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Scriptural Misappropriation: Critical Hermeneutics, Political Framing, and the Contestation of Religious Authority in Contemporary Indonesian Elections

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Abstract: The instrumentalization of holy scriptures to serve sectarian interests is a destructive phenomenon that threatens civic cohesion and democratic integrity in a pluralistic modern society. Political sociology studies often view religious populism as merely a contemporary dynamic, but often ignore the historical-hermeneutic lineage linking formative theological schisms to contemporary electoral scripturalism. This study examines the mechanisms of decontextualization and the conversion of Islamic sacred texts into instruments of political discourse within Indonesia's electoral space. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and contextual hermeneutic approaches, this article analyzes a corpus of texts including Qur'anic verses, hadith traditions, and campaign discourse in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election. The findings identify three dimensions of textual instrumentalization: institutional theological legitimacy, Manichean political framing, and liturgical coercion in mass mobilization. These dynamics directly impact the desacralization of canonical texts, the narrowing of meanings, and the institutionalization of religious polarization. This study concludes that countering text manipulation demands strengthening critical literacy and revitalizing contextual hermeneutics oriented towards ethics and humanity.

Keywords: *Misuse of Religious Texts;* Critical Hermeneutics; Political Framing Systems; Contestation of Religious Authority; Islamic Populism; Sectarian Polarization; Indonesian Electoral Politics

1. Introduction

Attaching scriptural rhetoric to electoral competition has sharpened sectarian polarization in various transitional democratic countries (Hadiz, 2016, p. 42; Hefner, 2020, p. 75). This socio-religious vulnerability is further strengthened when sacred texts are deliberately detached from their canonical horizons to be used as exclusive political weapons to legitimize opposing camps (Menchik, 2016, p. 88; Mietzner, 2018, p. 265). In the contemporary Indonesian landscape, this divisive dynamic is clearly reflected in the 2017 Jakarta Regional Head Election and the 2019 Presidential Election, where theological markers are used as benchmarks for public morality as well as electoral political preferences (Aspinall et al., 2017, p. 26; Burhani, 2018, p. 415). Sacred evidence and fiqh sanctions are mobilized at scale to suppress voters, as seen in the boycott of funeral prayers for citizens with different political choices (Fealy, 2020, p. 305; Fossati, 2019, p. 112). Moreover, discursive framing divides political coalitions into divine and satanic factions by using Qur'anic lexicon to stir mass hysteria (Hamid, 2018, p. 219; Muhtadi, 2019, p. 134). Incidents of violence and legal clashes involving the state apparatus are also framed as narratives of martyrdom, emphasizing how the term religion can be removed from its juridical boundaries for the sake of mobilization (Ahnaf, 2021, p. 55; Warburton, 2020, p. 38). This empirical phenomenon shows that sacred texts no longer function as transcendent moral compasses but have become tactical tools of political coercion.

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Academic studies on the politicization of Islam in Southeast Asia have actually grown rapidly over the past two decades (Bubalo & Fealy, 2005, p. 14; Ricklefs, 2012, p. 180). Mainstream political science literature examines this phenomenon through the lens of political economy and populism, assuming that religious rhetoric is merely an ideological cover for material oligarchs chasing power rents (Hadiz, 2018, p. 568; Robison & Hadiz, 2004, p. 92). In contrast, media communication scholars study conservative identity politics through digital ecology, highlighting how social media algorithms accelerate the polarization of hateful discourse and social segregation (Lim, 2017, p. 412; Slama, 2018, p. 351). Meanwhile, most conventional Islamic studies revolve around normative-apologetic polemics that condemn literalist readings without analyzing the structural power relations underlying them (Haleem, 2018, p. 129; Sirry, 2020, p. 63). Nevertheless, these approaches operate separately: political scientists often overlook the depth of religious textual hermeneutics, while Islamic studies experts rarely use structured critical discourse methodologies (Bayat, 2007, p. 11; Saeed, 2013, p. 47). As a result, a fundamental knowledge gap emerges regarding the epistemological genealogy linking classical Islamic schisms with modern electoral scripturalism (Donner, 2010, p. 175; Hinds, 1996, p. 33). This absence of a theoretical bridge obscures how ancient legitimacy tactics continue to be reproduced by contemporary religious populism.

This research specifically exists to close these theoretical and empirical gaps through hermeneutic criticism and discursive analysis of the instrumentalization of religious texts within the Indonesian political space (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 89; Fairclough, 2013, p. 132). Specifically, this study examines how Qur'anic verses and hadith narrations are decontextualized from their historical horizons to build ideological hegemony (Barlas, 2019, p. 104; Rahman, 1982, p. 5). This article asks three core questions: first, how is the historical and semiotic continuity between the theological schism of Islam's formative era and contemporary Indonesian electoral discourse (Donner, 1998, p. 44; Madelung, 1997, p. 82)? Second, through what linguistic and cognitive mechanisms do political actors transform normative arguments into instruments of discriminatory social categorization (Entman, 1993, p. 52; van Dijk, 2008, p. 85)? Third, what hermeneutic and social impacts arise from transforming sacred texts into political tools against religious authority and democratic citizenship (Asad, 1986, p. 14; Habermas, 2006, p. 5)? By elaborating these three focuses, this article aims to move beyond descriptive sociological coverage and build a tested theoretical model.

This article argues that the instrumentalization of sacred texts in Indonesia's political contests is not a fleeting incident driven by electoral dynamics alone, but a recent manifestation of ideological scripturalism rooted in a shift in historical hermeneutics (Arkoun, 2002, p. 35; Hadiz, 2014, p. 178). When elites dismantle canonical texts, a methodological break occurs that deliberately separates the decree of revelation from *the asbāb al-nuzūl* and its universal ethical values (Esack, 1993, p. 118; Saeed, 2006, p. 112). This discursive manipulation operates through three continuous patterns: institutionalizing absolute juridical justification, constructing Manichean binary framing, and coercively deploying religious sanctions in the social realm (Mietzner, 2020, p. 433; van Dijk, 1998, p. 144). This process triggers the paradox of textual desacralization, where the transcendent value of the word is reduced to pragmatic commodities that divide society (Abu Zayd, 2006, p. 61; Nasr, 2001, p. 28). Therefore, deconstruction of the monopoly claim of interpretation can only be realized through a critical return to contextual hermeneutics and the restoration of democratic public reasoning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Scriptural Misappropriation

Misuse of sacred texts refers to the practice of quoting canonical language units in isolation to legitimize ideological interests outside the text's ethical intent (Fishbane, 1985, p. 12; Kermani, 2006, p. 211). In Islamic hermeneutic theory, this deviation stems from treating revelation as a set of rigid evidences (nushūsh) detached from historical context and core moral values (Abu Zayd, 2000, p. 45; Rahman, 1984, p. 33). Theorists view this practice as instrumentalization of the text, where the sacredness of the holy book is used to protect political interests from rational criticism (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 105; Casanova, 1994, p. 67). Rather than making the text an ethical guide that

tests the reader's prejudices, ideological interpreters impose their political will on it (Esack, 1997, p. 82; Hallaq, 2009, p. 114). As a result, the sacred message is forced to become a silent instrument serving the hegemony of momentary power (Arkoun, 1994, p. 55; Saeed, 2008, p. 19). Thus, scriptural distortion is an epistemological violation of interpretative methodology and a form of power domination over religious meaning (Asad, 1993, p. 29; Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

Operational misuse of holy scripture takes three forms: historical decontextualization, semantic reduction, and doctrinal anachronism (Eco, 1992, p. 24; Hirsch, 1967, p. 68). Historical decontextualization occurs when a verse is deliberately removed from its original background (*sabab al-nuzūl*), forcing a particular law into a universal imperative (Campanini, 2011, p. 72; Saeed, 2014, p. 37). Semantic reduction narrows the Qur'anic vocabulary rich in meaning into rigid political slogans, just as the distortion of the meaning *of ḥukm* and *jihād* is often interpreted solely as a power struggle (Izutsu, 2002, p. 18; Peters, 1996, p. 110). Meanwhile, doctrinal anachronism recklessly projects modern political institutions—such as party rivalries—into 7th-century Hijri texts (Esposito, 2002, p. 49; Tibi, 2012, p. 83). These three patterns intertwine to form a pseudo-orthodoxy that suppresses interpretive diversity in society (El Fadl, 2001, p. 95; Moosa, 2005, p. 142). Through this layered manipulation, moral and ethical teachings are reduced to destructive discourse warfare (Gleave, 2012, p. 63; Kurzman, 1998, p. 18).

2.2. Political Framing and Manikean Polarization

Political framing is a linguistic and cognitive process in which strategic actors highlight certain aspects of reality in order to instill a single interpretation in the public mind (Entman, 1993, p. 53; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). In the religious realm, framing acts as a sacralization of worldly competition, transforming electoral political friction into an existential struggle of theological value (Goffman, 1974, p. 21; Snow et al., 1986, p. 464). Discourse literature conceptualizes this as theological framing, where political rivals are not seen as fellow citizens but as enemies of the divine order (Juergensmeyer, 2008, p. 148; Lincoln, 2003, p. 19). Through transcendent legitimacy, political elites can ignite collective moral anger while suppressing public rationality (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614; Lakoff, 2008, p. 78). Such framing facilitates mass mobilization because political choices are transformed into an indisputable obligation of faith (Brubaker, 2015, p. 10; Gorski et al., 2012, p. 92). Therefore, religious framing becomes the most effective instrument to secure constituent compliance in a divided democratic space (Norris & Inglehart, 2011, p. 132; Philpott, 2007, p. 505).

Religious framing in politics generally moves through three stages: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational, which often culminate in a Manichean binary view (Laclau, 2005, p. 86; Mudde, 2007, p. 54). Diagnostic framing identifies society's moral crisis and imposes absolute blame on political opponents labeled as hypocrites or infidels (Entman, 2003, p. 417; Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 59). Prognostic framing presents a single way out: choosing a line claimed to represent absolute truth (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 199; Zald, 1996, p. 262). Furthermore, motivational framing ignites religious emotions to mobilize political participation as a sacred war against cosmic threats (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992, p. 558; Tilly, 2003, p. 41). In the contemporary populism landscape, this relationship forms a Manichean narrative that rigidly divides society between "sacred groups" and "rebellious groups" (de la Torre, 2019, p. 7; Hawkins, 2010, p. 31). This discursive division kills political compromise and turns democratic contestation into a threat of moral destruction (Mouffe, 2005, p. 73; Riker, 1986, p. 22).

2.3. Contestation of Religious Authority

The contestation of religious authority illustrates the socio-political struggle surrounding the legitimacy of the right to interpret, establish, and guard sacred teachings within society (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996, p. 38; Zaman, 2002, p. 12). In the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, the authority of tafsir is built through strict scholarly sanad, mastery of language and grammar, and methodological consensus among scholars (Brown, 2009, p. 88; Hallaq, 2005, p. 61). However, political modernity, the massification of literacy, and the communication technology revolution have broken the centrality of such institutional authority (Mandaville, 2007, p. 104; Robinson, 1993, p. 231). The mandate

of interpretation is no longer held exclusively by official fatwa institutions, but is seized by political actors, movement activists, and social media influencers (Bunt, 2018, p. 45; Turner, 2007, p. 121). This structural transformation allows non-authoritative figures to obscure conventional interpretation methodologies in favor of creating a new popular orthodoxy (Meijer, 2009, p. 17; Roy, 2004, p. 156). As a result, religious authority has become a fragile free market that is easily drawn into ideological battles (Casanova, 2001, p. 422; Hefner, 2005, p. 19).

In the empirical landscape, the struggle for religious authority is divided into traditional-institutional, charismatic-populist, and discursive-bureaucratic authority (Weber, 1978, p. 215; Woodhead, 2011, p. 122). Traditional-institutional authority is rooted in mainstream Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which uphold moderate methodology and national jurisprudence (Bush, 2009, p. 68; Latif, 2008, p. 142). Charismatic-populist authority relies on street mobilizers and popular preachers who bypass scientific norms to ignite mass emotions (Fealy & White, 2008, p. 39; van Bruinessen, 2013, p. 115). Meanwhile, discursive-bureaucratic authority is managed by ministries and semi-state ulama councils that strive to maintain the stability of public order (Bowen, 2003, p. 87; Hosen, 2007, p. 55). On the electoral stage, populist groups often challenge traditional authority by citing literal texts to delegitimize mainstream ulama's considerations (Burhani, 2020, p. 23; Mietzner, 2009, p. 141). This friction triggers epistemic shocks that damage the governance of religious life (Hadiz & Teik, 2011, p. 472; Menchik, 2019, p. 441).

3. Methods

3.1. Material Objects

The material object of this research is the practice of instrumentalizing Islamic canonical texts in contemporary political discourse in Indonesia (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 67; Mietzner, 2018, p. 268). This choice of locus reflects Indonesia's status as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, currently facing a fierce clash between sacred texts and electoral politics (Fealy, 2020, p. 308; Hefner, 2000, p. 38). The unit of analysis includes verses of the Qur'an that are often debated (especially QS. Al-Mā'idah: 44, QS. Al-Mujādilah: 19 and 22, as well as (QS. Muhammad: 4), the Prophet's hadiths about obedience and hypocrisy, as well as the political speech texts of elites (Burhani, 2018, p. 418; Hosen, 2019, p. 82). These texts were chosen because they are frequently used and have been shown to cause widespread social polarization in elections (Aspinall et al., 2017, p. 31; Entman, 1993, p. 54). Each unit is examined in both its position as canonical revelation in the Islamic treasury and as a political speech act in the public sphere (Fairclough, 2003, p. 22; Saeed, 2006, p. 115). This affirmation of criteria ensures that the research focus consistently examines the relationship between textual hermeneutics and power relations (Asad, 1993, p. 35; Habermas, 1984, p. 95).

3.2. Research Design

This research is designed using a descriptive qualitative method that combines the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with contextual Qur'anic hermeneutics (Fairclough, 2013, p. 135; Saeed, 2013, p. 52). Qualitative design is most appropriate for unraveling the ideological motives, power relations, and historical background embedded in religious discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 29). Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model is applied to dissect texts at the microlinguistic level, meso-level discourse practices, and macro sociopolitical structures (Fairclough, 1992, p. 72; Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 18). At the same time, the contextual hermeneutic theories of Fazlur Rahman and Abdullah Saeed are used to assess the distance between the verse's socio-historical meaning and the distorted interpretation produced by political elites (Rahman, 1982, p. 8; Saeed, 2006, p. 120). Together, these approaches bridge the sociology of discourse analysis with the expertise of classical tafsir (Abu Zayd, 2006, p. 68; van Dijk, 2008, p. 92). This investigative flow uncovers how sacred texts are steered to serve political interests (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 112; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 64).

3.3. Data Sources

The data corpus was collected through *purposive sampling techniques* designed to collect texts on religious debates during the crucial period from 2016 to 2021 (Patton, 2015, p. 264; Silverman, 2016, p. 168). The corpus is divided into two primary sources: the canonical religious corpus and the empirical political discourse corpus (Babbie, 2021, p. 115; Bowen, 2009, p. 28). The canonical corpus includes the Qur'anic mushaf, classical authoritative tafsir works (*Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, and *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*), and the main hadith books (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*) (Brown, 2007, p. 45; Saleh, 2004, p. 16). The empirical corpus consists of 42 transcripts of recorded campaign speeches, press statements from political parties, speeches from Islamic organization leaders, audiovisual recordings, and photo archives of mosque banners related to the body boycott (Lim, 2017, p. 415; Mietzner, 2020, p. 438). The data screening criteria require direct quotations from sacred texts, explicit links to power contests, and evidence of real reactions or polarization among the public (Burhani, 2018, p. 420; Fossati, 2019, p. 115). Data that do not meet verification criteria and discourse outside electoral issues are excluded from the analysis (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 88; Saunders et al., 2018, p. 189).

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through careful, systematic archival documentation studies of various print and digital media (Prior, 2003, p. 24; Scott, 1990, p. 19). The choice of non-interventional documentation techniques ensures the data are original and free from researcher-induced bias (Kellehear, 1993, p. 11; Webb et al., 2000, p. 34). The operational steps began with digitally archiving audiovisual broadcasts and verifying mass media coverage from October 2016 to April 2021 (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 55; Karlsson & Sjøvaag, 2016, p. 14). Statements from public figures, such as Amien Rais and the leaders of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), were transcribed verbatim and matched with the original broadcast recordings (Hamid, 2018, p. 222; Warburton, 2020, p. 42). Visual archives, including banners prohibiting funeral prayers, were collected from journalistic documentation and reports from independent election monitors in the DKI Jakarta area (Fealy, 2020, p. 310; Mietzner, 2018, p. 272). The study directly examined classical tafsir references in scientific tahqiq editions to ensure accurate juz numbers, volumes, pages, and sanad context (Calder, 1993, p. 41; Gilliot, 2002, p. 94). All materials are classified into a well-organized research database (Miles et al., 2014, p. 31; Yin, 2018, p. 122).

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis stages apply thematic coding procedures, three-level discourse analysis, and contextual hermeneutic triangulation (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78; Saeed, 2006, p. 125). In the initial step, all empirical data is sorted through the process of reduction and open coding to mark repeated metaphors, religious lexicons, and political claims (Charmaz, 2014, p. 112; Saldaña, 2021, p. 85). In the second stage, Fairclough's framework is applied: microanalysis dissects the text's grammatical structure; mesoanalysis traces the circulation and reception of messages among constituents; and macroanalysis examines power relations and ideological shifts in society (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94; Jäger & Maier, 2016, p. 115). In the third stage, these political readings are critically confronted with authoritative tafsir literature (*Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*) to assess the degree of deviation from the rules of authentic interpretation (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 72; Rahman, 1982, p. 12). The validity of the data is maintained through referential adequacy, triangulation of primary and secondary sources, and critical reflection by researchers (Denzin, 2012, p. 82; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). These analytical steps ensure that the resulting findings have a strong and accountable epistemological foundation (Flick, 2018, p. 142; Tracy, 2010, p. 841).

4. Results

4.1. Historical Genealogy of the Instrumentalization of Sacred Texts

Classical historiographical evidence shows that using the Qur'anic text as a political rescue maneuver has continued since the first century of Islamic history (Donner, 2010, p. 162; Madelung, 1997, p. 238). The most monumental event was the Battle of Ṣiffīn (37 AH / 657 AD), when the Levant forces under the leadership of Mu'āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, who were in a hurry, lifted the mushaf (*maṣāḥif*) at the speartip on the advice of 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ (al-Ṭabarī, 1987, Vol. 16, p. 78; Ibn Kathīr, 1988, Vol. 7, p. 271). This military maneuver was accompanied by calls to stop the war: "Let the Book of Allah be the mediator between us" (Hinds, 1972, p. 94; Vaglieri, 1970, p. 38). The negotiation agreement (*taḥkīm*) between the factions of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Mu'āwiyah then sparked division among 'Alī's own supporters, which triggered the departure of the Khawarij group with the motto *lā ḥukma illā lillāh* ("there is no law except Allah") (Crone, 2004, p. 55; Wellhausen, 1901, p. 18). The Khawarij justify the rejection of peace by quoting QS. Al-Mā'idah: 44 ("Whoever does not decide according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers") to declare apostate (*takfīr*) against 'Alī, Mu'āwiyah, and the tahkim delegates (al-Shahrastānī, 1984, p. 115; Watt, 1973, p. 24). This historical data shows the beginning of the revelation text being used as a tool to validate political sovereignty in Islam.

A critical reading of this historiographical corpus reveals three structural patterns that recur in the history of text use (Hodgson, 1974, p. 218; Lewis, 1988, p. 52). The first pattern is pragmatic defensive tactics, in which sacred symbols are invoked precisely when political groups face the threat of fatal defeat (Donner, 1998, p. 85; Kennedy, 2004, p. 77). The second pattern is the reduction of the meaning of decree (*ḥukm*), where the Qur'anic vocabulary that includes moral justice and social ethics is narrowed to a pure political power struggle (Ibn Manẓūr, 1990, Vol. 12, p. 141; Izutsu, 2002, p. 35). The third pattern is careless confession (*takfīr*), where differences in political stance are judged as apostates that justify violence against fellow Muslims (El Fadl, 2001, p. 102; Madelung, 1997, p. 252). The same pattern continued during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties through pulpit manipulation of interpretation (Crone & Hinds, 1986, p. 64; Lapidus, 2014, p. 72). For example, the nickname "the cursed tree" (*al-shajarah al-mal'ūnah*) in QS. Al-Isrā': 60 is forced to criticize the Umayyad dynasty, and "a thousand months" in QS. Al-Qadr: 3 is interpreted as a satire of the Umayyad Dynasty (al-Suyūṭī, 1990, Vol. 5, p. 312; al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 15, p. 114).

The connection between the power struggle in the early Islamic era and the dynamics of contemporary electoral politics reveals a very clear common thread (Arkoun, 2002, p. 48; Asad, 1986, p. 16). The Khawarij's attitude in exploiting QS. Al-Mā'idah: 44 shares logical similarities with modern fundamentalist movements that accuse the secular democratic system of thagut (Hallaq, 2009, p. 128; Roy, 1994, p. 41). In both eras, the Qur'anic text was detached from its original context to create a false binary boundary: submitting to their political factions equates with obedience to Allah, while rejecting their faction is considered rebellious to religion (Abu Zayd, 2000, p. 58; Esack, 1997, p. 95). The Ṣiffīn arbitration event is not merely a historical story, but a precedent of political interpretation often imitated when religious elites clash with power (Hinds, 1996, p. 45; Watt, 1988, p. 31). This continuity shows that verse manipulation is driven not by unclear textual language, but by a political lust to monopolize religious legitimacy (El Fadl, 2003, p. 74; Piscatori, 1986, p. 29). Understanding these historical roots is crucial for analyzing electoral cases in Indonesia (Hadiz, 2016, p. 50; Hefner, 2020, p. 82).

4.2. Contemporary Typology of Sacred Text Misuse

In political contests in Indonesia, the first form of manipulation on the ground is using sacred texts as legal justification to delegitimize the state constitution (Aspinall et al., 2017, p. 34; Burhani, 2018, p. 422). Hardline groups often invoke QS. Al-Mā'idah: 44 to declare that officials and the legal system of the republic are infidels because they do not strictly enforce sharia (Hosen, 2019, p. 88; Mietzner, 2018, p. 275). In fact, in authoritative tafsir literature, companions such as Ibn 'Abbās emphasized in the *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* narration that the verse was revealed in response to the Jews of Medina who manipulated the Torah law, and he said: "That is disbelief that does not expel a person

from religion (*kufr dūna kufr*)" (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 8, p. 464; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, Vol. 3, p. 119). Contemporary Islamist discourse deliberately erases details of classical interpretation and forces the text to be read literally to justify rejecting civilian leadership (Fealy, 2020, p. 312; Menchik, 2016, p. 94). Through this narrowing, specific jurisprudential rules are transformed into general arguments to defy legitimate state laws (El Fadl, 2001, p. 114; Sirry, 2020, p. 71).

The second dominant form of the data corpus is Manichean political framing, in which election competition is transformed into a cosmic clash between the group of God and the satanic faction (Entman, 1993, p. 55; Laclau, 2005, p. 88). In the run-up to the 2019 presidential election, political figure Amien Rais openly divided Indonesian parties into two moral factions: *hizbullah* (the party of Allah) and *hizbusysyaithan* (the party of Satan) (Hamid, 2018, p. 224; Muhtadi, 2019, p. 138). This rhetoric directly refers to a quote from QS. Al-Mujādilah: 19 ("Satan has taken control of them and made them forget to remember Allah; they are the group of Satan") and QS. Al-Mujādilah: 22 ("They are the people of Allah; know that indeed it is the group of Allah that is successful") (al-Qurṭubī, 2006, Vol. 20, p. 315; Hosen, 2019, p. 92). Historically, these two verses illustrate the fundamental difference between monotheism and the hypocrites' betrayal in Medina, with no connection to the coalition of political parties in a modern republic (al-Wāḥidī, 1991, p. 422; Saeed, 2014, p. 45). By attaching this revelatory lexicon to supporting parties such as PAN, PKS, and Gerindra, and contrasting them with opposing coalitions, this discourse directs the public to view electoral preferences as a matter of faith safety (Bourchier, 2019, p. 719; Fossati, 2019, p. 118).

The third form redefines war as a holy jihad to construct resistance against law enforcers, as reflected in the post-KM 50 incident narrative involving FPI militias (Ahnaf, 2021, p. 58; Warburton, 2020, p. 45). The shooting tragedy of six FPI militia members on the Jakarta-Cikampek toll road in December 2020 was soon framed by organizational elites as a martyrdom event on the battlefield, upholding truth against regime oppression (Fealy, 2021, p. 12; Mietzner, 2021, p. 240). War texts, such as excerpts from QS. Muḥammad: 4 regarding the ethics of open battle ("When you meet disbelievers, then cut their throats..."), is also raised to ignite the sentiment that such clashes are a war of faith (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 21, p. 182; Peters, 1996, p. 118). This discourse dismisses the analysis of the chronology of civil law and the boundaries of fiqh siyasah that distinguish domestic security operations from military warfare (*qitāl*) against foreign enemies (El Fadl, 2001, p. 128; Hallaq, 2005, p. 74). As a result, public grief has been diverted into political fuel to undermine the legitimacy of state law enforcement (Asad, 2007, p. 42; Juergensmeyer, 2008, p. 156).

4.3. Hermeneutic and Social Impact on Society

The first structural impact of this political instrumentalization is real desacralization and the shallowing of the meaning of the Qur'an's sacred verses (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 95; Arkoun, 2002, p. 54). When verses are continuously dragged to serve the desire to win electoral votes, the transcendental values, spirituality, and ethical justice of the Qur'anic text are sidelined by pragmatic interests (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 115; Casanova, 1994, p. 74). The diversity and depth of meaning in the Arabic language of the Qur'an—which classical tafsir tradition understands with great caution—is unilaterally reduced to rigid political slogans (al-Qurṭubī, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 42; Izutsu, 2002, p. 48). Ultimately, the holy book is no longer lived out as a noble guide for civilization, but merely as a catalog of instant evidence taken during campaigns and discarded after the election (Esack, 1997, p. 102; Rahman, 1982, p. 18). This commodification lowers the dignity of the holy book in people's eyes, disappoints the critical generation, and damages religion's moral authority (Habermas, 2006, p. 8; Nasr, 2001, p. 33). The word of Allah also becomes distorted, distancing it from the guidance of conscience and enlightenment (El Fadl, 2003, p. 81; Saeed, 2006, p. 132).

The second structural impact is liturgical coercion through the politicization of obligatory worship, as shown by the boycott of funeral management during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election (Burhani, 2018, p. 425; Fealy, 2020, p. 315). Between February and March 2017, threatening banners were installed in several mosques in South and East Jakarta expressing their refusal to purify and perform funeral prayers for residents supporting Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) (Hamid, 2018, p. 226; Mietzner, 2018, p. 278). Agitators justified these social sanctions by exploiting QS. At-Tawbah: 84 ("And do not pray for the deceased of any of them, nor stand over their grave..."), grafting

the Prophet's prohibition against praying for genuine hypocrites onto ordinary voters (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 11, p. 586; Ibn Kathīr, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 195). This action turns communal obligations (*farḍ kifāyah*) into a psychological terror weapon so that citizens fear losing their religious rights and being ostracized from their residential environment (Fossati, 2019, p. 122; Menchik, 2016, p. 98). Using funeral rituals to force political choices abuses the social pastoral function of mosques (Aspinall et al., 2017, p. 38; Muhtadi, 2019, p. 142).

The third structural impact is the freezing of horizontal polarization among societies and the fragmentation of scholars' institutional authority in the civil public sphere (Hadiz, 2016, p. 58; Hefner, 2020, p. 89). When political choices are transformed into rigid boundaries between faith and hypocrisy, the pillars of shared civility collapse drastically (Habermas, 1984, p. 102; Mouffe, 2005, p. 81). Kinship and neighborly bonds are shattered due to theological judgments blaming each other for political party choices (Bourchier, 2019, p. 724; Lim, 2017, p. 420). This condition also sidelines moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, whose mild fatwas and national fiqh are hit by waves of hate speech on social media by impromptu preachers (Burhani, 2020, p. 28; Bush, 2009, p. 75). When moderate voices are accused of being cheap compromises against the ruling regime, the authority of the scholarly chain that has been tested for centuries collapses in the face of instant narratives (van Bruinessen, 2018, p. 24; Zaman, 2002, p. 18). The erosion of legitimate authority holders triggers prolonged social instability that can escalate into horizontal conflict (Barton et al., 2021, p. 172; Mietzner, 2020, p. 445).

5. Discussion

The findings reinforce the main thesis that manipulation of sacred texts in Indonesia's electoral arena is a structured political instrument, not merely seasonal ripples (Aspinall et al., 2017, p. 41; Hadiz, 2018, p. 572). Answering the initial research questions, the manuscript review shows that today's mechanisms reflect manipulation tactics from the classical Islamic schism era, namely cutting text from context to claim God's voice for one's camp (Donner, 2010, p. 178; Madelung, 1997, p. 256). In the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election, the movement's elites exploited a series of Qur'anic verses and hadith narrations to legitimize civil disobedience, create a dichotomy between the party of God and the party of Satan, and reject the handling of the corpse (Burhani, 2018, p. 428; Mietzner, 2018, p. 282). These actions culminate in severe social segregation, the reduction of the dignity of the revealed text, and the weakening of the legitimacy of mainstream ulama authority (Fealy, 2020, p. 318; Fossati, 2019, p. 126). Thus, this study has comprehensively mapped how the sanctity of religion has been shifted into the realm of electoral throne struggle (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 102; Fairclough, 2013, p. 140).

Through the lens of critical hermeneutics, this research indicates an epistemic crisis affecting religious understanding in modern society (Arkoun, 2002, p. 62; Asad, 1993, p. 41). The widespread cutting of the historical background of verses (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) reflects a shallow scriptural perspective that treats holy books like practical guidebooks without regard for their moral spirit (Barlas, 2019, p. 112; Rahman, 1982, p. 22). This neglectful attitude erases the crucial boundary between absolute divine sharia law and the relative product of human jurisprudence, so political opinions are seen as equivalent to God's commands (El Fadl, 2001, p. 135; Hallaq, 2009, p. 132). When political obedience is equated with faith worship, it usurps God's prerogative and subordinates worldly ambitions to Him (Abu Zayd, 2006, p. 75; Esack, 1997, p. 108). This shows that the wave of electoral scripturalism is not a pure piety revival, but a covert secularization that reshapes sacred verses in the political marketplace (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 118; Casanova, 1994, p. 82).

The use of sacred texts for political interests in Indonesia is deeply rooted in the dynamics of public space after the 1998 Reform and the explosion of digital communication technology (Hefner, 2020, p. 94; Lim, 2017, p. 424). The collapse of New Order repression opened the door for hardline Islamic factions, long suppressed by the military regime, to speak loudly in the public sphere (Hadiz, 2016, p. 64; van Bruinessen, 2013, p. 122). This openness of space was met with the massive use of social media, which tended to favor sensational, polarizing messages and lacked in-depth studies (Bunt, 2018, p. 52; Slama, 2018, p. 358). Oligarchic elites realize that burning religious emotions is much cheaper and more effective at garnering constituent sympathy than offering a substantive work program (Mietzner,

2020, p. 448; Robison & Hadiz, 2004, p. 105). In such intense competition, quoting sacred texts becomes a shortcut to attract the masses and push back opponents (Hamid, 2018, p. 228; Muhtadi, 2019, p. 146). In other words, textualization arises from the pragmatic marriage of electoral ambition, capital oligarchy, and the fragility of public critical literacy (Aspinall et al., 2017, p. 45; Bourchier, 2019, p. 728).

The findings of this study carry fundamental theoretical and practical implications for Islamic studies and the sustainability of the democratic order (Baderin, 2021, p. 24; Habermas, 2006, p. 12). Theoretically, this article refutes the essentialist orientalist view that radicalism stems from the inherent nature of Islamic texts and shows that material-political interests distort the meaning of the text (Asad, 1986, p. 18; Bayat, 2007, p. 16). In ushul fiqh, this study emphasizes the importance of shifting from a narrow literal understanding to a contextual hermeneutic methodology that considers the goal of public welfare (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) (Hallaq, 2005, p. 82; Saeed, 2013, p. 60). For state life, this research warns that allowing the politicization of religion will threaten the principle of equal citizenship rights guaranteed by the constitution (Fossati, 2019, p. 130; Menchik, 2016, p. 104). If a faction is allowed to revoke citizens' citizenship or worship rights based on political fatwas, the foundation of constitutional democracy will be fragile (Bowen, 2003, p. 94; Stepan, 2000, p. 42). Therefore, the monopoly of interpretation must be confronted with firm and impartial enforcement of the supremacy of law (El Fadl, 2003, p. 92; Muhtadi, 2019, p. 152).

In a global comparative context, the phenomenon in Indonesia mirrors the rise of right-wing populism in various parts of the world (Brubaker, 2015, p. 14; Gorski et al., 2012, p. 98). In the United States, India, and Brazil, right-wing politicians exploit the Gospel verses or the epic of the Mahabharata to divide society between loyal citizens and traitors to the nation (de la Torre, 2019, p. 11; Mudde, 2007, p. 62). In the Middle East, authoritarian regimes and opposition groups in Egypt and Turkey both use religious arguments to claim legitimacy and suppress freedom of expression (Esposito & Voll, 2019, p. 91; Mandaville, 2007, p. 112). Indonesia's uniqueness lies in the survival of religious social capital in the form of moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which actively suppress total polarization (Burhani, 2020, p. 34; Bush, 2009, p. 82). The wasathiyah Islamic tradition and Nusantara local wisdom became a defensive fortress that prevented Indonesia from falling into sectarian-based violent conflicts that have plagued many other countries (Hefner, 2000, p. 44; Latif, 2008, p. 156).

To address the future escalation of manipulation of sacred texts, integrated systemic reforms are needed in education, fatwa institutions, and election regulations (Baderin, 2021, p. 31; Habermas, 2006, p. 15). First, Islamic higher education institutions and pesantren must teach critical hermeneutics that equip the younger generation with a deep understanding of *asbāb al-nuzūl* and the ability to distinguish between universal ethical values and local-temporal law (Abu Zayd, 2004, p. 110; Saeed, 2006, p. 142). Second, mainstream religious organizations must respond by balancing extreme narratives on social media with enlightenment fatwas opposing the use of fardhu kifayah sanctions for political intimidation (Burhani, 2018, p. 432; Fealy, 2020, p. 322). Third, election supervisory authorities (Bawaslu) and law enforcers need to impose strict sanctions against the politicization of places of worship and religious terror practices without harming freedom of expression (Hamid, 2018, p. 232; Mietzner, 2018, p. 288). It must be emphasized that public criticism and control over government policies (*amr ma'rūf nahy munkar*) are legitimate constitutional rights, so political criticism must not be criminalized under the pretext of blasphemy or theological defiance (El Fadl, 2001, p. 142; Hallaq, 2009, p. 140).

6. Conclusion

The most important finding of this study is that instrumentalizing holy scripture verses in political contests reflects not religious obedience, but desacralization and the pragmatic use of the revealed text. Behind the hype of defending creed, political actors have stripped the Qur'an of its ethical principles and reduced them to slogans for worldly power campaigns. Researchers find that this deviation does not stem from ignorance of Islamic teachings, but is consciously carried out by elites who understand the intricacies of religion and use them to win votes. This manipulative awareness unveils the veil of political hypocrisy that endangers the nobility of the message of revelation

before the public. The greatest paradox of the political literalism movement is that those who feel the most persistent in fighting for sharia often become the ones who most damage the ethical values of the Qur'an itself.

This article makes an original scientific contribution by combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Islamic contextual hermeneutics to dissect power relations in religious interpretation. This interdisciplinary approach overcomes the weaknesses of political science studies, which often view religion mechanistically, while also improving conventional tafsir studies, which are often isolated from social reality. From a historical perspective, this article enriches academic insight by tracing the lineage between political arbitration in the formative Islamic era and electoral contests in present-day Indonesia. The formulation of typological models of text distortion—ranging from juridical justification and Manichean framing to liturgical coercion—offers a new theoretical framework for studying religious populism globally. This study affirms that the safety of democracy and the nobility of revealed teachings culminate in a shared commitment to interpret sacred texts contextually, honestly, and justly.

Despite the depth of analysis achieved, this study has several methodological limitations that pave the way for future research agendas. First, the empirical data corpus is largely concentrated on election events in urban areas of Java, especially DKI Jakarta, so it has not fully captured the variety of local dynamics outside Java that have different filtering customary traditions. Second, this analysis focuses on textual discourse and discursive elitism and is not reinforced by in-depth ethnographic field studies to quantitatively measure grassroots voters' psychological responses. Future research should broaden the scope by conducting algorithm-based digital ethnography to map the distribution of argument fragments on channels such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp. In addition, cross-country comparisons with the Middle East and South Asia will be valuable for enriching global understanding of civil society's resilience against populism based on sacred texts.

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