

A Global Scientometric Analysis of Research Trends on Religious Issues in Election Campaigns

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Abstract

This study examines global trends and key topics related to the use of religious issues in election campaigns using a scientometric approach. Literature was collected from the Scopus database and analyzed using VOSviewer, RStudio, and CiteSpace to map the study domain, identify topic frequency, and reveal thematic patterns and research networks. The results of the analysis show that religious issues in election campaigns are most often associated with topics such as elections, Islamism, and party politics, especially in Muslim-majority countries. Political parties play a strategic role in mobilizing religious voters, while social media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and disseminating religious messages widely. This study provides insights for policymakers and practitioners to understand the impact of the politicization of religion on electoral dynamics and social cohesion. However, this study has limitations in terms of data coverage, diverse political contexts, and specific time frames. These findings are expected to form the basis for further in-depth and contextual research on the relationship between religion and politics in the democratic process.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis tren global dan topik-topik kunci terkait penggunaan isu-isu agama dalam kampanye pemilu melalui pendekatan scientometrik. Literatur dikumpulkan dari basis data Scopus dan dianalisis menggunakan VOSviewer, RStudio, dan CiteSpace untuk memetakan domain penelitian dan mengidentifikasi pola tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa isu-isu agama dalam kampanye pemilu paling sering dikaitkan dengan topik-topik seperti pemilu, Islamisme, dan politik partai, terutama di negara-negara dengan mayoritas penduduk Muslim. Partai politik memainkan peran penting dalam menggerakkan pemilih beragama, sementara media sosial juga secara signifikan membentuk opini publik. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan bagi pembuat kebijakan dan praktisi untuk memahami dampak politisasi agama dalam proses pemilihan umum. Batasan studi ini meliputi cakupan data yang terbatas, konteks politik yang beragam, dan fokus pada periode tertentu.

Keywords

Elections, Islamism, Political Parties, Public Opinion, Social Media

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Introduction

The intersection between religion and electoral politics presents a dynamic and often contentious arena within democratic governance. While elections serve as a foundational mechanism for citizen representation (Sørensen & Torfing, 2018), the strategic deployment of religious issues in campaigns can reshape political dynamics, influence group identities, and challenge the integrity of democratic processes (Gherghina & Mişcoiu, 2022). Empirical cases such as Pakistan's electoral instability due to fraud allegations (Begum, 2022) and the polarization

observed in North Sumatra's 2018 regional election (Sembiring et al., 2023) illustrate how religious mobilization can exacerbate social tensions and undermine democratic norms.

This phenomenon is not geographically isolated. In post-Arab Spring contexts, Islamic and secular parties have competed for dominance, revealing fluctuating voter allegiances shaped by religious narratives (Sapronova, 2023). Meanwhile, Western Europe has witnessed a decline in moral traditionalism's electoral relevance, correlating with broader patterns of religious disengagement (Pless et al., 2023). In the United States, ethnic identity intersects with religious framing in campaign messaging, influencing voter preferences on social issues (Bjarnoe et al., 2023). Political advertising and issue-based appeals further demonstrate how religion is tactically employed to mobilize support, though such strategies risk deepening societal divisions (Bjarnoe et al., 2023; Macdonald, 2023).

Beyond electoral strategy, religion shapes broader sociopolitical behavior. Studies have linked religiosity to increased political participation, mediated by psychological constructs such as transcendent accountability and religious political awareness (Jang et al., 2023). Political parties that foreground religious identity often exhibit more inclusive attitudes toward refugees (Schiffer et al., 2023), while politicians' personal religiosity correlates with risk aversion in decision-making (Yadav, 2023). These findings suggest that religious belief systems not only inform voter behavior but also influence elite political conduct and institutional responsiveness.

However, the instrumentalization of religion in campaigns raises normative concerns. Manipulative use of religious rhetoric can threaten democratic principles and religious freedom (Taylorian & Ventura, 2023), marginalize minority groups, and erode pluralistic values (Lawelai et al., 2022). The dual role of religion as a source of civic engagement and a potential vector for exclusion is evident in Nigerian politics, where the church's political involvement has sparked both empowerment and polarization (Oluwanifise, 2023). Moreover, economic security has been shown to foster religious cohesion, which in turn affects political engagement and policy preferences, reinforcing the complex feedback loop between religion, stability, and democratic participation (Huber & Mohamed, 2023).

Recent scholarship has begun to explore how religious discourse is used to signal moral virtue, discredit opponents, and mobilize identity-based support, particularly in regions with strong religious traditions (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2023). Candidates often leverage religious affiliations to shape public perception and influence voter behavior (Taufiq et al., 2022). Yet, despite growing interest, literature remains fragmented, lacking systematic synthesis across contexts and disciplines. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis of global research trends on religious issues in election campaigns.

To address this need, the present study employs a scientometric analysis approach to examine global patterns and thematic developments in the literature. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify trends in topic occurrence and frequency over time, (2) map the domain and network of research topics, (3) reveal thematic clusters through timeline visualization, and (4) offer insights for future research directions. By doing so, this research contributes to a more integrated understanding of how religion operates within electoral politics and informs both academic discourse and policy deliberation across diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Unlike prior narrative reviews and single-country studies, this paper offers a reproducible, large-scale scientometric synthesis that (1) systematically maps global topic clusters

and their temporal evolution, (2) identifies bridging articles and cross-regional linkages that structure the field, and (3) interprets bibliometric patterns using explicitly stated political and communication theories. In short, the novelty lies in combining rigorous scientometric mapping with a theory-driven interpretation that connects structural bibliometric patterns to substantive explanations about politicization and communication processes.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical approaches used to interpret the scientometric patterns. The subsequent section explains the data collection procedures, search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical tools. The following section presents the results of the co-occurrence, cluster, and timeline analyses and discusses their theoretical and practical implications. The final section concludes the paper by addressing key limitations and proposing directions for future research.

Theoretical Framework

To interpret the patterns revealed through the scientometric mapping, this study requires a conceptual lens that can explain why certain topics, regions, and communication dynamics consistently emerge across the literature. While scientometric techniques identify structural properties, such as co-occurrence clusters, citation networks, and temporal bursts, their substantive meaning depends on theoretical frameworks that account for how religious issues become politically salient, how group identities shape electoral behavior, and how media environments amplify these dynamics. Therefore, the next section outlines an integrated theoretical framework that brings together the politicization of religion, social identity theory, and key perspectives from political communication, framing, and media-effects research. This integration not only guides the interpretation of bibliometric structures but also provides the analytical basis for connecting observed research trends to broader processes in religion and electoral politics.

Politicization of Religion in Electoral Strategies

The theory of religious politicization explains how political actors utilize religious symbols, rhetoric, and values to shape political identities and attract support from specific voter groups. This strategy is employed to foster emotional and ideological closeness between candidates and voters, as well as to reinforce belief-based political loyalty. In a global context, this practice can be seen in various cases such as the 2018 North Sumatra regional elections, which showed religious-based polarization (Sembiring et al., 2023), national-religious narratives in Poland and Hungary (Kulska, 2023), and political mobilization by evangelical groups in Brazil (Boas, 2020). In India, the exploitation of communalism has also become an effective electoral instrument (Kamath & Shetty, 2023).

The literature indicates that religious coherence, characterized by strong beliefs and regular participation in religious activities, correlates with increased political participation and the development of consistent voting patterns, particularly in economically stable democracies (Huber & Mohamed, 2023). Furthermore, psychological motivators such as transcendent accountability and religiously based political consciousness act as mediators between religiosity and political behavior (Jang et al., 2023). In the Sub-Saharan context, religious beliefs have been shown to influence attitudes toward social issues and political participation (Asha, 2023). The

political theology approach is also used to understand contemporary populism and ideological movements that rely on emotional appeal for mass mobilization (Martin & Newman, 2023). Thus, the politicization of religion is not only an electoral strategy but also an instrument that can either strengthen or undermine social cohesion, depending on the context in which it is used.

Social Identity and Religious Mobilization

Social identity theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how religious issues in election campaigns shape group identity and influence voter behavior. According to this theory, individuals derive part of their identity from membership in social groups, including religious affiliation, which can influence their political attitudes and preferences (Brown, 2020; Jubba et al., 2020). Campaigns that highlight religious issues tend to reinforce boundaries between “us” (in-group) and “them” (out-group), thereby influencing perceptions of candidates and political parties (Rasul & Asim, 2023).

The interaction between social identity and perceived threats also reinforces this dynamic. For example, American identity and perceived threats from immigrants were found to influence voter behavior in the 2016 US election (Garand et al., 2022). The social identity-based attitude system model shows that the need for distinct identities can drive system-justifying behavior, even among disadvantaged groups (Rubin et al., 2023). Conspiracy theories also serve to fulfill social identity needs such as security and belonging, which ultimately influence political behavior through group loyalty (Robertson et al., 2022). Furthermore, shifts in cultural policy priorities can change voter orientation from economic issues to identity issues, thereby reducing redistributive conflict and strengthening value-based political demands (Bonomi et al., 2021).

Together, politicization and social identity theories supply substantive explanations for why certain topics become focal points of research (actors and identities). Political communication and media-effects frameworks supply the mechanism through which those focal points evolve (frames, platforms, amplification). Using scientometrics to chart where and when these topics appear allows scholars to test whether bibliometric structure maps onto theorized social and political processes, and to identify lacunae where empirical case studies or comparative research are still needed.

Methods

This study uses a scientometric analysis approach to analyze trends and topics of the use of religious issues in election campaigns. This study uses literature sourced from the Scopus database (Hardinda et al., 2025; Lawelai et al., 2024). This research aims to identify influential trends and topics and the development of scientific works in the field. Scopus is widely known for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature in various fields, making it a suitable base for conducting literature reviews on election studies (Abbas et al., 2023). The use of Scopus facilitates detailed examination of the development and dissemination of research results related to the topic of the use of religious issues in election campaigns.

For systematic collection and analysis of relevant literature, the Scopus database is searched, and the resulting dataset is exported in CSV format. This data is then imported into VOSviewer, RStudio, and CiteSpace for visualization and analysis. These tools are an integral part of the methodological framework of scientific review and allow researchers to visualize

patterns, map bibliometric networks, and synthesize data efficiently. The use of VOSviewer, RStudio and CiteSpace helps to improve the understanding of the literature collected (Guo et al., 2023), thus allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of data taken from Scopus. This methodological approach is consistent with standard practices in data collection and analysis in scientometric research and emphasizes the importance of visual tools in data extraction and synthesis.

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology is used to determine the stages of data screening and selection (Wang et al., 2019) Only peer-reviewed papers published in English from 1 January 1980 to 31 December 2023) are included in this review. The selected time frame of 1980-2023 was chosen for two reasons. First, Scopus coverage becomes more consistent after 1980, enabling longitudinal mapping without substantial archival gaps. Second, the late 20th century marks a period in which politicized religion gained increased visibility in both electoral and scholarly arenas, making 1980 a theoretically appropriate baseline for capturing long-term patterns. This criterion ensures the inclusion of high-quality and relevant literature that reflects the current discourse on the use of religious issues in election campaigns. By following PRISMA guidelines, this study provides a transparent and iterative selection process, thereby increasing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

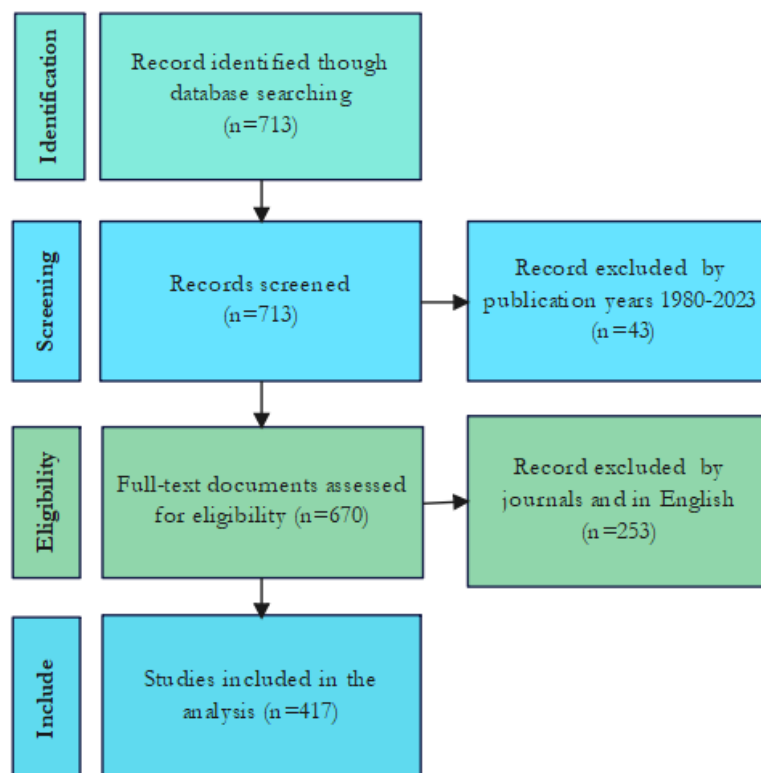


Figure 1. Modified PRISMA charts the article selection process in a systematic review

religious voters (Campbell et al., 2018), and political systems can facilitate or hinder the use of religious issues depending on their structure. Geographical terms such as “Iran”, “Asia”, “Eurasia”, and “Indonesia” highlight regions where religion plays an important role in politics, such as Iran, Asia, and Eurasia, due to religious diversity and complex political dynamics. The use of religion in election campaigns is often studied in the context of democracy and political conflict, highlighting how religion can mobilize support in democratic systems and its potential negative impact in triggering political conflicts.

Table 1 shows that research on the use of religious issues in election campaigns has identified several significant trends. The topic that comes up most often is “Islam”, which has been a major focus since 2014, reflecting the role of Islam in politics. The study also links the use of religious issues to the context of democracy, where the process of elections and political participation is analyzed in relation to religious values and practices. The topics of “Elections” and “Islamism” highlight how religious issues are used specifically in the context of elections. The term “election” began to appear frequently in 2011 and remained relevant until 2018, showing a steady trend in this study. The debate about secularism and religion in politics has been a major concern in recent years.

Table 1. Trend topic

Topic	Frequencies	Year_Q1	Year_Med	Year_Q3
Islam	39	2014	2018	2020
Democracy	24	2012	2018	2020
Elections	21	2011	2013	2018
Political Islam	17	2011	2014	2019
Islamism	17	2014	2018	2020
Election	14	2018	2019	2020
Secularism	12	2011	2012	2014
Arab Spring	9	2012	2013	2017
Religion	8	2010	2014	2018
Political Parties	8	2016	2020	2021
Democratization	7	2011	2012	2014
Populism	7	2012	2016	2018
Ideology	7	2018	2021	2022
Authoritarianism	6	2014	2015	2019
Islamic State	6	2012	2015	2016
Hamas	5	2006	2007	2015
Education	5	2014	2015	2016
Identity	5	2010	2016	2019
Islamic Political Parties	5	2016	2020	2023
Social media	5	2020	2021	2023

The topic of the Arab Spring, especially in the early years after the 2011 and 2012 revolutions, had a significant impact on the study of politics and religion, as well as political changes in the Middle East region. The topics of “Ideology” and “Populism” also experienced an upward trend from 2012 to 2022, indicating that the use of religious issues in election campaigns is often studied in the context of political ideology and populist movements (Kapten, 2020; Khan et al., 2019). Finally, the topic of “Social Media” was most frequently discussed from

2020 to 2023, reflecting the increasing role of social media in political campaigns, including how religious issues are disseminated and used to influence voters (Salahudin et al., 2020).

Religious issues play an important role in election campaigns, influencing political, social, and religious dynamics (Rasul & Asim, 2023). In Latin America, religious discourse on social media is used to emphasize closeness to God, promote traditional morality, and discredit opponents, especially in countries with rising evangelical groups (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2023). The use of religious rhetoric can be a powerful mobilization tool and source of conflict, impacting voting behavior based on a candidate's religious affiliation (Madrid et al., 2022). In addition, the approach to religious communication highlights how exposure to religious messages influences political behavior, with pastors engaging in politics in congregational affairs, attracting and sometimes rejecting individuals based on political involvement in religious settings (Djupe & Neihsel, 2022). Furthermore, the post-9/11 Bush administration discourse shows the influence of religious representation modes in legitimizing military action, showing how political discourse shapes perceptions and actions in times of crisis (Chang & Mehan, 2006).

Table 2. Top 9 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	1980 - 2023
Developing Country	1992	3.61	1992	1998	
Algeria	1992	3.4	1992	2001	
Terrorism	2002	3.5	2002	2007	
National Politics	2002	2.99	2002	2007	
Eurasia	2003	7.95	2003	2008	
Asia	2003	6.94	2003	2008	
Middle East	1992	4.32	2003	2008	
Party Politics	2006	4.57	2006	2011	
Arab Spring	2012	3.81	2012	2018	

Table 2 shows that from 1992 to 2018, the keywords “Developing Country” and “Algeria” showed strong citation strength, indicating a surge in research in the region (Chelala, 1998; Grimaud, 1996). This period was influenced by political and economic transformations, conflicts, and the rise of Islamist movements in Algeria. The keywords “Eurasia” and “Asia” experienced a high spike, indicating a significant increase in research focused on the region (van Klinken, 2008). The Middle East also experiences a strong focus on political issues, conflict, and Islamism, especially in the context of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its impact on regional stability.

The keywords “Terrorism” and “National Politics” experienced a strong surge from 2002 to 2007, reflecting the increased post-9/11 global focus on terrorism (Ali, 2004). This period saw a significant increase in research on national security, anti-terrorism policies, and the domestic political impact of the threat of terrorism. “National Politics” is becoming increasingly important in academic analysis, especially in the context of the state's response to terrorism and maintaining domestic political stability.

“Party Politics” experienced an explosion of 4.57 in power from 2006 to 2011, reflecting a growing interest in the internal dynamics of political parties and their impact on the

broader political system. The period of the “Arab Spring” saw a great focus on revolutions and protests in the Arab world, leading to research on regime change, democratization, and the role of Islamist movements in the political process in the Middle East and North Africa.

Domain of Study and Research Topic Network

This analysis examines the use of religious issues in election campaigns, examining the most frequently cited articles and a significant network of subjects using VOSviewer. The use of religious issues in election campaigns is an important aspect of political strategy, especially in Muslim-majority countries (Table 3). The AKP in Turkey has adopted a majoritarian approach, incorporating elements of Islam to overcome political conflicts (Özbudun, 2014). This strategy has resulted in a strong support base but has also deepened political and social polarization. Understanding the historical background of Islamic radicalism in Indonesia is essential to analyze how religious issues are used in election campaigns (van Bruinessen, 2002).

Table 3. Top 10 Cited Document

Title and Authors	Insight	Citation
AKP at the Crossroads: Erdoğan's Majoritarian Drift (Özbudun, 2014).	The Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey is increasingly adopting a majoritarian and authoritarian approach, characterized by Islamic elements, in dealing with various conflicts and political challenges.	200
Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia (van Bruinessen, 2002).	Radical Muslim groups in Indonesia are mostly derived from genuine Muslim political movements such as Darul Islam and the Masyumi party, as well as more recent transnational Islamic networks.	185
The conditions of Islamist moderation: Unpacking cross-ideological cooperation in Jordan (Clark, 2006).	Cross-ideological cooperation, as demonstrated by the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in The Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP), raises important questions about the significance, conditions, and mechanisms of such cooperation for political liberalization and democratization, as well as its impact on Islamist moderation.	120
Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain (Alvares & Dahlgren, 2016)	Populism mediated by new technologies tends to personalize public spaces and amplify popular engagement, but it has been less successful in promoting democratic values, and more research is needed on the relationship between new media and religious extremism.	102
Islamic Rule and the Empowerment of the Poor and Pious (Meyersson, 2014)	Islamic government increases secular education for women and women's political participation, as well as reducing adolescent marriage in the long run.	83
Winning coalitions and ethno-regional politics: The failure of the opposition in the 1990 and 1995 elections in Côte d'Ivoire (Crook, 1997)	In Ivory Coast, the ruling party retained power after the introduction of multi-party elections by exploiting incumbents and exploiting ethnic and nationalist sentiments, while the opposition failed due to internal divisions and ineffective mobilization strategies.	83
The Emerging Predominant Party System in Turkey (Gumuscu, 2012)	The AKP party in Turkey managed to consolidate its dominance through an initial mobilization cycle, the expansion of core support with material benefits, the delegitimization of the opposition, and the selective use of ideological rigidity and flexibility.	61
Competing populisms in post-authoritarian Indonesia (Hadiz & Robison, 2017)	Populist politics in Indonesia, although increasing, is used to maintain oligarchic dominance rather than carry out systemic transformation.	58
Poverty, inequality, and populist politics in Iran (Salehi-Isfahani, 2009)	Although Ahmadinejad's victory in the 2005 elections was often attributed to rising poverty and inequality, household survey data show that poverty has actually decreased substantially, while inequality has remained relatively constant after the Revolution.	58
Indonesia's Year of Democratic Setbacks: Towards a New Phase of Deepening Illiberalism? (Hadiz, 2017)	The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election showed the decline of democracy in Indonesia through the mainstreaming of conservative Islamic morality and reactionary hyper-nationalism in political discourse.	57

Cross-ideological cooperation in Jordan, particularly by the IAF, can influence political liberalization and Islamist moderation (Clark, 2006). Islamist political parties can adapt their strategies based on the existing political context, including working with other groups to increase their political appeal and expand their support base (Gumuscu, 2012). Understanding the relationship between populism, extremism, and the media is also important, as new technologies can strengthen public engagement but are less successful in promoting democratic values. Social media can be used to mobilize voters through religious messages, but it can also promote extremism and populism that are often at odds with democratic values.

Figure 3 explains the relationship between Islamism and elections which is a complex and important topic, explaining how Islamic political groups utilize elements of religion to garner support from religious voters. This dynamic reveals the intricate interaction between political and ideological forces when Islamic movements are involved in the democratic process, which has an impact on the quality of democracy in a nation (Fox & Menchik, 2023). Furthermore, the interaction between Islamic movements and authoritarian regimes reveals the power dynamics and strategy of opposition in countries under authoritarian governments (Daoud, 2023). Indonesia, with its large Muslim population, serves as a significant case study illustrating how Islamism affects national politics, emphasizing the role of social media in reinforcing Islamic narratives and organizing political campaigns (Salim, 2022). Understanding the relationship between Islamism and religion is essential for understanding the broader role of religion in shaping the political landscape and dynamics.

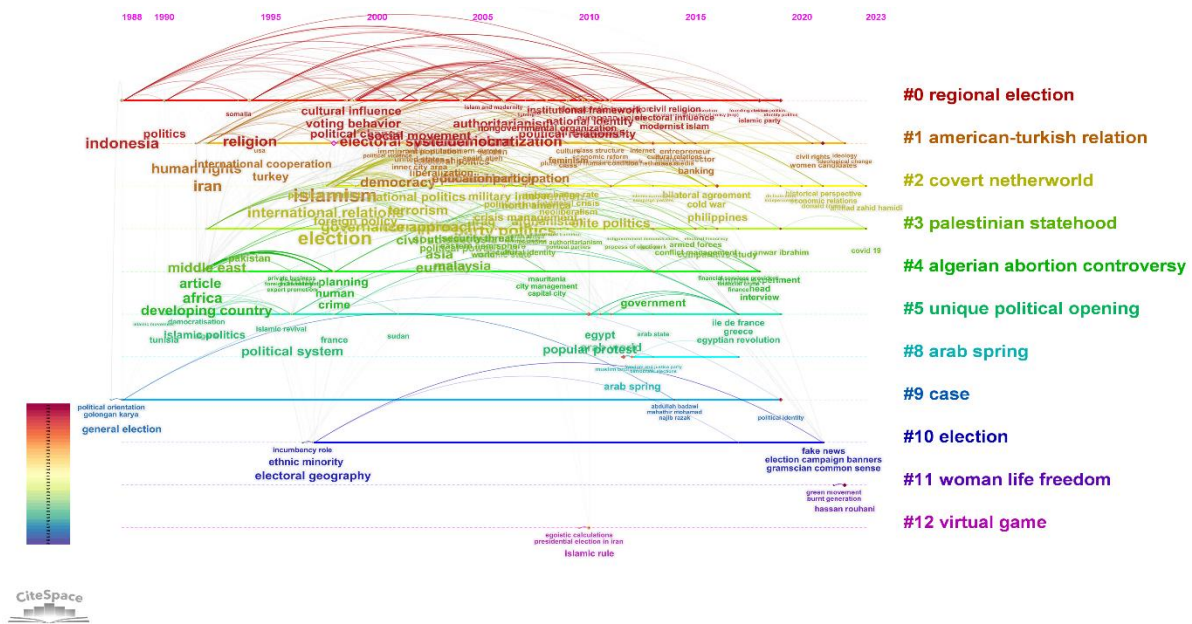


Figure 4. Timeline View Research Topic

Figure 4 explains the evolution of topics over time in the research domain. The largest cluster (#0 regional election) has 59 members and a silhouette value of 0.805. This study found that the most cited topic in this cluster are Indonesia, political Islam, religion, electoral system, and democratization. Religious issues in election campaigns in Indonesia are of significant concern, as highlighted in various studies. The politicization of religion to gain support, especially in the election of regional heads, has led to polarization and hatred based on religious differences (Sembiring et al., 2023). The role of religious elites in these elections is crucial, with their behavior having an impact on identity politics and the legitimacy of power (Azizah, 2023). In addition, the influence of religion on political preferences, especially among millennials, plays an important role in shaping election outcomes (Ahmad, 2022; Saputro et al., 2023). The historical context of Islamic politics in Indonesia underscores the complex relationship between religion and power (Adiwilaga et al., 2019), with implications for the democratization process and the electoral system in Indonesia (Aji & Dartanto, 2018). Addressing these religious issues in election campaigns is critical to promoting a diverse and tolerant political environment in Indonesia.

The second largest cluster (#1 American-Turkish relation) has 58 members and a silhouette value of 0.735. This study found that the most cited topics in this cluster are Islamism, Iran, democracy, human rights, and political ideology. Religion significantly influences political ideology and voter perception in election campaigns (Jacobsmeier, 2013), especially in American-Turkish relations, Islamism, Iran, democracy, and human rights (Gidengil & Karakoç, 2016). Religious affiliation and church attendance can influence a candidate's ideological views, leading to broader political stereotypes and issues. The “God Gap” phenomenon highlights the variable nature of religious rhetoric in political campaigns (Jelen, 2013). The candidates' religious affiliations and rhetoric can shape public opinion on foreign policy, democracy, and human rights, influencing voter attitudes and election outcomes (Bradberry, 2016). Understanding these interactions is essential for understanding religious issues in the United States.

The third largest cluster (#2 covert netherworld) has 53 members and a silhouette value of 0.821. This study found that the topics most cited in this cluster are elections, party politics, international relations, corruption, and the governance approach. Religious issues significantly influence election campaigns, party politics, international relations, corruption, and government approaches. In Latin America, religious discourse is common, with parties and candidates using references to God and Christianity to emphasize moral superiority and portray their opponents as corrupt (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2023). Globally, religious politics varies based on human development, secularism, and religious pluralism (Rosenberg & Smith, 2021). Personal religiosity influences politicians' risk preferences, public perceptions of candidates from minority religious backgrounds, and women's representation in politics (Madrid et al., 2022). The complex interaction between religion and politics shows how religious issues can shape election outcomes, party dynamics, and governance approaches in different contexts and regions. The complex interaction between religion and politics shows how religious issues can shape election outcomes, party dynamics, and governance approaches in different contexts and regions.

Implications of Framing Theory

The findings demonstrate the analytical strength of Erving Goffman's Framing Theory in explaining how religious issues are constructed, interpreted, and contested within electoral communication. Rather than treating public opinion as a passive reflection of media images, Goffman (1974) highlights that meaning emerges through socially situated interpretive processes, where political actors, media institutions, and audiences actively negotiate how religious discourse is understood and used. In religion-based campaigns, political elites and journalists strategically frame religion as a moral imperative, cultural defense, or marker of authenticity to resonate emotionally with voters and strengthen group identity (Heinich & Garnier, 2019; Smith, 2006). These frames simplify complex political realities and embed religious values into broader narratives of belonging, morality, and legitimacy, allowing candidates to connect personal religiosity with public virtue (Goffman, 1974; Smith, 2006).

Furthermore, Goffman's concept of the interactional order clarifies how these frames are maintained through everyday communicative acts that structure public discourse. Religious identity and piety function as forms of symbolic capital, performed strategically by candidates and reinforced by digital media to construct perceptions of moral credibility and authenticity (Svraka & Ossewaarde, 2011; Young, 2010). Through repetition and amplification in social networks, these interpretive frames generate moral hierarchies and binary distinctions, framing political competition in terms of "us" versus "them" (Heinich & Garnier, 2019). This process fuels ideological polarization and consolidates collective identities around moral or religious boundaries, as seen in recent studies of religious communication in Latin American political campaigns (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2023). Therefore, Goffman's framework reveals that the politicization of religion operates not only as a messaging strategy but as a performative and interactional mechanism through which meaning, morality, and power are publicly negotiated (Goffman, 1974; Young, 2010).

Table 4. Theoretical Propositions of Framing Theory in Religion-Based Election Campaigns

Theoretical Elements of Goffman's Framing Theory	Core Proposition	Implication for Religion-Based Campaigns	Sources
Interpretive Frames	Individuals and institutions construct meaning through interpretive schemas that organize social experience.	Political actors frame religion as a moral compass or cultural defense to evoke emotional responses and justify political agendas.	(Goffman, 1974; Smith, 2006)
Interactional Order	Meaning is negotiated through continuous interaction and communication within public discourse.	Religious narratives are reinforced in social media debates and campaign events, creating shared perceptions of "authentic" religiosity.	(Heinich & Garnier, 2019; Young, 2010)
Performative Dimension	Frames guide behavior by shaping how individuals present themselves in social contexts.	Candidates perform piety and religious identity as a strategic act to gain moral legitimacy and voter trust.	(Goffman 1974; Svraka & Ossewaarde 2011)
Frame Alignment Process	Frames link individual beliefs with broader collective narratives and identities.	Campaigns align religious messages with national identity or moral order, constructing "us vs. them" boundaries in public perception.	(Svraka & Ossewaarde 2011; Schwörer & Fernández-García 2023)
Media as Frame Amplifier	Media institutions reproduce and circulate dominant frames that shape public interpretation.	Digital platforms amplify religious symbolism and transform it into performative political capital that reinforces ideological polarization.	(Heinich 2019; Young 2010)

Conclusion

This study analyzed global research trends and thematic developments related to the use of religious issues in election campaigns from 1980 to 2023 using a scientometric approach. The results reveal that the intersection of religion and electoral politics is most frequently linked to themes of elections, Islamism, and party politics, particularly in Muslim-majority regions such as Indonesia, Turkey, and Iran. Political parties and actors strategically use religious rhetoric and symbolism to influence voter attitudes, strengthen ideological cohesion, and legitimize authority. Social media platforms have further intensified this trend by amplifying religious frames and transforming them into digital tools of persuasion, mobilization, and identity formation.

The findings underscore the analytical relevance of Erving Goffman's Framing Theory, which explains how religious narratives are actively constructed, negotiated, and performed through political communication. Framing operates as an interpretive mechanism that organizes public meaning and constructs moral hierarchies-delineating the boundaries between "us" and "them." This process reveals that religion functions not only as a campaign message but also as a performative framework of legitimacy, shaping how moral values and authenticity are publicly enacted. The study demonstrates that religious framing deepens polarization by mobilizing emotional attachment and reinforcing group-based identities within democratic contexts.

This study highlights the urgent need for more inclusive and ethically grounded communication strategies in political practice. Policymakers, scholars, and practitioners should consider how digital and media ecosystems reshape religious discourse and its effects on democratic participation. Future research should broaden its scope beyond the Scopus database, adopt comparative multi-context analyses, and explore the role of algorithmic amplification in intensifying religious polarization. By integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, subsequent studies can deepen the understanding of how religion continues to influence democratic resilience and civic cohesion in the digital era.

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