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Digital Governance and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority in Post-Secular Indonesia: The Emergence of Digital Faith as Mediated Authority

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Abstract: Post-secular Indonesia, where 229.4 million internet users coexist within an 87% Muslim population, presents a paradigmatic site for examining how digital governance reshapes religious authority. As digital infrastructure expands, tensions between traditional religious legitimacy and state-regulated algorithmic mechanisms intensify, yet the tripartite interaction among state regulation, platform architecture, and religious community agency remains theoretically underspecified. This study aims to analyse the dynamics of religious authority reconfiguration within Indonesia's digital governance ecosystem, examining how these interactions produce, contest, and transform Islamic religious legitimacy in the digital age. Employing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis three-stage model text analysis (2013), discursive practice analysis, and socio-cultural practice analysis this study analysed five categories of digital regulatory frameworks comprising legal instruments, administrative policies, and algorithmic control mechanisms. Data were collected from June to October 2025 through systematic retrieval of regulatory documents, institutional statements, and civil society monitoring reports. The findings reveal three key dynamics: state regulatory instruments function as mechanisms of discursive power repositioning religious authority from traditional institutions toward technocratic governance; hybrid forms of legitimacy emerge from the interaction between state, platforms, and religious actors; and digital communities negotiate and contest state control through performative engagement that constructs alternative truth regimes. This study concludes that digitisation fundamentally transforms both religious practices and the epistemological foundations of authority, captured in the concept of digital faith as mediated authority. This article contributes to the intersecting fields of digital religion, post-secular governance, and platform society studies by offering an integrative analytical model grounded in the Global South context, a dimension underrepresented in existing scholarship.

Keywords: digital religion; religious authority; post-secular governance; algorithmic regulation; Indonesia

Abstrak: Indonesia pasca-sekuler, di mana 229,4 juta pengguna internet hidup berdampingan dengan populasi Muslim sebesar 87%, menjadi lokasi paradigmatis untuk mengkaji bagaimana tata kelola digital membentuk kembali otoritas keagamaan. Seiring perluasan infrastruktur digital, ketegangan antara legitimasi keagamaan tradisional dan mekanisme algoritmik yang diatur negara semakin memanas; namun, interaksi tiga pihak antara regulasi negara, arsitektur platform, dan peran aktif komunitas keagamaan masih kurang dijabarkan secara teoritis. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis dinamika rekonfigurasi otoritas keagamaan dalam ekosistem tata kelola digital Indonesia, dengan

menelaah bagaimana interaksi-interaksi tersebut menghasilkan, menantang, dan mentransformasi legitimasi keagamaan Islam di era digital. Dengan menerapkan model tiga tahap Analisis Wacana Kritis karya Fairclough (2013) yaitu analisis teks, nalisis praktik wacana, dan analisis praktik sosiokultural, penelitian ini menganalisis lima kategori kerangka regulasi digital yang terdiri dari instrumen hukum, kebijakan administratif, dan mekanisme kontrol algoritmik. Data dikumpulkan dari Juni hingga Oktober 2025 melalui pengumpulan sistematis dokumen regulasi, pernyataan kelembagaan, dan laporan pemantauan masyarakat sipil. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan tiga dinamika utama: instrumen regulasi negara berfungsi sebagai mekanisme kekuasaan wacana yang memposisikan ulang otoritas keagamaan dari lembaga-lembaga tradisional menuju tata kelola teknokratis; bentuk-bentuk legitimasi hibrida muncul dari interaksi antara negara, platform, dan aktor keagamaan; serta komunitas digital menegosiasikan dan menentang kontrol negara melalui keterlibatan performatif yang membangun rezim kebenaran alternatif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa digitalisasi secara mendasar mengubah baik praktik keagamaan maupun landasan epistemologis otoritas, yang terangkum dalam konsep "iman digital" sebagai otoritas yang dimediasi. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada bidang-bidang yang saling beririsan antara agama digital, tata kelola pasca-sekuler, dan studi masyarakat platform dengan menawarkan model analitis integratif yang berakar pada konteks Global Selatan, sebuah dimensi yang kurang terwakili dalam kajian akademik yang ada.

Kata kunci: agama digital; otoritas keagamaan; tata kelola pasca-sekuler; regulasi algoritmik; Indonesia

1. Introduction

Rapid technological transformation has had a profound and irreversible impact on religious life in contemporary Indonesia. The country presents a globally significant case: an estimated 229.4 million internet users in 2025, drawn from a population of approximately 284.4 million people, of whom 87% identify as Muslim (Untari, 2025). This dual reality mass digital connectivity overlaid upon a majority-Muslim society makes Indonesia a paradigmatic site for examining how digital governance reshapes religious authority. Religious expression that was once anchored in mosques, face-to-face recitations, and physically bounded communities has migrated to platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, producing both unprecedented opportunities for Islamic public discourse and new arenas of regulation, contestation, and control (Pabbajah, Muchammadun, Mckenna, & Deraman, 2024). Indonesia's experience is not merely a local phenomenon; it offers a model for understanding how religion-based democracies in the Global South navigate the convergence of technological modernity and majority-religious contexts that differ fundamentally from the secular liberal democracies in which most digital governance theory has been developed.

The transformation of religious expression in Indonesia's digital space has generated a set of structurally distinctive tensions. As a Pancasila state, neither theocratic nor fully secular, Indonesia operates in a complex post-secular configuration in which religion is simultaneously a source of public legitimacy, a subject of state regulation, and a force shaping the moral parameters of digital governance. On the one hand, the state deploys legal and administrative instruments, including the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law, Law No. 19/2016), Permenkominfo No. 5/2020, and SE Menkominfo No. 6/2023, to regulate the circulation of religious content in the digital public sphere. On the other side, digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook function as socio-political infrastructures that distribute legitimacy through algorithmic logic, repositioning traditional religious authorities such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in relation to digitally popular preachers who gain authority through virality and follower count rather than scholarly credentials or institutional affiliation (Berger & Golan, 2024). Wahid, Kususiyanah, and Abdullah (2025) confirm that digital transformation has fundamentally challenged the trust and authority of fatwa institutions in Indonesia, requiring new strategies to maintain legitimacy in algorithmically mediated spaces. This

reconfiguration of the measurement of authority from scholarly expertise to digital performativity represents a fundamental epistemological shift that existing frameworks in digital religion and post-secular theory have not yet fully theorised.

Scholarly engagement with the intersection of digital media and Islamic religious authority in Indonesia has grown substantially. Kholili, Izudin, and Hakim (2024) examine the challenges of regulating Islamic broadcasting in the digital era, demonstrating how online platforms alter da'wah mechanisms, though their analysis remains focused on media and communication rather than the regulatory-governance dimension. Fitriansyah and Lubis (2023) illuminate how algorithmic logic shapes da'wah practices and constructs new forms of digital legitimacy, but their study does not engage with the state's role in shaping algorithmic environments. Ichwan, Amin, Khusairi, and Andrian (2024) document how digitalisation has displaced traditional religious literacy in the post-truth era of Society 5.0, while Nuriana and Salwa (2024) identify the need for algorithmic literacy and regulatory transparency in digital da'wah. Zuhri, Wahyudi, and Haeba (2024) further demonstrate that MUI's fatwa production has been reshaped by the post-truth digital environment, as traditional scholarly authority increasingly competes with alternative online voices for epistemic legitimacy. These studies collectively establish the communicative dimensions of religious transformation in Indonesia's digital landscape. However, they share a significant limitation: none systematically engages with the tripartite interaction between state regulatory power, platform governance architectures, and the negotiation strategies of religious communities as an integrated field of analysis. The dimension of how state instruments discursively construct the boundaries of legitimate religious expression and how religious actors strategically navigate and contest these constructions remains an underexplored gap.

Studies on digital religion in comparative perspective have also advanced the field. Campbell (2024) situates digital religion scholarship within broader questions of epistemic authority, while Campbell and Evolvi (2020) contextualise the emergence of controversies around religious content moderation on digital platforms. Bingaman (2023) argues that religion's migration to the digital realm is irreversible and constitutive of new social ontologies. Yet these contributions predominantly draw on Western, typically secular, national contexts. The specific dynamics of post-secular majority-Muslim societies where the state claims both democratic legitimacy and a mandate to protect and moderate religious life remain theoretically underspecified. This study addresses that gap by offering an integrative analytical framework that combines Critical Discourse Analysis with post-secular governance theory and platform society theory, applied to the Indonesian case as a representative instance of Global South religious democracy.

This study integrates two main theoretical frameworks to address this gap. First, Habermas' theory of post-secular governance (2008) explains that although modernity encourages processes of secularisation, religion remains an active and persistent force shaping democratic public spheres and demanding new forms of articulation. Jong (2025) extends this argument by showing that contemporary religion undergoes cosmopolitanisation in post-secular contexts, expanding beyond institutional boundaries through transnational digital networks. For this study, Habermas' concept of the post-secular public sphere is operationalised as a lens for reading how Indonesian state institutions negotiate the boundaries between religious freedom and social stability, specifically, how regulatory discourse constructs what counts as legitimate religious expression versus extremist or destabilising speech. Second, Van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal (2018) theory of the platform society views digital platforms not merely as technological tools but as socio-political infrastructures that distribute power, knowledge, and legitimacy through datafication and platform architectures. For this study, Van Dijck et.al's framework is operationalised to examine how platform algorithms shaped by both commercial logic and regulatory compliance function as agents of power that determine which religious voices gain visibility, reach, and authority. The analytical link between the two frameworks lies in the concept of co-regulatory governance: the state and platforms jointly construct the discursive field within which religious legitimacy is produced, recognised, and contested. Together, these frameworks enable this study to explain how religious authority in Indonesia is not simply displaced by digital technology but

is actively reconfigured through the interaction of regulatory discourse, algorithmic architectures, and community resistance practices.

Based on the foregoing analysis, this study aims to analyse the dynamics of religious authority reconfiguration within Indonesia's digital governance ecosystem by examining how state regulation, platform architecture, and religious community practices interact to produce, contest, and transform the foundations of Islamic religious legitimacy in the digital age. This overarching aim is operationalised through three research questions: How does the Indonesian state regulate digital religious authority through regulatory policy instruments and algorithmic governance mechanisms? What forms of religious legitimacy emerge from the interaction between the state, digital platforms, and religious actors in Indonesia's digital ecosystem? How do digital religious communities negotiate and challenge state control within a digital space increasingly structured by regulatory and algorithmic logic?

By answering these three questions, this study develops the concept of digital faith as mediated authority defined here as a form of religious authority that is produced, recognised, and contested through complex interactions between state regulatory frameworks and digital platform algorithms, wherein the legitimacy of a religious voice is increasingly determined not solely by scholarly credentials or institutional position but by the interplay of regulatory compliance, algorithmic visibility, and digital performativity. This concept serves as the theoretical synthesis toward which the empirical analysis builds.

To analyse this phenomenon, this study applies a qualitative approach based on Fairclough's (2013) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. CDA was selected over other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory or thematic analysis because it uniquely enables the investigation of the dialectical relationship among discourse production, power structures, and socio-political practices. CDA's epistemological commitment to examining how language constructs, rather than merely reflects, social reality makes it the most appropriate methodology for analysing how regulatory documents produce and distribute religious authority. Five categories of digital regulatory frameworks were identified as the primary corpus of analysis: (1) legal instruments (the ITE Law and Constitutional Court rulings); (2) administrative regulations (Permenkominfo No. 5/2020, SE Menkominfo No. 6/2023); (3) enforcement and takedown statistics (Kominfo 2023–2024 reports); (4) sectoral guidelines (Ministry of Religious Affairs Digital Da'wah Guidelines); and (5) cybersecurity regulations (BSSN Regulations No. 2/2024 and No. 5/2024). These five categories were selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion of regulatory significance: each represents a distinct mechanism through which the state intervenes in the digital religious public sphere, and together they constitute a comprehensive map of the state's regulatory apparatus. Data were collected from June to October 2025 through systematic retrieval of primary regulatory documents, official press releases, civil society monitoring reports (Safenet, 2024; Setara Institute, 2025), and digital religious content produced by institutional and community actors.

The analysis proceeded through three stages of CDA. In the text analysis stage, the study examined the linguistic features of regulatory documents, including lexical choices, grammatical structures, and framing devices, to identify how language constructs the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate religious expression. In the discursive practice analysis stage, the study traced how regulatory texts are produced (by which institutions), distributed (through which channels), and consumed (by which audiences), and examined how discursive practices reproduce or transform power relations among state actors, religious institutions, and digital communities. In the socio-cultural practice analysis stage, the findings were contextualised within the broader socio-political dynamics of post-secular Indonesia, including the history of state-religion relations, the logic of platform capitalism, and the advocacy practices of civil society organisations. Validity was maintained through source triangulation cross-referencing regulatory documents with civil society reports, media coverage, and institutional responses, and through peer discussion to address potential interpretive bias. A key methodological limitation that must be acknowledged is the inherent interpretive nature of CDA: findings cannot claim statistical generalisability but offer theoretically grounded analytical insights.

Furthermore, the corpus is limited to formal regulatory documents and does not incorporate direct perspectives from digital religious actors through ethnographic or interview methods; future research should address this gap.

2. State Regulatory Instruments as Mechanisms of Discursive Power

Text analysis of the five regulatory frameworks reveals a consistent pattern of discursive framing in which state power over religious expression is constructed not as censorship but as protection of social harmony, national security, and 'moderate' religious values. This discursive construction operates through three key linguistic strategies: securitisation framing (positioning religious content as a security risk), technocratic normalisation (presenting algorithmic governance as neutral and objective), and institutional authorisation (legitimising specific religious voices through official endorsement). Together, these strategies constitute what Fairclough (1992) identifies as discursive power: the capacity to determine who can speak, on what terms, and with what institutional backing.

Table 1. Five Digital Regulatory Frameworks and Their Discursive Impact on Religious Expression

Regulatory Instrument	Key Provisions & Discursive Framing	Impact on Religious Authority
ITE Law No. 19/2016 (Amendment)	Art. 45A criminalises dissemination of 'false news' and hate speech based on SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, intergroup). Framing: securitisation language constructs religious dissent as potential criminality.	Between October 2024–November 2025, Komdigi blocked 8,320 pieces of radical/religious extremist content. Reporting and prosecution increased significantly, producing a chilling effect on non-mainstream religious voices. Human rights-based advocacy mobilised in response.
Constitutional Court Decisions (Judicial Reviews of ITE Law, 2008–2024)	Eight judicial reviews (case nos. 50/PUU-VI/2008 through 115/PUU-XXII/2024). Framing: constitutional discourse that both limits and reaffirms state authority, creating evolving legal precedent.	Created dynamic legal landscape: court decisions simultaneously constrained enforcement overreach while legitimising the principle of state regulation of digital expression, producing ongoing negotiation rather than resolution.
Permenkominfo No. 5/2020 (Private Electronic System Operators)	Mandates registration and compliance of private digital platforms with government standards. Framing: technical-administrative language normalises platform compliance as governance routine, not political control.	Increasing number of registered ESOs reflects expanded state reach into platform governance. Platforms compelled to serve as co-regulators, filtering religious content at government request blurring the line between technical governance and ideological management.

Kominfo Enforcement Statistics 2023–2024	Press Release No. 225/HM/KOMINFO/03/2024: 5,731 pieces of extremist/radical content removed July 2023–March 2024. Framing: numerical data legitimises regulatory action as evidence-based governance.	Scale of takedowns signals systematic narrowing of digital public space. Susanto (2025) reports that Komdigi blocked over 11 million pieces of negative content in total, demonstrating the massive operational scale of digital enforcement. The correlation between removal actions and the reduced reach of certain religious discourses confirms structured information asymmetry ((Tang, Zhang, & Ning, 2023) as a governance outcome rather than an unintended consequence.
Ministry of Religious Affairs Digital Da'wah Guidelines	Code of ethics for preaching on electronic media, developed by Directorate General of Islamic Guidance. Framing: institutional authorisation language constructs official preaching as 'authentic' and alternative voices as epistemically suspect.	Growth in official da'wah accounts and training programs confers structural advantages on institutionally affiliated preachers. Non-official or theologically alternative actors face progressive marginalisation, narrowing epistemic plurality in the digital religious sphere.

As shown in Table 1, the regulation of religious expression in Indonesia's digital space operates through multiple legal and institutional frameworks that collectively shape the boundaries of legitimate religious discourse, reinforce state authority, and reconfigure religious legitimacy through mechanisms of securitisation, institutional authorisation, and platform governance. The linguistic analysis of these five instruments reveals a coherent discursive architecture. The ITE Law's use of SARA as a regulatory category grouping ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations under a unified threat framework performs a significant discursive operation: it constructs religious speech that diverges from mainstream norms as inherently prone to social disruption. It is not merely definitional; it creates a regulatory chilling effect in which self-censorship among religious content producers becomes rational risk management. Permenkominfo No. 5/2020 deploys a contrasting yet complementary strategy: the administrative-technical register of its provisions positions platform governance as a matter of procedural neutrality, obscuring the ideological dimensions of content decisions made under its mandate. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' Da'wah Guidelines perform yet another discursive function institutional authorisation whereby the state constructs a hierarchy of religious credibility that privileges certified, institutional voices while delegitimising alternative interpretations as epistemically unqualified.

As Zaluchu, Widodo, and Kriswanto (2025) demonstrate through bibliometric analysis, religious moderation in Indonesia is a conceptually contested terrain in which the state plays a decisive role in determining what counts as moderate, making digital regulation an extension of this broader moderation project. These findings are consistent with Fairclough's (1992) concept of discursive power but extend it in important ways. In the Indonesian context, discursive power operates not through a single hegemonic text but through a layered regulatory architecture in which legal, administrative, and sectoral instruments reinforce each other. The result is what this study terms *regulatory palimpsest*: multiple layers of governance text that cumulatively construct the boundaries of legitimate religious expression, with each layer adding legitimacy to the constraints established by the others. Mettler, Miscione, Jacobs, and Guenduez (2024) show that digital transformation policies systematically frame

societal change in ways that normalise state authority over digital infrastructure; in the Indonesian religious context, the same framing mechanisms legitimate state management of religious discourse. This finding also confirms Martino's mediatisation of religion thesis (2020): religious authority is being restructured through the interaction between social institutions and communication technology but specifies the mechanism: it is the discursive framing within regulatory texts, not merely technological change per se, that drives the restructuring.

3. Hybrid Legitimacy in the Post-Secular Digital Space

Discursive practice analysis examining how regulatory texts are produced, distributed, and consumed reveals a fundamental shift in the *locus of religious authority*: from traditional scholarly credentials and institutional affiliation toward a hybrid model in which legitimacy is constituted through the intersection of regulatory compliance, algorithmic visibility, and digital performativity.

Table 2. Power Negotiations between State and Religious Actors in the Digital Space

Regulatory/Institutional Actor	Discursive Mechanism	Effect on Religious Legitimacy
Joint Decree on Guidelines for the Implementation of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law: Joint Decree of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the Attorney General's Office, and the Indonesian National Police Number 229 of 2021, Number 154 of 2021, Number KB/2VI/2021. Effective from 2021 to present.	Centralises interpretive authority over 'problematic' religious content among law enforcement agencies. Discursive practice: institutional co-production of content risk categories, distributed through official channels and media coverage.	State acquires capacity to define the boundaries of acceptable religious expression through enforcement rather than theological deliberation. 8,320 radical-coded items blocked (Aditya & Prabowo, 2025); 1.3 million gambling-related items removed, demonstrating the scale of content-based governance (Biro Humas Kementerian Kominfo, 2024).
SE Menkominfo No. 6/2023 (PSE Guidelines)	Establishes technical-ethical standards for platform operators. Discursive practice: normalises platforms as co-regulators through press releases and official media discourse that frame compliance as social responsibility.	Platform architecture becomes a site of state power projection. Shifts locus of authority from who speaks to who controls the medium of speech (Andok, 2024), reconfiguring religious legitimacy through infrastructural control.
SE Menag No. 05/2022 (Mosque Loudspeakers)	Standardises mosque audio practices. Discursive practice: administrative framing positions religious ritual management as public order governance. Consumed through religious organisation responses (MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah).	Creates 'administrative religious authority': government institutions become normative reference for ritual practices previously governed by local religious communities (Setinawati, Jeniva, Tanyid, & Merilyn, 2025). Generates debate about the boundaries of freedom of worship vs. state intervention.

Regulatory/Institutional Actor	Discursive Mechanism	Effect on Religious Legitimacy
Kominfo Press Release No. 582/2023 (AI Ethics)	Frames AI ethics and platform compliance as instruments of social order. Discursive practice: produces normative narrative that positions digital regulation as inevitable and natural governance.	Builds hegemony through normative discourse (Fairclough, 2013): religious authority becomes linked to technocratic rationality. Indonesia as post-secular society exhibits pattern wherein religious legitimacy is increasingly articulated through regulatory compliance rather than theological standing.
BSSN Regulations No. 2/2024 & No. 5/2024 (Cybersecurity)	Develops CSIRT, risk management, and national cybersecurity frameworks. Discursive practice: positions religious digital narratives as potential strategic threats, legitimising monitoring through security discourse.	Religion is positioned in two simultaneous roles: as protected collective identity and as potential security risk (Yilmaz, Demir, & Shipoli, 2023). Data from 2022 recorded more than 900 million cyber attacks with religious overtones, prompting the Ministry of Religious Affairs to partner with BSSN to secure religious information services (Rajamedia.co, 2023). Cybersecurity becomes justificatory basis for state intervention in digital religious discourse, deepening the symbiotic relationship between state, religion, and technology.

As shown in Table 2, the reconfiguration of religious legitimacy in Indonesia's digital space is shaped by ongoing negotiations between state institutions, digital platforms, and religious actors, resulting in new forms of authority that increasingly combine regulatory compliance, algorithmic visibility, and institutional recognition. The discursive practice analysis reveals that the production of religious legitimacy in Indonesia's digital ecosystem operates through what this study terms *co-regulatory legitimacy*: a form of authority constituted not unilaterally by religious institutions or the state, but through their mutual accommodation within the platform governance framework. The responses of MUI, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama to SE Menag No. 05/2022 are analytically revealing. Muhammadiyah's acceptance of the loudspeaker guidelines, PBNU's qualified compliance, and MUI's endorsement of the circular letter do not represent simple submission to state authority; rather, they demonstrate how major religious organisations strategically align with state regulatory frameworks to maintain their institutional relevance and access to official channels of legitimacy. This alignment reinforces Campbell's (2024) digital religion thesis that platform architecture and state regulation increasingly determine religious authority, but adds a crucial dimension: religious institutions themselves participate in constructing this architecture by endorsing regulatory frameworks that privilege their own institutional position.

The concept of *digital faith as mediated authority* emerges most clearly from this analysis. As the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology's Press Release No. 582/2023 frames AI ethics and platform compliance as natural components of religious governance, and as the Joint Ministerial Decree positions law enforcement agencies as arbiters of religious content appropriateness, the

traditional bases of Islamic religious authority scholarly training, chain of transmission (sanad), institutional affiliation are progressively supplemented, and in some cases displaced, by technocratic criteria: Is the content compliant with regulatory frameworks? Does the platform's algorithm surface it as credible? Does the account maintain verified institutional status? It is the operational meaning of digital faith as mediated authority: religious credibility increasingly passes through the mediation of state regulation and algorithmic governance before it reaches its audiences.

4. Negotiating and Contesting State Control: Plurality, Conflict, and New Truth Regimes

Socio-cultural practice analysis situates the discursive data within the broader political economy of post-secular Indonesia, revealing that digital platforms function not only as instruments of state control but also as arenas of resistance, plurality, and the production of alternative truth regimes. The following data provide empirical grounding for the concept of digital faith as mediated authority, a contested rather than settled form of power.

Table 3. Implications of Post-Secularism and the Reconfiguration of Religious Public Space

Evidence / Case	Discursive Practices	Socio-cultural Implications
Setara Institute KBB Report 2025: 260 incidents, 402 violations of religious freedom (Setara Institute, 2025)	Human rights monitoring reports function as authoritative discursive resources: raw incidents are transformed into institutional knowledge through quantification, categorisation, and comparative framing. Disseminated to policymakers, civil society, and public audiences.	Frames intolerance as a structural governance failure, not merely individual aberration. Positions both state and non-state actors within asymmetrical power relations. Legitimises civil society demands for policy reform, creating a counter-discourse to state narratives of adequate religious freedom protection (Idris, Wirawan, Ilman Naafi'a, & Ilmiawan, 2025) .
SAFEnet Digital Monitoring: Q1 2024: 30 cases (52 reports); Q3 2024: 42 cases (digital expression violations) (Safenet, 2024)	Quarterly reports document doxing, threats, hate speech, and criminalisation cases. Disseminated through NGO channels, briefings to parliament and Kominfo, and media coverage. Serves as evidence base for litigation and platform advocacy.	Reveals the digital space as a post-secular arena of power negotiation between regulatory authority and social legitimacy. SAFEnet monitoring constitutes empirical discourse that shapes policy, litigation, and advocacy demonstrating that digitisation of religion modifies social surveillance mechanisms and politicisation of moral norms (Gorwa, 2024; Shukri, 2023).

Evidence / Case	Discursive Practices	Socio-cultural Implications
Ahok Case & Mass Mobilisation (2016–2017): 40,000 tweets in 6 days; millions at street protests (Juliani, 2018; Maarif, 2017)	Media content, religious-political rhetoric, viral social media material (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) amplified by religious figures and organisations. Consumed by public, political actors, and officials triggering street protests and legal demands.	Demonstrates digital platforms' capacity as performative arenas for political mobilisation and re-articulation of religious authority. Religion remains a dynamic public force even in digitally regulated post-secular context. Algorithms, platforms, and social networks interact with religious discourse to form a new, mediative, and distributed epistemology of religious authority (Hastuti, Maulana, Lawelai, & Suherman, 2025).
Platform Negotiations: TikTok temporary blocking (2018); PSE registration policy (2020–2023)	Bilateral negotiations reflected in memoranda, official statements, and PSE compliance policies. Disseminated through official Kominfo channels; platforms adjust moderation practices; government issues compliance regulations.	Co-regulatory governance (Sixto-Garcia, Palomo, & Penafiel, 2024) emerges as a model negotiated discursively and technically. Operational compromises between platforms and state reshape moderation practices, creating a de facto governance of religious content through platform compliance without public deliberation or civil society input.
MUI, Muhammadiyah, NU responses to SE Menag No. 05/2022 (loudspeaker guidelines) (Priyanto, 2025)	Institutional statements by major religious organisations expressing qualified acceptance of state regulation. Discursive practice: compliance framed as alignment with Islamic values of public harmony, not submission to state authority.	Demonstrates strategic adaptation of religious actors: major institutions maintain legitimacy by endorsing regulatory frameworks while negotiating for implementation flexibility. Confirms co-regulatory legitimacy as a survival strategy for traditional religious institutions in the digital governance era.

As shown in Table 3, the reconfiguration of religious public space in Indonesia is characterised by a multidirectional process involving state actors, civil society organisations, digital platforms, and religious institutions. Rather than reflecting a simple expansion of state control, the findings reveal continuous negotiations over authority, legitimacy, and public visibility in the digital environment. The socio-cultural practice analysis reveals that the reconfiguration of religious authority in Indonesia's digital space is not a one-directional process of state domination. Civil society organisations particularly Setara Institute and SAFEnet constitute a significant counter-discursive force. By quantifying religious freedom violations and documenting digital censorship cases, these organisations perform a discursive function that mirrors the state's own use of numerical data to legitimise regulatory action: they construct empirical evidence that reframes state regulation as a governance problem rather than a governance solution. Within Fairclough's (1992) CDA framework, this represents a struggle over discursive hegemony, a contest between state narratives that construct digital regulation as protection and civil society narratives that construct the same regulation as structural intolerance.

The Ahok case of 2016–2017 provides the most dramatic illustration of digital platforms as arenas for both mobilisation and the authority contestation. The generation of 40,000 tweets in six days, combined with mass street mobilisations attended by millions, demonstrates that religious narratives retain an enormous capacity for rapid, massive political mobilisation in the digital space, a capacity that neither state regulation nor platform algorithms were able to contain or redirect. This case empirically validates the concept of digital faith as mediated authority from a different angle: it shows not only that state and platform mediation shapes religious authority, but also that religious communities can exploit platform architectures to assert forms of authority that bypass or overwhelm regulatory mechanisms. The digital platform is simultaneously a site of state control and a site of community power.

Negotiations between the state and global platforms, exemplified by the 2018 TikTok blocking and the PSE registration framework, further reveal the contingent and contested nature of digital religious governance in Indonesia. The temporary blocking of TikTok, subsequently reversed following negotiations, illustrates that state authority over digital religious space is not absolute but must be continuously negotiated with global platform corporations that bring their own legal frameworks, commercial interests, and moderation standards. It confirms Gorwa's (2024) analysis of platform regulation politics while contextualising it in the specific dynamics of a post-secular Muslim-majority democracy: the Indonesian state must simultaneously assert national sovereignty over digital religious content and accommodate the technical realities of global platform governance. The result is a governance model characterised by ongoing negotiation rather than a settled hierarchy a model that creates spaces for both compliance and resistance by religious communities.

5. Digital Faith as Mediated Authority: State Power, Platform Visibility, and Contestation in Indonesia

This study's empirical analysis guied by three research questions yields a coherent theoretical picture. The Indonesian state exercises discursive power over digital religious expression through a layered regulatory architecture that combines legal securitisation, administrative normalisation, and institutional authorisation. This architecture produces a hybrid form of religious legitimacy termed digital faith as mediated authority in which the credibility of a religious voice is determined not solely by scholarly standing but by the interaction of regulatory compliance, algorithmic visibility, and digital performativity. At the same time, the analysis reveals that digital platforms also serve as arenas of contestation: civil society organisations, activist communities, and religious actors themselves actively negotiate and resist state regulatory frameworks, producing counter-discourses that challenge the hegemony of technocratic religious governance. These three dynamics state control through discursive power, emergence of hybrid legitimacy, and community contestation, constitute the empirical foundation of digital faith as mediated authority as a theoretical framework applicable to post-secular societies in the Global South.

The findings confirm several dimensions of Habermas' post-secular governance theory (2008) while also revealing important modifications necessary for the Global South context. Habermas argues that post-secular societies require new forms of articulation that accommodate religious voices within democratic public spheres without either excluding them or allowing them to dominate. The Indonesian case confirms the basic post-secular dynamic: religion is neither privatised nor allowed unrestricted public expression but is actively negotiated through institutional channels. However, Habermas' model was developed from the experience of Western European democracies in which religious actors typically occupy a minority or declining institutional position relative to secular state authority. In Indonesia, where 87% of the population is Muslim and major religious organisations command enormous social legitimacy, the negotiation between religious authority and state governance takes a fundamentally different form. The state does not seek to contain a minority religious voice but to manage a majority religious culture in the service of national unity, a dynamic that produces distinctive patterns of co-regulatory legitimacy not anticipated in Habermas' original framework. It suggests that post-secular theory requires modification for majority-religious contexts:

the central tension is not between secular reason and religious particularism but between pluralistic religious expression and state-managed religious moderation. Sajir (2023) proposes a post-secular approach to managing diversity in liberal democracies through the interplay of human rights and religious identity; the Indonesian case extends this framework to non-Western majority-Muslim contexts, where the state itself claims religious identity as a governance resource.

The findings also both confirm and extend Van Dijck et.al (2018) platform society framework. Van Dijck argues that digital platforms function as socio-political infrastructures that distribute power through datafication and algorithmic architectures. This study confirms the analytical power of this framework. The analysis of Permenkominfo No. 5/2020, SE Menkominfo No. 6/2023, and BSSN cybersecurity regulations clearly demonstrates how platform compliance requirements function as mechanisms for the distribution of power in the religious sphere. However, van Dijck's analysis primarily focuses on the commercial logic of platform capitalism in Western contexts. The Indonesian case reveals an additional dimension: the co-regulatory relationship between state and platform is not solely commercially driven but is actively shaped by national security concerns, religious moderation agendas, and the political economy of post-secular governance. The state's capacity to compel platforms to serve as co-regulators, as demonstrated by the 5,731 content removals in nine months, reflects a state-platform relationship that is more coercive and less market-mediated than the Van Dijck et al. model implies. Comparative scholarship on digital governance in Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey (Shukri, 2023; Yilmaz et al., 2023) similarly suggests that the state-platform relationship in Muslim-majority democracies is characterised by higher levels of state intervention than in Western liberal democracies, supporting this study's modification of the platform society framework for the Global South context.

Regarding co-regulatory governance (Sixto-Garcia et al., 2024), this study's findings extend existing scholarship by demonstrating that co-regulation in Indonesia's religious digital space is not an equal partnership but a hierarchically structured collaboration in which state power ultimately determines the parameters within which platforms operate. Bellanova and de Goede (2022) demonstrate that co-production of security through platform content moderation operates as a form of European security integration; the Indonesian case reveals a parallel but distinctively statist variant of this dynamic, where co-regulation serves national religious moderation rather than supranational security norms. This asymmetric co-regulation produces the structured information asymmetry (Tang et al., 2023) identified in the data: certain religious discourses systematically lose reach, visibility, and credibility not through democratic deliberation but through administrative-algorithmic governance mechanisms. This finding has broader implications for scholarship on digital democracy: it suggests that in Global South post-secular contexts, algorithmic governance and regulatory control can produce forms of epistemic inequality that structurally disadvantage minority and alternative religious voices, a dimension of digital religious governance that requires dedicated scholarly attention.

This study's primary strength lies in its integrative analytical framework: by combining Fairclough's CDA with Habermas' post-secular governance theory and van Dijck's platform society framework, it offers a multi-level analysis that simultaneously captures the discursive, institutional, and socio-cultural dimensions of the reconfiguration of religious authority. The focus on formal regulatory documents provides a systematic and verifiable corpus that can be rigorously analysed through CDA. The Indonesian case offers a uniquely significant site of analysis given its demographic scale, majority-Muslim character, and institutional complexity. The data period (June–October 2025) captures the current state of digital religious governance with contemporaneous relevance.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, CDA is inherently interpretive, and findings reflect analytical choices made by the researcher; statistical generalisability cannot be claimed, and the interpretations offered here represent theoretically grounded readings rather than definitive conclusions. Second, the corpus is limited to formal regulatory documents and civil society monitoring reports; it does not incorporate direct perspectives from digital religious actors, preachers, content creators, or community members whose lived experience of regulatory governance would enrich the analysis. Third, the data collection period of approximately five months, while capturing

contemporaneous regulatory developments, may not fully capture longer-term trajectories of change. Future research should address these limitations through ethnographic digital methods, in-depth interviews with religious content creators, and longitudinal analysis of regulatory impact.

The theoretical implications of this study are significant. The concept of digital faith as mediated authority contributes a novel analytical framework to the literature on digital religion, post-secular governance, and platform society studies. It specifies the mechanism through which religious authority is transformed in the digital age, not simply displaced or undermined by technology, but actively reconfigured through the interaction of regulatory discourse, algorithmic architecture, and community agency, and it grounds this mechanism empirically in the Global South context. The finding that Habermas' post-secular model requires modification for majority-religious societies opens a productive research agenda for comparative post-secular theory.

The practical implications are equally important. The identification of structured information asymmetry as a governance outcome in which the algorithmic and regulatory environment systematically reduces the reach of non-mainstream religious voices has direct implications for digital policy design. First, content moderation transparency: the data showing 5,731 content removals in nine months and 8,320 radical-coded items blocked demonstrate the scale of regulatory action; policymakers should introduce publicly accessible appeal mechanisms and independent oversight of content moderation decisions. Second, civil society inclusion: the effectiveness of Setara Institute and SAFEnet in producing counter-discourse suggests that digital governance frameworks should formally incorporate civil society monitoring and advocacy roles. Third, digital literacy: the growing dependence of religious credibility on platform visibility highlights the need for digital literacy programs that help religious communities navigate algorithmic environments without surrendering to their commercial and political logics. Fourth, comparative policy learning: Indonesian policymakers could benefit from engagement with digital governance experiences in Malaysia, Turkey, and other Muslim-majority democracies to identify best practices in balancing religious freedom and social stability in digitally mediated public spheres.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the Indonesian state regulates digital religious authority through a layered discursive architecture that combines legal securitisation (ITE Law), administrative normalisation (Permenkominfo No. 5/2020), institutional authorisation (Ministry of Religious Affairs Da'wah Guidelines), and cybersecurity legitimation (BSSN regulations), a configuration that collectively constructs the boundaries of legitimate religious expression not through theological deliberation but through technocratic governance. The study reveals that new hybrid forms of religious legitimacy have emerged from the interaction between state, platform, and religious actors, constituting digital faith as mediated authority: a form of religious credibility determined by the intersection of regulatory compliance, algorithmic visibility, and digital performativity, rather than solely by traditional scholarly or institutional standing. The evidence from Setara Institute, SAFEnet, the Ahok case, and platform negotiations demonstrates that digital religious communities actively negotiate and challenge state control through counter-discursive practices that construct alternative truth regimes, confirming that digital platforms function simultaneously as instruments of state governance and as arenas of community resistance.

This study contributes three interconnected advances to scholarship. Theoretically, it introduces digital faith as mediated authority. This novel concept specifies the mechanism by which religious authority is reconfigured in the digital age, beyond general observations about technology's impact on religion. Methodologically, it demonstrates the productivity of integrating Fairclough's CDA with post-secular governance and platform society frameworks for the analysis of digital religious governance, a combination that can be applied to comparative contexts in the Global South and beyond. In practice, it provides a comprehensive analytical map of Indonesia's digital religious governance architecture, offering a basis for evidence-based policy reform proposals that can support inclusive, transparent, and pluralistic digital religious public spheres.

At least two specific research questions remain open for future investigation. First, how do digital religious actors, preachers, content creators, and online community leaders experience, navigate, and strategically respond to regulatory and algorithmic constraints? Answering this question requires ethnographic digital fieldwork and in-depth interviews that capture the emic perspectives and agentic strategies of religious actors not accessible through regulatory document analysis. Second, do the patterns of digital religious authority reconfiguration identified in Indonesia generalise to other Muslim-majority democracies with different governance systems, such as Malaysia, Bangladesh, or Morocco? Systematic comparative research across these contexts would advance both the theoretical development of digital faith as mediated authority and the practical understanding of what governance arrangements best support religious pluralism in digitally regulated public spheres.

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