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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religious Disobedience: Understanding Disobedience to Religious Authority in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines how moral violations committed by religious figures affect public trust and foster selective disobedience toward religious authority. While previous research has focused predominantly on interfaith conflicts, this study highlights the internal dynamics of disobedience within religious communities toward religious authority, addressing gaps in understanding how the public responds to moral and legal transgressions. It poses key questions regarding the extent to which such breaches undermine trust and encourage conditional adherence to religious authority. Employing qualitative methods, the research analyses data from online news sources and social media using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that public disobedience is expressed through criticism, satire, and sarcasm—forms that underscore dissatisfaction with both moral conduct and institutional credibility. These expressions of dissent signal a shift in societal expectation wherein public trust is increasingly contingent upon the perceived moral integrity of religious figures. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of public disobedience as a reaction to crises of moral legitimacy and underscores the importance of further research into the interrelation of trust, morality, and authority in diverse religious contexts.

Keywords: Religious disobedience, Religious authority, Trust crisis, Power abuse.

***Abstrak**: Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana pelanggaran moral yang dilakukan oleh tokoh agama memengaruhi kepercayaan publik dan mendorong ketidakpatuhan selektif terhadap otoritas keagamaan. Sementara penelitian sebelumnya lebih banyak berfokus pada konflik antaragama, studi ini menyoroti dinamika internal ketidakpatuhan dalam komunitas keagamaan terhadap otoritas agama, serta mengisi kekosongan pemahaman tentang bagaimana publik merespons pelanggaran moral dan hukum. Penelitian ini mengajukan pertanyaan penting terkait sejauh mana pelanggaran tersebut merusak kepercayaan dan mendorong kepatuhan bersyarat terhadap otoritas keagamaan. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis data dari sumber berita daring dan media sosial melalui analisis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ketidakpatuhan publik diekspresikan melalui kritik, sindiran, dan sarkasme—bentuk-bentuk yang menekankan ketidakpuasan terhadap perilaku moral maupun kredibilitas institusi. Ekspresi ketidakpuasan ini menandakan adanya pergeseran dalam harapan masyarakat, di mana kepercayaan publik semakin bergantung pada integritas moral yang dipersepsikan dari tokoh agama.Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai ketidakpatuhan publik sebagai reaksi terhadap krisis legitimasi moral, serta menegaskan pentingnya penelitian lebih lanjut tentang hubungan antara kepercayaan, moralitas, dan otoritas dalam berbagai konteks keagamaan.*

***Kata kunci**: Ketidakpatuhan terhadap agama, Otoritas keagamaan, Krisis kepercayaan, Penyalahgunaan kekuasaan.*

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1. Introduction

Religious disobedience has become increasingly visible in Indonesian society, marked by growing public rejection of religious figures implicated in moral or legal scandals. As a nation characterized by diverse religious traditions, Indonesia faces serious challenges in sustaining public trust in religious authority. Incidents involving abuse of power and political scandals among religious leaders have intensified concerns regarding the integrity and role of religious institutions in both social and political spheres. Studies indicate that religious leaders—often perceived as morally upright—are frequently involved in corrupt practices, thereby undermining institutional credibility (Khoirin & Junaedi, 2022). In parallel, institutions such as the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) are increasingly perceived as being co-opted for political purposes, further eroding their public legitimacy (Yahya & Susilo, 2024). Moreover, reports highlight that public trust in these institutions is frequently challenged in the wake of power abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2023). This erosion of trust has triggered growing resistance toward religious authority, as people increasingly question and reject guidance from leaders whose behaviour is perceived as inconsistent with religious teachings or prevailing social realities. Consequently, the role of religious institutions is under heightened scrutiny and public debate.

Previous literature has predominantly addressed interreligious resistance and conflicts between different religious groups (De Juan, 2015; Gede Agung et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2022; Zain et al., 2019; Zainuddin, 2019). However, studies examining internal forms of disobedience—particularly resistance by adherents against their own religious leaders—remain limited. These internal tensions are often triggered by abuses of power, including corruption and sexual violence, which undermine trust in religious authority (Wuthnow, 2022). Interreligious conflicts are frequently shaped by collective memory and entrenched perceptions of threat, which can instigate or exacerbate broader social tensions (De Juan, 2015). Other studies have proposed local wisdom as a model for fostering interfaith communication in Indonesia's plural society, although challenges persist in its implementation (Gede Agung et al., 2024). Historical narratives and past conflicts also function as interpretive frameworks for understanding interreligious tensions, particularly within the context of Indonesia's religious diversity (Setiawan et al., 2022). For instance, the conflict in Aceh Singkil over worship spaces and majority–minority dynamics reflects the influence of political and social structures on religious relations (Zain et al., 2019). Furthermore, interactions between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia are more often shaped by political and economic interests than by theological differences (Zainuddin, 2019). This study contributes to filling the gaps in previous research and enriches the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the dynamics of internal disobedience toward religious authority, offering a new perspective on the complexities of socio-religious relationships in Indonesia.

Various studies have explored resistance toward religious authority; however, most have emphasized interfaith or interreligious conflict. De Juan (2015) demonstrated that intra-religious conflicts often arise from rivalries among religious elites over material resources and doctrinal authority, which may escalate into interreligious tensions through political alliances. In the Indonesian context, Setiawan et al. (2022) emphasized the significance of collective memory and perceived threats in sustaining social exclusion among religious groups, although their focus remained on intergroup dynamics. Zainuddin (2019) employing a historical approach, examined the relationship between Islam and Christianity in Indonesia but did not sufficiently address the impact of moral violations by religious leaders on trust within their own communities. Likewise, Gede Agung et al. (2024) underscored the role of local wisdom in promoting interfaith harmony but offered only limited attention to internal

resistance within religious institutions. Wuthnow (2022), meanwhile, analysed how moral scandals have contributed to the erosion of trust in religious institutions in the United States, highlighting a broader global trend in which ethical failings by religious leaders weaken public trust. By linking local and global phenomena, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of internal resistance toward religious authority—not only in Indonesia, but also within a comparative international framework. It offers a perspective that engages with global discourse on the evolving relationship between society and religious institutions, particularly in response to abuses of power and breaches of moral integrity.

The central questions guiding this study are: how do abuses of authority by religious figures affect public trust in religious institutions, and how does society respond to such violations? This research contends that moral and legal violations—such as corruption, sexual violence, and domestic abuse—not only undermine the legitimacy of religious leaders but also give rise to new patterns of public disobedience. These patterns are marked by increased selectivity among the public in following the teachings and guidance of religious figures no longer perceived as embodying moral values (O'Halloran, 2014). The central argument is that public disobedience toward religious authority emerges primarily as a response to the dissonance between leaders' actions and collective expectations of moral integrity, rather than as a rejection of religion itself. By examining this phenomenon, this study seeks to offer insights into how religious authority is being renegotiated within a dynamic and contested social context.

2. Literature review

This section outlines three key concepts that underpin the present study: religion, disobedience, and authority. The concept of religion pertains to how individuals and communities interpret and practice religious values in response to social change. Disobedience refers to forms of resistance directed at authority perceived as failing to uphold social norms and moral expectations. Authority, in turn, relates to power relations grounded in legitimacy, where influence and public acceptance are essential to its continuity. Together, these concepts offer a foundation for understanding how religious values, acts of disobedience, and authority relations intersect to shape broader social dynamics. This literature review aims to establish a relevant analytical framework for addressing the research questions posed in this study.

2.1. Religious values in social contexts

The concept of religion reflects how individuals and communities interpret and practice religious beliefs within the dynamics of social life. Giordan (2016) explains that religion is not only practiced collectively but also constitutes a personal journey that provides meaning and fosters social cohesion. Gustafson et al. (2022) position religion as an adaptive mechanism that enables individuals to confront fundamental life challenges while promoting solidarity within communities. Expanding on this perspective, Adenitire (2024) argues that religion functions not only as a value system but also evolves in response to diverse social needs. This transformation underscores the enduring relevance of religion in shaping social relationships and moral values across various contexts.

In academic literature, the concept of religion is frequently examined in terms of its role in shaping societal values, norms, and everyday practices. Giordan (2016) and Gustafson et al. (2022) emphasize religion's capacity to guide individual behaviour through value-based frameworks. For instance, Adenitire (2024) demonstrates how religion provides ethical direction in daily life, particularly in response to complex social challenges. However, a central challenge in applying this concept lies in ensuring that religion remains responsive to evolving societal needs without compromising its core principles. Accordingly,

understanding the concept of religion serves as a critical foundation for analysing the interaction between religious values and social practices.

2.2. Disobedience and public resistance

Disobedience refers to a response directed at authority perceived as failing to uphold societal norms and values. Brownlee (2016) defines civil disobedience as a public, nonviolent act intended to challenge authority or laws that conflict with individual conscience. Smith (2012) emphasizes that disobedience often functions as a form of moral communication, aimed at conveying messages to both authorities and society. Monteiro (2020) adds that disobedience is also relevant in non-democratic contexts, where collective actions are mobilized to critique rules that do not reflect community needs. Expanding this view, Daher (2023) introduces the concept of social disobedience, which focuses on collective action intended to improve the relationship between authority and the community through solidarity.

Moreover, disobedience can be categorized into several forms, such as civil, social, and collective disobedience, each characterized by distinct features. Brownlee (2016) notes that civil disobedience is often employed to capture the attention of authorities regarding issues perceived by the public. Smith (2012) illustrates how disobedience can serve as an effective mechanism for improving relations between authority and society. Additionally, Daher (2023) underscores the role of solidarity in social disobedience, where collective actions not only challenge authority policies but also reinforce social cohesion. Therefore, the concept of disobedience provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics shaping the relationship between society and authority.

2.3. Authority and legitimacy

Authority refers to power relations grounded in legitimacy, whereby those in positions of authority possess the capacity to establish rules that others follow. Presthus (2001, p. 455) emphasizes that authority is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic relationship shaped by individuals' perceptions of the strength and influence of others within formal social structures. Schneiderman (2015) explains that authority constitutes a fundamental element of social life, existing in both formal and informal institutions and operating through legitimacy accepted by society. Rosen (2023) highlights that political authority plays a relational role in generating social obligations through institutions deemed legitimate, provided that such authority does not exceed societal boundaries. Thus, authority not only reflects power relations but also functions as a mechanism for maintaining stable social order.

The concept of authority can be analysed through the aspects of legitimacy, the dynamics of power relations, and societal perceptions. Presthus (2001) emphasizes that authority largely depends on the degree of individual acceptance within specific social relationships, with mutual trust serving as a crucial element for its continuity. Schneiderman (2015) asserts that legitimacy constitutes the primary foundation of effective authority, enabling social institutions to maintain stability and public trust. Rosen (2023) further argues that political authority must balance the exercise of power with the needs of individuals to preserve legitimacy. Therefore, the concept of authority offers valuable insights into how legitimacy, perception, and social relationships collectively shape social order across diverse contexts.

3. Method

This study examines public disobedience toward religious authority, a phenomenon increasingly evident in cases of abuse of power by religious figures. Such moral and ethical

violations not only undermine the legitimacy of religious leaders but also affect the relationship between society and religious institutions (Wuthnow, 2022). The research aims to understand societal responses to abuses of religious authority, particularly through acts of disobedience expressed in digital spaces and daily life. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, this study enables a systematic analysis of the phenomenon. Primary data were collected from online news sources and social media interactions, while secondary data were collected from academic articles and reputable websites. The focus lies on mapping patterns of public disobedience toward religious figures and exploring the social implications of this phenomenon. Data collection occurred between July and November 2024, capturing public discourse surrounding prominent religious scandals during that period.

Primary and secondary data were collected through online sources. Primary data consist of online news and social media content documenting cases of moral violations by religious leaders, as well as public responses to these events. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were used to analyse public opinion and interaction patterns. Keyword searches, including terms such as “religious leader scandals,” guided the collection of relevant posts and comments on these platforms. Secondary data include academic journal articles, official reports, and reputable websites that provide theoretical and historical frameworks. These sources were identified through systematic searches on databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus AI, selected based on their relevance to the research theme. All collected data were later filtered for credibility and relevance to ensure alignment with the study’s objectives. This approach offers a robust foundation for a detailed analysis of public disobedience toward religious authority.

Data were analysed using a thematic approach to identify key patterns and relationships within public disobedience toward religious authority. The initial stage involved coding primary data—such as online news articles and social media posts—to uncover main themes, including criticisms of religious leaders’ morality, various forms of disobedience, and their impacts on public trust. For example, social media posts were examined to understand public sentiment and how negative perceptions of religious figures develop in digital spaces. Secondary data, including academic articles and official reports, supported the interpretation of primary data by providing contextual and conceptual frameworks. After identifying key themes, the data were organized into relevant thematic categories, such as types of disobedience and their effects on social relationships. This analytical process enabled the study to produce systematic and nuanced findings, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of public disobedience toward religious authority.

4. Result

The results of this study indicate that moral crises involving religious figures—such as cases of sexual abuse, violence, and corruption—have considerably eroded public trust in religious authority. The public manifests disobedience through various forms, including open criticism, sarcasm, and satire on social media platforms. Furthermore, this phenomenon affects not only the individuals involved in scandals but also contributes to a broader legitimacy crisis for religious institutions. These results underscore a significant transformation in the relationship between society and religious authority, where public trust increasingly depends on the moral integrity of both religious figures and the institutions they represent.

4.1. Problems of religious authority figures in Indonesia

One of the factors contributing to public disobedience toward religious authority figures is the occurrence of criminal acts committed by religious leaders. The public

experiences a sense of betrayal by leaders who were initially trusted as promoters of virtue but later engaged in criminal behaviour (Hidayat, 2024; Lindgren et al., 2024; Wuthnow, 2022). Among the most widely remembered offenses are acts of sexual abuse. According to the annual report by KOMNAS Perempuan, 386 cases of violence against women were recorded in service institutions, some involving religious figures (KOMNAS Perempuan, 2024). Additionally, cases of violence against children have been reported in educational institutions (Erni & Asror, 2022). These cases underscore the potential for significant public outrage toward religious authority figures (see Table 1).

Table 1. Problems of religious authority figures and religious institutions in Indonesia

Context	Narration
Case of sexual violence against 13 female students perpetrated by a boarding school teacher	The incidence of sexual violence in religious-based and boarding educational institutions remains high (KOMNAS Perempuan, 2021).
A religious figure reported in a case of domestic violence	A religious figure in Surabaya has reportedly abused his wife for several years (Kompas, 2024).
Religious figures implicated in corruption cases	Corruption involving religious leaders is linked to the political culture in which political parties require their cadres to pay substantial deposits to the party (Okezone, 2015).
Child sexual abuse committed by religious figures	Religious figures have committed sexual violence against their students (Kompasiana, 2023).
Corruption in Ministry of Religious Affairs	Three suspects have been identified in a bribery case involving the sale and purchase of positions within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Asumsi.co, 2021).
A *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) leader in Aceh reportedly harassed eight students	Using the pretext of teaching specialized knowledge, the head of the *pesantren* committed immoral acts against the *santri* (*students of pesantren*) (Serambi, 2024).
Sexual assault against female students in Semarang	Boarding school leader raped three students (BBC, 2023).
Religious figure was wanted for sexual abuse	Religious figure sexually molested his 7-year-old stepdaughter (Terkini.id, 2024).
Religious figure was arrested by police	A religious figure sexually molested members of his own congregation (Sabangmeraukenews, 2024).
A religious leader in Aceh was sentenced to flogging	Members of the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) were found to have violated the provisions of *ikhtilat*—being alone with non-mahram individuals (BBC, 2019).

Source: Online news accessed via Google.

Table 1 presents various cases of moral and legal violations involving religious figures in Indonesia, which have significantly eroded public trust in religious authority. These include instances of sexual abuse within religious-based educational settings, such as the assault of 13 female students by a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) teacher, as well as similar cases in Aceh and Semarang involving pesantren leaders who abused their students. Additionally, cases of domestic violence by religious figures in Surabaya illustrate how personal misconduct contradicts societal expectations of moral integrity. Corruption also emerges as a critical issue, exemplified by bribery cases related to position trading within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the involvement of several religious leaders influenced by a broader culture of political corruption. Moreover, acts of sexual violence against children, the molestation of congregants, and violations of ikhtilat (being alone with non-mahram individuals) by religious leaders in Aceh further undermine their public image.

Overall, the table demonstrates how various forms of moral and legal transgressions has contributed to the decline of both moral and institutional legitimacy among religious figures once regarded as custodians of religious values.

The moral violations committed by religious figures in Indonesia, as outlined in Table 1, illustrate a broader crisis of legitimacy in religious authority. Simandjuntak (2021) argues that this erosion of legitimacy is closely linked to the entanglement between religious leadership and authoritarian political practices, which further intensify public distrust. Schäfer (2019) adds that scandals involving religious figures—such as sexual violence, corruption, and domestic abuse—create a widening gap between society and religious institutions. Schneiderman (2015) emphasizes that the legitimacy of authority is fundamentally rooted in public perceptions of morality and justice; thus, such moral violations directly weaken institutional credibility. Eryanto et al. (2022) similarly notes that authority is a dynamic construct shaped by individual trust in leadership, and when such trust is damaged by scandal, it leads to public disobedience. This phenomenon aligns with Brownlee's (2016) concept of moral disobedience, wherein the public rejects authority figures who fail to embody accepted moral standards. The cumulative impact of these violations demonstrates how individual moral failings can produce systemic consequences for the legitimacy of religious institutions in Indonesia.

4.2. Public reaction to religious figure scandals

Scandals involving religious figures—such as sexual abuse and domestic violence—have elicited strong public reactions. These responses stem from disappointment over moral violations by individuals who are expected to embody religious values (Mancini, 2022). Criticisms and demands have been widely voiced through public commentary. This indicates that the public is no longer passive in the face of such transgressions but increasingly demands accountability from religious authorities (see Table 2).

Table 2. Public reaction to religious figure scandals

Context	Narration
Kiai in Jember allegedly sexually molested 11 students and 4 *ustazahs* (female religious teachers).	"I feel disheartening that a space meant to provide minors with religious education and a joyful upbringing has instead become a place of harassment and rights violations." *"Saya sedih kenapa tempat aman buat mereka yang di bawah umur, belajar agama, dan tumbuh dewasa dengan bahagia malah jadi tempat mereka dilecehkan dan dirampas hak-haknya." (Indina, 2023)*
A priest at a Pontianak school molested a student, after an abortion was sodomized.	"He deserves the death penalty." Dr. HS—a pastor described as unethical, and a supervisor at the Education Foundation, a member of the PGI Board, and the son of a prominent religious leader in West Kalimantan—is a suspect in a case of sexual abuse against a minor. *"Patut dihukum mati. DR. HS seorang oknum pendeta, pembina Yayasan Pendidikan juga Pengurus PGI dan anak dari tokoh agama ternama di Kalbar menjadi tersangka kasus Pelecehan Seksual persetubuhan anak bawah umur." (Assegaf, 2023)*

A religious figure has allegedly abused his stepdaughter since 2020.	"There can be no peace in cases like this. The perpetrator deserves the harshest possible punishment, even lifelong disability, if necessary." *"Tidak ada kata damai buat kasus pencabulan seperti ini, pelaku layak di siksa di dunia di hukum seberat beratnya, di buat cacat seumur hidup kalau perlu." (Ruang, 2024)*
Pastor arrested for allegedly abusing congregation over 17 years.	"Happy Santri Day. Indonesia's day of deceit and obscenity". *"Selamat Hari Santri. Hari ngibul dan cabul Indonesia." (Saputra, 2024)*
A religious figure in Trenggalek has been reported for allegedly sexually abusing students; the police are still investigating the case.	"Religious figures, you know… Such depraved behaviour must be met with severe punishment." *"Tokoh agama, Iho ... Kelakuan bejat harus dihukum berat." (Luwes, 2024)*
Religious figure molested stepdaughter from the age of 7, the case has remained unresolved for over a year.	"What else could it be? Indeed, religious figures are the perpetrators." *"Lagi-lagi apa? Ya, benar. Tokoh agama pelakunya" (Rainxx, 2024)*
Domestic violence cases involving religious figures.	"A fake priest. Hopefully he will face consequences similar to those experienced by prison inmates." *"Pendeta abal-abal. Semoga mengalami hal yang sama nanti sama napi di dalam hotel prodeo." (Fercehermanus, 2024)*
A religious figure in Bali was reportedly framed for immoral acts.	"The girl immediately ran away, which initially her Instagram was not privatized, suddenly it was privatized ... hopefully the problem will be resolved quickly." *"Yang ceweknya langsung kabur, yang awalnya instagramnya tidak diprivat, tiba-tiba diprivat... semoga masalahnya cepat tuntas." (Joycedewayani, 2023)*
Alleged indecent acts by a Hindu religious figure are circulating in cyberspace.	"It appears that anyone who claim to be most religious can still commit such acts. Regardless of their religion." *"Wah, ternyata siapa saja yang mengaku paling beragama bisa sampai berbuat seperti itu, ya. Apapun agamanya." (Barbiefan, 2023)*
Pastor Gilbert has been charged in a blasphemy case.	"Ahok, a former governor, was prosecuted and imprisoned for blasphemy, why should this pastor be treated differently? Regarding the apology, okey I forgive, but the legal process must continue. If we let him be, this pastor will become more insolent." *"Ahok yang notabene seorang gubernur saja bisa dipolisikan dan dipenjarakan atas kasus penistaan agama, masa si pendeta yang ini tidak? Soal minta maaf. Oke, saya maafkan, tapi proses hukum tetap berjalan. Kalau didiamkan akan melunjak saja si pendeta ini." (Bratalegawa, 2024)*

Source: Social media platform on the Internet.

Table 2 presents various scandals involving religious figures, including cases of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and blasphemy. These cases have circulated widely across social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram, illustrating how immoral actions by religious figures have drawn public attention. Notable scandals involve the sexual abuse of stepchildren, allegations of molestation against religious students, and indecent acts toward congregants. Additionally, cases of blasphemy further complicate the ongoing moral crisis faced by religious figures. The rapid dissemination of such information via social media underscores the widespread public reactions and growing dissatisfaction with the conduct of religious leaders, who are expected to serve as role models for society.

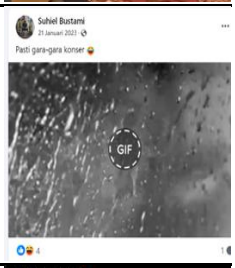
Public reactions to scandals involving religious figures reflect deep moral disappointment and increasing demands for accountability. Such scandals often elicit sharp criticism, as religious figures are perceived to violate the moral standards they are expected to uphold (Soukup, 2019). The findings indicate that society actively responds to cases such as sexual abuse and violence through critical commentary and public demands. This phenomenon demonstrates that the legitimacy of religious authority is closely tied to public perceptions of morality and justice (Schneiderman, 2015). These changes suggest a growing societal tendency to evaluate religious authority based on personal conduct rather than the symbolic authority inherent in their positions.

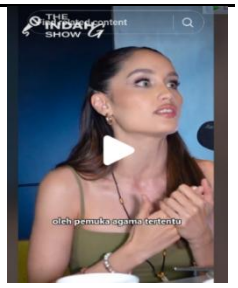
4.3. Public displays of disobedience toward religious figures and institutions

Public disobedience toward religious figures signals a significant shift in societal responses to religious authority. This phenomenon stems not only from moral scandals involving religious leaders but also affects the institutions linked to them (Williamson et al., 2023). While society continues to observe religious teachings, there is a growing tendency to resist directives issued by these figures or their institutions. This trend suggests that public trust in religious authority increasingly depends on the perceived moral integrity of both individuals and organizations, as well as their ability to meet societal expectations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Public displays of disobedience on social media

Public Responses	Figure Explanation	Figures
"It's understandable, as entertainment options in Banda Aceh are limited. Try coming to our place in Jakarta." *"Maklum saja, karena jarang-jarang di Banda Aceh ada Hiburan. Coba pergi ke tempat kami Jakarta" (Fharizki, 2024)*	Acehnese teenagers participated/danced in a concert banned by the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU).	
"The concert brought disaster (flood), it caused by excess water (it won't dry up anytime soon)." *"Konser membawa bala (banjir), banjir disebabkan surplus debit air (Tidak akan kering lagi)" (MZ8, 2024)*	An Acehnese content creator produces satirical content regarding the concert ban in Banda Aceh, suggesting that concerts can bring disaster.	

"Many fools, fanatics and bigots claimed that the concert would cause a tsunami." *"... banyak orang bodoh dan kampungan serta kolot dan fanatik yang menyatakan konser sumber Tsunami" (Pls, 2024)*	A TikTok video features satire regarding the prohibition of concerts deemed inconsistent with Islamic law, suggesting that such events invite disaster.	
"Please share the schedule and location. I'd like to hang out there sometime." *"Infokan jadwal dan tempat, Bang. Mau nongkrong di situ sesekali." (Tasjet, 2024)*	A group of youths attended the gigs, which were later raided by Satpol PP. However, others expressed interest in participating.	
"It's raining. Must be because of the concert." *"Hujan. Pasti gara-gara konser." (Bustami, 2023)*	A satirical Facebook post regarding the potential for concerts to cause disasters.	
"Disband the MUI, an unproductive organization, that sucks up the budget. A parasite on the state." *"Bubarkan MUI ormas nirfaedah penghisap anggaran. Benalu negara." (Soejagad, 2023)*	A user on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) expressed criticism regarding the marriage policy implemented by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI).	
"The MUI has long taken a stance that divides the community. Arab culture is brought along with the religion pushing for an exclusive way of life. They don't want to interact with people of other faiths." *"Sudah lama MUI memilih bersikap memecah-belah umat. Budaya Arab diusung sekalian agama yang dibawa maunya hidup secara eksklusif. Tidak mau bercampur dengan umat agama lain." (Mejo, 2021)*	Users on the social media platform X expressed criticism of a circular letter issued by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) that prohibits wishing "Merry Christmas" and participating in Christmas celebrations within Christian residences.	

"Maybe for those who don't really understand, they think there's nothing wrong with just memorizing. But it's better to actually understand what we're memorizing. So, we won't be easily misled by certain people." *"Mungkin bagi yang kurang mengerti, mereka mengatakan tidak masalah dengan menghafal. Tapi, baiknya harus paham juga apa yang kita hafalkan. Supaya tidak mudah disesatkan pihak tertentu." (EI, 2024)*	Amid the podcast controversy, Indah G and Cinta Laura asserted that the memorization technique could lead to manipulation by certain religious leaders.	
"What kind of stupidity is this?" *"Kebodohan apa lagi ini?" (Mestasih, 2024)*	A video featuring an individual performing ruqyah on a doll suspected of harbouring a demon has elicited responses from netizens, some of whom have labelled the act as irrational.	
"This film was boycotted in its own country, yet made it nominated to the Oscars. Sometimes, local creations are forced to bow down in their own country." *"Film ini diboikot di negara sendiri. Tapi, masuk nominasi piala Oscar. Kadang karya anak bangsa harus bertekuk lutut di negeri sendiri." (Agung, 2019)*	Public responses to the boycott of the movie Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku by certain religious groups.	
"Great! Brilliant! A clear step backward." *"Mantap! Briliant! Menuju kemunduran." (Hutasoitjuni, 2020)*	The Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) Fatwa on the potential for corporal punishment of PUBG mobile players.	

Sources. Social media platforms on the Internet.

Figure 1 depicts various forms of public disobedience toward religious figures and institutions, as reflected in open criticism and satire on social media. One example is the backlash against the concert ban issued by the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) in Aceh, which was widely mocked through satirical and sarcastic posts. In addition, public complaints regarding religious policies—such as the prohibition of Christmas greetings and marriage regulations issued by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI)—illustrate increasing criticism toward religious authority, particularly when policies are perceived as irrelevant. Other contentious cases, including the boycott of the movie Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku and the MPU fatwa on PUBG Mobile, have also triggered critical responses from netizens questioning the legitimacy of religious intervention. These reactions demonstrate that the public no longer passively accepts religious authority but actively uses digital platforms to voice dissent, often through critical commentary or satire.

Public disobedience toward religious figures and institutions reflects a critical response to both moral transgressions and religious policies deemed irrelevant. Moral betrayal by religious leaders has eroded public trust and raised concerns regarding the legitimacy of religious institutions (Wuthnow, 2022). The findings demonstrate how the public utilizes social media to express dissatisfaction—often through criticism, sarcasm, and satire—targeting specific issues such as concert bans or controversial fatwas. These acts of disobedience function as forms of critical communication that challenge the authority of religious institutions while simultaneously creating space for alternative narratives (Atilgan, 2020). This shift in public behaviour indicates a move from passive acceptance to selective compliance with religious authority, driven by moral considerations that are perceived as more aligned with contemporary societal values. Ultimately, this shift underscores the growing expectation that religious leaders uphold moral integrity in order to regain public trust.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that moral violations committed by religious figures—such as sexual abuse, violence, and corruption—have significantly eroded public trust in religious authority. In response, the public expresses disobedience through various forms of criticism, including opposition to religious policies perceived as irrelevant, such as concert bans and controversial fatwas. Social media functions as a primary channel for conveying dissatisfaction, with sarcasm, satire, and critical commentary emerging as dominant modes of expression (Adel & Numan, 2023; Akula & Garibay, 2021). This public reaction indicates a crisis of moral legitimacy, in which society begins to evaluate religious figures based on their personal conduct rather than their formal roles or titles. As public awareness increases, this phenomenon signals a shifting relationship between society and religious institutions. The findings suggest that society is becoming more selective in acknowledging religious authority, emphasizing moral integrity as a core prerequisite for legitimacy and trust. Scandals involving religious figures not only damage the credibility of the individuals involved but also weaken the authority of religious institutions as a whole, thereby generating a broader crisis that disrupts the societal foundation of religious structures (Piazza & Jourdan, 2018).

This phenomenon of disobedience can be interpreted as a societal response to the disconnect between the moral values promoted by religion and the behaviour of religious figures who fail to embody them. As Wuthnow (2022) observed, moral transgressions committed by religious leaders evoke profound public disappointment due to they undermine religion's role as a guardian of collective ethics. This disillusionment is further reinforced by the perception that religious institutions frequently fall short in addressing the actual needs of society (Simandjuntak, 2021). Within this context, social media accelerates the spread of information related to religious scandals, offering a platform for the public to critique religious policies viewed as irrelevant or misaligned with public interest (Faizin, 2024; Henry, 2021; Soukup, 2019). The resulting dissatisfaction reflects a shift in societal perceptions of religious authority wherein moral legitimacy emerges as the primary basis for acceptance. Ultimately, such disobedience not only serves as a form of protest but also marks a transformation in how society critically articulates its stance toward religious institutions.

Beyond the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of moral disobedience is not isolated but reflects a broader global pattern. Studies have shown that public reactions to religious scandals—particularly those involving sexual abuse by religious leaders—have contributed to a decline in religious participation and charitable giving (Bin Mohamad et al., 2024; Bottan & Perez-Truglia, 2015; Rante Salu et al., 2023). This trend is observable

across diverse cultural and religious settings, including Ireland, South Africa, and the United States, where such scandals have significantly undermined public trust in religious institutions and triggered a wider legitimacy crisis (Moran, 2019). These scandals not only erode trust in individual figures but also signal growing public expectations that religious institutions uphold moral integrity to retain credibility. Accordingly, the findings of this study contribute to a broader discourse on the shifting dynamics between religious authority and public trust, in which legitimacy increasingly depends on moral alignment rather than formal institutional roles.

The consequences of this phenomenon are substantial for the relationship between society and religious authority. Growing distrust toward religious figures has weakened the legitimacy of religious institutions, shifting the way society evaluates and accepts authority (Schneiderman, 2015; Williamson et al., 2023). As public scrutiny intensifies, religious institutions increasingly struggle to maintain their influence. This transformation indicates that moral integrity is now valued more than formal positions, thereby driving changes in the structure of both social and religious relationships (Agbiji & Agbiji, 2020). If left unaddressed, this phenomenon may result in heightened public disobedience toward religious policies and a declining role for religious institutions in shaping societal norms (Vilks et al., 2025). In the long term, such a shift could prompt society to seek alternative moral values beyond formal religious institutions, potentially undermining religion's role as a collective ethical guide.

The findings of this study align with previous research emphasizing the central role of moral legitimacy in sustaining religious authority. For example, Wuthnow (2022) demonstrated that moral violations by religious figures can trigger a crisis of trust, ultimately undermining the legitimacy of religious institutions in society. This study also supports Simandjuntak's (2021) observation that public responses to religious authority are becoming increasingly critical, particularly in the context of moral scandals. However, it extends prior research by showing that in Indonesia, criticism of religious figures is predominantly expressed through social media—often in the form of sarcasm, satire, and direct commentary—rather than through public demonstrations or acts of civil disobedience, which are more commonly observed in other global contexts (Asli et al., 2025; Lövheim & Stenmark, 2020; Schwaiger et al., 2020). These findings contribute to the broader literature by revealing that even religious institutions not directly implicated in scandals may suffer a loss of public trust. Moreover, the study suggests that disobedience in Indonesia reflects a form of collective dissatisfaction that does not necessarily translate into full rejection of religious institutions.

The recommendations from this study highlight the need for further research to deepen the understanding of the relationship between moral legitimacy and religious authority across various cultural and religious contexts. In-depth investigations are necessary to explore how these dynamics evolve within societies shaped by diverse values, where perceptions of religious authority are increasingly influenced by social and cultural transformations. Future studies could also examine how social media shapes collective narratives regarding religious figures and contributes to emerging patterns of disobedience toward religious institutions. Moreover, research should consider the long-term implications of such disobedience for the legitimacy of religious institutions, particularly in societies facing with complex social challenges. In methodological manner, the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches—such as combining content analysis of social media discourse with public opinion surveys—may yield more comprehensive insights. By adopting this multidimensional perspective, future studies can offer a deeper understanding

of the evolving relationship between society, religious authority, and processes of social transformation.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that moral violations by religious figures—such as sexual abuse, violence, and corruption—have contributed to a crisis of public trust in religious authority. The findings indicate that society responds through acts of disobedience, often manifested in criticism of religious policies, as well as expressions of sarcasm and satire on social media platforms. This response marks a significant shift in public engagement with religious institutions, signalling a transition from passive acceptance to more critical and selective forms of responses. Moreover, such disobedience not only impacts religious figures directly involved in scandals but also systematically undermines the broader legitimacy of religious institutions. Overall, the study offers valuable insights into the evolving dynamics between society and religious authority, emphasizing how critical public responses reflect broader transformations in social norms and trust in religion.

This study offers a conceptual contribution by deepening the understanding of religious disobedience within the framework of moral legitimacy and authority. It integrates perspectives on the role of social media as a central medium for public criticism, providing new insights into how society renegotiates trust in religious figures and institutions. In methodological manner, the use of a qualitative approach—drawing on social media data and thematic analysis—presents a relevant framework for examining social phenomena in the digital era. The findings also carry theoretical significance by illustrating that moral legitimacy is a foundational condition for religious authority, and that acts of disobedience function as a means for society to express its moral concerns and social aspirations.

This study has limitations related to its data sources, which are primarily drawn from online and social media platforms, potentially excluding perspectives from individuals less active on these media. Moreover, the qualitative approach emphasizes identifying patterns and themes, which limits the ability to quantitatively measure the impact of disobedience on the legitimacy of religious institutions. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating broader population surveys to capture more comprehensive views. Additionally, further studies are necessary to investigate the relationship between religious disobedience and local political and cultural dynamics, which may offer deeper insights into how social transformations influence the legitimacy of religious authority across diverse contexts.

Author Contribution Statement

Contributions of the authors in this article: Muhammad Maulana contributed as concepts, drafters of the article, data analyzers and interpreters; Muhammad Hendri as the drafter of the manuscript, collecting data and critically revising the article. All authors agree to take responsibility for all aspects of this work.

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