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ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT WITHOUT SOVEREIGNTY: Sunni–Shia Coexistence, Authority, and Pancasila in Bondowoso, Indonesia

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Abstract: This article examines Islamic political thought beyond sovereignty-centered paradigms. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork in Bondowoso, Indonesia, it analyses Sunni–Shia coexistence within Sadah communities where political reasoning unfolds through mediated religious authority, communal negotiation, and constitutional belonging. The study finds that Islamic normativity in this context is not oriented toward capturing or restructuring the state but is articulated through genealogical legitimacy, moral leadership, and socially embedded mechanisms of dispute resolution. Sectarian difference is stabilised through recognised religious authorities who enjoy cross-sectarian legitimacy, allowing doctrinal distinctions to persist without escalating into political antagonism. The article further argues that Pancasila functions not merely as a constitutional framework but as a normative horizon that enables Islamic ethical commitments to acquire public legitimacy. By decentring sovereignty and foregrounding relational authority and constitutional embeddedness, this study advances the concept of Islamic political thought without sovereignty as a distinct and analytically significant mode of political reasoning within plural nation-states.

Keywords: Islamic political thought, sovereignty, Sunni–Shia relations, religious authority, Pancasila

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Introduction

ISLAMIC POLITICAL thought has frequently been framed—often reductively—through the category of sovereignty, whether in

classical juristic reflections on the caliphate or in modern debates on Islamic constitutionalism and the state.[1] Across these trajectories, political legitimacy is often assumed to culminate in a supreme authority, institutionalised through state structures or articulated as a project of Islamic governance.[2] Even reformist currents that emphasise ethics, civil society, or public reasoning tend to retain the state as the implicit horizon of political imagination.[3] Such state-centered paradigms narrow the analytic field by obscuring configurations of Islamic political reasoning that unfold within established nation-states without aspiring to reconstitute or capture them.[4]

Recent scholarship has productively shifted attention from formal doctrines to lived practices, associational networks, and mediated authority in Muslim societies.[5] Studies of Islam in Southeast Asia have demonstrated that political agency is frequently exercised through educational institutions, religious organisations, and communal arbitration rather than through direct state control.[6] At the same time, research on Sunni–Shia relations in Indonesia has largely been framed in terms of sectarian tension, minority protection, and conflict management.[7] While

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[1] Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*, Paperback edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[2] Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University press, 2009).

[3] Asef Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199766062.001.0001.

[4] Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[5] Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 2. ed, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[6] Robert W. Hefner, *Shari'a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011). See also, Greg Fealy and Sally White, Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia, Indonesia Update Series (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008). And see, Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316344446.

[7] Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Hating the Ahmadiyya: The Place of 'Heretics' in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Society," *Contemporary Islam* 8, no. 2 (May

these studies illuminate dynamics of accommodation and vulnerability, they rarely conceptualise coexistence itself as a form of political thought. The result is a conceptual gap: Islamic political imagination is either tied to sovereignty or reduced to the management of difference, with limited attention to how authority and normativity are stabilised in plural settings.[8]

Indonesia provides a setting in which this gap becomes analytically salient. As a Muslim-majority nation constitutionally grounded in Pancasila, it affirms belief in God while rejecting the institutionalisation of a confessional state.[9] Islamic normativity therefore develops within, rather than against, a plural constitutional framework.[10] Pancasila operates not merely as a legal arrangement but as a shared political ethic that shapes public discourse and collective belonging.[11] The interaction between Islamic commitments and Pancasila gives rise to forms of political

2014): 133–52, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-014-0295-x. See also, Muhammad Fauzinudin Faiz, Khoiruddin Nasution, and Ali Sodiqin, "Converging Religious Doctrine: Sunni-Shi'i Marriages in Indonesia," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 17, no. 1 (June 2024): 123–46, https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2024.17108. And See, Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford, California: Stanford Briefs, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2013).

[8] Andrew F. March, "Genealogies of Sovereignty in Islamic Political Theology," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (March 2013): 293–320, https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2013.0011. See also, Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, "Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15, no. 3 (July 2017): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2017.1354462.

[9] Nadirsyah Hosen, "Religion and the Indonesian Constitution: A Recent Debate," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 419–40, JSTOR.

[10] R. William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Indonesian Democracy: From Transition to Consolidation," in *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, ed. Mirjam Künkler and Alfred Stepan (Columbia University Press, 2013), 24–50, https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.7312/kunk16190-006/html.

[11] Yudi Latif, *Negara Paripurna: Historisitas, Rasionalitas, Dan Aktualitas Pancasila* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2011). See also, Yudi Latif, "Building the Soul of the Indonesian Nation: Mohammad Hatta on Religion, the State Foundation, and Character Building," *Studia Islamika* 32, no. 2 (August 2025): 241–78, https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v32i2.45220.

reasoning that cannot be adequately captured by binaries of theocratic ambition and secular exclusion.[12]

The case of Bondowoso in East Java sharpens this problem. Within segments of the Sadah community—locally recognized as descendants of the Prophet (sayyid) and occupying a position of enduring genealogical prestige that underpins religious authority—Sunni and Shia Muslims maintain social, ritual, and organisational relations despite doctrinal differences that elsewhere have produced polarisation.[13] Religious elites mediate boundaries, interpret normative distinctions, and prevent theological variance from escalating into political rupture.[14] Sectarian plurality in this context does not culminate in claims of autonomy or rival sovereignty. Instead, authority is enacted through persuasion, communal arbitration, and moral standing.[15] This relative stability—maintained through continuous negotiation and boundary management—invites a reconsideration of Islamic political thought as a mode of reasoning embedded in mediated authority and constitutional coexistence rather than in state formation.[16]

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[12] Lorenzo Zucca, "Freedom of Religion in a Secular World," in *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, 1st ed., ed. Rowan Cruft, S. Matthew Liao, and Massimo Renzo (Oxford University PressOxford, 2015), 388–406, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199688623.003.0022.

[13] Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, Series in Comparative Politics and International Studies (New York : Paris: Columbia University Press ; In association with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, 2008). See also, Moh Syaeful Bahar et al., "Managing Sunni-Shia Tensions: Socio-Political and Cultural Peacebuilding in Sādah Bā 'Alawiyyah, Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 3 (September 2025): 2195–222, https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v13i3.1623.

[14] Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[15] Ronald Lukens-Bull, "'Politics' by Other Means: Using Education to Negotiate Change," in *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java*, ed. Ronald Lukens-Bull (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), 47–70, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403980298_3.

[16] Bayat, *Post-Islamism*. See also, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, "Religion, the State, and Constitutionalism in Islamic and Comparative Perspectives," *Drake L. Rev.* 57 (2008): 829.

This study examines how Islamic political thought is articulated in a setting where sovereignty is not the central axis of political aspiration, how local religious authorities legitimise and regulate Sunni–Shia coexistence while maintaining doctrinal distinctions, and how Pancasila functions as a constitutional horizon enabling Islamic normativity to circulate within civil society. By foregrounding these questions, the article reconceptualises Islamic political thought beyond the opposition between theocratic aspiration and secular containment.[17]

The analysis draws on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Bondowoso between 2022 and 2024. The study involved twenty-three in-depth interviews with purposively sampled habaibs, Sunni and Shia community leaders, pesantren teachers, and local youth actors, selected through purposive and snowball sampling within Sadah networks. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews focusing on perceptions of authority, mechanisms of dispute resolution, and the management of sectarian difference, complemented by sustained participant observation in ritual gatherings, commemorative events, and inter-communal forums, as well as the examination of locally circulated religious texts and public discourse. Interviewees included senior Sadah figures from both Sunni- and Shia-identified lineages, alongside non-Sadah community members who regularly interacted within these networks.[18]

Data were analyzed through iterative and inductive thematic coding to identify patterns of authority, modes of mediation, and forms of political reasoning embedded in everyday communal practice. Analytical attention was directed toward how actors articulate legitimacy, negotiate doctrinal boundaries, and situate their practices within the constitutional framework of Pancasila. To enhance credibility, findings were triangulated across interviews, observations, and documentary sources.

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[17] Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[18] Michael Buehler, *The Politics of Shari'a Law: Islamist Activists and the State in Democratizing Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316417843.

This study does not aim for statistical representativeness but offers an analytically grounded account of a specific **pattern** of mediated authority within a particular socio-religious context. The findings are therefore context-bound and should therefore be understood as theoretically generative rather than universally generalizable. The researcher's positionality as an insider to Indonesian Islamic academic networks facilitated access to key actors while requiring ongoing reflexive awareness of potential interpretive bias.

Post-Sovereign Islamic Political Imagination in Local Context

Islamic political thought in Bondowoso unfolds without recourse to sovereign claims or projects of Islamic statehood. Within the Sadah communities examined in this study, sectarian difference between Sunni and Shia does not generate constitutional demands, parallel political institutions, or appeals to alternative models of Islamic governance. Religious actors do not articulate their authority in terms of replacing or restructuring the state.[19] Instead, political reasoning is embedded in moral leadership, kinship legitimacy, and communal mediation. As one senior habaib explained, "We do not seek to change the state. Our responsibility is to guide the community so that differences do not lead to conflict." This articulation reflects a broader pattern in which authority is exercised through recognized lineage and moral standing rather than through formal political mobilization.[20] The empirical material from field interviews and community observation shows that religious elites exercise influence through recognised genealogical authority and social trust rather than through formal political mobilization.[21] Sovereignty is not rejected;

[19] Apostolos G. Paralikas and Anna Boumpa, "State Recognition and Islamic Legal Authority: Repositioning the Mufti Institution in Greece," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law* 9, no. 1 (February 2026): 28–49, https://doi.org/10.35719/1gpqja79.

[20] Ismail Fajrie Alatas and Martin Slama, "Rethinking Diasporic Returns: Ḥaḍramī Trajectories in Indonesia's Religio-Political Field," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 178, no. 4 (2022): 410–39.

[21] Fany Nur Rahmadiana Hakim, "Re-Understanding Tolerance through Intrareligious Dialogue: The Discourse of Anti-Shi'ism in Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 25, no. 2 (December 2021): 350–72, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v25i2.449.

rather, it is not the primary framework through which Islamic normativity is imagined or pursued.

This empirical setting departs from dominant state-centric readings of Islamic political theory. Much of the classical and modern literature situates Islamic political thought within debates over the caliphate, divine sovereignty, or Islamic constitutional order.[22] In contrast, the evidence from Bondowoso demonstrates that Islamic political articulation can operate within an existing constitutional framework without aspiring to alter it. The absence of sovereign ambition is not a sign of political passivity.[23] Rather, it reflects a different locus of political agency: authority is enacted in communal arbitration, ritual leadership, and the management of doctrinal boundaries.[24] Interview data from twenty-three informants—including senior habaib, Sunni and Shia community leaders, and pesantren teachers—consistently show that sectarian tensions are first redirected toward recognized lineage-based authorities before any consideration of formal institutional channels. Several informants explicitly noted that bringing internal disputes to state offices would be perceived as escalation and public exposure rather than resolution. In practice, disagreement is managed through consultation and consensus-building convened by respected religious figures whose genealogical standing commands cross-sectarian deference. As one pesantren teacher explained, "If we take these matters outside, it becomes public conflict. Here, we resolve them through those who are respected by all sides." This pattern confirms that political imagination in

[22] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Between Separation and Unity: The Interplay of Law and Morality in Islamic Jurisprudence," in *Sharia Law in the Twenty-First Century* (World Scientific, 2022), 21–46, https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/q0344#page=68.

[23] Hussein Ali Agrama, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 3 (July 2010): 495–523, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417510000289.

[24] M. Khusna Amal, "Anti-Shia Mass Mobilization in Indonesia's Democracy: Godly Alliance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Exclusion," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.25-48.

this context is structured around mediated authority rather than institutional supremacy.[25]

The theoretical implications are significant. If Islamic political thought is defined exclusively through sovereignty, then configurations such as Bondowoso appear apolitical or derivative. Yet the data demonstrate a sustained form of normative ordering grounded in religious legitimacy and social hierarchy.[26] Political thought, in this context, is manifested through practices that stabilise communal life, regulate difference, and preserve moral cohesion. The persistent equation of Islamic political thought with sovereignty has not merely privileged one trajectory among others; it has narrowed the analytical field by rendering relational and non-institutional forms of **governance** conceptually invisible.[27] Treating sovereignty as the necessary horizon of Islamic politics risks mistaking a historically contingent paradigm for a definitional essence. Decentring sovereignty as the defining horizon of Islamic politics allows recognition of these mediated forms of governance as constitutive rather than secondary.[28] This empirical setting thus expands the conceptual vocabulary of Islamic political theory by foregrounding relational authority over sovereign command.

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[25] Muddathir ʿAbd al-Rahim, review of *Review of Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam*, by Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 4 (2005): 614–15.

[26] Sundus Serhan Ahmed, "The Evolving Role of Sustainable Development in Shaping Political Progress: A Contemporary Islamic Perspective on Human Rights and Civil Institution," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 4, no. 1 (2025): 1–30.

[27] Hallaq, *The Impossible State*; March, "Genealogies of Sovereignty in Islamic Political Theology"; Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400845026.

[28] Gert J. J. Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2015), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634319. See also, Harith Hasan Al-Qarawee et al., *Religious Leaders and the Sunni-Shia Divide in the Middle East*, Islam and Human Rights (Atlantic Council, 2017), 13–19, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03717.6. See also, Mohammad Iqbal, "Sunni-Shia Division in Islam: It's Origin, Development, Political & Socio-Economic Implications & Contemporary Relations," SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 3692983, Rochester, NY, September 15, 2020, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3692983.

Practically, this post-sovereign configuration reduces the likelihood that sectarian plurality escalates into constitutional confrontation.[29] Because religious authority is exercised within and not against the national framework, doctrinal differences are channelled into negotiated coexistence rather than political rupture.[30] The empirical material shows that community actors consistently affirm loyalty to the Indonesian constitutional order while maintaining theological distinctiveness. This positioning suggests that plural Muslim societies may sustain robust forms of Islamic normativity without transforming it into a project of state power.[31]

The findings remains context-bound. Bondowoso's configuration is shaped by specific genealogical networks, local histories of coexistence, and the moral standing of religious elites documented in the fieldwork. Regions lacking comparable authority structures may not exhibit similar post-sovereign dynamics.[32] Comparative research across different Indonesian provinces or Muslim-majority contexts would clarify whether mediated, non-sovereign articulations of Islamic political thought constitute a broader pattern or remain locally contingent.[33] Nevertheless, the present findings demonstrate that Islamic political imagination can be politically meaningful without invoking sovereignty, thereby reorienting debates on Islam and politics within plural constitutional orders.

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[29] Bahar et al., "Managing Sunni-Shia Tensions."

[30] Faiz, Nasution, and Sodiqin, "Converging Religious Doctrine." See also, D. I. Kabupaten Bondowoso, "Harmonisasi Sunni Syiah (Studi Kasus Kelurahan Kademangan Kampung Arab Bondowoso)" (PhD Thesis, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Jember, 2018).

[31] Ahmad Fauzan, *Doctrinal Differences and Social Cohesion: A Study of Sunni-Shia Interactions* (n.d.).

[32] Muhammad Syaqiq Al-Azdi Bin Abd Razak, Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, and Siti Arni Basir Basir, "Harmonizing Faith and Governance: A Comprehensive Study of Islamic Governance Frameworks: Menyatukan Agama Dan Tadbir Urus: Kajian Komprehensif Kerangka Tadbir Urus Islam," *Jurnal Pengajian Islam* 17, no. 2 (December 2024): 87–101, https://doi.org/10.53840/jpi.v17i2.304.

[33] Sabrina Mervin et al., *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media* (Hurst Publishers, 2013).

Mediated Religious Authority and the Governance of Sectarian Difference

Sectarian difference in Bondowoso is regulated through a configuration of authority that is neither statist nor purely informal, but structurally mediated through genealogical legitimacy and moral hierarchy.[34] Within the Sadah networks examined in this study, religious authority derives from recognised lineage, accumulated symbolic capital, and long-standing social trust rather than from formal office or state delegation.[35] Habaib and senior religious figures function as boundary-setters who determine the acceptable limits of doctrinal expression and intervene pre-emptively when tensions arise.[36] Empirical evidence from interviews and communal observation indicates that disputes are consistently channelled toward these mediating authorities, with minimal recourse to state litigation or securitized intervention. As one Sunni community leader noted, "When disagreements arise, we first bring them to the habaib; going to the authorities would only make the issue larger." A Shia community participant similarly observed, "If it is handled by respected elders, it stays within the community and does not become a public problem." These accounts illustrate how dispute resolution is routinised through recognized lineage-based authority rather than escalated into formal institutional processes.[37] Authority here operates in a Weberian register of

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[34] Friedhelm Hartwig, *Contemplation , Social Reform and the Recollection of Identity . Hadramī Migrants and Travellers between 1896 and 1972 Author (s): Friedhelm Hartwig Source : Die Welt Des Islams , New Series , Vol . 41 , Issue 3 , The Making and Unmaking of Published By*, 41, no. 3 (2015): 311–47.

[35] Hakim, "Re-Understanding Tolerance through Intrareligious Dialogue."

[36] Jonathan Brown, "Even If It's Not True It's True: Using Unreliable Hadīths in Sunni Islam," *Islamic Law and Society* 18, no. 1 (2011): 1–52, https://doi.org/10.1163/156851910X517056.

[37] Abd Hannan and Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia," *Digital Muslim Review* 1, no. 2 (November 2023): 84–104, https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.10. See also, Muzayyin Ahyar and Alfitri Alfitri, "Aksi Bela Islam: Islamic Clicktivism and the New Authority of Religious Propaganda in the Millennial Age in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (May 2019): 1, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v9i1.1-29.

traditional legitimacy, yet it is continually reproduced through performative moral leadership rather than static inheritance. Sectarian plurality is therefore governed through relational rather than bureaucratic mechanisms.[38]

A concrete illustration emerged during a communal discussion following a Muharram commemoration in Kademangan, where divergent ritual practices prompted concern among younger participants. Rather than allowing the disagreement to circulate publicly, a senior habaib convened a closed deliberative meeting attended by representatives from both Sunni- and Shia-identified families. According to interview testimony, he reframed the dispute not as a matter of orthodoxy versus deviation, but as a question of adab and communal harmony. The outcome was not doctrinal convergence but mutual agreement on the limits of public expression and ritual visibility. No appeal was made to local authorities, and no formal complaint was filed. The dispute was resolved through recognised moral authority rather than institutional adjudication. This episode exemplifies how sectarian boundary management operates through relational mediation embedded in genealogical legitimacy.[39]

This mediated configuration challenges two dominant paradigms in the literature on sectarian governance. The first equates stability with coercive state regulation or legal codification, assuming that doctrinal divergence requires formal institutional containment.[40] The second interprets sectarian coexistence primarily through the lenses of minority protection or securitised tolerance, in which the state acts as guarantor against escalation.[41] The observed pattern demonstrates an alternative

[38] Iván Szelenyi, "Weber's Theory of Domination and Post-Communist Capitalisms," *Theory and Society* 45, no. 1 (2016): 1–24.

[39] 7/3/2026 12:14:00 PM

[40] Seema Gul, Riaz Ahmad, and Faisal Shahzad Khan, "Beyond Force Majeure: Rethinking Contractual Risk through the Lens of Shariah and Common Law Doctrines," *Research Journal of Psychology* 3, no. 2 (May 2025): 443–54, https://doi.org/10.59075/rjs.v3i2.144.

[41] Menchik, Jeremy, "Productive Intolerance: Godly Nationalism in Indonesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 3 (2014): 591–621. See also, Khoirul Faizin et al., "Language, Authority, and Identity: Shia-Salafi Debates

ordering principle: Difference is stabilized through recognised religious authorities who enjoy cross-sectarian legitimacy. Doctrinal distinctions are neither dissolved nor formalised into parallel jurisdictions. Instead, they are domesticated within a shared moral economy that privileges continuity over antagonism.[42] These prevailing paradigms presuppose that political order ultimately depends on institutional command, thereby overlooking how authority embedded in social relations can perform equivalent regulatory functions without juridical coercion. By treating the state as the default site of sectarian management, much of the literature has under-theorised civil-society authority as a primary locus of political ordering. This model diverges from consociational arrangements and state-managed pluralism by situating regulatory capacity within civil society rather than in constitutional engineering.

Theoretically, this finding reorients debates on Islamic political order by foregrounding relational authority as a constitutive political mechanism. Sectarian plurality is not merely a problem to be administered but a site in which authority is enacted and legitimised.[43] The data show that religious elites routinely frame theological divergence as manageable within a broader Islamic identity, thereby preventing its translation into political antagonism. Authority thus performs a quasi-regulatory function that shapes norms of interaction, circumscribes public expression, and limits escalation without resorting to coercion.[44] Such dynamics resonate with scholarship on everyday politics and

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on Imamate and Nationalism in Indonesia's Online Sphere," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 2 (December 2025): 313–49, https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.2.313-349.

[42] Bahar et al., "Managing Sunni-Shia Tensions." See also, Amin Said Husni, "Bupati Bondowoso Periode 2008-2013 Dan 2013-2018.," November 8, 2023, Bondowoso.

[43] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq: With a New Introduction by the Author*, 2nd pbk. ed., with a new introduction, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[44] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 3 (October 2009): 229–50, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0096-9.

moral authority, yet they extend it by demonstrating how mediated authority can substitute for sovereign enforcement in maintaining political order.[45] If Islamic political theory continues to equate governance with formal sovereignty, it will systematically misrecognise these relational structures as secondary or merely cultural, rather than as fully political modes of ordering collective life. Governance, in this context, emerges through recognition and deference rather than through command and sanction.

The observed pattern also reframes sectarianism within Islamic political theory. If political thought is understood solely through sovereign aspiration or institutional control, then mediated authority appears secondary or pre-political.[46] The empirical evidence suggests the opposite: relational governance constitutes a primary mode of political ordering in plural Muslim societies. By stabilising difference without institutional fragmentation, mediated authority preserves both doctrinal distinction and communal cohesion. This expands the analytical vocabulary of Islamic political theory beyond the binary of theocratic assertion and secular containment, positioning civil-society authority as an autonomous political field.[47]

Practically, the implications are significant for contexts marked by rising sectarian polarisation. Strengthening mediating religious institutions may prove more effective than securitised interventions in sustaining coexistence.[48] The field data indicate that community members trust and comply with recognised

[45] Harith Hasan, *Islamic Endowments and Shia Religious Authority*, Religious Authority and the Politics of Islamic Endowments in Iraq (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), 10–14, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20966.7.

[46] Damanhuri, Noffiyanti, and Andi Eka Putra, "Social Media, Shifting Religious Authority, and Contemporary Da'wah in 'Post-Secular' Indonesia," *Kodifikasia* 19, no. 1 (June 2025): 149–73.

[47] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[48] Dr Sajjad Ahmad et al., "Integrating Islamic Ethics with Modern Governance: A Comprehensive Framework for Accountability Across Religious, Social, and Economic Dimensions," *Al-Irfan* 8, no. 15 (June 2023): 51–79, https://doi.org/10.58932/MULB0043.

religious authorities precisely because these figures are embedded in genealogical and moral networks that transcend sectarian affiliation.[49] Where such credibility exists, sectarian grievances are less likely to migrate into formal political arenas or become vehicles for populist mobilisation. Governance of difference thus depends on durable moral capital rather than on legal enforcement alone.

The analysis, however, remains context-specific. The regulatory capacity observed in Bondowoso presupposes the continued legitimacy of particular religious lineages and the resilience of social trust across sectarian lines. In settings where authority is fragmented, politicised, or delegitimised, similar dynamics may not emerge.[50] Future research should examine how mediated authority adapts under conditions of generational transition, digital religious contestation, and national political polarisation. Comparative inquiry across Indonesian provinces or other Muslim-majority societies would clarify whether relational governance represents a broader pattern or a locally contingent equilibrium.[51] Nevertheless, The empirical material demonstrates that sectarian difference can be governed through mediated authority that functions as a non-sovereign mode of political ordering, thereby challenging prevailing assumptions about the necessity of state-centric regulation in Islamic political life.

Yet this empirical arrangement rests on uneven ground. The authority exercised by habaib and senior religious figures is sustained through asymmetrical relations of recognition, in which genealogical status and accumulated moral capital distribute

[49] Ahmad Zaenuri and Ahmad Irfan, "Arab Sunni-Wahhâbism and Shia Iran: From Sectarian Conflict, to the Domination of the Gulf Region," *Al-Bayyinah* 7, no. 2 (November 2023): 2, https://doi.org/10.30863/al-bayyinah.v7i2.4721. See also, Shamsul Yusof, *The Role of Religious Institutions in Mitigating Sectarian Conflict* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 2018).

[50] Abd Hannan and Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia."

[51] Suhadi Cholil, "Freedom of Religion amid Polarization and Religious Moderation Policy," *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 6, no. 2 (March 2023): 196–204, https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.24603.

influence unevenly across actors. While such asymmetry enables decisive mediation, it also narrows the space for dissenting interpretations, particularly among younger or less institutionally embedded participants. Several informants suggested, albeit cautiously, that compliance is often shaped as much by obligation as by shared conviction. The durability of this arrangement, therefore, hinges on the continued credibility of specific figures rather than on institutional guarantees. Where that credibility weakens—whether through generational transition, contestation, or politicization—the capacity to contain disagreement may erode rapidly. The relative absence of overt conflict should therefore be understood not as equilibrium but as a contingent achievement sustained through ongoing negotiation. What appears as stability is, in effect, a managed condition whose persistence depends on fragile alignments of authority, trust, and recognition.

Pancasila as Constitutional Horizon: Enabling Islamic Normativity

Pancasila does not function as a neutral constitutional backdrop but as a normative horizon that structures how Islamic political claims become intelligible within the public sphere of the nation-state.[52] It provides the shared vocabulary through which religious authority is translated into civic legitimacy. In the empirical configuration examined here, religious actors invoke Pancasila neither defensively nor as a reluctant concession to secular authority.[53] Instead, they treat it as a legitimate frame of belonging that authorises Islamic ethical commitments in public life. Constitutional loyalty and doctrinal fidelity are articulated as mutually reinforcing orientations, not as competing allegiances.

The evidence complicates the entrenched binary between secular constitutionalism and Islamic political aspiration.[54] Much

[52] Yudi Latif, "The Religiosity, Nationality, and Sociality of Pancasila: Toward Pancasila through Soekarno's Way," *Studia Islamika* 25, no. 2 (August 2018): 207–45, https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i2.7502.

[53] Nurlaelah Abbas, "Escalation Of Iranian Shia Theology In Indonesia," *Proceeding International Seminar Da'wah And Communication*, 2022.

[54] Gabriel Abraham Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, 2015, 1–576.

comparative political theory presumes that constitutional pluralism either constrains religious normativity or awaits eventual Islamisation.[55] The case analysed here resists both trajectories. Pancasila neither neutralises Islamic discourse nor serves as an object of theological contestation. Rather, it stabilises a political grammar within which Sunni and Shia actors can affirm doctrinal distinctiveness while remaining anchored in a shared constitutional order.[56] By presuming that constitutional frameworks operate primarily as constraints upon religious normativity, dominant paradigms have underestimated how civic principles can function as generative conditions for Islamic political articulation. The assumption that constitutionalism and Islamic normativity stand in structural tension obscures configurations in which constitutional identity actively authorises religious ethical expression. This dynamic aligns more closely with models of constitutional pluralism that emphasise negotiated legitimacy than with paradigms of rigid secular containment or confessional sovereignty.[57]

The theoretical implications are substantial. If sovereignty has structured the dominant horizon of Islamic political thought—from classical juristic debates to modern constitutional reformism—then the Bondowoso configuration requires a conceptual recalibration.[58] Islamic political articulation here does not culminate in claims to supreme authority, yet it remains

[55] An-Na'im, "Religion, the State, and Constitutionalism in Islamic and Comparative Perspectives." See also, Samuel Stroope and Joseph O. Baker, "Whose Moral Community? Religiosity, Secularity, and Self-Rated Health across Communal Religious Contexts," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 59, no. 2 (2018): 185–99.

[56] Mervin et al., *The Dynamics of Sunni-Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*.

[57] Wardatul Asfiyah, "Akulturasi Budaya Arab Dan Lokal Dalam Membangun Harmoni Sosial Pada Masyarakat Kademangan Bondowoso," *Mozaic: Islamic Studies* 01, no. 01 (2022).

[58] Iqbal, "Sunni-Shia Division in Islam." See also, D. A. N. Damai et al., *Relasi Sosial Sunni-Syiah Yang Konflik Dan Damai: Studi Tentang Faktor Pembentuk Dan Kebijakan Negara Yang Berbeda Di Sampang Dan Yogyakarta* (2019). And see, Musdhalifah Musdhalifah, "Amalgamasi Sunni Dan Syi'ah Di Kampung Arab Bondowoso," *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Humaniora* 5, no. 2 (2021): 238–63, https://doi.org/10.35719/islamikainside.v5i2.92.

normatively robust and publicly consequential. Pancasila operates as a constitutive condition of this process: it shapes the terms under which religious authority acquires civic recognition. Treating sovereignty as the defining metric of political seriousness risks misclassifying constitutionally embedded Islamic articulation as accommodation rather than as a distinct mode of political reasoning. **The findings** suggest that constitutional pluralism can be a site of productive Islamic normativity, not merely a boundary imposed upon it. By decentring sovereignty and foregrounding constitutional embeddedness, this case expands Islamic political theory beyond the opposition between theocratic assertion and secular exclusion.[59] It demonstrates that constitutional orders can actively enable the circulation of Islamic normativity rather than merely delimit it.

The implications extend beyond a single locality. Where constitutional principles resonate with embedded religious authority, sectarian plurality is less likely to crystallise into constitutional antagonism. Field evidence shows that actors consistently anchor theological divergence within references to shared citizenship and national unity, thereby preventing doctrinal difference from escalating into claims of rival sovereignty.[60] Constitutional belonging functions as a stabilising medium through which Islamic ethical claims are expressed without triggering institutional confrontation. This suggests that durable coexistence in plural Muslim societies depends not on suppressing religious claims, but on sustaining constitutional frameworks that religious actors can inhabit without self-displacement.[61]

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[59] Amal, "Anti-Shia Mass Mobilization in Indonesia's Democracy: Godly Alliance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Exclusion."

[60] M. Khusna Amal, "Towards a Deliberative Conflict Resolution? A Reflection on State Inclusive Response to Sunni-Shi'a Tension in Indonesia's Democracy," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 8, no. 2 (December 2020): 226–56, https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v8i2.7146.

[61] Roberta Medda-Windischer, Kerstin Wonisch, and Alexandra Cosima Budabin, *Religious Minorities in Pluralist Societies* (Brill, 2023), https://brill.com/display/title/59466.

The argument remains context-bound. The enabling role of Pancasila presupposes the existence of a political culture in which constitutional legitimacy is broadly affirmed and religious authority retains cross-sectarian credibility. In settings where constitutional trust is eroded or politicised along sectarian lines, similar patterns may not obtain.[62] Comparative research across different Indonesian provinces and other Muslim-majority constitutional systems would clarify the conditions under which constitutional pluralism facilitates rather than constrains Islamic normativity.[63] Nonetheless, the present analysis demonstrates that Islamic political thought can be articulated within a plural constitutional order in ways that are structurally post-sovereign yet normatively substantive, reframing Pancasila as a constitutive horizon of political imagination rather than a peripheral legal constraint.

Conclusion

This study examined how Islamic political thought is expressed where sovereignty is not the primary horizon of political aspiration, how religious authority regulates Sunni–Shia coexistence, and how Pancasila structures the public articulation of Islamic normativity. The analysis demonstrates that these dimensions converge in an empirical setting where political ordering unfolds without sovereign ambition yet remains normatively consequential. Rather than orienting toward state transformation, political reasoning operates through relational authority, communal mediation, and constitutional embeddedness.

First, Islamic political articulation in this context decouples normative authority from institutional supremacy. Political agency is exercised through ethical governance within civil society rather than through claims to supreme rule. Second, sectarian plurality is

[62] Amal, "Anti-Shia Mass Mobilization in Indonesia's Democracy: Godly Alliance, Militant Groups and the Politics of Exclusion."

[63] Alexander R. Arifianto, "Practicing What It Preaches? Understanding the Contradictions between Pluralist Theology and Religious Intolerance within Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (December 2017): 241–64, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.241-264.

stabilised by recognised religious figures whose legitimacy derives from genealogical standing and sustained moral credibility. Their authority performs a regulatory function that contains doctrinal divergence without dissolving it. Third, Pancasila provides the constitutional vocabulary that renders Islamic commitments civically legitimate. Constitutional belonging and religious fidelity are enacted as compatible orientations, reducing incentives to translate theological difference into rival political projects.

These findings contribute to extending Islamic political theory beyond state-centric paradigms. They demonstrate that Islamic politics can be publicly authoritative without aspiring to sovereignty, and that constitutional pluralism can enable rather than constrain religious normativity. Mediated authority and constitutional embeddedness emerge as co-constitutive mechanisms of political order in plural Muslim societies.

The argument remains context-sensitive. Its durability depends on sustained legitimacy of religious elites and continued trust in the constitutional framework. Comparative research across regions with differing authority structures and levels of sectarian polarisation would clarify the broader applicability of this model, particularly under conditions of generational change and digital religious contestation. Nonetheless, the case analysed here shows that Islamic political thought without sovereignty constitutes a distinct and theoretically significant mode of political imagination within plural constitutional orders.

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