision-making process in a group or society, especially related to government, power, or resource management. Politics includes the ways in which individuals or groups influence, regulate, and distribute power and resources in society. According to (Noer, 1983) politics is any form of activity or attitude that is related to power and that intends to influence, by way of changing or maintaining, some kind of form of social structure. According to (Kau et al., 2020) politics is defined as an arena of social life, where people can gather together, and freely identify and discuss various social problems. One of the social activities is religion such as carrying out religious rituals that touch the social life of the community. So that religion and politics have social forces that are interrelated in regulating community life. A political system can be sustainable if the political system as a whole receives support, such as acceptance and recognition from the community (Fauza, 2020).

Religion has become one of the important pillars in social and political structures in various cultures around the world. In many contexts, religion not only serves as a spiritual belief system, but also as a source of legitimacy for political power. Religion is often used by leaders to gain and maintain power. In many cases, the legitimacy gained through religion gives the leader additional power to control society. For example, in Iran, after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini used the concept of "Wilayat al-Faqih" to support his political power. This concept states that political leaders must have religious authority, so that Khomeini can claim that his government is God's will (Keddie, 2006).

Statistics show that in countries with faith-based governments, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, public support for the government is often closely linked to religious legitimacy. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020 showed that 85% of Iranians believe that religion plays an important role in their political lives (Pew Research Center, 2020). This shows that religion not only serves as a tool of legitimacy, but also as a strong social bond. In many countries, religion also serves as an important element in the formation of national identity. For example, in India, Hinduism has not only become the majority religion, but also an integral part of national identity. Political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) often use religious symbols and Hindu rhetoric to gain political support. This was evident in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, where the BJP won a majority of votes by putting forward the Hindu nationalist agenda (Jaffrelot, 2019).

This phenomenon suggests that religion can serve as a tool to form social solidarity among certain groups, but it can also trigger conflicts between different groups. In India, rising tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities are often triggered by religious-based identity politics. More broadly, religion in the context of globalization has brought new challenges to the relationship between religion and politics. On the one hand, globalization allows for the spread of new ideas and values that can change the way people view religion and power. However, on the other hand, many religious groups feel threatened by these changes and seek to strengthen their position in society. For example, extremist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda use religious narratives to justify their acts of violence. They claim that they are fighting against the oppression and moral decadence brought by the West. In this context, religion serves as a tool of legitimacy for violence and terrorism, which creates a major challenge to global security (Hoffman, 2006).

On the other hand, religion can also function as a driver of social change. Many social movements led by religious leaders have succeeded in bringing significant changes in society. For example, the civil rights movement in the United States led by Martin Luther King Jr. was heavily influenced by Christian values. King used the teachings of Jesus to encourage society to fight against discrimination and injustice (King, 1963). In this context, religion not only serves as a source of legitimacy for political power, but also as a tool to challenge unjust power. This shows that the relationship between religion and politics is not always one-way; Religion can also be a progressive force driving social change.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive-exploratory analysis methods to understand the role of religion as a source of legitimacy in political power in various cultures. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex and contextual socio-political phenomena, especially those involving religion and politics. According to (Sukmadinata, 2005) This research is a type of exploratory descriptive research, which is research that aims to describe or describe existing phenomena, both natural and man-made. Data collection is carried out using credible sources, including books, journal articles, and reports from international organizations. The study also considers different cultural contexts, such as those in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Europe, to provide a comprehensive picture of how religion plays a role in political power structures. Data analysis is carried out using a thematic approach, where the main issues that arise from the data are categorized and analyzed. For example, the themes of the legitimacy of power, mass mobilization, and the influence of religious values in policymaking will be explored further. In addition, certain case studies, such as the role of Islam in politics in Indonesia and the influence of Christianity in the United States, will be a major focus to show the variety of religious roles in different political contexts. Metrics used to measure the impact of religion in politics include the level of political participation of religious communities, the influence of political decisions based on religious values, and the relationship between religious institutions and the government. This research aims to provide better insight into how religion can function as a tool of power, as well as a source of conflict, depending on the existing social and cultural context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Role of Religion in the Legitimacy of Political Power

Religion is often used as a tool to give legitimacy to political power. In many cultures, political leaders claim that their power comes from divine authority, thus strengthening their position in the eyes of society. In this context, it is important to understand how religion plays a role in shaping political legitimacy and how this can affect social and political dynamics in different countries. This is according to (Jati, 2014) religion and politics have a process of tug-of-war. Religion has a strategic role in constructing in providing a framework of values and norms in building state structures and social discipline. Meanwhile, the state uses religion as a dogmatic legitimacy to bind citizens to obey the state. For example, in Iran, a theocratic system of government led by the religious leader, the Ayatollah, shows how religion can provide strong legitimacy to political power. In this structure of government, religious leaders not only have spiritual power but also significant political power. The concept of *Velayat-e Faqih*, which means "the power of the ulama," explains that religious leaders have the right to lead society based on their interpretation of Islamic law. This creates a close relationship between religion and politics, where government actions are often justified through religious narratives. According to data from Freedom House, Iran is one of the countries with the lowest political freedoms, where the legitimacy of power relies heavily on religious

interpretations (Freedom House, 2021). In this context, we can see how the legitimacy derived from religion can create resistance to social and political change, as any attempt to challenge such power is often seen as an attack on religious values.

On the other hand, in Christian-majority countries, such as the United States, many politicians use religious symbols to attract voter support. For example, in the 2020 presidential election, the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, openly claimed support from the evangelical Christian community, which played an important role in his electoral base. According to a survey from the Pew Research Center, about 76% of evangelical voters support Trump, showing how religion can affect political legitimacy in a democratic country (Pew Research Center, 2020). In this context, we can see how the use of religious symbols in political campaigns not only serves to attract votes, but also to build a narrative that links political values with spiritual values. This creates an emotional bond between voters and candidates, where voters feel that voting for a particular candidate is part of exercising their religious beliefs.

In addition, in Indonesia, the legitimacy of power is also often influenced by religion. In the context of general elections, political parties often adopt religious symbols to attract votes from Muslim voters. Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that around 87% of Indonesia's population is Muslim, so parties that are able to associate themselves with Islamic values tend to have greater support (BPS, 2021). In elections, we often see the use of Qur'anic verses or Islamic symbols in political campaigns, aiming to show that the party is in line with the aspirations and values of Muslim society. However, the use of these symbols can also trigger polarization among different groups of society, who may feel marginalized or underrepresented by the dominant narrative. However, the role of religion in the legitimacy of power is not always positive. In some cases, the use of religion to justify political action can lead to conflict. In Myanmar, for example, tensions between the Buddhist community and Rohingya Muslims have led to a severe humanitarian crisis. The Myanmar government, with the backing of several Buddhist religious leaders, has claimed that their actions against Rohingya Muslims are to protect national identity, which shows how religious legitimacy can be used to justify discriminatory actions (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In this situation, we can see how legitimacy built through religious narratives can serve to reinforce discrimination and violence against minority groups. This suggests that, while religion can provide strong legitimacy, it can also be a tool for justifying adverse actions. Overall, the role of religion in the legitimacy of political power is a complex phenomenon and varies depending on the cultural and historical context. In some cases, religion can provide the stability and legitimacy necessary for effective government. However, in other cases, the use of religion to justify political action can lead to conflict and injustice. This research will delve deeper into how this legitimacy is built and maintained in different contexts, as well as its impact on society. By understanding these dynamics, we can better anticipate and respond to the challenges that arise from the interaction between religion and politics in different parts of the world.

Through an in-depth analysis of the above examples, we can see that the legitimacy of power based on religion not only affects the political structure, but also has a much broader impact on society. In this context, it is crucial to consider how legitimacy built through religious narratives can affect the daily lives of individuals and groups, as well as how this can shape collective identities and social dynamics. In many countries, including Indonesia, the legitimacy of power is often associated with the religious values embraced by the majority of society. This creates pressure on political parties to show that they align with those values, even if it means ignoring democratic or human rights principles. In this context, we need to question the extent to which legitimacy built through religion can be considered legitimate, especially when it leads to actions that are detrimental to certain groups. Furthermore, we also need to consider how legitimacy built through religion can serve as a tool for maintaining the status quo. In many cases, political leaders may prefer to use religious narratives to distract from the fundamental problems faced by society, such as poverty, injustice, and corruption. By shifting the focus of society to religious issues, they can maintain their power without having to face more substantial challenges.

In this context, it is important to conduct critical reflection on how religion is used in politics. We need to consider whether the legitimacy built through religion truly reflects the aspirations of society or simply serves the interests of a group of ruling elites. By conducting an in-depth analysis, we can begin to understand how religion can be used both as a tool to establish legitimate legitimacy and as a tool to maintain unjust power. According to (Latifah, 2018) among the people at the top of religion, it is often used as an instrument of legitimacy and even domination. This is very closely related to the affairs of powerful people who are endlessly struggling with efforts to build legitimacy and domination. The understanding and practice of the function of religion as legitimacy can be seen in the behavior of elites, including political elites. By some elites, religion is often used as a shield to legitimize a social action.

In conclusion, the role of religion in the legitimacy of political power is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In some cases, religion can provide strong legitimacy and stability to government, but in other cases, the use of religion to justify political action can lead to conflict and injustice. Therefore, it is important to continue to conduct research and analysis on the relationship between religion and politics, as well as their impact on society. By doing so, we can better understand these dynamics and develop more effective strategies to build a more equitable and inclusive society.

3.2 Results of the Implementation of Activities

Mass mobilization is an interesting and complex phenomenon in the relationship between religion and politics. This

phenomenon not only reflects the strength of religious organizations, but also shows how religious values and beliefs can affect political dynamics in different parts of the world. In this context, mass mobilization by religious organizations will be discussed in more depth, with an emphasis on specific examples from different countries, as well as an in-depth analysis of their impact on social change and potential conflicts. First of all, it is important to understand what mass mobilization means. Mass mobilization is the process by which a group of people, often in large numbers, are organized to participate in an action or movement, be it a protest, demonstration, or other form of political participation. In the context of religion, these mobilizations are often led by religious organizations that have a wide network and significant influence in society. These organizations, both formal and informal, have the ability to mobilize the masses quickly and effectively, often through mobilizing support in their communities.

One of the most striking examples of mass mobilization by religious organizations is the Arab Spring that occurred in the early 2010s. In this context, many pro-democracy movements that have emerged in Arab countries are driven by Islamic groups that have been operating in society for many years. These groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, were able to organize massive demonstrations demanding political change. According to a report from Al Jazeera, the demonstration not only involved members of Islamist groups, but also attracted the attention of a wide range of people who felt marginalized by the authoritarian regime. This mobilization shows how religion can serve as a key driver for social and political change.

In Indonesia, a similar phenomenon can also be observed. The 212 action that took place in 2016 is one example of a very significant mass mobilization. In this action, millions of Muslims took to the streets to demand law enforcement against the then Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who was considered to have blasphemed religion. This action not only shows the strength of the mobilization of religious organizations, but also its impact on local politics. Data from the General Election Commission shows that this mobilization successfully influenced the outcome of the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017, where Anies Baswedan, who is supported by Islamist groups, managed to win the election. This shows that mass mobilization can be a very effective tool in influencing political decisions at the local level. According to (Aminuddin *et al.*, 2023) this happened because there were a number of concerns that arose at that time, and the Indonesian Muslim community felt as if their identity and existence were in danger. However, mass mobilization by religious organizations does not always lead to positive results. In some cases, these mobilizations can create tension and conflict in society. In India, for example, mobilization by certain religious groups, especially nationalist Hindu groups, has led to an increase in interreligious tensions. In recent years, there have been numerous reports of violence directed at the Muslim community, often fueled by rhetoric and mobilization by these groups. This example shows that mass mobilization can not only serve as a force for social change, but can also exacerbate social polarity and create prolonged conflicts.

In the context of elections in Western countries, such as the United States, mobilization by religious groups is also evident. Conservative religious groups, such as the Moral Majority, have succeeded in mobilizing voters to support candidates who align with their religious values. According to a survey from Gallup, about 40% of voters in the US consider religion very important in their lives. This shows that there is great potential for mobilization among voters who have strong religious commitments. These mobilizations often relate to social issues that religious communities consider important, such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious freedom. In this case, religious organizations serve as a bridge between religious values and political action, facilitating public participation in the democratic process. However, it is important to note that mass mobilization by religious organizations is not always homogeneous. There are a wide variety of organizations with different goals and approaches. Some organizations may focus on advocating for positive social change, while others may be more oriented towards maintaining the status quo or promoting specific agendas that could potentially create conflict. Therefore, a more in-depth analysis is needed to understand these dynamics.

In conclusion, mass mobilization by religious organizations is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. On the one hand, these mobilizations can serve as a positive force for social change, giving a voice to the marginalized and encouraging political participation. On the other hand, this mobilization also has the potential to cause conflict and exacerbate interreligious tensions. By understanding these dynamics, we can better navigate the challenges facing society in the face of mass mobilization triggered by religion, as well as find ways to promote dialogue and understanding between different groups. Mass mobilization is not just a number or the number of people taking to the streets; It is a reflection of the hopes, dissatisfaction, and aspirations of the community.

3.3 The Influence of Religious Values in Policy Making

Religious values are often the foundation for policymaking in various parts of the world. In countries with a majority of people of a particular religion, these values are often adopted by political leaders to give legitimacy to their policy decisions. For example, in Saudi Arabia, a country where the majority of the population is Muslim, sharia law is the basis for the legal system and public policy. Sharia law covers various aspects of life, from criminal law to family law, and often reflects the values taught in the Qur'an and hadith.

The implementation of sharia law in Saudi Arabia, although aimed at creating a society in accordance with the teachings

of Islam, has often faced criticism from human rights organizations. According to a report from Human Rights Watch, many sharia law practices implemented in Saudi Arabia have the potential to violate human rights, especially against women. For example, women in Saudi Arabia were not allowed to drive cars until recently, and they needed permission from a male guardian to carry out various activities, including traveling. It shows how religious values can influence policies that ultimately impact individual freedom. On the other hand, in Western countries, despite the separation between church and state, religious values still have a significant influence on the formation of public policy. For example, on controversial issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, many conservative Christian politicians seek to influence policies based on their religious beliefs. Data from the Pew Research Center shows that about 61% of Christians in the United States refuse abortion in most cases. This suggests that religious beliefs can shape political views and, in turn, influence policymaking related to reproductive rights.

In addition, the debate over same-sex marriage in the U.S. also reflects how religious values can influence public policy. Many conservative religious groups oppose the recognition of same-sex marriage on the grounds that it is contrary to their religious teachings. Despite progress in the recognition of LGBT rights in many states, this debate shows the tension between religious values and human rights. In Indonesia, religious values also play an important role in policymaking. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, many policies reflect the dominant religious values in society. For example, the Marriage Law regulating marriage between a man and a woman reflects strong religious norms. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency, around 90% of marriages in Indonesia are carried out in accordance with religious values, which shows the strong influence of religion in aspects of social life. However, it also poses challenges for minority groups that are not aligned with these norms. However, the influence of religious values in policy-making is not always universally accepted. In countries like France, there is a significant tension between secular values and the influence of religion in public policy. The policy of banning the use of religious symbols in public schools, which was implemented to maintain the separation between religion and the state, often sparked protests from religious communities. This suggests that despite efforts to separate religion from public policy, religious influence persists and can lead to social conflicts.

For example, in some countries with strict sharia laws, such as Iran, women face many restrictions in their daily lives. For example, they are required to wear hijab in public places and are not allowed to participate in various activities that are considered incompatible with religious values. It shows how policies influenced by religious values can limit individual freedom, especially for women. On the other hand, in countries with strong secular values, such as Sweden, public policy often focuses on equality and human rights. Despite the influence of various religious groups, the policies adopted tend to be more inclusive and seek to protect the rights of all individuals, regardless of their religious background. This suggests that while religious values can influence policy, there is also room for secular values that emphasize human rights and equality.

In this analysis, we must also consider how globalization and intercultural interaction affect the relationship between religion and policy. With the increasing amount of communication and information exchange between countries, religious values can influence each other. For example, international human rights movements often challenge practices that are considered to violate human rights based on religious values, such as discriminatory practices against women in some countries. In addition, rapid social change can also affect the way religious values are accepted and applied in policy. In many countries, younger generations tend to be more open to change and more receptive to values that focus on human rights. This could lead to a shift in the way religion interacts with public policy, where secular values are starting to gain a greater place in policymaking. In conclusion, the influence of religious values in public policy-making is a complex and diverse phenomenon. From sharia law in Saudi Arabia to secular policies in France, we can see how religious values can shape policies that impact people's daily lives. Despite the challenges and tensions that arise due to differences in values, it is important to continue to analyze and understand these relationships in order to create more inclusive policies and respect human rights. Thus, we can hope to strike a balance between religious values and the diverse needs of society in this era of globalization.

3.4 Religion as a Source of Conflict and Resolution

Religion is often a source of conflict in various parts of the world. Interreligious tensions, especially between communities of different faiths, often lead to violence and discrimination. This phenomenon can be seen in many cases that occur in different countries, where differences in beliefs are often exploited by certain parties to achieve their political or social goals. For example, the conflict between Muslims and Hindus in India has led to thousands of deaths and displacement. Data from Amnesty International shows that faith-based violence has increased in India in recent years, reflecting how religion can be a trigger for conflict (Amnesty International, 2020). In this context, it is important to understand how and why religion can be a source of tension, as well as the factors that contribute to the escalation of the conflict. According to (Natalia, 2016) religion is easily dragged into the scene of radicalism by politicizing religion as an open source of radicalism, which is actually more based on the weakening of the existing political system and institutions. Politics and religion are also often used as legitimacy for radicalism carried out by the rulers with the intention of maintaining power hegemony.

Tensions between communities of different religions are often triggered by a variety of factors, including historical, political, and economic. For example, in India, the long history of rivalry between Hindus and Muslims, exacerbated by government policies and political rhetoric, has created an atmosphere of distrust and hostility. In many cases, political leaders use religion as a tool for mass mobilization, which in turn exacerbates tensions. Concrete examples of this can be seen in events such as the Gujarat riots in 2002, where hundreds of people were killed in violence triggered by religious tensions. In a deeper analysis, we can see how the narratives constructed by the media and public figures contribute to the formation of deep stereotypes and prejudices between different groups. However, on the other hand, religion can also serve as a tool for conflict resolution. Many religious organizations are involved in mediation and reconciliation efforts in conflict-torn areas. For example, in Africa, many religious leaders have played a role in the peace process in countries such as Sudan and Uganda. According to a report from the United Nations, the involvement of religious leaders in the peace process can help build trust between warring parties (United Nations, 2018). In this context, it is important to explore how religious values can be used to encourage dialogue and reconciliation, as well as how religious leaders can serve as bridges between conflicting groups.

In Indonesia, despite the potential for religion-based conflicts, many religious organizations seek to promote tolerance and harmony between religious communities. For example, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, two of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, are active in interreligious dialogue and social programs aimed at reducing interreligious tensions. According to a survey from the Indonesian Survey Institute, around 70% of Indonesians believe that inter-religious harmony is important to maintain social stability (LSI, 2021). In this case, we can see how initiatives from religious organizations can create space for dialogue and understanding, as well as reduce the potential for conflicts that may arise. However, challenges remain, especially when political interests are involved. In some countries, political leaders use religion to justify discriminatory or violent acts. For example, in Myanmar, the government uses religious rhetoric to justify oppression against the Rohingya Muslim community, which shows how religion can be politicized for specific purposes (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In this analysis, it is important to explore how religion can serve both as a source of conflict and as a tool for resolution. This research will examine various examples from different countries to understand these dynamics and provide recommendations to encourage interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution.

In a broader context, we need to consider how interfaith education and understanding can contribute to conflict resolution. An inclusive education based on the values of tolerance can help reduce prejudices and stereotypes that often trigger conflict. For example, educational programs that teach the history and values of different religions can help create a better understanding between different groups. In addition, initiatives that involve youth in interfaith dialogue can create a more open and tolerant generation. In closing, it is important to remember that religion has the potential to be a source of conflict, but it can also serve as a tool for resolution. By understanding these dynamics and encouraging interfaith dialogue, we can create a more harmonious and peaceful society. Efforts to promote tolerance and harmony between religious communities must continue to be carried out, both through education, religious organizations, and supportive public policies. In doing so, we can hope to reduce the tensions that often arise due to differences in beliefs and create a better world for all.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the role of religion in political power is a complex and varied phenomenon. Religion can be used as a tool of legitimacy, mass mobilization, and influence in policymaking, but it can also be a source of conflict. In this context, it is important for religious and political leaders to understand these dynamics and work together to create a more just and harmonious society. Religion plays a complex role in the legitimacy of political power in different cultures. From the use of religion as a tool of legitimacy by political leaders to its role in shaping national identity and driving social change, religion has had a significant impact on social and political structures. In the context of globalization, new challenges are emerging, in which religion can be used to justify acts of violence, but can also be a source of inspiration for social change. It is important to understand that the relationship between religion and politics is not static; It continues to evolve along with social and political changes. Therefore, further study of this phenomenon is urgently needed to understand the dynamics of power in modern society.

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