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The Role of Religion in Strengthening Democratic Values in Indonesia Based on Pancasila: A Qualitative Library Research Study.

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ABSTRACT *This study aims to analyze the role of religion in strengthening democratic values in Indonesia based on Pancasila. Indonesian democracy is not only oriented toward a political system but also requires moral and spiritual foundations in order to function in a just and civilized manner. This research employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method, with data obtained from various relevant sources such as books, scientific journals, and official documents. The findings indicate that religion has a significant influence on strengthening democracy through three main roles: as a source of moral values that guide political behavior in accordance with ethics and justice; as a shaper of civic awareness characterized by responsibility, honesty, and tolerance; and as a social adhesive that maintains harmony in a plural society. These findings affirm that democracy in Indonesia cannot be separated from religious values, which are an integral part of national life. The study concludes that religion plays an important role in maintaining the quality of democracy by instilling values of justice, humanity, and tolerance, as well as preventing the misuse of political freedom for practical interests. Therefore, the integration of religious values and democratic principles is essential for achieving a just and dignified social order.*

Keywords : Religion, Strengthening, Democratic Values, Indonesia, Pancasila

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and democracy has become an increasingly relevant topic in the study of political science and religion, particularly in countries with religious diversity such as Indonesia (Lieberman & Tilles, 2026). Although many studies suggest that religion can serve as a source of moral values and social strength to reinforce democracy (Chaudhary et al., 2025), recent developments indicate a new dynamic in which religion may also function as an instrument of politicization that triggers fragmentation and polarization. For instance, The politicization of Islam frequently emerges in electoral contests in Indonesia and has the potential to cause social disintegration if not properly managed (Tønnessen & al-Nagar, 2024). Meanwhile, a study on the interaction between religion and politics in Indonesia (2024) notes that although religion influences

public policy and political parties, challenges related to pluralism and tolerance remain unresolved sources of tension.

Democracy, as a system of government that places sovereignty in the hands of the people, requires active participation, equality, and respect for individual rights (Kuswanto & Kurniawan, 2025). In the context of national life, democracy is not merely understood as a political mechanism, but also as a set of values that must be internalized within society. In Indonesia, a country with high religious diversity, the relationship between religion and democracy is both important and complex (Riadi et al., 2026; Sulaiman et al., 2025). Religion plays a strategic role in shaping public morality, social ethics, and societal value orientation (Anshori & Wasehudin, 2024; Kumar et al., 2022). Religious values such as justice, honesty, tolerance, and respect for others are fundamentally aligned with democratic principles (Anshori, 2026; Hadiyanto et al., 2025). Therefore, religion can function as a moral foundation that strengthens healthy and civilized democratic practices. On the other hand, narrow and exclusive interpretations of religion may generate tension and even conflict, thereby hindering the process of democratization.

In practice, the dynamics of the relationship between religion and democracy in Indonesia reflect a tension between political interests and religious values (Sukidin et al., 2025). Religion is often used as a tool of political legitimacy (Manby, 2025), which may lead to social polarization. This phenomenon is evident in various political contests that utilize religious identity as a means of mass mobilization. Such conditions indicate that the role of religion in democracy is not always constructive, but can also become a source of disintegration if not properly managed.

In addition, globalization and the rapid flow of information have influenced how society understands religion and democracy (Luan et al., 2026). The emergence of diverse religious narratives in digital public spaces requires adequate literacy so that society is not easily influenced by provocative or intolerant messages. In this regard, the role of religious leaders, educational institutions, and the government is crucial in fostering a moderate and inclusive understanding of religion.

Recent studies also highlight the tension between religion as a noble public value and its tendency to be used as a tool of identity-based political strategy (Martin & Cleveland, 2024). For example, the study “Shifting from Religious Populism to Authoritarian Populism” (2025) shows that political elites sometimes adapt religious discourse for pragmatic legitimacy rather than ethical purposes. On the other hand, other research emphasizes that religious moderation is essential to ensure that religion remains a social unifier rather than a divider.

However, there remains a research gap that has not been adequately addressed: few studies systematically and comprehensively analyze how religious values can be internalized into democratic practices, and how value conflicts between religious and democratic principles are managed in the contemporary Indonesian context. In addition, there is inconsistency in the literature, where some emphasize religion as a moral foundation of democracy, while others criticize its instrumentalization in practical politics.

This study aims to address the following questions: How does religion play a role in strengthening Indonesia’s democratic system, and under what conditions can religious values serve as a reinforcing rather than divisive force in democracy? The main objective is to analyze the dynamics and conditions in which religion functions as a moral and social pillar supporting democracy, as well as to identify the risks of distorted religious politicization. This study is situated in the contemporary Indonesian context, with units of analysis focusing on religious values and democratic practices in political life, public policy, and civic attitudes.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in the conceptual analysis and in-depth understanding of the role of religion in strengthening Indonesia's democracy, rather than in the collection of field-based empirical data. The qualitative method enables the researcher to explore meanings and values embedded in texts, documents, and scientific literature in a contextual, reflective, and interpretative manner.

The research was conducted through several stages. First, data collection involved gathering literature sources, including primary sources such as books, scientific journal articles, previous research findings, and policy documents related to the theme of religion and democracy. The literature was selected purposively based on relevance, recency (within the last ten years), and the academic authority of the authors. Second, data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques, which involve examining the content and meaning of various texts to identify patterns, themes, and conceptual relationships between religion and democracy. This analytical process consisted of three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

In the context of library-based research, the researcher serves as the main instrument who interprets the data through theoretical understanding and critical reflection on the sources being examined. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing findings from different but relevant literature, as well as referring to established theories of democracy and religious ethics from recognized scholars. In addition, data validity was strengthened through repeated reading and cross-referencing among sources to ensure consistency of meaning and accuracy of interpretation.

This study was conducted over a period of one week, with a focus on the context of post-reform Indonesian democracy, particularly in the 2015–2025 period. Thus, the literature review method is considered reliable and valid because it provides a deep analytical framework for examining existing texts and academic discourse, while also enabling the researcher to construct new conceptual understandings of how religion functions as a moral and social force in strengthening national democracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study indicate that religion plays an important role in providing a moral foundation for democratic practice in Indonesia. Religious values such as justice, honesty, and responsibility function as ethical guidelines in political and governmental life. Democracy without a moral foundation tends to produce uncontrolled freedom and may lead to social injustice. Religion functions as a moral regulator that guides citizens' behavior in accordance with humanitarian principles and public ethics. Thus, religion serves not only as a source of spirituality but also as a foundation for democratic ethics.

The findings also show that religious values contribute significantly to strengthening social cohesion in Indonesia's plural society. Religion encourages tolerance, mutual respect, and social solidarity, which are essential for maintaining harmony in a Pancasila-based democratic system. When religion is understood in a substantive manner emphasizing compassion, justice, and humanity, it functions as a social adhesive that supports democratic stability. Conversely, when religion is reduced to a political symbol, it tends to generate polarization and social fragmentation.

Furthermore, religion functions as a source of public ethics that shapes both individual and collective behavior in national life. This is reflected in increasing awareness of integrity, accountability, and justice in democratic processes such as elections and public policy formulation. In this sense, religion operates not only as a belief system but also as a social force that enhances the quality of democracy. However, the results also reveal an ambivalent function of religion in democracy. While it strengthens social cohesion, it may also trigger conflict when utilized for political interests. The politicization of religion, particularly through the use of religious symbols and narratives in electoral contests, contributes to social polarization and weakens democratic inclusivity and equality.

The study further finds that the politicization of religion is a major challenge in the relationship between religion and democracy (Jungkunz et al., 2023). The use of religious identity in political contests often shifts religion from a moral value system into a pragmatic political instrument, thereby reducing democracy to identity-based loyalty rather than rational public deliberation (Toyibah & Riyani, 2025). In addition, the results indicate that strengthening democracy based on religious values requires comprehensive efforts, particularly through moral education and religious moderation. The internalization of religious values must be inclusive and contextual so that religion functions as a universal value system that enriches democratic life rather than dividing society. This can be supported through civic education, moderate religious institutions, and strengthening ethical political awareness.

The findings also show that the development of digital technology and social media has contributed to the rapid spread of diverse religious narratives, including exclusive and intolerant interpretations. Limited digital and religious literacy increases public vulnerability to misinformation and hate speech based on religion, which poses challenges to democratic stability in a plural society. Overall, the results demonstrate that the relationship between religion and democracy is dialectical. Religion has the potential to strengthen democracy through moral values and social solidarity, but it can also weaken democratic life when misused for political interests. Therefore, religion and democracy must be harmonized so that both function as mutually reinforcing elements in national life.

Finally, the study finds that religion plays a dynamic and contextual role in democracy. It functions as a constructive force when its values are applied in an inclusive and collective-oriented manner, but it may also become a source of social tension if not properly managed.

Discussion

This study highlights that religion, particularly Islam as the majority religion in Indonesia, plays a fundamental role in strengthening the moral and ethical foundations of democratic life. Democracy, as a system that emphasizes popular participation, freedom of expression, and equality, risks losing its substantive meaning if it is detached from strong moral values. In the Indonesian context, which is characterized by ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, religion serves as a vital source of values that reinforces social cohesion and collective solidarity.

Islam in Indonesia is widely recognized for its moderate and inclusive character. As emphasized by Azra (2017), Indonesian Islam tends to engage constructively with various social and political systems, including democracy (Mu'alimin et al., 2026). This characteristic enables Islam to actively contribute to the formation of an ethical and civilized political culture. Core Islamic values such as justice, consultation, and trustworthiness are not only religious principles but also universal values that align closely with democratic ideals.

In line with this, Effendy (2018) argues that the relationship between Islam and democracy in Indonesia is not antagonistic but rather symbiotic (Muthohirin, 2025). Islam provides an ethical and moral framework that enriches democracy, while democracy offers a space for equal participation and expression of Muslim communities in public life. Therefore, the internalization of religious values through education, preaching, and public policy can strengthen democracy, making it not merely procedural but also substantive.

Islamic education plays a strategic role in the internalization of democratic values. Maulana (2024) notes that contemporary Islamic education has evolved from merely transmitting religious doctrine to becoming a medium for forming democratic, critical, and responsible citizens. Within Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs and pesantren, values of justice, respect for differences, and dialogue are not only taught theoretically but also practiced in daily life, making them effective arenas for democratic social learning.

In addition, the application of Islamic values in political life further demonstrates the synergy between religion and democracy. Mujani and Liddle (2019) show that the majority of Indonesian Muslims support democracy, as it is perceived to be compatible with Islamic moral principles such as justice and deliberation (Shin et al., 2024). This indicates that democracy is not viewed as a threat to religious values but rather as a legitimate instrument for articulating aspirations while maintaining moral integrity in political life. However, a contextual and open understanding of Islam remains essential to prevent exclusivist interpretations that may undermine democratic values.

A key challenge identified in this study is the emergence of narrow and exclusive religious interpretations that are sometimes used to justify intolerant or anti-democratic actions. The rise of excessive religious identity politics may weaken the quality of democracy if it is not balanced with moderate and inclusive religious education. Therefore, strengthening Islamic education that emphasizes rationality, tolerance, and national unity is essential to prevent social polarization and maintain national harmony.

Furthermore, Islamic philosophical principles such as consultation and justice serve as foundational values in building a moral democracy. Rijal and Pranajaya (2025) argue that consistent implementation of these principles in political life can produce a more transparent, accountable, and corruption-resistant democratic system. This is particularly relevant for Indonesia, which continues to face challenges such as corruption and weak accountability. In this sense, Islamic values function as a moral control mechanism in political practice.

In the educational context, Emphasizes that Islamic educational institutions have great potential to instill democratic values through participatory approaches. Madrasahs and pesantren can serve as practical arenas where students learn dialogue (Riadi et al., 2026), respect differences of opinion, and engage in collective decision-making. This reinforces the view that Islamic education not only develops spiritual dimensions but also equips learners with social and political competencies aligned with democratic principles (Faizudin et al., 2025).

The importance of democratic management in Islamic education institutions is also emphasized by Latifah (2025), who highlights that leadership models based on deliberation, openness, and collective responsibility can strengthen democratic character among students. In this sense, education not only transmits values but also models them through institutional practices, thereby fostering individuals with integrity, openness, and the ability to live in a plural society.

The multicultural and plural context of Indonesian society requires that religion and democracy function in harmony rather than opposition. A study on Islamic Education Management in Promoting Multiculturalism and Democratic Harmony (2025) emphasizes that

Islamic education plays a crucial role in fostering tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect as foundations for social harmony. This is particularly important in addressing threats such as intolerance, extremism, and national disintegration that may arise when democracy is not grounded in moral values.

Overall, the findings of this study affirm that religion is not an obstacle to democracy. On the contrary, it serves as a moral foundation that supports the development of a healthy and civilized democratic system. Through education, religious preaching, and social practice, Islamic values can be integrated into a political system that is just, open, and participatory. This study also contributes to the development of a contextual Islamic education theory that aligns with the dynamics of modern democracy. The synergy between religion and democracy thus offers a strong hope for the realization of a humane, just, and harmonious Indonesian society in national and state life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that religion plays a fundamental role in building and strengthening democratic values in Indonesia. Through the internalization of moral teachings such as justice, deliberation, and responsibility, religion particularly Islam serves as a source of public ethics that supports democratic life. The findings of the literature review indicate that these values are not in opposition to the democratic system; rather, they enrich its practice by making it more civilized and oriented toward social welfare. In this regard, religion functions as a moral force that ensures democracy operates within ethical and humanitarian boundaries. In addition, Islamic education plays a significant role in instilling democratic values within society. Through participatory learning processes, Islamic education fosters the development of citizens who are tolerant, critical, and respectful of diversity. Recent literature shows that the integration of democratic values into Islamic education strengthens national consciousness while maintaining a balance between civil liberties and moral responsibility. Therefore, Islamic education is not only a means of spiritual development but also a strategic instrument for strengthening the foundation of democracy in Indonesia. This study also opens opportunities for further empirical research on the implementation of religious values in political and educational practices. Future research is encouraged to conduct field studies on how Islamic educational institutions apply democratic values within their curricula and governance systems. Moreover, the implications of this study emphasize the need for synergy among religious leaders, educational institutions, and policymakers in realizing a democracy grounded in moral and spiritual values. Through such collaboration, Indonesian democracy is expected to be not only politically stable but also ethically and spiritually dignified.

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