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Sacred Streets and Islamic Devotion in Urban Indonesia Identity Politics and Religious Authority Contestation

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Abstract

Islamic ritual practice in Indonesia increasingly occupies streets, sidewalks, and other urban spaces, turning the regulation of sacred space into a question of religious authority and public order. This study examines the Tadarus on the Road controversy in Banten Province as a collision between two regimes for producing urban space. Drawing on Lefebvre, it conceptualises Institutional Spatial Purism as the logic through which formal authorities seek to separate sacred practice from functionally secular space, and Performative Spatial Populism as the logic through which religious actors sacralise public space through disciplined collective presence. The study employs a qualitative embedded case design centred on Banten, supplemented by contextual comparison with street-based Islamic practices in other Indonesian settings. Data derive from participant observation, semi-structured interviews, digital ethnography, and documentary analysis of MUI Fatwa No. 2 of 2022. The findings show that embodied devotional practices transform public space into symbolic religious territory; formal religious authority is challenged by alternative sources of legitimacy grounded in visibility and mobilisation; the restrictive fatwa generated organised resistance rather than straightforward compliance; and the contrasting Gorontalo case suggests that street devotion need not produce institutional rupture where prior authority contestation is absent. The study conceptualises these dynamics through an Authority Displacement Loop, showing how spatial occupation, institutional intervention, and mediated counter-mobilisation can interact in contemporary Muslim public life.

1. Introduction

The deprivatization of religion, meaning the structural reversal of modernity's push to confine faith to private life stands out as a defining sociological shift of the current century Cassanova's [1] Across vastly different geographies, religion has firmly reasserted its place in public life. This return relies less on the mere persistence of belief than on the active occupation of physical and symbolic spaces. within Lefebvre's [2] demonstrated, space is never inert. Competing social actors constantly produce, dispute, and invest it with meaning, etching their claims directly onto the built environment. When religious communities claim public streets for devotion, they are doing much more than worshiping. They are actively contesting how urban life itself is organized. This dynamic takes on particular weight in postcolonial Muslim-majority societies, where the boundaries separating faith, culture, and political claim-making have always been intentionally porous rather than accidentally blurred [3]

In Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, the outward expansion of religious symbolism has accelerated dramatically since the fall of the New Order. The rapid growth of dakwah jalanan (street preaching), hijrah communities, and networked Islamic lifestyle initiatives signals a much broader structural shift. Mosques and pesantren now share the stage with open urban venues, digital platforms, and spontaneous gathering sites as the primary arenas for Muslim public life [4, 5] These movements thrive within a democratizing political climate, one that has liberalized religious expression while simultaneously sharpening identity-based competition [6, 7]

The phenomenon of *Tadarus on the Road* captures the friction of this shift perfectly. Erupting during Ramadan 2022 in Yogyakarta, this mass recitation of the Qur□an on public sidewalks quickly spread to cities like Banten, Bandung, Bogor, and Pekanbaru. To its supporters, claiming the sidewalk for scripture readings is an act of syiar (public propagation). They view it as cultivating *bumi al-Qur□an* (Qur□anic ground) a necessary, highly visible assertion of Muslim presence in urban settings [8, 9] Critics, however, see the movement very differently. Many mainstream ulama argue that the practice directly violates the adab (etiquette) required for handling scripture, exposing the mushaf to the noise, vehicular exhaust, and ritual impurity of the street. From this perspective, reading on the asphalt strips away sanctity rather than producing it [10, 11]

The conflict reached a breaking point when the Banten chapter of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) issued Fatwa No. 2 of 2022. The council classified sidewalk *tadarus as makruh* (discouraged), warning that under aggravating conditions, the practice could even become haram (forbidden). Rather than settling the debate, the ruling poured fuel on the fire. Practitioners and their allies openly defied the fatwa. They fought back with accusations of Islamophobia, tapping into Islamic populist rhetoric to actively undercut the legitimacy of formal religious bodies [12] Ultimately, the episode laid bare a deep crisis of arbitration. The decrees of established institutions no longer serve as the unquestioned final word on public religious truth. Today, formal councils are forced to compete directly with street-level actors and the relentless, amplifying power of digital virality.

In the post-Reformasi era, the commodification of Islamic identity has spawned a massive market for visible piety. This phenomenon is inextricably bound to electoral politics, consumer culture, and ideological posturing [13, 14] When Islamic symbols appear in public spaces, they do heavy lifting across multiple fronts. They act as expressions of genuine devotion, calculated market strategies, and overt political signals all at once, making any single-cause explanation woefully inadequate [15–17] Despite this complexity, the institutional side of the story is still largely overlooked in current scholarship. We still know very little about exactly how formal legal instruments, like fatwas, collide with and shape grassroots spatial practices on the ground.

Consequently, this article addresses a highly specific gap in the current literature. Previous studies have certainly done the heavy lifting of mapping digital populism, platform-driven authority, festival piety, and state regulation of Muslim environments [18–21] Yet, we still lack any analysis of direct spatial-theological conflicts the exact moments when formal institutional fatwas crash head-on into grassroots street occupations.

This blind spot becomes especially clear when we examine the two fields of study that come closest to the topic. Research on fatwa reception generally focuses on how communities absorb, endorse, and mobilize around institutional rulings [22] completely ignoring instances of organized, public repudiation. Conversely, research into religious spatial politics tends to concentrate on segregation, state control, and the physical inscription of Muslim spaces [20, 23–25] This leaves the raw clash between institutional

fiqh and devotional street occupation totally unexplored. Ultimately, these two bodies of literature simply talk past one another.

Because of this disconnect, most existing research treats public space as little more than a passive stage where religious actors happen to operate, or reduces it entirely to a tool for market commodification and electoral signaling. This approach completely overlooks the theological and physical mechanics required to actually produce, claim, and fiercely defend sacred ground. The Banten controversy provides exactly the missing case study needed to understand this dynamic. In this instance, a fatwa was deployed not as quiet legal advice, but as an overt demand for spatial jurisdiction. It was immediately met by the counter-claim of an organized mass movement, one determined to secure the concrete sidewalk as a legitimate arena for Muslim devotion

At the heart of this sociological problem is a complex feedback loop. When public spaces are fiercely repurposed into sacred territories, it both triggers and reflects a deep fracturing of Muslim religious authority, driven by democratic populism and media saturation. To properly understand this shift, we have to discard tired binaries like traditional versus modern or moderate versus radical. We need instead to focus on the raw, spatial, and performative mechanisms that actors use to construct, challenge, and rebuild authority in real time.

The value of this inquiry lies in three distinct areas. Empirically, it captures a mode of religious contestation fought over physical ground, pushing beyond the usual focus on texts or screens. On a practical level, it equips policymakers, urban planners, and religious councils with the precise analytical vocabulary needed to address a type of conflict they face daily but struggle to define. Theoretically, the research broadens comparative debates on deprivatization. It identifies a disruptive, spatial form of religious resurgence that Casanova's classic model which largely envisions a deliberative, civil entry into the public sphere simply fails to anticipate.

Ultimately, this article breaks new ground by pivoting away from the heavily saturated study of digital religion to confront direct, spatial-theological clashes. We frame this collision by pitting Institutional Spatial Purism (the protectionist logic of formal institutions) directly against Performative Spatial Populism (the logic of populist mobilization). Viewed through this lens, the study demonstrates how contemporary religious authority is increasingly forged through sheer public visibility and spatial sovereignty, bypassing traditional clerical legitimacy entirely [24, 26]

This study pursues two primary objectives. First, it aims to dissect the sociological anatomy of the Tadarus on the Road phenomenon in Banten, treating it as a prime example of spatial-theological conflict between street-level religious actors and formal religious authorities. Second, it seeks to map the specific mechanisms that allow street-based piety to function as performative religiosity, counter-hegemonic resistance, and identity politics within Indonesia's fiercely contested urban public sphere.

2. Literature Review

Three debates frame the present study: the performativity of contemporary Muslim piety, the spatial politics of religion, and the fragmentation of religious authority under conditions of media saturation. Recent scholarship published between 2022 and 2025 clusters around five distinct streams that cut across these debates.

The first stream examines digital Islam and how platform algorithms are completely reordering religious authority.Zaid et al. [21] reveal that a new wave of media-savvy Muslim influencers has taken over interpretive roles previously held by credentialed scholars. Their legitimacy relies heavily on narrative charm and audience metrics instead of formal juridical training or classical transmission chains. Looking specifically at Indonesia,Hannan and Mursyidi [19] track how intense social media engagement has deeply fractured religious authority from within. The result is a crowded arena where countless actors claim interpretive power all at once, leaving no single institution capable of enforcing consensus.Kholidi et al. [27] apply this framework to youth movements, whileNaamy [28] and.Yazid et al. [29] document how established clerics are fighting back to reclaim their lost digital territory.

A second body of literature tackles institutional and traditional authority on its own terms. Faisal et al. [30] argue that the kiai (traditional scholars) still wield considerable influence over religious moderation, especially when state initiatives blend with cultural approaches. Anwar et al. Anwar et al. [22] look closely at how a women's pesantren community responded to an MUI fatwa. Their findings are highly instructive for our present case: rather than defiance, they document eager acceptance, solidarity, and active mobilization in support of the institutional ruling.

A third stream focuses on how the urban Muslim middle class increasingly aestheticizes its piety. Faiz et al. [18] analyze Indonesian piety festivals such as Puteri Muslimah Indonesia, Muslimah Preneur, and Duta Santrimframing them as stages where social class and Islamic norms are actively negotiated through public spectacle. In these settings, piety is carefully curated and put on display rather than quietly internalized. This exhibition carries a distinct class undertone, subtly reinforcing social hierarchies under the banner of religious devotion. Similarly, Marhumah et al. [31] demonstrate how Salafi study groups shape both individual and collective pious expressions to solidify social identity and secure public engagement. Highlighting the commercial aspect of this trend, Mudasiru [32] documents the rise of a spiritual marketplace where devotional goods are openly traded.

A fourth line of inquiry isolates urbanity itself as the primary variable. Setiawati et al. [33] establish that urban da□wah now operates in a landscape where singular religious authority has entirely collapsed. To survive, preachers must constantly adapt their actors, messaging, and media formats to reach populations that are pluralistic, highly individuated, and inherently resistant to inherited deference.

The final stream addresses the spatial politics of religion. Examining the People's Republic of China,McCarthy [20] illustrates how aggressive state narratives and assimilationist policies can forcibly remake a city rooted in Muslim identity. The result is a sharp collision between the government's official spatial design and the messy reality of lived religious experience. Shifting the focus to Britain and other contexts,Tahar et al. [25] andKalay [23] explore issues of spatial exclusion, segregation, and identity

among Muslim minority populations. To capture these dynamics globally,Morrison [24] proposes "religeopolitics" an analytical framework specifically tuned to the affective, spatial dimensions of faith. Finally,Jarrah et al. [26] map how religious inscriptions across Jordanian cities actively produce a sense of vernacular identity and urban belonging. Table 1 breaks down these five streams, summarizing their core contributions and identifying exactly what they leave out of the frame.

Table 1
Research streams, established findings, and the unexamined intersection

Research stream	Representative studies	What it establishes	What it leaves unexamined
Digital Islam and platform authority	[19, 21, 27–29]	Authority migrates from credentialed scholars to media-fluent actors; legitimacy accrues through reach and affect	Treats the screen as the arena; offline territorial claim-making falls outside the frame
Institutional and traditional authority	[22, 30]	*Kiai* authority remains consequential for moderation; communities respond to MUI rulings through solidarity and social action	Documents compliance with a fatwa rather than organised defiance of one
Performative and middle-class piety	[18, 31]	Public piety is a cultivated social project of spectacle, class distinction, and collective agency	Bounded and permitted venues; no jurisdictional trespass on regulated space
Urban *da□wah*	[33]	Urbanity dissolves the monopoly of a single religious authority and compels adaptation of actors and media	Diagnoses the condition without tracing a concrete institutional collision
Spatial politics of religion	[20, 23–26]	Religious conflict is spatial conflict; official representations of space collide with lived religious space	Concentrates on state control, segregation, and inscription rather than on *fiqh* against occupation
Street occupation versus fatwa	This study	—	The intersection itself remains unoccupied

Taken together, this body of work has advanced the field considerably. It has, however, been organised around a screen, a stage, and a state rather than a street. Authority fragments online; piety is performed at bounded festivals; governments regulate from above; and where compliance with religious rulings is studied, it is compliance that is found. What remains conspicuously absent is the case in which a formal juridical instrument issued by an established religious institution collides directly with a mass occupation of physical public space, and loses.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a qualitative embedded case study design following Yin's [34] framework, in which a primary case and a set of contextual secondary cases are examined across multiple levels of analysis simultaneously: the movement level, the actor level, and the institutional-authority level. An embedded design was selected because spatial contestation of this kind cannot be reduced to a single analytic unit. The practice is enacted by bodies, organised by institutions, contested by juridical bodies, and circulated by media, and an adequate account must hold these registers together rather than isolate one.

3.2 Research Site and Case Selection

The primary research site is Banten Province, specifically the greater Serang metropolitan area, where the *Tadarus on the Road* controversy reached its most institutionally consequential form with the issuance of MUI Fatwa No. 2 of 2022. Banten was selected purposively because it combines three analytically necessary features that do not co-occur elsewhere in the national field: mass mobilisation operating at scale, formal institutional intervention through a restritcive fatwa, and organised grassroots refusal of that fatwa. The province thus supplies a complete conflict sequence rather than a fragment of one.

Three contextual secondary cases were incorporated to establish the breadth of street piety forms and to situate Banten within a wider national pattern: *Ruqyah on the Street* at the Barelang Bridge in Batam; *Dakwah on the Street* along Gorontalo's Car Free Day corridor; and comparable activities in Pekanbaru and Bandung. Gorontalo was retained deliberately as a contrasting positive instance, since its trajectory diverges from the Banten pattern and permits specification of the conditions under which street devotion produces cohesion rather than rupture.

3.3 Participants and Key Informants

The Banten case involved eight key informants, aged between 20 and 77 years, selected purposively on the basis of their direct participation in the movement, institutional involvement in the controversy, or relevant public and political role. The sample was constructed to capture perspectives from both formal religious authority and actors involved in or closely connected to street-based religious mobilisation.

The informants comprised four groups. First, two representatives of ulama HS (50) and HI (77), were interviewed to provide the institutional and juridical perspective surrounding the deliberation and issuance of MUI Fatwa No. 2 of 2022. Second, three members of majelis taklim, HS (50), M (56), and MS (57), represented participants and community-based religious networks involved in the wider mobilisation surrounding Tadarus on the Road. Third, two younger participants from santri and youth backgrounds, IR (24) and AS (20), were included to capture the perspectives of younger Muslims involved in contemporary forms of public religious expression. Fourth, one political actor, JR (55), was interviewed to explore the relationship between religious mobilisation, public visibility, and political engagement surrounding street-based Islamic activities.

Informants are identified throughout the manuscript using anonymised codes. The inclusion of actors occupying different institutional, generational, and organisational positions enabled the study to compare competing interpretations of street-based devotion, the MUI fatwa, religious authority, and the legitimate use of urban public space..

3.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2023 with all eight key informants described above. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and addressed participants' involvement in or assessment of *Tadarus on the Road*, their interpretation of the MUI fatwa, their understanding of religious authority, and their views on the legitimate use of urban public space. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis For the secondary cases, digital ethnography traced the movements' documentary footprints across activity videos, *da□wah* posters, national and regional press coverage, and platform debate on YouTube, Instagram, X,clnstitutional documents, principally the text and juridical apparatus of MUI Fatwa No. 2 of 2022, were collected in full.

3.5 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeded through iterative thematic coding using a hybrid inductive–deductive approach, combined with critical discourse analysis of fatwa texts, press narratives, and digital-platform discourse. Initial coding remained open to themes emerging from the empirical material, while subsequent coding was organised around three sensitising dimensions derived from the theoretical framework: spatial practice, referring to how actors use and re-signify public space; authority dynamics, referring to how competing actors claim, negotiate, and contest religious legitimacy; and identity politics, referring to how movements articulate, consolidate, or fracture collective Muslim identities. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the coding process, and emergent interpretations were compared across interviews, observations, institutional documents, and digital materials. Selected interpretations were subsequently tested through member-checking with key informants to assess their empirical plausibility and contextual accuracy.

3.6 Ethical Compliance

The research reported in this article underwent ethical review by the Institute for Research and Community Service (Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat [LP2M]), State Islamic University of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Indonesia. Ethical clearance was granted under reference number 610/Un.17/L.II.3/02.1/07/2022. The institutional review determined that the research complied with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (1975), the guidelines of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS), and the ethical standards of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Informed consent

was obtained from all interview participants prior to audio recording. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. To protect confidentiality, all non-public individual informants are identified using anonymised codes rather than by name. Institutional affiliations are reported only where they are matters of public record. Publicly available digital materials were analysed in aggregate; where individual posts are referenced, only public figures speaking in their public capacity are identified.

4. Results

This section reports the empirical findings in three parts: the organisation and self-understanding of the devotional movement, the fatwa and the response it provoked, and the contrasting Gorontalo trajectory. Interpretation through sociological theory is reserved for Section 5.

4.1 The Organised Anatomy of a Devotional Movement

Field evidence establishes that *Tadarus on the Road* was neither a spontaneous overflow of private devotion nor a purely spontaneous grassroots eruption. The practice originated on the sidewalks of Malioboro, Yogyakarta, during Ramadan 2022 and propagated rapidly to Riau, Bandung, Jakarta, Banten, Bogor, Bekasi, Temanggung, and Martapura in Kalimantan [35–37]. In Banten, mobilisation was driven by a coalition of institutional actors: FSPP, MBB, and networked *majelis taklim* groups. In Bandung, the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera organised Qur□an distribution and sidewalk recitation as part of *Nuzul al-Qur□an* commemorations, with party cadre K describing the activity in a press report as *syiar* and as an organisational statement of Qur□anic presence in urban space [37, 38] In Bogor and Jakarta, thousands of women from *majelis taklim* arranged themselves in ordered rows along pedestrian sidewalks [37]

Participant interviews with members of *majelis taklim* HS (50), M (56), and MN (57) yielded a consistent motivational frame. The streets, as one participant put it, must be occupied so that they are not “dominated by displays of immodesty, permissive dating practices, and spaces perceived as accommodating moral deviance.” Across these interviews, participants also criticised what they described as a tendency to “concealing goodness” and insisting that truth be proclaimed publicly rather than held privately. The formulation is significant: visibility is not treated as a by-product of devotion but as its constitutive requirement.

The secondary cases reinforce the pattern. In Batam, the occupation of the Barelang Bridge for *Ruqyah on the Street* was narrated by practitioners as spatial purification, a reclamation of a site marked by suicides through the sonic and ritual presence of recitation [39] In each instance, as in Banten, site selection was neither incidental nor merely pragmatic. Each case involved the deliberate choice of a secular space whose symbolic transformation could be witnessed and documented.

4.2 The Fatwa and Grassroots Resistance

MUI Banten Fatwa No. 2 of 2022 constitutes the most consequential institutional intervention in the trajectory of the movement. Its juridical reasoning drew on established classical scholarship. Drawing onNawawi's [11] *At-Tibyan* on the ethics of Qur□anic engagement, the council held that recitation on sidewalks offends the *muru□ah* of the Qur□an and risks exposing the *mushaf* to conditions of *hadas*, rendering the practice *makruh* and, under aggravating circumstances, potentially *haram*. The policy institute Lembaga Kajian Anak Bangsa echoed these reservations from a civic angle, asking whether mass mobilisation for street recitation concealed political interests behind a devotional facade. The media channel 2045 TV described the practice as part of a wider trend of exhibiting ritual worship in public space at the expense of its spiritual substance. Local informant MS was blunter: sincere worship, he maintained, does not require dirty streets, and insistence on public visibility produces the impression of *riya□*, contradicting Islamic values that prioritise serenity and sincerity Detiknews [38]

The reception of the ruling produced the opposite of compliance. Across Banten's media environment and on national platforms, the fatwa met organised repudiation. Movement supporters, among them Felix Siauw, dismissed it as evidence of Islamophobia, recasting MUI not as guardian of Qur□anic dignity but as an instrument of anti-Islamic sentiment. Regional clerics aligned with the movement issued counter-statements affirming street recitation as legitimate *syiar*. Banten Pos headlined the episode "Kiai Membangkang MUI" (Religious scholars defy MUI), a formulation that captured the public character of the rupture ([12] Platform circulation amplified the counter-narrative at a scale the fatwa could not approach, with documentation videos travelling alongside condemnations of the ruling and conferring on the movement a form of legitimacy no institutional pronouncement could match.

4.3 The Contrasting Trajectory

Not every instance of street devotion followed the Banten pattern of rupture. Along the Barito road corridor in Gorontalo, *Dakwah on the Street* began in 1989 and has run through annual Ramadan cycles since. Documentary evidence indicates that the practice functioned, at least in part, as a mechanism of conflict resolution between two previously antagonistic neighbourhood groups [40] Rather than hardening communal lines, the activity generated *silaturahmi* and re-established shared use of the corridor as common ground.

5. Discussion

The analysis moves from the bodily production of sacred space, through the mechanism by which institutional authority is challenged, to the two competing spatial logics underlying the controversy, and finally to the implications for theories of deprivatization and the conditions under which street devotion coheres rather than divides

5.1 The Somatic Society and the Production of Sacred Ground

The findings reported in Section 4.1 require a theoretical apparatus capable of explaining not simply what these actors did but how bodies arranged in particular formations on asphalt produced a transformation of spatial meaning. Turner's [41] account of the somatic society supplies it. In the somatic society the body is the primary medium through which social, political, and religious claims are made; it is not a container for belief but the instrument through which belief is performed into social fact. When several hundred participants arrange themselves in disciplined uniform rows along a pedestrian pathway, oriented in a single direction, reciting in coordinated voice, and dressed in recognisably Islamic attire, they enact what this study terms *spatial purification*: a choreographed ritual through which profane space is not merely used for religious ends but reclassified as sacred territory. Uniformity of posture and dress is not incidental aesthetics. It is the mechanism of transformation. Every body seated on the asphalt with an open *mushaf* functions, in Turner's terms, as a unit of disciplined somatic signification, and the aggregate produces a single proposition: this ground is now Qur□anic ground.

Spatial purification operates concurrently as a show of force, a demonstration of numerical, organisational, and symbolic strength within a contested urban environment. The visual repertoire of the movement, documented systematically in photographs circulated by Detik.com, Tribunnews.com, and Republika.co.id, is not a by-product of the devotional act but its political communication. Serried ranks of Muslim bodies on a sidewalk constitute a territorial claim legible to several audiences at once: to co-religionists as evidence of solidarity, to the secular state as a challenge to its management of shared space, and to perceived moral adversaries as a rejoinder to the cultural dominance they are accused of exercising. Piety on these terms ceases to be an intimate transaction between worshipper and God and becomes a visual commodity oriented toward the public gaze for the assertion of collective identity and moral standing [42]. The finding aligns with Faiz et al.'s [18] analysis of festival piety as cultivated public spectacle, while identifying a decisive difference: where the festival is bounded, ticketed, and commercially framed, the street occupation is unbounded, free, and jurisdictionally transgressive. It is spectacle that trespasses.

Discursive framing by movement actors and their high-profile supporters confirms this reading. When the influencer Felix Siauw characterised criticism of sidewalk recitation as Islamophobia, he was not advancing a theological argument. He was deploying what Scott would recognise as a weapon of the symbolically subordinate What Peker and Laxer[43] a move that recasts dispute over spatial practice as evidence of bad faith by the dominant party, disqualifying regulation before its merits can be assessed. The sidewalk becomes, within this frame, a site of existential Muslim presence rather than of regulated public order, and any challenge to that presence becomes prima facie evidence of prejudice. The manoeuvre insulates the practice from critique while amplifying its identity-political charge.

Read together, the evidence reveals that spatial re-signification through bodily discipline follows a consistent three-stage logic. *Occupation* physically claims a secular site through mass devotional presence. *Narration* frames that occupation discursively as religious duty, *syiar*, or moral counter-attack. *Documentation* captures and circulates images that convert an ephemeral spatial act into durable symbolic capital. Media within this circuit is not a neutral conduit reporting on the movement; it is a

component of the movement's mechanism. Without documentation and circulation, spatial purification remains local and temporary. With them, it becomes a replicable template and a nationally legible political statement (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Pamungkas, 2018). This is precisely where the present analysis extends the digital-authority literature. Where Zaid, et.al [21] and Hannan and Mursyidi [19] track authority migrating into digital space, the Banten evidence shows digital circulation functioning as the ratification stage of a claim whose origin and force are territorial.

5.2 The Authority Displacement Loop

The sequence just described instantiates a structural mechanism this study proposes as its principal theoretical contribution: the *Authority Displacement Loop*. The model five analiticaly connected stages. Frist, A community of Muslim actors performs a public devotional practice that generates visibility and popular resonance. Second, A formal religious institution responds with a juridical ruling intended to reassert control over the definition of appropriate sacred practice. Thrid, Movement actors reject the ruling, not by counter-juridical argument but by mobilising a populist counter-narrative that repositions the institution as the transgressor. Fourth, Digital Platform circulation amplifies the emotionally charged counter-narrative to audiences far exceeding the fatwa's reach, conferring distributed popular legitimacy on the movement. Fifth, the institution's authority is then not merely contested but structurally diminished, since subsequent pronouncements carry reduced credibility before a public that has witnessed, and in significant numbers endorsed, successful defiance. The loop resets, and the movement, now demonstrably immune to institutional regulation, repeats and extends the practice.

Political actors are constitutive of this loop rather than incidental to it. PKS cadres organised and publicised Qur□an distribution in Bandung's Dago corridor with explicit reference to *syiar* and *Nuzul al-Qur□an* [38] local politicians normalised street recitation through endorsements asserting that worship may legitimately be performed anywhere. This scaffolding performs a dual function, supplying organisational infrastructure and political cover to the movement while capturing its legitimacy for electoral ends. What Maulana [44] identify as the sacralisation of politics and the politicisation of the sacred operates here with unusual clarity: the sidewalk becomes a site at which devotional practice and electoral mobilisation are rendered structurally inseparable. Rows of Muslim bodies on asphalt, photographed and shared, carry substantial signalling value in Indonesia's competitive post-Reformasi politics [13]

The Authority Displacement Loop

5.3 Two Colliding Spatial Logics: Institutional Spatial Purism versus Performative Spatial Populism

Beneath the surface dispute over a devotional practice lie two irreconcilable logics for the production of urban space, and their identification constitutes the analytical core of this study. Each can be located precisely withinLefebvre [2] triad. The first, which this article terms Institutional Spatial Purism, is the operative logic of conceived space. It is voiced by MUI Banten's fatwa and its scholarly endorsers[11, 45]

but its sociological character exceeds its juridical form. Purism treats the city as an ordered representation in which activities are properly sorted and the sacred is held apart from the profane by design. The classical idiom in which the council reasons the *adab* of scriptural handling, the *muru□ah* owed to the *mushaf*, the danger of *hadas* on the open street, is the local vocabulary of a general impulse: the bureaucratic and scholarly drive to keep space legible, bounded, and pure. On this logic the sidewalk, a zone of traffic and disorder, is categorically unfit for scripture, and the street recitation does not sanctify the street but degrades the sacred object exposed to it. Purism, in short, defends the map drawn by those authorised to draw it.

Against this stands what the article terms Performative Spatial Populism, the operative logic of lived space. It is articulated by the movement's initiators, its supporting *ulama*, and its populist preachers, and its theological idiom the prophetic mandate of *da□wah*, the duty of *syiar*, the conviction that devotion consecrates whatever ground it touches again expresses a broader sociological claim. Populism refuses the planners' compartmentalisation and asserts the right of inhabitants to appropriate the street and charge it with meaning through their own presence. Its instrument is not the text but the body. FollowingNieuwkerk K V.[41] the disciplined arrangement of reciting bodies is the spatial practice through which lived space is seized; the crowd does not petition the conceived order for permission but overrides it by demonstration. The street is not too profane for scripture; the gathered body of the faithful makes it sacred by occupying it. Where Purism defends the map, Populism redraws it from the ground.

The two logics do not disagree merely about a rule. They proceed from opposed answers to a prior question who produces urban space, and by what authority and this is why no ruling could resolve the conflict. The fatwa is an act of conceived space attempting to discipline lived space, and lived space, mobilised at scale and amplified through the media circuit described above, simply declined the discipline. Table 2 sets out the structure of this opposition across the sociological variables that emerged from the coded data.

Table 2
Institutional Spatial Purism and Performative Spatial Populism: A Typology of Contestation over Urban Space

Analytical Variable	Institutional Spatial Purism (Conceived Space)	Performative Spatial Populism (Lived Space)
Lefebvrian register	Representations of space; the abstract order of planners and authorities	Spaces of representation; space as directly inhabited and appropriated
Locus of authority	Institutional and juridical; councils, credentials, formal issuance	Popular and performative; crowd size, viral reach, and the demonstrated capacity to occupy ground
Ontology of public space	Functionally secular and administratively partitioned; the sacred kept apart from the profane	Available for conversion; sacralised by the embodied act of devotion that occupies it
Primary instrument	The authorising text and classical precedent	The disciplined body; coordinated mass presence as spatial practice
Mechanism of spatial claim	Codification, boundary maintenance, and the partitioning of use	Occupation, embodied demonstration, and the visible saturation of a secular site
Mode of legitimation	Textual reasoning and appeal to institutional standing	Numerical presence, bodily discipline, media documentation, populist endorsement
Relation to media	Media as a channel for disseminating a completed ruling	Media as a constitutive component of the spatial claim itself
Response to opposition	Restatement of reasoning and appeal to standing	Reframing of criticism as Islamophobia; disqualification of the critic rather than the argument
Outcome of the encounter	Diminished capacity to regulate subsequent use of space	Consolidated visibility and enhanced capacity to mobilise

Table 2 clarifies why the conflict proved intractable. The two columns do not name positions within a shared field that a superior ruling might reconcile. They name distinct regimes for the production of space, each internally coherent and each generating its own criterion of validity. Purism presupposes a public that accepts the authority of those who represent and regulate space; Populism presupposes a public that accepts embodied occupation as self-authenticating. The fatwa was issued into a field where the second presupposition had already taken hold, and so it did not so much fail as address a jury that had left the room. This displacement, and not any deficiency in the ruling's internal reasoning, accounts for its outcome.

5.4 Deprivatization by Occupation

These findings resonate with, and substantially complicate, Cassanova's [1] thesis on the deprivatization of religion. For Casanova, religion's return to the public sphere across diverse contexts refutes the

secularisation thesis structurally: religion does not recede as modernity advances but reasserts itself as a public force. The Indonesian evidence confirms this trajectory emphatically. *Tadarus on the Road*, *Ruqyah on the Street*, and *Dakwah on the Street* instantiate the deprivatization of Muslim practice across multiple urban settings simultaneously.

The modality, however, differs sharply from the one Casanova's model anticipates. His account emphasises religion's entry into civil society through deliberative and communicative channels, whereby religious actors advance arguments within a public sphere organised around reasoned exchange. The Indonesian case demonstrates entry through bodily spatial occupation, populist counter-authority, and viral identity politics. Religion in the Indonesian public sphere does not deliberate its way back in. It occupies its way back in, and the occupation is devotional, political, and organisational at once. This is deprivatization under the conditions of competitive Muslim-majority democracy, where the boundaries separating religious practice, identity mobilisation, and electoral signalling have collapsed structurally rather than incidentally. The finding refines the comparative literature in a specific direction: analyses that measure religious resurgence by the volume of religious argument in public debate will systematically underestimate resurgences that proceed by territorial claim.

The wider implication for the sociology of religious authority is equally direct. Where Zaid, et.al. 21] and [Hannan and Mursyidi [19] locate the fragmentation of authority in the migration of interpretive practice onto platforms, and McCarthy's [20] locates the constraint on Muslim public expression in state regulatory instruments, the Banten case identifies a third and largely unexamined vector. Authority here was neither dissolved by digital abundance nor curtailed by the state. It was displaced by a rival claim grounded in physical presence, and the displacement was accomplished against, rather than in the absence of, a formal juridical intervention. Public visibility and spatial sovereignty functioned as sources of legitimacy in their own right.

5.5 The Conditions of Cohesion: Interpreting the Gorontalo Contrast

The Gorontalo cases reported in Section 4.3 constrain any totalising reading of street-based Islamic practice as inherently polarising. They do not contradict the Banten analysis. They specify its scope conditions. The determining variable is not public Islamic devotion as such but the presence or absence of prior institutional contestation over religious authority. Where street *da□wah* unfolds within communities characterised by integrated social networks, shared local history, and no competing claim from formal religious institutions, it tends toward cohesion. Where it unfolds within a field already structured by competing factions, formal juridical intervention, and politicised identity claims, as in Banten, it tends toward polarisation and authority crisis. The observation is consistent with Jahroni's (2018) argument that ritual innovation in Indonesian Islam becomes contentious precisely when it intersects unresolved competition over who may regulate collective religious practice, a condition that post-Reformasi institutional fragmentation has rendered structurally endemic rather than episodically exceptional.

The comparison carries a practical corollary. Interventions that target the practice, as the Banten fatwa did, address a symptom while leaving the generative condition untouched. Where authority is already contested, prohibition supplies the movement with the antagonist its counter-narrative requires.

6. Conclusion

Street-based Islamic devotion in Indonesia, as instantiated in *Tadarus on the Road* in Banten, *Ruqyah on the Street* in Batam, and *Dakwah on the Street* across multiple urban sites, is neither private devotion made incidentally public nor a simple expression of Islamist political ambition. It operates as a multi-layered spatial practice that constitutes performative religiosity, counter-hegemonic response to the perceived secularisation of urban space, identity affirmation for Muslim communities under competitive democratic conditions, and authority contestation within a field where formal religious institutions no longer command unquestioned deference.

The study makes three contributions. First, it identifies the Institutional Spatial Purism and Performative Spatial Populism two internally coherent systems of legitimation whose collision cannot be adjudicated juridically, since the disagreement concerns the ontology of sacred space rather than the application of a rule. Second, the study proposses Authority Displacement Loop as the mechanism through which institutional intervention against a visible devotional movement produces the diminution of the intervening institution's own standing. Third, it establishes that deprivatization in competitive Muslim-majority democracies can proceed by occupation rather than deliberation, a modality that comparative theory built on Western cases does not anticipate. The Indonesian sidewalk has become a space of representation in Lefebvre's sense: a site at which competing definitions of the sacred, of religious legitimacy, and of Muslim public identity are produced through struggle. Street piety, on this analysis, is best understood as spatial politics in devotional form.

Two limitations bound these claims. The primary case is situated within the specific institutional and political ecology of Banten Province, and intensive observation centred on Ramadan 2022 and its immediate aftermath, leaving the movement's longer trajectory outside the present analysis. The secondary cases, while analytically productive, were examined through digital ethnography rather than sustained fieldwork, which constrains the depth of contextual interpretation available for them.

Three directions for further research follow. Comparative spatial studies of analogous street piety phenomena in other Muslim-majority democracies, with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Malaysia, and West African contexts offering productive sites, would test the generalisability of the spatial-theological conflict model advanced here. Longitudinal work tracing whether displaced institutional authority recovers, adapts, or continues to erode across successive Ramadan cycles would establish whether the Authority Displacement Loop is self-reinforcing or self-limiting. Methodologically, computational analysis of platform data offers substantial potential for mapping the circulation dynamics that this study has treated qualitatively, and for measuring the reach differential between institutional pronouncements and movement counter-narratives that the present analysis has established descriptively.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate:

The research reported in this article underwent ethical review by the Institute for Research and Community Service (Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat [LP2M]), State Islamic University of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Indonesia, which granted ethical clearance under reference number 610/Un.17/L.II.3/02.1/07/2022. The research was reviewed and considered to comply with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (1975), the guidelines of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS), and the ethical standards of the World Health Organization (WHO). Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants

Consent to publish:

Not applicable. The manuscript contains no identifiable personal information, images, or videos requiring specific consent for publication. Participant quotations are presented in anonymised form.

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Author Contribution

U.H.: Formal analysis; Writing – original draft. K.A.: Formal analysis; Writing – review & editing. E.P.: Investigation; Data collection. A.A.: Investigation; Data collection. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript

Data Availability

The interview and field observation data generated during this study are not publicly available due to the sensitive nature of the material and the confidentiality assurances given to informants, some of whom spoke critically of a public religious authority. Anonymized data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to approval by the ethics review procedures of the State Islamic University of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten. MUI Fatwa No. 2 of 2022, analyzed as a public institutional document, is available from the Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Banten Province.

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Figures

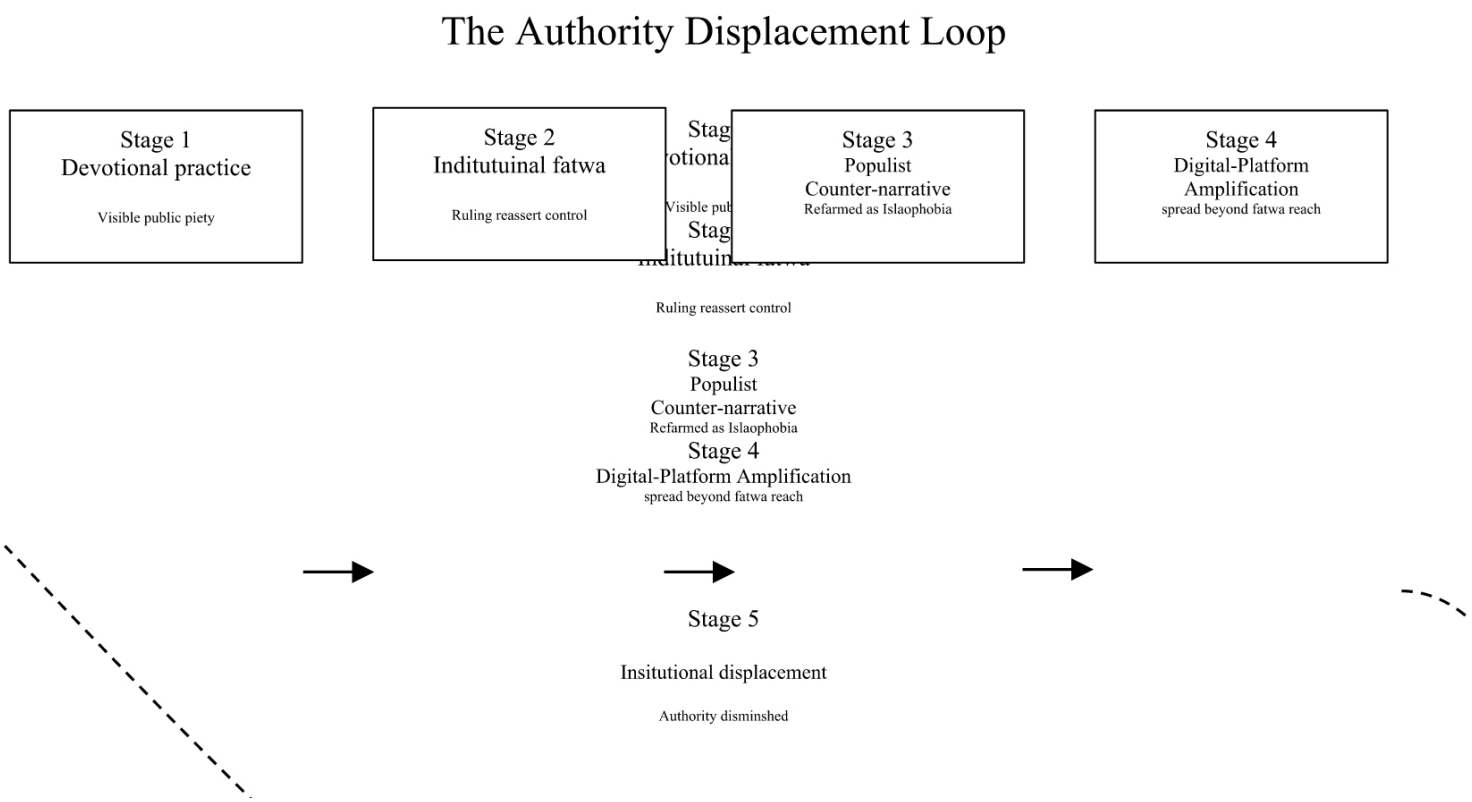


Figure 1

The Authority Displacement Loop. The model depicts a five-stage analytical sequence linking visible devotional practice, institutional intervention, populist counter-narrative, digital-platform amplification, and the displacement or weakening of institutional regulatory authority. The dashed return arrow indicates the possibility that successful resistance to institutional regulation facilitates subsequent mobilisation. The model is derived from the Banten case and is proposed as an analytical mechanism rather than as a universally generalisable causal law