

Deauthorizing Fatwa on Money Politics: Shifting Religious Morals in the Era of Transactional Democracy

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Abstract

The recurring phenomenon of money politics in every electoral contest in Indonesia reflects a persistent tension between religious moral authority and electoral political rationality. Although Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) have issued fatwas forbidding money politics as a form of *risywah* (bribery) that contradicts Islamic principles of justice and trustworthiness, the practice continues to flourish at the grassroots level. This research departs from a central question: why is the fatwa on money politics issued by major Islamic institutions in Indonesia ineffective in shaping the political behavior of the ummah in the Reformasi era? Using a qualitative method framed within the sociology of fatwas and the politics of Islamic law a combined analytical lens that examines fatwas as both normative-legal texts and socio-political instruments, this study analyzes fatwa documents, organizational publications, and elite as well as community responses to the practice of money politics. The findings reveal a process of deauthorization of fatwas, namely the weakening of religious moral authority under the growing dominance of transactional democratic logic and pragmatic electoral rationality. Fatwas function more as symbolic moral references than as effective instruments capable of transforming political behavior. These findings highlight the need to reorient religious authority from a purely normative approach toward an ethical-political praxis that is more responsive to contemporary socio-political realities. The study contributes theoretically by expanding the understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia and by enriching scholarly discussions on the effectiveness of fatwas within the modern democratic sphere.

Keywords: Deauthorization; Fatwa; Money Politics; Democracy.

Abstrak

Fenomena berulangnya praktik politik uang dalam setiap kontestasi elektoral di Indonesia menunjukkan adanya ketegangan yang terus-menerus antara otoritas moral keagamaan dan rasionalitas politik elektoral. Meskipun Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, dan Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) telah mengeluarkan fatwa yang mengharamkan politik uang sebagai bentuk *risywah* (suap) yang bertentangan dengan prinsip keadilan dan amanah dalam Islam, praktik tersebut tetap marak terjadi di tingkat akar rumput. Penelitian ini berangkat dari pertanyaan utama: mengapa fatwa politik uang dari lembaga-lembaga Islam besar di Indonesia tidak efektif membentuk perilaku politik umat pada era Reformasi? Menggunakan metode kualitatif yang dibingkai dalam pendekatan sosiologi fatwa dan politik hukum Islam, suatu perangkat analitis terpadu yang memandang fatwa sebagai teks normatif sekaligus instrumen sosial-politik. penelitian ini menganalisis dokumen fatwa, publikasi organisasi, serta respons elite dan komunitas terhadap praktik politik uang. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan adanya proses deotorisasi fatwa, yakni melemahnya otoritas moral keagamaan akibat dominasi logika

demokrasi transaksional dan rasionalitas elektoral yang pragmatis. Fatwa lebih berfungsi sebagai simbol moral daripada instrumen yang efektif dalam mengubah perilaku politik. Temuan ini menekankan perlunya reorientasi otoritas keagamaan dari pendekatan yang semata normatif menuju praksis etika-politik yang lebih responsif terhadap realitas sosial-politik kontemporer. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dengan memperluas pemahaman mengenai hubungan agama dan politik di Indonesia serta memperkaya wacana tentang efektivitas fatwa dalam ruang demokrasi modern.

Kata kunci: *Deotorisasi, Fatwa, Politik Uang, Demokrasi.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of deauthorization of the fatwa on money politics has become increasingly apparent in Indonesian Muslim society. Religious fatwas that strictly forbid the practice of money politics no longer have the strong moral power to control political behavior (Muhajir, 2022). In various regions, particularly in the run-up to general elections, the tendency for people to view money politics as “normal” suggests a shift in the value orientation of politics (Junaidi, 2022). This condition becomes increasingly worrying when religion, which should function as a guide to public ethics, is often used to support the pragmatic interests of political contestants (Yani et al., 2022).

Several surveys show empirical evidence of the deauthorization of money politics fatwas. Like Indonesian Political Indicators 2024, only 8% of voters reject money politics (Kautsar Widya Prabowo, 2024). In another survey conducted (Indekstat Indonesia, 2024) Shows that 33.7% feel that money politics is acceptable. In fact, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have all issued fatwas declaring money politics to be haram (Hasyim, 2020). This weakening indicates that fatwas are unable to counteract transactional political practices driven by economic logic and short-term calculations, leading to the neglect of public ethics and spirituality. Therefore, the deauthorization of fatwas not only reflects a violation of religious norms but also signifies the erosion of the moral authority of religion in an increasingly pragmatic democracy, where religion is reduced to a tool for legitimizing short-term political and economic interests.

Studies on fatwas concerning money politics have generally focused on legal arguments regarding their prohibition or criticism of the fatwas, but have not explicitly addressed the phenomenon of deotorization as a decline in the symbolic and ethical authority of religion in transactional political culture. (Muhajir, 2022) for example, it shows that fatwas have not been able to restrain the transactional rationality of Muslim voters, while (Schäfer, 2019), (Menchik, 2022), and (Hasyim, 2020) highlighting the role of religious authorities in the decline of democracy, fatwa politics, and the conservatism and politicization of religion. This study focuses on the process of delegitimization and erosion of religious moral authority in transactional electoral democracy, thereby differing from previous studies in its exploration of how fatwas lose their normative, symbolic, and social power when religious authorities are confronted with economic and political logic in contemporary democratic practices in Indonesia. The primary theoretical framework of this research is the sociology of fatwas,

drawing on the sociology of religion tradition, which extends beyond normative legal products to encompass fatwas as practices of symbolic authority, manifesting in socio-political structures.

Thus, a significant gap exists in the literature: no study has directly examined the mechanisms of delegitimization and erosion of religious moral authority in the context of transactional elections. The main argument presented in this study is based on the assumption that the delegitimization of political fatwas is a direct consequence of the shift in the social rationality of the people and religious institutions within the landscape of transactional democracy. This phenomenon indicates that moral legitimacy, which was once derived from the symbolic authority of religion, has now weakened, replaced by instrumental rationality that reduces religion to a mere ornament of political legitimacy. In this context, the scientific questions to be answered are how and why fatwas on money politics have lost their normative authority, and to what extent social and political economic structures influence this delegitimization.

Analytically, this study departs from three main hypotheses, namely that political fatwas lose their influence due to the subordination of religious values under economic-political logic; that religious institutions experience erosion of symbolic authority as a result of their involvement in practical politics; and that the restoration of religious moral authority is only possible through a paradigm shift in fatwas towards prophetic public ethics that emphasize social justice and moral integrity. The formulation of these hypotheses also directs the scientific questions to be answered: How and why fatwas on money politics have lost their normative authority, and to what extent social and economic-political structures contribute to this process of delegitimization.

To answer this question, this study examines the mechanism of deauthorization of fatwas on money politics and the factors that contribute to the erosion of religious moral authority. This analysis is then used to offer a prophetic ethical perspective as the basis for revitalizing the role of religion in Indonesian democracy. With this theoretical foundation and hypothesis formulation, the following section outlines the research methods used to identify patterns of fatwa delegitimization and explain the sociological dynamics behind them.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with a focus on interpretive analysis (Stanley, 2023) towards religious authorities and political behavior. The method applied combines a sociological approach to Islamic law and critical discourse analysis, to reveal the dynamics behind the process of deauthorizing political fatwas in the context of Indonesian democracy. Research data was obtained from primary and secondary sources, including fatwas from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as well as official statements, survey data, and scientific works relevant to the theme of

religious authority and political ethics. The analysis process involved identifying key themes related to the weakening of moral and symbolic authority, interpreting the findings within the framework of the sociology of religion theory, and validating the results through data source triangulation. This methodological design ensures conceptual depth and contextual accuracy in answering the questions of how and why religious fatwas have lost their normative power amid the strengthening of transactional democracy in Indonesia.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama regarding Money Politics

The fatwas most commonly referred to by the public are those issued by their respective community organizations. The two largest mass organizations in Indonesia, namely Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, have their own fatwa institutions. NU through the Bahtsul Masail forum and Muhammadiyah through the Majelis Tarjih. In addition to these two fatwa institutions from major organizations, there is also the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), an institution whose fatwas are eagerly awaited. The large number of fatwa institutions raises the question: do they produce similar fatwas using the same methods, or are they different? The presence of these three institutions clearly adds its own flavor to the development of Islamic law in Indonesia (Sofiana, 2022).

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) have expressed their respective views on money politics, both through fatwas and question-and-answer sessions. The MUI's views, as stated in the 2018 Sixth Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwa Commission Meeting, emphasize that requesting or giving rewards in the process of nominating public officials is a practice categorized as bribery, transactional politics, or political dowry. This practice is prohibited by both national positive law and sharia principles, as it violates the public trust and undermines the democratic process, which should be conducted fairly and with integrity (Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), 2018). The MUI emphasized that such actions are haram and that both the perpetrators and recipients are equally involved in acts that undermine political governance.

Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah, through its Fatwa Tarjih on money politics, explains that money politics falls under the category of bribery, which is the giving of something to nullify the truth or bring about falsehood, as defined by classical scholars (Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2023). Muhammadiyah emphasizes that bribery is haram and constitutes a major sin, referring to the verse prohibiting the consumption of unlawful wealth (Qur'an, al-Baqarah 2:188), as quoted in the document. This fatwa also explains that money politics undermines the objectives of Sharia law, which include the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, and leads to the deterioration of society's mental health, the emergence of corrupt governments, and the loss of leadership integrity.

In the NU tradition, the article “Prohibition and Dangers of Money Politics in Islam” published (NU Online, 2024) Emphasizes that money politics is a sinful act that constitutes bribery and causes moral, social, and political damage to society. Money politics is viewed as a form of injustice that destroys the social order and contradicts the principles of justice and trust in Islam. On the other hand, the 2017 NU National Conference and Conference documents available do not specifically discuss money politics, but clearly highlight the dangers of corruption, unethical political practices, and call for politicians to abandon actions that damage public life, including the use of religious sentiment and transactional practices that erode political morality (Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama, 2017). Thus, broadly speaking, NU views money politics as part of the socio-political corruption that must be eradicated.

When compared, the three share several fundamental similarities. MUI, Muhammadiyah, and NU all declare that money politics is haram, including bribery, and is theologically and socially dangerous because it violates the principles of trust and justice. All three view money politics as a trigger for the destruction of democracy, the proliferation of corruption, and the destruction of leadership integrity. The differences between them lie mainly in their approach: Muhammadiyah emphasizes the framework of maqasid al-syariah and its moral-spiritual impact; MUI highlights the aspects of positive law and its role in the political nomination process; while NU, through the articulation of NU Online and the Munas-Konbes document, emphasizes social, moral, and political damage in the context of nationality.

Based on these overall views, it can be synthesized that money politics is consistently viewed by the three central religious authorities in Indonesia as a practice that not only violates state law but also contradicts the basic principles of sharia and Islamic ethical values. Money politics is considered to undermine the integrity of democracy, threaten social justice, and weaken the quality of leadership. This substantial similarity suggests a strong consensus that money politics must be eradicated to maintain public welfare, electoral integrity, and the sustainability of moral values in Indonesian political life.

3.2. The Crisis of the Effectiveness of Religious Fatwas in Upholding Political Morality

Data from the Indonesian Political Indicators survey indicate that the majority of the public (over 90%) still tolerates the practice of money politics, both directly and covertly (Indikator Politik, 2024). This finding reinforces the indication that religious fatwas prohibiting money politics have not been effective in shaping voters' moral awareness. The practice of accepting money or gifts ahead of elections is no longer considered an ethical violation, but has become a norm in Indonesian electoral politics (Muhtadi, 2019). This shows that even though religious organizations such as MUI, Muhammadiyah, and NU have issued fatwas prohibiting money politics, most people continue to engage in this practice. Fatwas have not served as a firm moral guideline in determining the political behavior of Muslim communities (Menchik, 2022).

From this data, three critical patterns can be observed that require careful examination. First, there is a delegitimization of the normative power of religious fatwas in the public sphere, marked by low compliance with moral provisions derived from religious teachings. Second, the political rationality of voters has shifted from ethics to pragmatism, where short-term economic considerations dominate religious values. Third, religious institutions have lost their symbolic position as determinants of moral truth, replaced by a transactional logic that is more materially beneficial. From these three patterns, it can be concluded that religious fatwas are experiencing a crisis of effectiveness because they no longer have the symbolic and social power to shape public moral consciousness. This crisis of effectiveness indicates the occurrence of fatwa de-territorialization, which is the process of weakening the moral and spiritual authority of religious institutions in influencing the political behavior of the people. Fatwas have lost their ethical function and have been reduced to normative discourse without social transformative power.

The phenomenon of fatwa deauthorization indicates social and moral dysfunction on the part of religious authorities in the political sphere. Functionally, fatwas should serve as a moral control mechanism that guides political behavior in accordance with the principles of justice, honesty, and trustworthiness (Arifin & Setiawan, 2024). However, the opposite has happened: fatwas have lost their symbolic control because they no longer have a normative effect on the behavior of voters or political actors. As a result, there has been a disarticulation between religious morality and electoral political practices. The political public sphere is no longer governed by religious ethics, but rather by transactional logic that treats religion merely as an ornament of legitimacy. Thus, religious fatwas, which should serve as ethical guidelines, have been transformed into moral symbols without practical substance (Awass, 2019).

This deauthorization has broad implications for the crisis of legitimacy of religious institutions, as the public has begun to view fatwas not as moral guidelines that must be followed, but merely as religious opinions that are relative and non-binding. In the long term, this erodes the prophetic function of religion as a source of public ethics and weakens the moral foundations of the nation's politics.

3.3. The Normalization of Money Politics as a Symptom of Shifting Ethical Values Among Muslim Voters

The normalization of money politics in Indonesian elections is evident in the widespread practice of giving money or goods to voters, which is accepted as usual in political contests (Wardhana, 2020). Kompas Research and Development shows that most voters believe that money politics has become “institutionalized” and difficult to eradicate because it involves many actors at various levels (Masyukrilla, 2023). This phenomenon shows that voters, including Muslim voters as the majority group, no longer view money politics as an unethical act, but as a routine part of the modern electoral process.

This shift in ethical values is evident in voters' changing attitudes toward material rewards. Many voters view the giving of money as an advance payment or a "right" that is received before the elected leader takes office, given the low level of public trust in public officials in the post-New Order era (Nurdin, 2021). In this logic, ethics and moral responsibility are marginalized by pragmatism. What matters is the immediate benefit that can be gained from the candidate, regardless of their qualities or political agenda.

In fact, from an Islamic perspective, money politics is categorized as bribery, which is prohibited because it undermines justice, leads to manipulation, and causes social damage. Islamic economic studies emphasize that money politics diminishes the moral integrity of Muslim voters because it encourages them to accept something that leads to dishonesty and neglects social responsibility (Rohmah et al., 2025). When practices that are clearly forbidden are accepted and considered normal, this is evidence of a profound shift in religious ethical values.

In addition to moral factors, the normalization of money politics is also related to the economic pressures experienced by the community. The giving of money or goods by candidates is often viewed as a form of "blessing" or legitimate social assistance, particularly for low-income communities (Rohmah et al., 2025). In situations like this, Islamic values such as trustworthiness and honesty are often compromised in favor of economic needs. Muslim voters understand money politics not as a moral transgression, but as an opportunity to obtain assistance that is rarely provided by the state.

The strength of transactional political culture also plays a significant role in encouraging this normalization. Money politics is not only practiced by candidates, but is also supported by a permissive social structure and low political literacy. (Adityawan, 2025) Cites weak law enforcement and a deep-rooted culture of transactional politics as the primary causes of money politics persisting from election to election. When the social environment does not support ethical behavior, permissive attitudes towards money politics become increasingly institutionalized, including in Muslim-majority areas.

Thus, the normalization of money politics among Muslim voters is not merely an individual behavioral deviation, but a symptom of collective moral change. Voters no longer base their political choices on Islamic values, but rather on short-term pragmatic calculations. This shift threatens the quality of democracy because it reduces the chances of leaders with integrity emerging, while also damaging the ethical basis of Muslims in political life (Nurdin, 2021) (Wardhana, 2020). If left unchecked, this phenomenon could widen the gap between Islamic ethical teachings and actual societal practices.

3.4. The Instrumentalization of Religious Symbols and Authority in the Practice of Transactional Democracy

The instrumentalization of religious symbols in Indonesian democracy is a political strategy that relies on emotional power and collective identity to influence voter behavior. The politicization of religion, as noted by (Ridwan & Pababbari, 2025), This is done through the use of sacred verses, religious jargon, or religious attributes to build a symbolic closeness between candidates and voters. In the context of transactional democracy, these symbols are

no longer representations of spiritual values, but rather political commodities that are traded to increase electability. This strategy diverts public attention from substantive issues to identity politics, causing democracy to move towards a contest of symbols rather than a contest of ideas.

Further, (Ronaldo & Darmaiza, 2021) Shows that religious symbols, such as skullcaps, turbans, and prayer beads, as well as religious rituals, are used as political bargaining chips in determining candidate pairs, as seen in the dynamics of the 2019 presidential election. This practice is driven by transactional calculations that place Islamic identity and the legitimacy of religious scholars as political bargaining chips. Even religious ceremonies, such as *ijtima* and *ijtihad*, are positioned as sources of electoral legitimacy that can be manipulated according to political interests, when religious rituals are practiced as a transactional mechanism, religious authority shifts from the moral sphere to the manipulative sphere.

The instrumentalization of religious authority also occurs when political elites exploit the position of clerics, priests, or other religious figures as extensions of their campaigns. According to (Abadi, 2024), Religious elites possess high moral and symbolic capital, which can strengthen identity politics and mobilize mass support through their endorsement. In transactional democracy, such support is not always based on the integrity of religious values, but is often related to negotiated political interests. Religious authorities, which should play an ethical role in providing moral guidance to the people, have instead been co-opted by electoral logic.

This phenomenon has also created deeper social polarization. (Parinduri & Pujiati, 2023) explain how the use of religion in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and the 2019 presidential election resulted in “us versus them” antagonism, hardened sectarian sentiments, and gave rise to religious-based political identification. This polarization was reinforced by hate speech and SARA-based propaganda, primarily through digital media. Instead of strengthening deliberative democracy, the use of religious symbols as a transactional tool has created social fragmentation that weakens national cohesion.

In a broader context, the instrumentalization of religious authority in transactional democracy can also be interpreted through the dynamics of religion in the digital space. (Buckley et al., 2023) shows that religious authorities have significant power to influence political behavior through social media, especially when public trust in formal institutions weakens. In such situations, religious leaders act as emotional brokers who provide moral narratives that are easily accepted by the audience, thereby making critical or rational information less influential on people's political choice.

These findings (Buckley et al., 2023) indicate that religious authorities can be either a “balancing force” or a “trigger” in digital political dynamics, depending on how the narrative is mobilized. When these findings are linked to the Indonesian context, it appears that the use of religious symbols and legitimacy in the online space not only strengthens identity politics, but also accelerates the spread of emotions and disinformation that are vulnerable to being exploited in electoral political transactions. Thus, this phenomenon broadens the understanding that the instrumentalization of religion does not only take place offline

through ritual symbols, but also intensively in the digital space, which is increasingly becoming an arena for identity-based political contestation.

Another impact of the instrumentalization of religious symbols and authority is the erosion of rationality in politics and society. (Yunus et al., 2023) noted that the politicization of religion shifts voter behavior from programmatic to emotional and identitarian orientations. When artificially constructed religious perceptions guide voters, they become vulnerable to manipulation, fake news, and misleading religious framing. In such conditions, democracy loses its substantive nature because citizens no longer vote based on the candidates' track records or capacity, but rather on staged religious performativity.

Finally, transactional democracy that exploits religious symbols and authority poses a systemic threat to the quality of democracy itself. When political support is obtained through symbolic mobilization and transactional instruments, elected leaders tend to be oriented toward the interests of their support groups or the religious elites who provide legitimacy, rather than the broader public interest. As warned by (Ridwan & Pababbari, 2025), This can erode public trust in political institutions and weaken the legitimacy of democracy. Therefore, the instrumentalization of religion in democracy is not merely an ethical deviation, but also a threat to the integrity and sustainability of Indonesian democracy.

4. Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the phenomenon of deauthorization of political fatwas on money is a direct consequence of the strengthening of transactional democratic logic in the contemporary Indonesian political landscape. Although the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama have explicitly prohibited vote buying and affirmed that this practice is a form of bribery that undermines the principles of justice and trust, the fatwa has not been able to function as expected in shaping the political behavior of society. The research findings confirm the hypothesis that religious moral authority is weakened due to the subordination of religious values under pragmatic political-economic rationality.

The research findings also show that the symbolic authority of religious institutions has been eroded as some religious elites have become involved in practical politics. In such conditions, fatwas lose their normative power and become moral symbols that no longer have a significant impact on public consciousness. The normalization of money politics at the grassroots level is further clarifying the shift in the ethical values of Muslim voters, from a moral orientation toward a utilitarian and short-term orientation. Additionally, the instrumentalization of religion in the political sphere, both offline and digitally, weakens the role of religious ethics in guiding public behavior and reduces religion to a mere identity commodity in electoral contests. Thus, the deauthorization of money politics fatwas is not merely a regulatory failure, but a structural phenomenon of the moral legitimacy crisis of religion in modern political space. Reorienting the paradigm of religious authority toward prophetic public ethics is crucial for religion to regain its transformative role in democracy, rather than just being normative and symbolic.

Within this framework, religious institutions need to take practical steps, such as distancing themselves from involvement in practical politics and electoral transactions, focusing on issues of social justice, equality, and the protection of vulnerable groups, as emphasized in prophetic ethics, and strengthening political ethics education that emphasizes integrity and public responsibility. These efforts are necessary so that religious moral authorities are not merely present as normative texts, but become a living ethical force in shaping a more civilized political culture.

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