

Competing Qur'anic Authorities in the Public Sphere: Textual Meaning, Social Contestation, and Interpretive Politics in Contemporary Indonesia

Muhammad Reza Pahlavi¹, Abdul Aziz Hasibuan², Yessy Sundry³

¹ Universitas al-Ahgaff Tarim, Yemen

^{2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Corresponding E-mail: pahlevi98@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article examines how Qur'anic authority is constructed, contested, and circulated in contemporary Indonesian public discourse. While Qur'anic interpretation has often been studied through exegetical content, theological method, or textual genealogy, less attention has been given to the mechanisms through which Qur'anic textual authority becomes public authority in legal, political, digital, and civic arenas. Focusing on Indonesia's post-Reformasi public sphere, this study analyzes the contestation surrounding Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51, the translation of *awliyā'*, digital Islamic media, and state discourse on *moderasi beragama*. Methodologically, the article employs a qualitative textual and socio-discursive design, combining document analysis, critical discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, and socio-hermeneutic interpretation. The primary corpus includes MUI's institutional statement, the North Jakarta District Court decision, Qur'anic translation platforms, NU Online tafsir articles, Islami.co discourse, and Kementerian Agama policy documents. The findings show that Qur'anic authority in Indonesia is produced through four interrelated processes: institutional humidification, semantic contestation, digital fragmentation, and state-mediated civic reframing. MUI's intervention converted scriptural interpretation into public legitimacy and legal relevance; competing translations of *awliyā'* shaped different political and social meanings; digital platforms expanded and fragmented Qur'anic publics; and *moderasi beragama* reframed Qur'anic public ethics through civic norms. The article contributes to Qur'anic studies and Islamic hermeneutics by conceptualizing Qur'anic interpretation as a socio-discursive public practice in which sacred textual meaning becomes authoritative through institutions, translation, media, law, and state governance.

Keywords: Qur'anic authority; public sphere; interpretive politics; digital Islam; Indonesian Islam

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana otoritas Qur'ani dikonstruksi, diperebutkan, dan disirkulasikan dalam wacana publik Indonesia kontemporer. Meskipun penafsiran Al-Qur'an sering dikaji melalui isi tafsir, metode teologis, atau genealogi tekstual, perhatian terhadap mekanisme bagaimana otoritas tekstual Al-Qur'an berubah menjadi otoritas publik dalam arena hukum, politik, digital, dan kewargaan masih relatif terbatas. Dengan berfokus pada ruang publik Indonesia pasca-Reformasi, penelitian ini menganalisis kontestasi seputar Q.S. al-Mā'idah [5]: 51, penerjemahan istilah *awliyā'*, media Islam digital, dan wacana negara tentang *moderasi beragama*. Secara metodologis, artikel ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif tekstual dan sosio-diskursif dengan memadukan analisis dokumen, analisis wacana kritis, analisis isi kualitatif, dan interpretasi sosio-hermeneutik. Korpus primer penelitian mencakup pernyataan kelembagaan MUI, putusan Pengadilan Negeri Jakarta Utara, platform terjemahan Al-Qur'an, artikel tafsir NU Online, wacana Islami.co, dan dokumen kebijakan Kementerian Agama. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa otoritas Qur'ani di Indonesia diproduksi melalui empat proses yang saling terkait: juridifikasi kelembagaan, kontestasi semantik, fragmentasi digital, dan pembingkai ulang etika kewargaan oleh negara. Intervensi MUI mengubah penafsiran teks suci menjadi legitimasi publik dan relevansi hukum; perbedaan terjemahan *awliyā'* membentuk makna politik dan sosial yang berbeda; platform digital memperluas sekaligus memfragmentasi publik Qur'ani; dan *moderasi beragama* membingkai ulang etika publik Qur'ani melalui norma-norma kewargaan. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian Al-Qur'an dan hermeneutika Islam dengan mengonseptualisasikan penafsiran Al-Qur'an sebagai praktik publik sosio-diskursif, yaitu ketika makna tekstual yang sakral menjadi otoritatif melalui institusi, terjemahan, media, hukum, dan tata kelola negara.

Kata kunci: otoritas Qur'ani; ruang publik; politik interpretasi; Islam digital; Islam Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an has never functioned solely as a sacred text confined to ritual recitation, doctrinal reflection, or classical exegetical scholarship. Across Muslim societies, it has also served as a source of public reasoning, moral legitimacy, legal imagination, political authority, and collective identity. In contemporary settings, Qur'anic interpretation increasingly circulates beyond traditional institutions of tafsir and enters arenas shaped by electoral politics, digital media, state religious policy, civil society activism, interreligious negotiation, and every day public controversy. This transformation raises a central problem for Qur'anic studies, Islamic hermeneutics, and interdisciplinary Islamic textual studies: how does a sacred text acquire public authority when its meaning is mediated by competing actors, institutions, technologies, and political interests?

This problem is particularly urgent in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy. Indonesia is home to roughly 242 million Muslims, or about 87% of the national population, according to Ministry of Religious Affairs data reported by Pew Research Center.¹ At the same time, Indonesia's public sphere has been substantially reshaped by digital communication: APJII recorded 221,563,479 internet users in 2024, with internet penetration reaching 79.5%, while DataReportal reported 143 million active social media user identities in January 2025, equivalent to about 50.2% of the population. These figures indicate that Qur'anic meaning in Indonesia is no longer mediated only through *pesantren*, mosques, printed tafsir, Islamic universities, or established religious organizations; it is also produced and circulated through digital platforms, online preachers, Islamic portals, political campaigns, and algorithmically intensified public debates.

Within this communicative ecology, Qur'anic authority has become both more visible and more contested. The post-Reformasi period has opened Indonesia's religious public sphere to a plurality of Islamic voices, including state institutions, the Indonesian Ulama Council, *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), *Muhammadiyah*, *Salafi* networks, Islamist activists, progressive Muslim platforms, celebrity preachers, and digital *da'wa* communities. Arifianto describes post-Reformasi Indonesia as a competitive "marketplace of ideas," where established Islamic authorities increasingly contend with new religious actors operating through campuses, community preaching, and social media.² This pluralization has transformed Qur'anic interpretation from a specialized scholarly activity into a public discursive practice that is often entangled with law, identity, media visibility, and political mobilization.

The controversy surrounding Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 during the 2016–2017 Ahok case illustrates this transformation with clarity. The *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) issued a religious opinion that treated public statements about the verse as a matter of possible blasphemy against the Qur'an and the ulama. Subsequent scholarship has shown that the controversy was not merely a legal or electoral episode, but a struggle over who could define Qur'anic meaning in public life. Tsaqofi, for example, argue that digital religious discourse around al-Mā'idah 5:51 sharpened struggles over Qur'anic authority and generated counter-narratives through progressive Islamic media such as *Islami*.³ The case demonstrates how a Qur'anic verse can become a contested signifier through which political legitimacy, religious identity, moral boundaries, and institutional authority are negotiated.

Existing scholarship has approached this phenomenon from several important directions. One body of research on Indonesian Islam has examined the transformation of religious authority after Reformasi, especially the fragmentation of Islamic leadership, the rise of conservative activism, and

¹ Pew Research Center, "5 Facts about Muslims and Christians in Indonesia" (Pew Research Center, 2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/28/5-facts-about-muslims-and-christians-in-indonesia/>.

² Alexander R Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-Reformasi Indonesia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37–50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2019.10>.

³ Wildan Ahmad Tsaqofi et al., "Digital Religious Discourse: Constructing Legitimacy and Counter-Narratives in *Islami.Co*," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025): 225–38, <https://doi.org/10.15408/mimbar.v42i1.48924>.

competition between mainstream organizations and new religious entrepreneurs.⁴ This literature has been crucial in showing that Islamic authority in Indonesia is no longer institutionally centralized. Yet it often treats Qur'anic interpretation as one component within broader political and sociological processes, rather than analyzing the specific mechanisms through which Qur'anic textual authority becomes public authority.

A second strand of scholarship, focused on digital Islam, has shown how online platforms decentralize Islamic learning, create new publics, and allow non-traditional actors to claim religious authority.⁵ Recent studies extend this argument by showing that platforms such as NU Online and Voa-Islam.com reflect ideological divisions between sharia formalism and democratic compatibility,⁶ while social media reshapes religious expression and authority among younger Muslims.⁷ Research on digital religious authority also shows that debates over issues such as early marriage among Muslim millennials reflect a shift in interpretive authority from traditional scholars toward social media influencers and online communities.⁸ These studies illuminate the technological transformation of religious authority, but they do not always explain how specific Qur'anic meanings are authorized, contested, and stabilized across institutional and digital fields.

A third body of work within Indonesian Qur'anic studies has examined thematic tafsir, contextual interpretation, translation debates, local exegetical traditions, and the reception of specific verses in public controversies.⁹ Studies of translation have shown that the rendering of key Qur'anic terms is not linguistically neutral. Tsaqofi, Saehudin, and Mahmudah, for instance, analyze how conservative Islamic websites frame the translation and authority of *awliyā'* in Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51.¹⁰ Musaffa further argues that Qur'anic translation in Indonesia is shaped by state intervention and ideological preference, embedding legal and political content into religious texts.¹¹ These studies are important because they shift attention from tafsir as commentary to translation as an arena of authority. However, a more integrated account is still needed to explain how translation, institutional claims, digital circulation, and political contestation interact within a single public field.

⁴ Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); Robert W Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316344446>; Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-Reformasi Indonesia."

⁵ Heidi A Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Routledge, 2013); Gary R Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Eva F Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 24–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1416758>; Martin Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416798>.

⁶ M Muji Buddin SM et al., "Islamic Law, The Constitution, And Digital Media: A Study of Islamic Discourse Construction in Contemporary Indonesia," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 25, no. 2 (2025): 20–36, <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v25i2.1951>.

⁷ N Jafar et al., "Gender And Religiosity In Indonesian Popular Media: An Anthropological Reading Of Cultural Representations," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 23, no. 2 (2025): 667–95, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v23i2.1489>.

⁸ Yusuf Rahman and Ervan Nurtawab, "Western Qur'anic Studies In Indonesian Islamic Universities" 62, no. 2 (2024): 337–61, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.622.337-361>.

⁹ Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2013); Jajang A Rohmana, *Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Tatar Sunda* (Bandung: Mujahid Press, 2017); Wildan Ahmad Tsaqofi, Asep Saehudin, and Siti Hajar Mahmudah, "Power of Translation of QS. Al-Ma'idah 51 on the Conservative Islamic Website in Indonesia," *Lingua Didaktika: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Pembelajaran Bahasa* 17, no. 1 (2023): 57–70, <https://doi.org/10.24036/ld.v17i1.121305>; Tsaqofi et al., "Digital Religious Discourse: Constructing Legitimacy and Counter-Narratives in Islami.Co."

¹⁰ Tsaqofi, Saehudin, and Mahmudah, "Power of Translation of QS. Al-Ma'idah 51 on the Conservative Islamic Website in Indonesia."

¹¹ M U A Musaffa, "Language Politics and Fiqh's Authority on Qur'anic Reinterpretation in Indonesian Translation Practices," *Al-Mazaahib* 13, no. 1 (2025): 114–21, <https://doi.org/10.14421/al-mazaahib.v13i1.4357>.

A fourth and increasingly significant strand of research examines the relationship between Qur'anic interpretation, state authority, and local cultural formation. Mursyid shows that state-sponsored tafsir produced under the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs plays a role in shaping narratives of religious pluralism and interreligious harmony.¹² Other studies demonstrate that Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia is frequently mediated through local cultural contexts: Javanese tafsir integrates Islamic teachings with local ethical and cultural traditions,¹³ while Sasak Muslim interpretive practices in Lombok reflect oral hermeneutics, communal religious practice, and ideological conflict.¹⁴ These studies complicate any assumption that Qur'anic authority in Indonesia is defined only by formal institutions or national politics. They show that Qur'anic meaning is also produced through local traditions, communal memory, cultural accommodation, and regionally embedded forms of interpretive authority.

The literature on public religion and pluralism adds another layer to this discussion. Indonesia has frequently been represented, both domestically and internationally, as a site of moderate Islam and interfaith dialogue. Damayanti argues that Indonesia's promotion of moderate Islam in global politics is linked to interfaith initiatives rooted in principles of diversity and tolerance.¹⁵ At the same time, legal scholarship has shown that Indonesia's anti-blasphemy framework reveals continuing tension between religious protection, public order, minority rights, and state authority.¹⁶ This tension is important for the present study because Qur'anic interpretation in the public sphere is not merely a matter of theological disagreement; it may become legally consequential, socially polarizing, and politically mobilizing.

These scholarly trends have made substantial contributions, but they leave an important conceptual and methodological problem unresolved. Studies of tafsir often focus on exegetical content, interpretive method, translation, or genealogy. Studies of political Islam tend to examine ideology, mobilization, populism, institutional authority, or electoral contestation. Studies of digital religion emphasize platform culture, online authority, and mediated religious practice. What remains insufficiently theorized is the mechanism through which Qur'anic textual authority becomes public authority: how scriptural meaning moves from interpretation into public contestation; how actors compete to authorize meanings; and how Qur'anic discourse becomes entangled with social identity, legal legitimacy, institutional hierarchy, and political power. The unresolved issue, therefore, is not simply what a Qur'anic verse means, but how its meaning is publicly produced, contested, circulated, and legitimized.

This article addresses that gap by conceptualizing Qur'anic interpretation as a socio-discursive practice rather than merely a textual, theological, or doctrinal exercise. It draws on three interrelated theoretical perspectives. First, it employs Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition,¹⁷ which treats Islamic practices and interpretations as historically situated attempts to define correct form, continuity, and authority. This framework is useful because Qur'anic meaning is not produced in

¹² A Y Mursyid and A Nahdiyati, "State-Sponsored Quranic Exegesis: A Comparative Analysis of Turkiye's and Indonesia's Official Tafsir," *AlBayan* 22, no. 3 (2024): 439–68, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20240159>.

¹³ Supriyanto Supriyanto and Akhmad R B Zaman, "Living Quran in the Context of Rural Communities: A Study on the Miracle of the Quran in Gentasari, Kroya, Cilacap," *Al-Bayān – Journal of Qur'ān and Hadīth Studies* 21, no. 2 (2023): 199–216, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20230132>.

¹⁴ M Taufiq and M Said, "Qur'anic Interpretation among Sasak Muslims across Communities, Theologies, and Ideological Conflicts," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 383–412, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6287>.

¹⁵ R Damayanti, "The Relevance of Fiqh Siyasa Dauliyah and Religion as Indonesian Soft Power in International Relations," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 15, no. 2 (2023): 343–65, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v15i2.23371>.

¹⁶ P R Sianturi, J N Pardede, and S D Riadi, "Rebalancing Religious Policy and the Concept of Public Sphere: Indonesia Cases," *Udayana Journal of Law and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2021): 119–37, <https://doi.org/10.24843/UJLC.2021.v05.i02.p02>.

¹⁷ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986).

isolation; it is authorized through traditions, institutions, pedagogies, and claims about legitimate interpretation. Second, the article engages public sphere theory, especially Habermas's account of public reason¹⁸ and Fraser's critique of a singular public sphere through the idea of counter publics.¹⁹ This perspective helps explain why Indonesia's Islamic public sphere is not a neutral communicative arena, but a field of unequal access, competing publics, and contested legitimacy. Third, it adopts critical discourse analysis, particularly Fairclough's view that discourse is both shaped by and productive of social power.²⁰ CDA is appropriate because it enables the study to analyze how language, translation, institutional statements, and religious argumentation construct authority and marginalize alternative positions.

This theoretical approach also allows the article to engage critically with recent CDA-based studies of Indonesian religious authority. Alnizar for example, shows that MUI fatwas use rhetorical and linguistic strategies to reinforce authority and marginalize dissenting groups such as Ahmadiyah.²¹ This insight is highly relevant, but the present article extends the analysis beyond fatwa discourse alone by examining how Qur'anic authority travels across multiple arenas: institutional statements, translation platforms, digital Islamic media, public controversies, legal reasoning, and state discourses of moderation. Likewise, recent studies on competition between *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Salafi* movements show that religious legitimacy is constructed through divergent hermeneutical strategies: NU tends to emphasize contextual and inclusive approaches, while Salafi movements privilege textual purity and scriptural immediacy.²² The present study builds on this insight by asking how such hermeneutical differences become publicly consequential when attached to Qur'anic verses, social controversies, and political claims.

Based on this framework, the article asks three focused research questions. First, how is Qur'anic textual authority constructed and contested in contemporary Indonesian public discourse? Second, which actors, institutions, and media platforms shape the public meaning of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia? Third, how does interpretive contestation over Qur'anic meaning contribute to broader struggles over religious legitimacy, social identity, and political authority? These questions move the analysis beyond isolated exegetical meaning toward the public life of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia's democratic, digital, and legally plural public sphere.

The objectives of the study are therefore threefold. First, it examines how competing Islamic actors construct claims of Qur'anic authority in public debates. Second, it analyzes how Qur'anic meanings are mediated through institutional, political, translational, legal, and digital channels. Third, it explains how interpretive competition contributes to wider struggles over legitimacy and authority in contemporary Indonesian Islam. Methodologically, the article is designed as a qualitative critical discourse analysis of selected public texts, including institutional religious statements, state-sponsored tafsir and translation, digital Islamic media, legal documents, public controversies around Qur'anic verses, and interpretive narratives circulating in Indonesia's post-Reformasi public sphere.

The article's academic significance lies in its effort to bridge Qur'anic studies, Islamic hermeneutics, sociology of religious authority, legal-political analysis, and discourse studies. Its novelty is not the general claim that the Qur'an influences Indonesian public life, which is already well established, but the more specific argument that Qur'anic authority is produced through competition

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

²⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Longman, 1995).

²¹ F Alnizar, "The Language of Exclusion: Ideology and Power in the Fatwa of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia on Ahmadiyah," *Journal of Islamic Law* 6, no. 1 (2025): 67–88, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v6i1.3338>.

²² A N An et al., "Millennial Era Islamic Parenting Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis Utilizing the Scopus Database," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 8, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2025002>; C Chaplin, "Religious Authority in the Urban Mosque: Islamic Activism and the Ethics of 'Being Present' in Eastern Indonesia," *American Ethnologist* 52, no. 2 (2025): 159–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.13388>.

among actors, institutions, media environments, legal frameworks, and interpretive regimes. By theorizing Qur'anic interpretation as a contested public practice, the article contributes to international scholarship on sacred texts in modern Muslim societies. It argues that Qur'anic authority in contemporary Indonesia is neither singular nor static; it is continuously negotiated through textual claims, semantic contestation, institutional mediation, digital circulation, local-cultural adaptation, state intervention, and the politics of interpretation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual and socio-discursive research design to examine how Qur'anic authority is constructed, contested, and circulated in contemporary Indonesian public discourse. The design combines document analysis, critical discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, and socio-hermeneutic interpretation. This approach is appropriate because the study does not aim to measure public opinion statistically, but to interpret how Qur'anic meanings, institutional authority, ideological positions, and public legitimacy are produced through texts, translations, legal documents, policy materials, and digital religious discourse. Following Creswell and Poth, qualitative inquiry is understood here as an interpretive approach that investigates how meaning is constructed within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts.²³

The main analytical approach is critical discourse analysis. Fairclough's model is used because it allows discourse to be examined at three interrelated levels: textual form, discursive practice, and socio-political context.²⁴ At the textual level, the study analyzes wording, translation choices, concepts, and rhetorical structures used in Qur'anic interpretation. At the level of discursive practice, it examines how texts are produced, circulated, cited, contested, and received in public arenas. At the socio-political level, it analyzes how Qur'anic interpretation becomes connected to legal authority, religious legitimacy, digital visibility, and political mobilization. This model is adapted by adding a hermeneutical dimension, since Qur'anic discourse involves sacred textual authority, Arabic semantic structure, classical exegetical tradition, and institutional claims of religious legitimacy.

The study is categorized as a qualitative case-based textual study. The case is not treated as a single event, but as a broader discursive field: the contestation of Qur'anic authority in Indonesia's post-Reformasi public sphere. Attention is given to Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51, the public translation of *awliyā'*, digital Islamic media, and state discourse on religious moderation. This case is analytically useful because it shows how Qur'anic meaning moves across institutional religious authority, legal procedure, electoral politics, mass mobilization, digital media, and counter-interpretive discourse.

The primary data consist of publicly accessible textual and digital documents. Following Bowen, documents are treated not as neutral sources of information, but as social facts that reflect institutional purposes, ideological positions, and communicative contexts.²⁵ The corpus includes five categories: MUI's *Pendapat dan Sikap Keagamaan* on Basuki Tjahaja Purnama's statement concerning Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51; the North Jakarta District Court Decision No. 1537/Pid.B/2016/PN JKT.UTR; Qur'anic translation platforms such as Qur'an Kemenag, QuranMu Muhammadiyah, and NU Online Qur'an; digital Islamic media including NU Online tafsir articles, Islami.co materials, and conservative-progressive Islamic media discussions; and state policy documents such as Kementerian Agama's *Moderasi Beragama*, Presidential Regulation No. 58/2023, and Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 3/2024.

Data were collected through purposive textual sampling. The selected sources had to meet four criteria: direct relevance to Qur'anic interpretation or public religious discourse in Indonesia; public accessibility and verifiability; representation of different types of authority, including state, religious institution, Islamic organization, legal institution, and digital media; and relevance to the post-

²³ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018).

²⁴ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*; Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*.

²⁵ Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

Reformasi public sphere. This procedure enables comparison among juridical, institutional, exegetical, digital, and state-bureaucratic modes of Qur'anic authority.

The analysis is guided by three theoretical frameworks: Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition, Habermas-Fraser public sphere theory, and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. These frameworks are integrated into the following analytical model: Qur'anic text → translation and interpretation → institutional mediation → public circulation → social contestation → political legitimacy. The collected texts were analyzed through manual qualitative coding informed by Krippendorff's content analysis.²⁶ Open coding identified recurring terms such as *awliya'*, "pemimpin," "penistaan agama," "otoritas ulama," "moderasi," "toleransi," and "legitimasi." Axial coding grouped them into broader categories: institutional authority, humidification, semantic contestation, digital circulation, counter-authority, and state moderation. Theoretical coding then linked these categories to the article's analytical framework.

The interpretive procedure involved textual analysis, discursive-practice analysis, and socio-political analysis. Although the study engages digital media, it is not a computational digital humanities project; it does not use scraping, sentiment analysis, topic modeling, or network analysis. Its digital corpus is treated as a qualitative textual corpus, with methodological awareness drawn from Hine and Kozinets. Trustworthiness is maintained through source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, transparent corpus selection, and interpretive reflexivity. Since all data are public documents, legal records, published materials, and open digital texts, no human-subject consent is required. The study is limited by its reliance on documentary data, selective digital corpus, and absence of interviews, but these limits define its purpose: to explain how Qur'anic textual authority becomes public authority through institutional mediation, semantic contestation, digital circulation, and state discourse in contemporary Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Qur'anic Authority and the Judaification of Interpretation

The most fundamental finding of this study is that Qur'anic authority in contemporary Indonesia is not produced only through exegetical reasoning, but also through institutional procedures that transform scriptural interpretation into juridical, political, and public legitimacy. The controversy surrounding Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 during the 2016–2017 Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, or Ahok, case demonstrates that a dispute over Qur'anic meaning can move beyond the domain of tafsir and enter the arenas of law, electoral politics, mass mobilization, and state-mediated religious adjudication. The central issue, therefore, was not merely what the term *awliya'* means in a philological or exegetical sense, but how a particular interpretation of the verse acquired institutional authority and became consequential in public life.

The primary evidence for this process is the Majelis Ulama Indonesia's *Pendapat dan Sikap Keagamaan* concerning Ahok's statement on Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51. In this document, MUI argued that declaring as "bohong" those ulama who used Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 as the basis for prohibiting non-Muslim leadership could be understood as insulting the Qur'an and the ulama. MUI further categorized the statement as an act that carried religious and legal consequences.²⁷ The document is significant not simply because it offers an institutional view on a Qur'anic verse, but because it establishes a normative boundary between legitimate and illegitimate public speech about the Qur'an. In doing so, MUI did not merely participate in an interpretive debate; it converted a dispute over scriptural meaning into a question of religious injury, communal protection, and legal accountability.

This pattern became more explicit when the issue entered the judicial process. The North Jakarta District Court Decision No. 1537/Pid.B/2016/PN JKT.UTR, dated 9 May 2017, formally recorded

²⁶ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019).

²⁷ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Pendapat Dan Sikap Keagamaan Majelis Ulama Indonesia Terkait Pernyataan Basuki Tjahaja Purnama" (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2016), <https://mirror.mui.or.id/berita/10590/pendapat-dan-sikap-keagamaan-mui-terkait-pernyataan-basuki-tjahaja-purnama/>.

the blasphemy case involving Ahok and positioned the controversy within Indonesia's legal framework on religious insult. The court case shows how Qur'anic discourse became humidified: interpretive disagreement was no longer treated only as a matter of hermeneutics, translation, or theological debate, but as a possible violation of public religious order. In this sense, the movement from MUI's religious opinion to the court process reveals a chain of institutional mediation: Qur'anic text, religious interpretation, public controversy, legal classification, and judicial consequence.

This juridification does not mean that MUI fatwas or religious opinions are formally equivalent to state law. Several studies have emphasized that MUI fatwas are not binding legal norms within Indonesia's formal hierarchy of legislation, although they often exert strong sociological and religious authority.²⁸ Their force lies less in direct legal enforceability than in their capacity to define orthodoxy, shape Muslim public opinion, and influence legal reasoning through expert testimony or evidentiary use in court. Recent studies on blasphemy trials show that MUI's fatwas and expert opinions frequently become influential in judicial processes despite their formally non-binding status.²⁹ The Ahok case thus reveals a distinctive legal-religious configuration: MUI's authority operates in the space between doctrinal interpretation and state law, where religious legitimacy can be translated into juridical relevance without becoming legislation in a strict positivist sense.

This finding is best understood through Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition. For Asad, Islamic authority is produced through historically embedded practices that define correct belief, proper conduct, and legitimate speech.³⁰ MUI's intervention in the al-Mā'idah 5:51 controversy can therefore be read as an attempt to regulate not only the meaning of a Qur'anic verse, but also the conditions under which the verse could be publicly discussed. The institution's authority rested on a double claim: first, that the Qur'an possesses a sacred status requiring protection from insult; second, that MUI has the interpretive legitimacy to distinguish between permissible disagreement and impermissible offense. Qur'anic authority here is not simply textual; it is institutionally organized through procedures of classification, correction, and public discipline.

The pattern also reflects a broader trajectory of MUI's role in Indonesian state-religion relations. Scholars have shown that MUI has moved from being a government-affiliated advisory body into a more autonomous religious institution capable of influencing public morality, legal debate, and political contestation.³¹ This influence is visible not only in blasphemy cases, but also in sectors where MUI fatwas have become closely integrated with national regulatory systems, such as halal certification and Islamic finance.³² These cases indicate a wider process of humidification in which religious norms, although initially articulated as Islamic opinions or fatwas, may become embedded within

²⁸ S Fenwick, "Eat, Pray, Regulate: The Indonesian Ulama Council And The Management Of Islamic Affairs," in *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 33, 2018, 271–90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2018.23>; I.E.A.S. Pelu and J Tarantang, "Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia Sebagai Solusi Permasalahan Umat Islam Di Indonesia," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 14, no. 2 (2020): 307–16, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v14i2.3927>.

²⁹ MR Ilahi et al., "Fatwa Institutions in Handling Religious Blasphemy Crimes in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Al-Ahkam* 34, no. 1 (2024): 33–62, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2024.34.1.18624>; K Thresher, "The Role of Majelis Ulama Indonesia in Blasphemy Trials in East Java," *Australian Journal of Asian Law* 25, no. 2 (2025): 103–20, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105000050618&partnerID=40&md5=2c82bfac08ce7a8d322b15bbf3dbaa10>; I Yahya and S Susilo, "Conservative Muslims in Indonesia's Religious and Political Landscapes: Ahok's Blasphemy Case as a Political Leverage," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2392293>.

³⁰ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

³¹ Fenwick, "Eat, Pray, Regulate: The Indonesian Ulama Council And The Management Of Islamic Affairs"; Yahya and Susilo, "Conservative Muslims in Indonesia's Religious and Political Landscapes: Ahok's Blasphemy Case as a Political Leverage."

³² M Kharrazi, I Fautanu, and A Suganda, "Legal Analysis Of Mui's Authority In Providing Halal Label Guarantees After The Issuance Of Law Number 33 Of 2014 Concerning Guarantees For Halal Products," *Revista de Gestao Social e Ambiental* 18, no. 9 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n9-057>; F Mustafid, K Nasution, and A Sodikin, "Positivization of the Council of Indonesian Ulema's Halal Fatwa: Policy and Position in Indonesian Legislation," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 23, no. 1 (2024): 155–66, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v23i1.10859>.

administrative, commercial, or legal infrastructures. The al-Mā'idah 5:51 controversy differs from halal or Islamic finance regulation, but it reveals the same structural tendency: MUI's interpretive authority can acquire public force when mediated through state institutions, legal discourse, and mass political mobilization.

The Ahok case also shows that humidification is never merely legal; it is socially and politically mediated. Yahya argues that the MUI position in the case was politically leveraged and contributed to the formation of broader public mobilization, including the emergence of groups such as the National Fatwa Guard Movement, or GNPF-MUI.³³ This development illustrates how a religious opinion can become a mobilizing symbol, not only a doctrinal statement. Once the Qur'anic verse was framed as a matter of insult, protection, and communal obligation, interpretive authority moved into the sphere of collective action. The verse became a marker through which religious identity, political opposition, and institutional legitimacy were organized.

This finding refines existing scholarship on Indonesian Islamic authority. Studies by Hefner, Fealy and White, Menchik, and Arifianto have convincingly shown that post-Reformasi Indonesia is marked by the pluralization and fragmentation of Islamic authority.³⁴ However, the present analysis shows that pluralization does not necessarily diminish the power of formal institutions. In moments of public controversy, institutional actors such as MUI may regain authority precisely because they can translate interpretive claims into legal, moral, and political categories. Arifianto's description of post-Reformasi Indonesia as a competitive "marketplace" of Islamic authority is therefore supported, but this study adds that competition does not produce a flat religious field.³⁵ Some actors possess greater institutional capacity to convert scriptural interpretation into juridical consequence and public legitimacy.

The case also complicates the distinction between religious authority and state authority. MUI is not a court, parliament, or executive agency, yet its religious opinion may influence legal processes and public expectations of justice. Its authority is grounded in Qur'anic texts, hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and the language of communal protection, including concepts associated with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* such as the preservation of religion, *ḥifẓ al-dīn*, and the preservation of life, *ḥifẓ al-nafs*.³⁶ However, when such reasoning enters public controversy, it may function less as abstract legal theory and more as a mechanism for defining orthodoxy, identifying transgression, and legitimizing intervention. This is precisely why the Ahok case matters for Qur'anic studies: it shows how scriptural meaning becomes public authority through institutional mediation, not through exegesis alone.

Methodologically, this finding demonstrates the limits of studying Qur'anic controversies through tafsir analysis alone. A narrowly exegetical approach would focus on whether *awliyā'* should be rendered as "leader," "ally," "protector," or "loyal friend." Such analysis is important, but insufficient. The socio-discursive approach adopted here asks a different question: how did one interpretive framing become institutionally authorized, legally relevant, politically mobilized, and publicly consequential? The MUI document and the North Jakarta District Court decision show that Qur'anic interpretation in public controversies operates through a chain of mediation involving sacred text, institutional opinion, public affect, legal procedure, political mobilization, and media circulation.

³³ Yahya and Susilo, "Conservative Muslims in Indonesia's Religious and Political Landscapes: Ahok's Blasphemy Case as a Political Leverage."

³⁴ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*; G Fealy, "The Political Contingency of Reform-mindedness in Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama: Interest Politics and the Khittah," in *Islamic Legitimacy in a Plural Asia*, 2008, 154–66, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203933404-16>; Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*; Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-Reformasi Indonesia."

³⁵ Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post-Reformasi Indonesia."

³⁶ K Hamim, L S Bin Mujib, and A Muhasim, "Religious Fatwā and Human Security: Managing Public Health through the Lens of Islamic Jurisprudence in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia," *Khazanah Hukum* 6, no. 3 (2024): 234–50, <https://doi.org/10.15575/KH.V6I3.40478>; Pelu and Tarantang, "Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia Sebagai Solusi Permasalahan Umat Islam Di Indonesia."

The core significance of this finding is that institutional Qur'anic authority in Indonesia operates through humidification: scriptural interpretation becomes public authority when it is translated into categories of insult, orthodoxy, legal responsibility, communal protection, and political legitimacy. This humidification does not erase interpretive plurality, but it reveals how certain institutions can temporarily stabilize one interpretation as publicly authoritative and legally consequential within Indonesia's contested religious public sphere.

Translation, Semantic Contestation, and the Public Meaning of *Awliyā'*

The central interpretive tension in this sub-section is that the public authority of Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 in Indonesia depends not only on the verse's exegetical history, but also on the semantic and political work performed by the translation of *awliyā'*. The term is not easily reducible to a single Indonesian equivalent. Across exegetical and translation traditions, *awliyā'* has been rendered or interpreted as "friends," "allies," "intimates," "confidants," "helpers," "protectors," or "leaders".³⁷ This semantic range is precisely what made the verse publicly contestable. The controversy was not simply a dispute over Arabic vocabulary, but a struggle over which Indonesian rendering would become socially authoritative and politically consequential.

The primary textual corpus shows that Indonesian public translations of Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 do not speak in one voice. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' Qur'an platform functions as a state-authorized reference point for Indonesian Muslims and therefore occupies a significant position in the public standardization of Qur'anic meaning.³⁸ Muhammadiyah's digital Qur'an renders *awliyā'* through the phrase "*teman setia*," foregrounding loyalty, intimacy, and alliance rather than direct political office.³⁹ NU Online's Qur'anic platform similarly places the verse within an exegetical field rather than reducing it to an electoral prohibition. These differences reveal that translation is not merely a technical transfer from Arabic into Indonesian. It is a mode of interpretive positioning through which institutions participate in defining the public meaning of scripture.

This finding supports, but also refines, previous scholarship on the semantic complexity of *awliyā'*. Comparative studies of Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 have shown that the term is highly context-dependent and that its interpretation varies across theological, linguistic, historical, and regional settings.⁴⁰ *Salafi*-oriented exegesis tends to emphasize a sharper boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims, interpreting the verse in terms of loyalty, dissociation, and communal separation, while Indonesian and Turkish commentators have often adopted less confrontational readings than many Arab commentators.⁴¹ Other modern exegetes argue that the prohibition should be understood in relation to contexts of hostility toward Islam rather than as a general prohibition of all forms of non-Muslim political or social association.⁴² The Indonesian controversy therefore belongs to a wider transregional debate, but it also has a distinctive public character: semantic ambiguity became

³⁷ J Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51," *Welt Des Islams* 50, no. 1 (2010): 3–59, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006010X489801>; H Çoruh, "Friendship between Muslims and the People of the Book in the Qur'an with Special Reference to Q 5.51," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 4 (2012): 505–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2012.712436>.

³⁸ Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, "Qur'an Kemenag" (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2022), <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/>.

³⁹ Muhammadiyah, "Al-Ma'idah: 51" (QuranMu: Al-Qur'an Digital Muhammadiyah, 2026), <https://quran.muhammadiyah.or.id/al-maidah/51>.

⁴⁰ Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51"; Çoruh, "Friendship between Muslims and the People of the Book in the Qur'an with Special Reference to Q 5.51."

⁴¹ Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51."

⁴² A Kholid, A Bakar, and M Zamzami, "Rereading the Indonesian Interpretation of the Qur'an on Awliya': The Cases of Hamka and m. Quraish Shihab," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 37–72, <https://doi.org/10.21043/QIJS.V9I1.7567>.

politically charged because the Indonesian public sphere translated *awliyā'* into categories of citizenship, electoral choice, religious identity, and communal loyalty.

The NU Online tafsir corpus illustrates this interpretive plurality. Its article on *Tafsir Jamal* acknowledges that Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 had become publicly associated with leadership debates, but it re-situates the verse within broader classical exegetical discussion rather than presenting a single contemporary political meaning.⁴³ Its discussion of Ibn 'Abbās frames the verse less as a direct statement about political leadership and more as a warning concerning religious allegiance and following another religious community.⁴⁴ Its treatment of al-Ṭabarī further foregrounds the breadth of riwāyah-based interpretation surrounding the verse.⁴⁵ Taken together, these materials show that the semantic field of *awliyā'* is broader than the public keyword "*pemimpin*." They also demonstrate how digital tafsir can reopen classical interpretive plurality in response to contemporary political simplification.

The contrast with MUI's formulation is therefore analytically important, although it should not be reduced to a simple opposition between "political" and "non-political" interpretation. In its institutional statement, MUI explicitly connected Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 with the issue of "*larangan menjadikan nonmuslim sebagai pemimpin*".⁴⁶ This wording did not invent the political reading of the verse, since leadership-oriented interpretations exist within broader exegetical debates. However, it stabilized one possible semantic trajectory—*awliyā'* as political leadership—as the central public frame of the controversy. The move from *awliyā'* to "*pemimpin*" condensed a wider semantic range into a politically salient category. In that condensation, translation became a mechanism of public authority.

This finding expands previous studies on Qur'anic translation in Indonesia. Tsaqofi, Saehudin, and Mahmudah show that conservative Islamic websites used the translation of Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 to construct religious authority and political meaning.⁴⁷ The evidence analyzed here supports their argument but suggests that the politics of translation cannot be adequately explained through a binary division between conservative and progressive actors. State translation, Muhammadiyah's reformist digital Qur'an, NU's traditionalist tafsir platform, MUI's institutional opinion, and online Islamic media all participate in the same contested semantic field. The question is not only which actor is ideologically conservative or progressive, but how each actor stabilizes, expands, narrows, or redirects the semantic possibilities of the Qur'anic term.

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis clarifies why this semantic contest matters. Translation is not a transparent linguistic act; it is a discursive practice that produces social effects by organizing what can be said, authorized, contested, and acted upon.⁴⁸ Rendering *awliyā'* as "*pemimpin*" foregrounds political authority and electoral decision-making. Rendering it as "*teman setia*" foregrounds intimacy, loyalty, alliance, and social-religious proximity. Reading it through classical contextual exegesis foregrounds historical relations among Muslims, Jews, Christians, hypocrites, and political alliances in the Medinan setting. Each formulation organizes a different public imagination: one centered on political rule, another on communal loyalty, and another on historically situated religious allegiance. The translation debate therefore shows how linguistic choices can become instruments for producing social boundaries.

⁴³ NU Online, "Surat Al-Ma'idah Ayat 51: Arab, Latin, Terjemah Dan Tafsir Lengkap" (NU Online, n.d.), <https://quran.nu.or.id/al-maidah/51>.

⁴⁴ NU Online, "Surat Al-Ma'idah Ayat 51 Menurut Tafsir Jamal" (NU Online, 2016), <https://islam.nu.or.id/tafsir/surat-al-maidah-ayat-51-menurut-tafsir-jamal-j4Ucy>.

⁴⁵ NU Online, "Tafsir Al-Ma'idah 51 Menurut Ibn 'Abbas" (NU Online, 2016), <https://islam.nu.or.id/tafsir/tafsir-al-maidah-51-menurut-ibnu-abbas-5fvM1>.

⁴⁶ Indonesia, "Pendapat Dan Sikap Keagamaan Majelis Ulama Indonesia Terkait Pernyataan Basuki Tjahaja Purnama."

⁴⁷ Tsaqofi, Saehudin, and Mahmudah, "Power of Translation of QS. Al-Ma'idah 51 on the Conservative Islamic Website in Indonesia."

⁴⁸ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*; Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*.

The Indonesian case also contributes to broader discussions of semantic politics in Qur'anic interpretation. Pink and Çoruh show that exegetes often mobilize Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 to address contemporary questions of interfaith relations, political alliances, and Muslim communal boundaries while grounding their arguments in historical and linguistic analysis.⁴⁹ The Indonesian data confirm this pattern, but they also reveal an additional layer: the public force of interpretation depends on the institutional and media environments through which translation circulates. A semantic possibility becomes socially authoritative only when it is amplified by institutions, quoted in controversy, reproduced by digital platforms, and linked to public anxieties about religious identity and political belonging.

The theoretical implication is that Qur'anic authority in the public sphere cannot be separated from the politics of translation. Authority is not located solely in the Arabic text, nor solely in the interpreter's institutional status. It emerges through the interaction between lexical ambiguity, exegetical tradition, translational choice, institutional framing, and public circulation. The debate over *awliyā'* strengthens the originality of this study because it shows that competing Qur'anic authorities in Indonesia are produced not only by rival institutions or ideological blocs, but also by the semantic struggle to determine which translation of a key Qur'anic term can organize public meaning.

Digital Media, Fragmented Authority, and the Expansion of Qur'anic Publics

The methodological contribution of this study lies in showing that a qualitative digital-corpus approach reveals forms of Qur'anic authority that remain obscured when interpretation is examined only through printed tafsir, formal institutions, or doctrinal texts. By treating online institutional archives, digital Qur'an platforms, Islamic media portals, and public-facing tafsir articles as primary materials, the analysis demonstrates that Qur'anic authority in contemporary Indonesia is not simply transmitted through digital media; it is reorganized by the digital conditions under which texts become searchable, shareable, quotable, and publicly contestable. This approach makes visible a transformation that a conventional tafsir-centered method would only partially capture: the expansion of Qur'anic publics through platform-mediated circulation.

The empirical basis for this methodological choice is substantial. Indonesia's Muslim population, estimated at approximately 242 million or around 87% of the national population, forms one of the largest Muslim publics in the world.⁵⁰ This religious demography intersects with a highly connected digital environment. APJII reported that Indonesia had 221,563,479 internet users in 2024, with internet penetration reaching 79.5% of the population.⁵¹ DataReportal estimated Indonesia's population at 285 million in January 2025 and documented the country's extensive digital connectivity.⁵² These data matter methodologically because Qur'anic discourse in Indonesia now circulates within a social field where religious authority and digital access overlap at massive scale. The public life of Qur'anic interpretation therefore cannot be adequately analyzed without examining the digital infrastructures through which religious texts and interpretive claims are distributed.

The digital corpus analyzed in this study includes MUI's official online archive, NU Online's tafsir articles, Muhammadiyah's QuranMu platform, Kemenag's Qur'an portal, and public-facing Islamic media such as Islami.co. These materials do not represent a single type of religious authority. Rather, they correspond to different institutional and discursive positions: MUI's institutional-legal authority, NU Online's traditionalist scholarly authority, Muhammadiyah's reformist organizational

⁴⁹ Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51"; Çoruh, "Friendship between Muslims and the People of the Book in the Qur'an with Special Reference to Q 5.51."

⁵⁰ Center, "5 Facts about Muslims and Christians in Indonesia."

⁵¹ Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, "APJII Jumlah Pengguna Internet Indonesia Tembus 221 Juta Orang" (APJII, 2024), <https://apjii.or.id/berita/d/apjii-jumlah-pengguna-internet-indonesia-tembus-221-juta-orang>.

⁵² DataReportal, "Digital 2025: Indonesia" (DataReportal - Global Digital Insights, 2025), <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia>.

authority, Kemenag's state-authorized scriptural authority, and Islami.co's counter-discursive digital authority. Reading these sources together reveals a pattern that would be difficult to identify through isolated document analysis: digital media creates a shared arena in which distinct claims to Qur'anic authority are placed into public proximity. Different institutions do not merely publish their interpretations; they become part of a searchable and comparative field in which audiences encounter competing versions of Qur'anic meaning.

This finding supports scholarship on digital Islam that emphasizes the transformation of religious communication, but it also refines that scholarship by showing how digital authority operates at the level of Qur'anic textual mediation. Earlier studies have demonstrated that digital platforms reshape Islamic learning, create new publics, and allow non-traditional actors to gain religious visibility.⁵³ More recent studies similarly show that social media in Indonesia has become a space for political mobilization and religious discourse, used by both moderate and conservative Islamic actors to shape identity and public narratives.⁵⁴ The present study confirms these insights, but adds that the key issue is not only the emergence of online religious communication. It is the digital relocation of Qur'anic interpretation itself into a field where institutional statements, tafsir articles, Qur'an translations, media commentaries, and counter-narratives circulate side by side.

The al-Mā'idah 5:51 controversy illustrates the value of this method. MUI's 2016 position was available as an online institutional document; NU Online responded through several tafsir-based articles that reopened classical interpretive debates; *Kemenag* and *Muhammadiyah* provided digital Qur'an translations that shaped public access to the verse; and later scholarship on Islami.co showed how progressive Islamic media constructed counter-narratives around the Ahok controversy and Qur'anic legitimacy.⁵⁵ When these materials are read as a digital corpus, the controversy appears not as a linear movement from verse to fatwa to legal case, but as a multi-directional field of circulation. Digital media allowed institutional authority, counter-authority, translation, commentary, and public argument to interact in ways that intensified the visibility and contestability of Qur'anic meaning.

This approach also clarifies that digital media does not simply replace traditional authority with new authority. Rather, it produces a hybrid religious field in which older institutions and newer digital actors compete within the same communicative ecology. Studies on fragmented religious authority have noted the rise of celebrity imams, cyber-muftis, female ulama activists, and other hybrid figures whose legitimacy is shaped by algorithmic visibility, audience engagement, and participatory practices.⁵⁶ At the same time, established organizations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* face the challenge of maintaining influence amid the rise of new digital authorities.⁵⁷ The findings of this article support this argument, but with an important qualification: established institutions are not

⁵³ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*; Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*; Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia"; Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia."

⁵⁴ F Mahzumi et al., "Cyber-Islamic Moderation In Indonesia: Digital Activism of Islami.Co and IBTimes.Id and Its Implications for Young Muslims," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 22–49, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1290>; N. Rohid, "Islamic Discourse and Political Mobilization on Indonesian Social Media.," *Journal of Digital Islam* 10, no. 2 (2025): 140–59.

⁵⁵ Tsaqofi et al., "Digital Religious Discourse: Constructing Legitimacy and Counter-Narratives in Islami.Co."

⁵⁶ S H Wahid and S Abdulloh, "Digital Islamic Authority: A Revolutionary Shift or Mere Hype? A Systematic Review," *SN Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-026-01328-5>; B Zaid, M Ibahrine, and M Ben Moussa, "Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice," *New Media and Society*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448261436035>.

⁵⁷ W Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24>; Mahzumi et al., "Cyber-Islamic Moderation In Indonesia: Digital Activism of Islami.Co and IBTimes.Id and Its Implications for Young Muslims."

simply displaced. They adapt by digitizing their own authority through official portals, online tafsir, searchable Qur'an platforms, and rapid public responses to controversy.

The concept of fragmented authority is therefore more accurate than the idea of straightforward democratization. Digital tafsir and online Islamic media have certainly expanded access to religious knowledge. Platforms such as tanwir.id and tafsilalquran.id, for instance, have been identified as spaces for progressive Qur'anic interpretation, including gender-sensitive readings and rights-based approaches.⁵⁸ Studies of digital tafsir also suggest that virtual communities may participate in reinterpretations of Islamic law, challenge patriarchal assumptions, and invoke *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* as an ethical framework for contemporary issues.⁵⁹ Yet the same digital environment also generates epistemic risks. The proliferation of unauthoritative tafsir online has led some scholars to propose AI-based frameworks for authenticating tafsir content against established sources.⁶⁰ The methodological point is that digital corpora must be read neither as inherently liberating nor inherently corrupting, but as contested spaces where accessibility, authority, and epistemic vulnerability develop together.

This digital-corpus approach further reveals the importance of algorithmic and affective mediation. The digital Islamic public sphere is not a neutral archive of religious texts. Algorithms, platform logics, echo chambers, and audience engagement patterns amplify certain voices while marginalizing others, producing ideological entrenchment and new challenges for minority groups.⁶¹ The idea of "liquid authority" is useful here because it captures how credibility in digital religion may depend less on formal scholarly credentials and more on trust, relational proximity, affective resonance, and algorithmic circulation.⁶² This does not mean that classical scholarship or institutional authority disappears. Rather, formal authority must now compete with communicative intimacy, media fluency, emotional appeal, and platform visibility.

The Indonesian case also resonates with broader transnational patterns in digital religion. Muslim digital activists in the United States, for example, have emphasized the interconnection between digital and physical activism, using online platforms to pressure policymakers and advocate for social change.⁶³ Similarly, Indonesian Islamic actors use digital platforms not only to explain religious texts but also to mobilize publics, shape moral sentiment, and intervene in political debates. This comparison does not collapse different national contexts into a single model. Instead, it shows that Qur'anic publics today are often formed through the interaction between online discourse and offline institutional, legal, and political consequences.

At the same time, the method used in this study has limits. Because the article relies on qualitative analysis of selected digital texts, it does not measure the full scale of audience reception, algorithmic ranking, user engagement, or networked diffusion. It cannot determine how many users accepted a particular interpretation, how content circulated across closed messaging platforms, or how

⁵⁸ S Musafa'ah et al., "Reframing Islamic Family Law Through Web-Based Tafsir: The Case of Nushuz in the Indonesian Tafsir Online," *Ulumuna* 29, no. 2 (2025): 666–700, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v29i2.1756>.

⁵⁹ W A Saleh, "Contemporary Tafsir: The Rise of Scriptural Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, 2020, 693–703, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.56>.

⁶⁰ M S B Sahimi et al., "Preserving the Authenticity of Quranic Exegesis Through Artificial Intelligence: A Proposed Framework for Digital Verification," *Quranica* 17, no. 2 (2025): 325–44, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105018592981&partnerID=40&md5=0f97d0de1636bddbe68eca85e15581b6>.

⁶¹ S Duhri et al., "Dislocation Of Islamic Scientific Tradition Through Digital Public Sphere: Netnographic Analysis On The Discourse Of Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jama'a Between Traditionalist And Modernist Muslims," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 25, no. 1 (2025): 204–38, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v25i1.25776>; F A Atallah, "Digital Mediation and Fatwa Authority in Contemporary Islam: A Critical Islamic Legal and Media-Theoretical Framework," *Religions* 17, no. 3 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17030350>.

⁶² Zaid, Ibahrine, and Ben Moussa, "Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice."

⁶³ B Sevinç, "Activist Muslim Students' Perspectives on Digital Public Sphere and the Power of Activism in the USA," *Sociology Lens* 38, no. 4 (2025): 314–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.70012>.

algorithmic recommendation systems shaped exposure. Nor does it replace ethnographic work on how Indonesian Muslims consume, trust, or reject digital Qur'anic discourse. These limitations are important. However, the strength of the method lies elsewhere: it allows close analysis of how institutional and digital texts construct authority, how meanings are positioned in relation to controversy, and how different platforms create overlapping Qur'anic publics.

The methodological contribution of this sub-section is therefore twofold. First, it shows that digital materials must be treated as primary sources in contemporary Qur'anic studies, not merely as secondary reflections of offline religious authority. Second, it demonstrates that a qualitative digital-corpus approach can capture the fragmentation, hybridization, and public circulation of Qur'anic authority in ways that conventional tafsir analysis or institutional history alone cannot. Digital media expands Qur'anic publics by making interpretation more accessible, but it also fragments authority by multiplying the actors, platforms, and epistemic conditions through which Qur'anic meaning becomes public.

State Moderation, Counter-Authority, and the Reframing of Qur'anic Public Ethics

The broader theoretical implication of this study is that Qur'anic authority in contemporary Indonesia is not contested only through rival interpretations of specific verses, but also through state efforts to define the civic norms under which religious interpretation should operate in public life. The discourse of *moderasi beragama* illustrates this point. It does not function as tafsir in the conventional sense, since it does not proceed through verse-by-verse exegesis or philological commentary. Yet it is deeply hermeneutical in effect because it establishes a normative grammar for evaluating public religious expression: acceptable interpretation is expected to promote balance, tolerance, national commitment, non-violence, and accommodation toward local culture.⁶⁴ In this respect, state moderation operates as a counter-authoritative framework that seeks to discipline exclusivist or polarizing readings without directly replacing classical or institutional tafsir.

The primary policy corpus makes this reframing explicit. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Moderasi Beragama* defines moderation through principles of balance, justice, and avoidance of extremity, and identifies four key indicators: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation toward local culture.⁶⁵ This framework was later strengthened through Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on the strengthening of religious moderation and Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 3 of 2024, which regulates coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of religious moderation programs. These documents show that the state's concern is not limited to the semantic meaning of Qur'anic terms. Rather, it is concerned with the public consequences of religious interpretation: whether religious discourse sustains civic peace, national cohesion, and plural coexistence.

This finding extends existing discussions of religious moderation in Indonesia. Recent studies describe *moderasi beragama* as a state-driven initiative designed to counter extremism, radicalism, and intolerance while strengthening interfaith harmony and national unity.⁶⁶ Other studies emphasize that moderation is framed through values such as tolerance, justice, balance, and peace.⁶⁷ These accounts

⁶⁴ Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

⁶⁵ RI.

⁶⁶ E R L Tinambunan et al., "Implication Abu Dhabi Document: To Build Religious Moderation with Brotherhood-Sisterhood and Friendship in Indonesia," *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2451514>; B Afwazdi et al., "Religious Moderation of Islamic University Students in Indonesia: Reception of Religious Texts," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9369>.

⁶⁷ A A Nasution et al., "The Implementation of the Islamic Accounting Standard for Zakah, Infaq, and Shadaqah (ZIS) in Indonesia," in *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems*, vol. 1083 LNNS, 2024, 444–56, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67431-0_43; S G Saleh et al., "A Critical Review of Hermeneutic Approaches to Language and Translation: Theoretical Foundations, Interpretative Challenges, and Implications for Cross-Cultural Communication," *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 7, no. 4 (2025): 511–26, <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i4.8802>.

are helpful, but they often approach moderation primarily as policy, education, or counter-extremism strategy. The present study adds a more specific contribution: religious moderation should also be read as a form of public hermeneutics. It does not merely regulate religious behavior; it regulates the civic acceptability of interpretive outcomes.

This perspective revises how Qur'anic authority is usually mapped in studies of Indonesian Islam. Earlier sub-sections showed how MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah, digital Islamic platforms, and media actors compete over the meaning, translation, and circulation of Qur'anic discourse. The moderation corpus introduces a different mode of authority. The state does not usually compete by issuing a more detailed tafsir of Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51 or by claiming superior philological expertise. Instead, it shifts the question from "What does this verse mean?" to "What kind of religious understanding is compatible with Indonesia's plural democratic order?" This shift is theoretically important because it reveals that Qur'anic public authority can be organized not only through exegetical correctness, but also through civic evaluation.

From the perspective of Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition, the state's moderation project can be understood as an attempt to shape the conditions under which Islamic reasoning is publicly recognized as proper, constructive, and nationally legitimate.⁶⁸ This does not mean that the state creates Islamic authority from nothing. Rather, it reorganizes existing Islamic vocabularies—justice, balance, peace, public benefit, tolerance, and communal responsibility—through bureaucratic, pedagogical, and regulatory mechanisms. The state thus becomes part of the discursive tradition not by replacing ulama, tafsir, or religious organizations, but by establishing criteria for acceptable public religiosity.

This finding also complicates theories of the public sphere. Habermas's model of public reason assumes a communicative space in which claims are publicly evaluated, while Fraser's critique emphasizes that publics are multiple, unequal, and contested.⁶⁹ The Indonesian case supports Fraser's concern but adds a further layer: the state is not merely an external regulator of public discourse; it actively produces a normative public theology of moderation. *Moderasi beragama* creates a civic public in which religious speech is not excluded, but is expected to align with national commitment, tolerance, and anti-violence. In this sense, Indonesia's Qur'anic public sphere is neither secular in the liberal sense nor theocratic in a formal sense. It is a managed religious public sphere in which the state recognizes religion as public while disciplining its acceptable forms.

This interpretation aligns with Menchik's account of Indonesian democracy as a system of religious pluralism that is neither liberal secularism nor theocracy.⁷⁰ It also speaks to Hefner's analysis of civil Islam and democratization, in which Muslim civic actors play a crucial role in shaping democratic culture.⁷¹ Yet the moderation corpus indicates that civil Islam is not produced only by voluntary associations and public debate; it is also bureaucratically cultivated through state programs, curricula, institutional training, and regulatory coordination. Studies of implementation confirm this point: *Kemenaq* promotes moderation through education, community programs, *pesantren*, and higher education institutions, often aligning these efforts with Pancasila and the state's ideology of unity in diversity.⁷² The state therefore acts not only as an arbiter of religious conflict, but as a producer of public Islamic ethics.

⁶⁸ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

⁶⁹ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."

⁷⁰ Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*.

⁷¹ Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*.

⁷² S D Rismawati et al., "The Legal Politics of Religious Moderation in Indonesia: Responsive or Repressive?," *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues* 24, no. 4 (2021): 1–8, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85108870899&partnerID=40&md5=0aab875b7559286a1c691d965d148687>; M Athoillah et al., "Policies And Practices Religious Moderation In Pesantren," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024): 387–96,

This state role is not without tension. *Kemenag* has positioned itself as a key actor in balancing religious diversity and national unity, promoting inclusive interpretations and countering exclusivist forms of Islam.⁷³ Yet its authority is contested by conservative factions, local religious actors, and communities whose trust may lie more strongly with ulama, kiai, Salafi ustadh, or digital preachers. Tahir notes that collaboration with traditional leaders can help bridge the gap between state policy and local religious communities, especially where state programs struggle to reach rural areas.⁷⁴ This suggests that state moderation does not simply impose a top-down interpretive order. It depends on negotiation with existing religious authorities, local networks, and community-based legitimacy.

The state's intervention in religious moderation also reflects a broader pattern in Indonesian governance: the bureaucratization of Islamic life. Studies of state Islam have shown that the Indonesian state actively manages domains such as hajj administration, zakat, halal regulation, and other aspects of Islamic practice, blurring the boundaries between religion and governance.⁷⁵ The moderation project belongs to this wider pattern, but it extends bureaucratization into the domain of public ethics. It does not merely administer religious services; it defines the ethical orientation that religious interpretation should support. This confirms Millie's observation that public Islam in Indonesia is shaped by institutional forms of pedagogy, discipline, and performance, while also generating tensions when state norms conflict with more traditional or conservative interpretations.⁷⁶

The concept of counter-authority is important here. State moderation functions as a counter-authority not because it abolishes MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah, Salafi networks, or digital preachers, but because it offers an alternative criterion for evaluating Islamic public discourse. In the al-Mā'idah 5:51 controversy, the dominant interpretive frame was juridical and polemical: whether a public statement amounted to insult against the Qur'an and the ulama. In the moderation discourse, the dominant frame is civic and ethical: whether religious understanding contributes to peaceful coexistence and national cohesion. These two frames do not necessarily cancel each other, but they generate different models of Qur'anic public authority. One emphasizes protection of sacred boundaries; the other emphasizes regulation of religious expression for plural coexistence.

At the same time, the state's counter-authority is not always received without suspicion. Long's study of compliance and suspicion in Indonesia shows that communities may comply with state directives while simultaneously transferring moral responsibility to the state, even when they harbor doubts about state authority.⁷⁷ This insight helps explain why *moderasi beragama* cannot be understood simply as policy success or ideological consensus. It may be accepted, adapted, resisted, or strategically performed depending on local religious authority, political context, and public trust. The state's hermeneutical intervention is therefore powerful, but not absolute.

The broader relevance of this finding extends beyond Indonesia. Many Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts face similar tensions over how sacred texts should function in plural societies, democratic politics, digital publics, and legal systems. The Indonesian case shows that the public authority of the Qur'an is not shaped only by scholars, activists, or religious institutions; it is

<https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i2.27543>; Nasution et al., "The Implementation of the Islamic Accounting Standard for Zakah, Infaq, and Shadaqah (ZIS) in Indonesia."

⁷³ F Y Dharta et al., "MUI's Fatwa on Interfaith Greetings and Religious Tolerance: Can Indonesia Find a Middle Ground?," *Frontiers in Communication* 10 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1537568>; S Herlina and E Istikomah, "Implementation Digital Literacy of Textbook of Statistics 1 for Islamic Religious Education Students," in *AIP Conference Proceedings*, vol. 2734, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0155539>.

⁷⁴ M Tahir et al., "Water Shortage and Role of Biotechnology," in *Innovations in Agricultural Water Management: Risks and Solutions*, 2025, 345–68, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-91883-4_17.

⁷⁵ S Zuhri, "Regimented Islamophobia: Islam, State, And Governmentality In Indonesia," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021): 387–422, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v9i2.8249>.

⁷⁶ J Millie, "An Anthropological Approach to the Islamic Turn in Indonesia's Regional Politics," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, no. 2 (2018): 207–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2018.6>.

⁷⁷ N J Long, "On the Islamic Authority of the Indonesian State: Responsibility, Suspicion, and Acts of Compliance," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, no. 4 (2017): 709–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12698>.

also shaped by state programs that translate religious ethics into civic norms. This is theoretically important for Qur'anic studies because it expands the object of analysis. If scholars study only tafsir books, fatwas, or online sermons, they may miss how policy documents, curricula, national regulations, and bureaucratic manuals participate in defining the public meaning of Islam.

The academic contribution of this sub-section is therefore to show that *moderasi beragama* is not merely an administrative response to extremism or intolerance, but a state-mediated hermeneutical project that reframes Qur'anic public ethics. It extends the article's central argument by demonstrating that competing Qur'anic authorities in Indonesia operate across multiple registers: institutional-juridical, semantic-translational, digital-public, and civic-bureaucratic. This synthesis prepares the conclusion by showing that Qur'anic authority in contemporary Indonesia is produced not through a single interpretive center, but through continuous negotiation among scripture, institutions, media, law, local culture, and the state's normative project of managed pluralism.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how Qur'anic authority is constructed, contested, and circulated in contemporary Indonesian public discourse. By analyzing institutional religious documents, legal records, Qur'anic translation platforms, digital Islamic media, and state policy texts, the study demonstrates that Qur'anic authority in Indonesia is neither singular nor fixed. It is produced through a dynamic process involving textual interpretation, institutional mediation, semantic contestation, digital circulation, humidification, and state intervention. The study answers its first objective by showing that competing Islamic actors construct Qur'anic authority through different mechanisms of legitimation. In the case of Q. al-Mā'idah 5:51, MUI's institutional statement transformed scriptural interpretation into a matter of public legitimacy, religious protection, and legal responsibility. This finding indicates that Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia is not shaped only by exegetical argumentation, but also by institutional authority capable of defining the limits of legitimate and illegitimate public speech about the Qur'an.

The second objective concerned the mediation of Qur'anic meaning through institutional, political, legal, translational, and digital channels. The findings show that translation is central to this process. The contestation over *awliyā'* reveals that Qur'anic meaning becomes publicly consequential when a broad semantic field is stabilized into particular social and political categories, such as leadership, loyalty, alliance, or religious allegiance. Translation therefore functions not merely as linguistic transfer, but as a mechanism through which Qur'anic authority is shaped, narrowed, expanded, and publicly circulated. The third objective was to explain how interpretive competition contributes to wider struggles over legitimacy and authority in contemporary Indonesian Islam. The study finds that digital media has expanded Qur'anic publics by making institutional opinions, tafsir articles, translations, and counter-interpretive narratives more accessible and contestable. Digital platforms do not simply replace traditional authority with new authority. Rather, they create a hybrid field in which state institutions, ulama councils, mass Islamic organizations, online Islamic media, and emerging digital actors compete within the same communicative ecology.

The analysis also shows that the Indonesian state participates in shaping Qur'anic public ethics through the discourse of *moderasi beragama*. This discourse does not operate as conventional tafsir, but it functions as a state-mediated hermeneutical framework that evaluates religious interpretation according to civic norms such as tolerance, national commitment, anti-violence, and cultural accommodation. Thus, Qur'anic authority is not only contested among religious organizations or digital actors, but also reframed through policy, bureaucracy, and civic ethics. The article's theoretical contribution lies in conceptualizing Qur'anic interpretation as a socio-discursive public practice. It extends Qur'anic studies beyond the analysis of exegetical content by showing how sacred textual authority becomes public authority through institutions, translation, media, law, and state governance. It also contributes to the sociology of religious authority by demonstrating that authority in contemporary Muslim societies is not merely fragmented or decentralized but continually reorganized through competing mechanisms of legitimation.

The broader implication of this study is that sacred texts do not enter the public sphere as self-evident meanings. They become socially and politically effective through interpretive actors, institutional procedures, semantic choices, digital infrastructures, and regulatory projects. This insight is relevant beyond Indonesia because many Muslim societies face similar tensions over scriptural authority, democratic plurality, digital mediation, and state regulation of religion. Future research may extend this study by examining audience reception, interviews with religious actors, ethnographic observation of digital Qur'anic communities, or computational analysis of online tafsir circulation. Further comparative studies across Muslim-majority democracies would also clarify whether Indonesia's pattern of humidification, semantic contestation, digital fragmentation, and state moderation represents a distinctive national case or part of a broader transformation in contemporary Islamic public discourse. Qur'anic authority in contemporary Indonesia is best understood as a contested public formation. It is not located solely in the Arabic text, classical tafsir, religious institutions, or state policy, but emerges through the interaction of these elements within Indonesia's democratic and digital public sphere. The originality of this article lies in showing that the politics of Qur'anic interpretation is not only about what the Qur'an means, but about how particular meanings become authoritative, public, and consequential.

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