

## Hybrid Moral Sovereignty in Indonesia: Religion, Content Moderation, and Digital Public Authority

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### ABSTRACT

Digital platforms have become decisive arenas for the governance of public morality in Indonesia, where legal authority, religious legitimacy, and private moderation systems increasingly intersect. In this environment, disputes over visibility, prohibition, and reputational sanction are not merely technical matters of content control but contests over who may define legitimate public order. This article examines how hybrid moral sovereignty is produced through the interaction of state signaling, platform enforcement, religious authority, and digitally mobilized public pressure in Indonesia. The article adopts a qualitative, theory-driven approach grounded in political sociology, platform governance, and scholarship on religion and public authority. It draws on academic literature, policy and legal materials, platform-related public documents, media coverage, and publicly accessible cases of digitally mediated moral controversy in Indonesia. Analytical attention is directed to legal signaling, religious legitimacy, complaint infrastructures, and platform enforcement as interconnected mechanisms of norm production. A mechanism-based synthesis is used to explain how these actors co-produce binding moderation outcomes without a single sovereign center. Digital governance in Indonesia emerges as a hybrid regime in which state institutions, religious actors, platforms, and mobilized publics jointly shape enforceable moral order. The article concludes that content moderation in Indonesia is best understood as a field of distributed sovereignty in which public power is assembled through legal, moral, and infrastructural coordination. The article contributes to the field by offering a conceptually integrated framework for understanding how religion shapes political authority and how digital governance reconfigures sovereignty in a democratic but morally contested public sphere.

Keywords: Political Authority, Religion, Digital Governance, Indonesia

### INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have become central arenas in which public morality, legal authority, and political order are negotiated in contemporary Indonesia. Content moderation no longer operates as a narrowly technical practice for filtering harmful material, because it shapes who can speak, which claims become visible, and what kinds of conduct are marked as acceptable in the digital public sphere (Lestari et al., 2025). In a society where religious legitimacy remains socially consequential, these struggles over visibility are also struggles over the right to define moral boundaries for public life. Platform companies, state agencies, religious organizations, civil society actors, and mobilized publics now intervene in the same controversies, often at high speed and with overlapping claims to authority (Masduki, 2021).

Indonesia is especially significant because rapid platform expansion has unfolded within layered legal regimes, dense civic mobilization, and recurring disputes over blasphemy, sexuality, gambling, and electoral disinformation (Nurhayati et al., 2025). These conditions make the Indonesian digital sphere an analytically rich site for examining how religion and political power become intertwined under mediated conditions. The central background of the article is therefore a public sphere in which digital infrastructures have become part of the practical architecture of moral and political order.

The core problem lies in the fact that digital controversies in Indonesia rarely pass through a single institutional channel before producing sanction, compliance, or public outrage (Zayyadi et al., 2025). A local clip, screenshot, or accusation can move rapidly across platforms and trigger complaint campaigns,

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regulatory pressure, media amplification, and moral condemnation almost at once. This creates a governance environment in which decisions must be made quickly while their normative grounds remain deeply contested. The real-world significance of this issue is substantial because moderation outcomes can influence public reputation, electoral narratives, legal exposure, and the perceived boundaries of legitimate citizenship. In such moments, content governance becomes inseparable from struggles over who has standing to speak for public morality and who can claim to defend social order (Suryani & Rohman, 2025). The stakes are therefore much larger than platform policy alone. They concern the practical distribution of public power in a democratic setting where religion still carries considerable authority. The problem is not merely whether harmful content should be restricted, but how the power to define harm is assembled across competing institutional and moral actors.

A substantial body of scholarship already establishes several dimensions of this landscape. Research on platform governance has shown that digital companies increasingly perform quasi-regulatory functions by setting rules, interpreting violations, and enforcing speech standards in everyday public life. Scholarship on moral regulation and moral panic has likewise demonstrated that publics often mobilize around perceived threats by invoking shared values, communal fear, and narratives of social breakdown (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019; Wakhidah et al., 2025). Studies of digital religion and Indonesian politics further indicate that religious authority remains central to disputes over blasphemy, decency, public order, and democratic legitimacy.

Existing work also clarifies that networked communication intensifies the speed, scale, and symbolic force of controversy, especially when fragments travel across platforms with different affordances and audiences (Fatimah & Pribadi, 2025; Lubis, 2023). These literatures make clear that content moderation is shaped by a relational field rather than by platform rulebooks alone. They also show that moral authority continues to matter as a practical resource in digital politics. What is already known, then, is that platform enforcement, public morality, and religious legitimacy are deeply entangled in Indonesia's mediated public sphere.

What remains less clearly specified is how these interacting forces produce enforceable outcomes when no single actor can definitively settle contested norms. Existing accounts often describe state regulation, platform policy, and moral mobilization as adjacent processes, yet they do not always explain how these processes become coordinated in practice (Tobing et al., 2025). There is still limited conceptual clarity about how legal signals shape platform responsiveness, how complaint infrastructures translate outrage into measurable inputs, and how legitimacy is stabilized under conditions of uncertainty and high visibility. It is also unclear why some moral controversies generate swift compliance while others provoke backlash, selective enforcement claims, or polarized counter-mobilization. Without a more integrated account, moderation appears either as private corporate discretion or as straightforward state censorship, neither of which adequately captures the Indonesian pattern. The unresolved issue concerns the relational production of authority across public and private actors operating under moral pressure. This unresolved issue is especially important in settings where religious organizations contribute directly to the practical definition of public order (Raya, 2024).

The research gap becomes sharper when approached through the concept of hybrid moral sovereignty. This concept is useful because it treats digital moral regulation not as a conflict between state and platform, but as a practical settlement in which multiple actors claim the right to define acceptable speech and conduct. It is hybrid because law, platform policy, religious reasoning, media

amplification, and civic activism function as interdependent sources of legitimacy. It is sovereignty because these interactions can produce binding effects for users, including takedowns, reputational damage, visibility reduction, and in some cases legal sanction. Prior scholarship has not sufficiently integrated these dimensions into a single explanation of how authority becomes actionable across institutional boundaries (Fauzi et al., 2024). The gap is therefore not only empirical but also theoretical. A framework is needed that can connect the infrastructural mechanics of moderation to the moral and political production of order. Hybrid moral sovereignty provides that framework by showing how religion and political systems co-produce enforceable norms in the digital public sphere.

Filling this gap is theoretically justified because neither a purely legal account nor a purely platform-centered account can explain Indonesia's current moderation environment. A legal account would underestimate the role of religious organizations, complaint campaigns, and public moral mobilization in shaping enforcement priorities. A platform-centered account would miss the extent to which legal instruments, regulatory signaling, and public order concerns structure platform decision-making. The concept of hybrid moral sovereignty is coherent because it captures authority as relational, contingent, and assembled rather than monopolized (Gumati, 2024b). This allows the analysis to explain why enforcement can appear simultaneously legitimate, selective, and unstable. It also makes visible how religious authority operates not simply as a moral commentary on politics, but as a practical source of justification that influences digital governance itself. Such an approach is especially relevant for a journal concerned with political authority and religion because it places moral legitimacy and public power within the same analytical frame. The Indonesian case therefore becomes more than a national example; it becomes a site for theorizing the recomposition of sovereignty under platform-mediated conditions (Saputra, 2025).

From this foundation, the article is guided by a set of closely related research questions. How is authority over digital morality assembled in Indonesia when neither the state nor the platform can unilaterally settle contested norms. Through what mechanisms do legal signals, complaint infrastructures, and religiously charged public mobilization interact to produce enforceable moderation outcomes. How do religious organizations and moral narratives shape the legitimacy of decisions made in moments of outrage, panic, and rapid visibility escalation. Under what conditions do transparency rituals, partnership performances, and enforcement spectacles strengthen compliance while also increasing the risk of selective targeting and due process erosion. What kinds of sovereignty are created when public and private actors coordinate around the regulation of speech in a morally contested digital environment. These questions move the discussion beyond abstract debates about censorship and platform autonomy. They focus attention on the practical production of authority in a democratic setting where religion remains a central source of public legitimacy. In doing so, they place religiously inflected public power at the center of the analysis rather than at its margins.

The urgency of these questions is heightened by the increasing centrality of digital platforms to political communication, moral panic, and everyday public judgment in Indonesia. Public trust, democratic contestation, and legal accountability are all affected when moderation decisions emerge from converging pressures among regulators, platforms, religious actors, and mobilized publics (Kholili et al., 2024). This article contributes by offering a sharper conceptual vocabulary for understanding those convergences as a form of hybrid moral sovereignty rather than as isolated moderation failures or policy inconsistencies. It also contributes to broader debates on state–religion relations by showing that

religious authority in Indonesia now operates through digitally mediated governance as well as through doctrine and formal organization. The argument therefore expands the study of political authority beyond state institutions alone and demonstrates how public power is assembled across legal, technological, and moral infrastructures. This matters not only for Indonesia, but for comparative scholarship on plural democracies where religion remains active in shaping public legitimacy (Liu, 2025). Hybrid moral sovereignty thus provides a theoretically precise and empirically grounded way to understand how moral order, governance, and sovereignty are being recomposed in platform-mediated public life.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs a qualitative, theory-driven research design grounded in interpretive political sociology to examine how digital moral regulation is produced through the interaction of state authority, platform governance, religious legitimacy, and public mobilization in Indonesia. A qualitative approach is methodologically appropriate because the central object of inquiry consists of contested meanings, legitimacy claims, institutional coordination, and moral-political boundary making that cannot be adequately captured through numerical indicators alone (Christofi et al., 2021). The analytical framework is organized around the concept of hybrid moral sovereignty, which treats content moderation not as a purely technical or purely legal process, but as a relational field in which multiple actors co-produce enforceable norms of public order.

Within this framework, authority is analyzed through the linked dimensions of legal signaling, complaint infrastructures, religiously inflected moral claims, platform enforcement, and public legitimacy (Lester et al., 2021). This design works particularly well for the research because moderation outcomes in Indonesia do not arise from a single institutional center, but from contingent alignments among regulators, platforms, religious organizations, media publics, and civic actors. A qualitative strategy makes it possible to trace how these alignments are assembled, justified, and contested across specific episodes of digital controversy. It also preserves the contextual specificity required to explain why similar controversies can produce different forms of compliance, backlash, or selective enforcement (Ellingsen et al., 2010). Such a design is therefore especially suited to a research problem concerned with sovereignty, legitimacy, and the reconfiguration of public power in a digitally mediated religious democracy.

The data consist of academic literature, policy and legal documents, platform governance materials, public statements, media coverage, and publicly accessible digital content related to moral controversy, moderation disputes, and religiously charged public mobilization in Indonesia. Data collection was conducted through purposive selection of materials directly relevant to cases involving blasphemy accusations, sexual morality disputes, gambling-related content, electoral misinformation, and other controversies in which state agencies, platforms, religious actors, and digital publics intersected in visible governance processes (Öhman, 2005). The units of analysis are not individual users as survey respondents, but episodes of digitally mediated moral regulation, including the discursive claims, institutional responses, authority markers, and enforcement pathways through which moderation decisions became publicly consequential.

A qualitative coding matrix functioned as the primary analytical instrument, organizing the material according to key dimensions such as legal signaling, complaint mobilization, religious authority claims, platform enforcement logic, transparency rituals, legitimacy work, and selective contestation (Stickley et al., 2022). These dimensions served as the principal variables for tracing how hybrid moral sovereignty is assembled across public and private institutions. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation across legal, media, policy, and platform-related materials; reliability was supported by a transparent and consistent coding

procedure; and validity was enhanced through explicit alignment between the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the selected controversy cases (Alase, 2017). Because the study relies exclusively on publicly accessible documentary and digital materials and does not involve direct interaction with human subjects, formal informed consent was not required; nonetheless, ethical safeguards were maintained by avoiding unnecessary reproduction of harmful content, treating religiously sensitive and reputationally consequential material with caution, and preserving confidentiality wherever non-public individual information could otherwise be inferred.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital moral regulation in Indonesia operates through a hybrid sovereignty arrangement in which state institutions, platform companies, religious actors, and mobilized publics jointly shape what becomes governable in the online sphere. Content moderation is therefore not exhausted by platform rules or legal compliance in isolation. It unfolds through layered interactions among formal law, reputational pressure, organized complaint, and morally charged public interpretation. In this arrangement, no single actor monopolizes authority, yet concrete outcomes still emerge with substantial force (Marnita, 2024). Visibility can be reduced, accounts can be sanctioned, reputations can be damaged, and legal exposure can intensify without a singular sovereign command. The practical effect is a dispersed but effective regime of order production. Indonesia's digital public sphere thus reveals how sovereignty can be exercised through coordination, escalation, and legitimation across institutional boundaries. The key pattern is that moderation becomes an arena where public power is assembled rather than merely applied.

A central mechanism within this arrangement is legal signaling. State law and regulatory discourse do not need to determine each enforcement action directly in order to shape the moderation environment. Their power lies partly in establishing a horizon of risk that platforms, users, and civic actors must anticipate. Legal ambiguity can be especially productive in this context because it widens the space for precautionary enforcement while narrowing the willingness of platforms to tolerate contentious content. Regulatory warnings, public statements, and enforcement precedents help define which issues are likely to trigger intervention (Gumati, 2024a). They also shape user expectations about what kinds of expression will be treated as dangerous, improper, or legally vulnerable. Law therefore functions as an orienting force in the governance ecology, not merely as a downstream sanctioning instrument. This legal signaling extends public authority into digital infrastructures through indirect but consequential means.

Religious authority plays an equally important role by shaping the moral legitimacy of intervention. In Indonesian digital controversies, claims grounded in religious obligation, blasphemy concern, moral harm, or communal offense often determine whether an issue is perceived as urgent and publicly actionable. Religious organizations and clerical figures do not simply comment on controversies after the fact (Kaloko, 2025). They can define the normative stakes of the controversy itself by framing an episode as a threat to social order, faith, or moral decency. This framing matters because platform and state responses are more easily justified when moral urgency has already been established within public discourse. Religious authority therefore becomes part of the architecture of enforcement, even when no formal clerical order exists. Its influence is practical because it shapes the terms under which intervention appears defensible. Moral legitimacy is thus a constitutive input into digital governance rather than a symbolic afterthought.

This dynamic is amplified by complaint infrastructures and digitally mediated public mobilization. Screenshots, reposts, hashtags, tagging practices, coordinated reporting, and viral condemnation convert local outrage into scalable pressure. Such practices are not incidental to governance. They are mechanisms through which publics render claims actionable for both regulators and platforms. The complaint infrastructure helps transform moral disapproval into traceable signals of collective urgency. In this way, public outrage becomes legible as governance input rather than remaining diffuse sentiment. These infrastructures also alter temporal dynamics by accelerating controversy and narrowing the interval for reflective institutional response. Moderation pressure intensifies because visibility itself is treated as proof of urgency. Digital publics therefore participate directly in the production of enforceable order.

Platform enforcement within this environment takes on a quasi-sovereign quality. Companies do not merely host speech; they determine the conditions under which speech remains visible, monetizable, searchable, or sanctionable. Their actions shape reputational life and public legitimacy with consequences that can rival formal legal intervention. Yet this authority is not fully autonomous, because it is continuously conditioned by legal risk, moral mobilization, and public pressure. Platform enforcement therefore appears both private and public at once. It is private in formal ownership and procedural opacity, yet public in effect because it regulates speech, identity, and legitimacy in spaces central to democratic life. The sovereign-like dimension lies in the capacity to impose binding practical outcomes without full democratic accountability. Moderation becomes a form of public-order governance enacted through private infrastructure.

This layered interaction can be summarized through four linked dimensions: legal signaling, religious legitimacy, complaint infrastructures, and platform enforcement. Each dimension reveals a different source of authority, but their force lies in mutual reinforcement rather than isolated operation. Legal signaling establishes the horizon of permissible risk. Religious legitimacy frames the moral seriousness of the alleged violation. Complaint infrastructures convert normative outrage into scalable pressure. Platform enforcement translates these pressures into visibility decisions that shape public order in practice. The following table synthesizes this configuration.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Hybrid Moral Sovereignty in Indonesian Digital Governance

| Analytical Dimension      | Main Pattern                                                         | Political Implication                                 |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Legal signaling           | State law and regulatory cues shape enforcement environments         | Public authority extends into platform governance     |
| Religious legitimacy      | Moral claims from religious actors define urgency and norm violation | Religious authority influences public order decisions |
| Complaint infrastructures | Digital mobilization turns controversy into actionable pressure      | Public outrage becomes a governance mechanism         |
| Platform enforcement      | Moderation decisions regulate visibility and reputational legitimacy | Platforms exercise quasi-sovereign power              |

Table 1 clarifies that hybrid moral sovereignty is not a metaphor for institutional confusion, but a concrete mode of governance in which different authorities contribute distinct forms of force. Legal signaling provides coercive shadow, religious legitimacy supplies moral justification, complaint infrastructures generate escalation, and platform enforcement delivers practical effect. The political significance of the table lies in showing that authority is assembled through convergence rather than hierarchy. No single actor needs full jurisdiction for outcomes to become binding in public life. This helps

explain why moderation in Indonesia can appear simultaneously legal, moral, popular, and privately administered. The table also supports the broader argument that public order in the digital sphere is co-produced across state, platform, religious, and civic domains. Sovereignty becomes hybrid because enforceability emerges from coordination among heterogeneous legitimating sources. This is the central mechanism through which contested norms become governable.

This interpretation extends existing scholarship on platform governance by shifting attention from private rule enforcement to the co-production of authority across institutional sites. Earlier work has shown that platforms exercise substantial regulatory power over speech and visibility. Scholarship on moral panic has likewise demonstrated how publics mobilize around symbolic threats and demand intervention in the name of order. Studies of religious authority in Indonesia have long established that clerical and organizational actors remain central to defining public morality and communal legitimacy. The present analysis brings these traditions together by specifying how they interact during moments of digital controversy. The result is a stronger account of why moderation outcomes cannot be understood as either purely technological or purely legal. They are produced through a relational field in which moral authority and public pressure shape operational decisions. This reframing strengthens both platform studies and the study of religion in politics by connecting them through a common problem of enforceable legitimacy.

The implications for political authority and state–religion relations are substantial. Religion appears here not merely as an external normative influence on the state, but as an active component of public-order production within a digitally mediated governance field. Religious organizations and moral claims help determine which controversies acquire urgency and which interventions appear justified. This means that state–religion relations in Indonesia can no longer be understood only through formal institutions, legal accommodation, or constitutional doctrine. They must also be examined through the routine co-production of enforceable norms in digital environments. Political authority becomes more dispersed but not weaker. It is redistributed across institutions whose legitimacy depends on different registers of law, morality, technical capacity, and public responsiveness. This hybridization changes how sovereignty is perceived and exercised. The digital public sphere becomes one of the main sites where religious legitimacy and political power now intersect.

These processes also have direct consequences for democratic pluralism and public accountability. Hybrid moral sovereignty can stabilize order in the face of rapid digital escalation, but it can also narrow the space for contestation when moral urgency overwhelms due process. Selective enforcement becomes more likely when complaint intensity and symbolic offense function as triggers for intervention. Transparency rituals may reassure publics that action is being taken, yet they do not necessarily clarify who made the decision, under what standards, or with what safeguards. Democratic risk emerges when visibility control substitutes for deliberative adjudication. Moderation under these conditions can be experienced as necessary and legitimate by some actors while appearing arbitrary and politically partial to others. The resulting asymmetry weakens common trust in procedural fairness. Order is maintained, but often through modes of justification that remain unstable, contested, and unevenly accountable.

The strengths of this analytical approach lie in its ability to connect moral panic, religious authority, legal signaling, and platform enforcement within a single framework of public power. Rather than treating moderation as an isolated technical function, the discussion locates it within a broader

political sociology of sovereignty and legitimacy. This makes visible why non-state moral authority becomes central to digital governance without reducing the state to irrelevance. At the same time, several limitations remain. Moderation practices vary across platforms, and the relative weight of legal and religious pressures may differ by issue area, technical architecture, and audience composition. Publicly visible controversies also do not reveal all backstage negotiations among state agencies, platform teams, and organized complainants. One notable complexity is that actors demanding intervention may frame themselves as defenders of public order while also contributing to the expansion of selective and opaque enforcement. That ambivalence is not peripheral; it is intrinsic to hybrid moral sovereignty itself.

Future research should examine comparative cases across platforms, issue domains, and jurisdictions in order to clarify how different institutional ecologies generate different hybrids of digital sovereignty. Closer attention is also needed to audience reception, especially how users interpret the legitimacy of moderation decisions in controversies framed through religion, morality, and legality. Work on complaint networks and intermediary actors would deepen understanding of how outrage is operationalized into enforceable pressure.

There is also substantial practical relevance for regulators and platforms seeking to preserve public order without collapsing pluralism into majoritarian moral enforcement. More robust transparency and appeal design may reduce some harms, but such reforms will remain incomplete unless they address the wider ecology of moral legitimacy and legal signaling in which moderation decisions are made. Religious civil society likewise has a role in shaping whether moral authority is mobilized toward dialogical restraint or punitive escalation. Indonesia's digital public sphere therefore offers a critical site for understanding how sovereignty, religion, and democratic governance are being recomposed under platform-mediated conditions.

## CONCLUSION

Hybrid moral sovereignty clarifies how digital public order in Indonesia is governed through the convergence of state law, platform enforcement, religious legitimacy, and mobilized public pressure. The discussion has emphasized that content moderation is not a purely technical function or a simple extension of state censorship, but a relational process through which multiple actors co-produce binding outcomes in morally charged controversies. Legal signaling establishes the horizon of enforceable risk, religious authority shapes the moral urgency of intervention, complaint infrastructures convert outrage into actionable pressure, and platforms translate these pressures into decisions that govern visibility and reputational legitimacy. Authority is therefore dispersed across heterogeneous institutions while remaining highly consequential in practice. This makes digital governance in Indonesia a site where religion and political power are not merely adjacent, but jointly involved in defining what counts as acceptable public conduct. The broader significance of the discussion lies in showing that sovereignty in the digital sphere is increasingly exercised through coordination, escalation, and legitimacy work rather than through singular institutional command.

The article contributes to the field by offering a conceptually integrated account of how religion, public authority, and platform governance intersect in the regulation of Indonesia's digital public sphere. Its main theoretical contribution lies in the concept of hybrid moral sovereignty, which captures the co-production of enforceable norms by state institutions, private platforms, religious actors, and mobilized publics. This perspective extends existing scholarship on content moderation by showing that enforcement decisions are shaped not only by platform rules and legal obligations, but also by moral claims and public-order narratives that derive legitimacy

from religious authority. It also advances debates on state–religion relations by demonstrating that religious organizations and moral discourse operate as practical components of public power in digitally mediated governance rather than merely as symbolic commentators on politics. In this formulation, the article speaks directly to POLAR’s concern with how religion shapes political authority and how political systems regulate and transform religious actors and ideas. The broader analytical value lies in recovering legitimacy, sovereignty, and public power as central categories for understanding digital governance in plural democracies.

Future research should extend this framework through comparative work across issue domains, platform architectures, and national settings in order to clarify how different institutional ecologies produce different configurations of hybrid sovereignty. Greater attention is also needed to audience reception and complaint networks, especially how publics interpret the legitimacy of moderation decisions and how organized outrage is transformed into enforceable pressure. Comparative study of religious organizations, civil society coalitions, and regulatory agencies would further illuminate how moral authority is mobilized toward either pluralist restraint or punitive escalation. There is also strong practical relevance in examining how appeal systems, transparency mechanisms, and due process safeguards can be strengthened without ignoring the wider moral and legal environment in which platforms operate. Future inquiry should therefore address not only who moderates, but under what normative conditions moderation becomes publicly defensible and democratically accountable. Advancing this agenda remains essential for understanding how sovereignty, religion, and digital governance are being recomposed in contemporary public life.

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