

# Polarization of Religious Issues in Indonesia's Social Media Society and Its Impact on Social Conflict

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(Received: July 13, 2024; Revised: September 1, 2024; Accepted: October 17, 2024; Available online: December 30, 2024)

## Abstract

In this new era, people use social media to share information and discuss political, social, and religious issues, leading to pros and cons arguments. In Twitter's hashtags and tweets, religious issues frequently trigger a hot conversation that causes disputes among citizens and even street movements. This study is intended to reveal the religious issues that often trigger polarization among Twitter users and how they influence horizontal conflict in society as what happened during the election period in 2019. This research applied mixed methods with social media analytics to conceal religious issues in Indonesia's social media society. The data collection was done by crawling data from the Indonesian Twitter users' tweets regarding religious issues hashtags, which is a reference for further analysis. The research findings show that the top eight religious issues widely discussed based on 23,433 Twitter users' tweets are the hashtags (#) salafi, wahabi, intoleransi (intolerance), taliban, anti-Pancasila, politisasi agama (politicization of religion), politik identitas (identity politics), and radikalisme (radicalism). In social conversation networks, these issues are related to each other and other issues such as political figures, the three presidential candidates, the general election, and the Republic of Indonesia presidential election in 2024. Concerning these issues, Twitter users believe that the issues, positive or negative, do not influence their religious and political stance. However, to a certain extent, they believe that religious issues impact social discourses regarding horizontal conflicts. 44% opinions prove this indicated that the debate over religious matters had little influence on their opinion of these topics, and 64.5% agreed that religious concerns can cause social strife. Finally, it is hoped that further studies will elaborate on how religious issues on Twitter and other social media directly impact social harmony in everyday life.

**Keywords:** Polarization, Religious Issues, Social Media Analytics, Social Conflict

## 1. Introduction

The plurality and diversity of tribes, ethnicities, cultures, and religions are the treasures of Indonesia that do not belong to the other nations in the world. This plurality constitutes the main capital in our efforts to build a strong national civilization in various fields and a backfire that may explode when the triggers for social conflict emerge. The biggest challenges in our society arise from the polarization, fragmentation, and even social conflict that continues to occur [1]. This polarization happens not only in the political realm but also in religious life [2]. This fact shows that there still appear to be conflicting opinions among the social groups.

In the post-reform era in 1998, Islamic groups received more freedom to express their political preferences. As a most populous group, this atmosphere of freedom triggers Islamic groups to contribute and participate in the political battle [3]. As a result, some discourses begin to be discussed in the public sphere, such as Islamic politics, religion-state relations, Islam and Pancasila, the application of Islamic law as a formal state constitution, and even the establishment of an Islamic state [4], [5], [6], [7].

The development of Islamic organizations with a large number of followers has formed internal cohesion, which immediately determines the orientation of preferences and views of electoral politics [8], [9]. This phenomenon was clearly visible in Indonesia's presidential election in 2014, in which the Muslim people showed a big interest in

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47738/jads.v6i1.447>

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determining the future of Indonesia, which was represented by the active involvement of Islamic organizations in politics. At the time, a political contest was strong since the presence of two pairs of candidates, namely Prabowo Subianto-Hatta Rajasa and Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla in the 2014 Indonesian presidential election. The term “kampret” was applied to Prabowo’s supporters, while the term “cebong” was addressed to Jokowi loyalists [10].

To some extent, religious issues can be a very effective political tool to gain sympathy and support from religious groups since it is believed that religious sentiment is the easy way to unite different stances. In other words, politics and religion are like two sides of a coin that complement each other [11]. Politicians will benefit when they appeal to religious sentiments in their political campaigns and turn religion into a commodity for electoral gain alone. Mietzner stated that Jokowi used “polite populism” by showing his siding with the lower classes through his speech, way of dressing, body language, and gestures to win the votes of the lower classes [12]. On the other hand, Prabowo took advantage of the Islamic Right group “Islamic Populism” by approaching them and siding with those who always kept their distance from power [13].

The social polarization in the post 2014 and 2019 presidential elections caused physical clashes and symbolic violence between two opposing political groups [14]. The symbolic violence appeared in the two opposing group interactions on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and other platforms, which sparked narratives of hatred, fear, and fake news (hoaxes) in the pre and post-campaign period. The Ministry of Communication and Information of Indonesia reported that from 2018 to 2021, there were 3,640 hate speeches related to ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group (SARA). Of the total hate speech, 62% contains SARA discrimination in the digital space [15]. Furthermore, Drone Emprit data from July 2015 to April 2022 shows that the Twitter platform contains a lot of the keywords “cebong”, “kampret”, “kadrun”, and “buzzerRp” filling the digital space. In the 2015-2019 period, total interactions for all these keywords amounted to 14,249,458 mentions, with the 2019 election being the top trending.

Polarization is an inevitable thing in nature that can happen to any country in the world, communities that have homogeneous languages and ethnicity, as it happened to Arab countries [16]. Indonesia, with its diversity of tribes, languages, ethnicities, groups, and religions, has a great potential to fall into polarization that divides strong national ties. Polarization—as a social fact related to politics, society, and culture—is defined variously and broadly depending on the point of view used by scientists. Talisse emphasized that polarization was born along with the emergence of democracy, which encourages justice and sees all elements of society as equal [17]. In contrast, in a democratic system, society demands justice in economics, politics, education, etc. And (political) polarization is a prominent issue of powerful groups abusing power [18].

The polarization that occurs in the real world—with the widespread use of social media—migrates slowly and steadily to cyberspace in the form of strengthened perceptions/opinions on various controversial issues, such as political issues, religious views, and the convergence of both simultaneously [19], [20], [21], [22]. From opinions based on subjective sentiments and feelings, polarization is born on social media [23] so that social media users will participate in spreading these opinions again and stand in the ranks of groups with the same beliefs and ideologies. Accepting the truth of information from only one side or groups with similar ideologies will ultimately trigger anger in a debate on social media [24]. In addition to being closed to alternative views, Del Vicario et al. emphasized that the higher the activity of social media users from a certain group, the greater the opportunity for them to provide negative responses to groups with different ideologies [25].

Many factors can trigger polarization in society, one of which is one’s religious understanding. Since religion is personal and involves personal subjective feelings, everyone will be easily sensitive to any disturbance from other religious adherents. In the Indonesian context, the emergence of religious (re)polarization was due to a dichotomy in the views of two opposing groups, namely Islamist groups and non-Islamist groups [26]. The group segmentation in a broad sense includes conservative Islamic groups who do not object to apply a religious diversity constitution in Indonesia, liberal Islamic groups, and secular nationalists who see religion as a private matter without having to involve them in their public affairs. In contrast to the political systems in most Islamic countries in the world, Indonesia, with its unique characteristics, tries to embrace and bring together two opposing poles, Islamist groups and pluralist groups [27].

Polarization of religious issues grows and develops in Indonesia because there is no common ground between Islamist groups and pluralist groups. Meanwhile, the Islamist group in Fealy's (2020) study tried to follow the views of figures and groups who attempted to apply the formalization of Islamic law and principles to the public sphere, in the form of establishing an Islamic state, implementing sharia as the basis of state law, civil and criminal law. Many other political scientists attempted to classify the two opposing groups as pluralist and Islamist groups [28], [29]. Compared to 1950, today, each group continues to experience a transformation in both its character and the issues it organizes to fight for its big ideas [30], and with the widespread use of social media, the battle for ideas that has been taking place on land has shifted to cyberspace. with various strategies from each group.

The latest data from We Are Social and Hootsuite shows that in January 2023, the number of social media users worldwide will reach 4.76 billion. This number equals 59.4% of the world population today. The next question is, what is social media that many people so love? Many experts provide definitions regarding social media. Kottler and Keller state that social media is used by someone to share text, images, sound, video, and information with other parties [31]. Meanwhile, the definition of social media is media that someone uses for social interaction or social online by displaying content, news, photos, and so on to other parties [32], [33], [34]. Another understanding from Thaib is that social media is a process of connection between people to create, share, exchange, and modify ideas in a network [35].

From several popular social media in Indonesia, Twitter is one platform widely used by various groups: artists, politicians, students, entrepreneurs, and so on. In 2006, Jack Dorsey first launched the Twitter platform, then it grew very quickly and was widely used for free by various levels of society. Twitter users can communicate via short messages called 'tweets' with a maximum number of characters up to 280 characters. Short messages on Twitter have several features, such as text, images, audio, video, and URL links, which other users can resend by retweeting. Another advantage of Twitter is the hashtag feature, which can be used to search for results based on hashtags. Next, the trending topic feature was created to present the most popular issues that users are widely discussing.

With the features provided, Twitter has become an effective and efficient social media for carrying out economic activities [36], [37], for conveying opinions on certain issues as a digital campaign movement [38], and creating narratives of resistance around political issues, for example #Egypt [39]. With its wide reach and the availability of many Twitter platforms, it indirectly helps many parties contesting the election to gain public attention and sympathy [40].

One of the social phenomena that continues to be embedded in society is the struggle between conflict and integration, which alternately influence the dynamics within society. Literally, the word conflict is taken from the Latin "con," which means together, and "figure," which means clash or collision [41]. Meanwhile, the term social conflict is interpreted as a struggle for values and recognition of position, where power and sources of conflict are perpetuated, neutralized, or reduced by rivals. Based on Coser's understanding, conflict is not only seen as resistance to values, discrimination, and oppression of the dominant lower classes [42]. Coser also suggests that conflict can be understood as an obstacle to self-actualization. Apart from the definition above, conflict is seen as a social process involving many people and groups confronting each other and threatening violence [43]. According to this definition, conflict is manifested in verbal and non-verbal anarchic behavior.

In recent years, social media platforms, particularly Twitter, have played a significant role in shaping public discourse, often exacerbating polarization on various issues, including religion. While numerous studies have examined the general impact of social media on societal division, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific dynamics of religious polarization on Twitter and how it influences social conflict in Indonesia. Based on several social facts described above, this article focuses on uncovering the polarization of religious issues on social media and its influence on social conflict in society. Furthermore, to be more focused, the research is intended to answer the following problems, namely, (a) religious issues that trigger polarization on Twitter social media, (b) forms of polarization of religious issues on Twitter social media, and (c) the influence of polarization of religious issues on social media to social conflict in society.

## 2. Research Method

### 2.1. Research Approach

The method used in this research is mixed-method, namely a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with a concurrent embedded model, with a main method and secondary methods that support the procedure [44], [45]. This research uses qualitative research as the primary method and quantitative research as the secondary method. This quantitative method is solely used to reveal the percentage of frequency of appearance of religious issues that are widely discussed on Twitter social media.

Cropley states that qualitative research methodology is a research procedure that presents descriptive data in the form of spoken and written language from the behavior of people who can be observed [46]. Another opinion was expressed that qualitative research not only describes facts but also provides interpretations of these facts and sees the urgency of understanding the relationship between text and context [47], [48]. As has been stated, qualitative methodology sees reality as something that continues to develop (dynamic), is not stable, has many dimensions, and continues to change [49], [50].

This research incorporates comments within communities on social media based on trending topics about religious issues to assess the real-world impacts of religious polarization on social conflict. Social media represents what happens in real-world social communities, so this research conducts an in-depth analysis of social media dynamics. The use of social media platforms to disseminate misleading content about a candidate's religious identity led to widespread protests, social division, and even instances of violence. Therefore, this social media analytics is used to prevent social conflict in the real world, especially in religious issues.

### 2.2. Social Media Analytics

Social media analytics is the process of extracting valuable insights from large amounts of social media data to enable informed decision-making. It involves using skilled data analysts, advanced tools and technologies, and reliable data to analyze and interpret personal and professional social networks. Social media analytics can take three forms: descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive. The identification stage is crucial in social media analytics as it involves searching and identifying the right sources of information for analysis. Constant development of social media analytics tools is necessary to keep up with the growing need to extract, clean, and analyze the vast amount of social media data [51]. It is an interdisciplinary field that combines and adapts various methods to evaluate social media data and aims to provide insights for research and the development of information systems and applications based on social media [52]. Social media analytics, as a form of big data application, can provide valuable insights and information for the management and marketing of cultural tourism destinations by analyzing the vast amount of data generated on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok [53].

Social media analytics refers to analyzing data generated by social media platforms to gain insights and create valuable information. It involves capturing, understanding, and presenting social media data [54]. The rise of social media has led to the generation of a vast amount of data, which can be analyzed to understand public behavior, opinions, and perceptions [52]. Social media analytics involves various techniques such as data acquisition, preprocessing, data representation, analysis, and presentation [55]. It also utilizes tools and algorithms like Gephi, Networkx, IGraph, Pajek, Node XL, and cytoscope for social network analysis [56]. The analysis of social media data can be used for descriptive, diagnostic, predictive, and prescriptive analytics, providing insights into the past, present, and future [57]. Overall, social media analytics plays a crucial role in understanding and utilizing the vast amount of data generated by social media platforms for various purposes. The social media analytics conducted in this research include engagement metrics, such as the number of tweets, hashtag clusters, and keyword frequencies.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The data collection is carried out by crawling big and small data originating from Twitter platform users' tweets when responding the trending topics. Afterward, the data was analyzed in two stages. First, the hashtag #religious issues became a keyword used to analyze the circulation of online conversations. This is used since the language patterns of Twitter users do not always use standard language [58]. Furthermore, determining hashtags can simplify the process of collecting big data and analyzing this data based on selected religious issues. According to Sauter and Bruns, Twitter

and its hashtags are not just communication markers; more than that, they have an important role in revealing political realities in society, including religious issues [59].

In this research, analysis was done based on conversation and mention contents with the hashtag (#) religious issues, user accounts that were in the top eight, and words that appeared most often in conversations as an indication of Twitter users' involvement in religious issues. These conversations, such as intoleransi (extremism/intolerance), anti-Pancasila (Pancasila as the ideology of Indonesia), radikalisme (radicalism), Wahabi (a school in Islam founded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab), politisasi agama (politicization of religion), politik identitas (identity politics), Salafi (a movement of the people who lived in early period of Islam), and Taliban (a conservative group who want to implement Islamic law in Afghanistan).

Second, data analysis was performed qualitatively using thematic analysis techniques on the content of Twitter users' tweets [60]. The crawling process produced the entire list of tweets (in Bahasa Indonesia) taken from 21 July to 21 October 2023. The top 10 tweets were analyzed to understand various religious issues adequately. The selected data is treated as small data, and the content of Twitter users' tweets is analyzed using the Python programming language. There are 23,433 tweets that contain religious issues in Indonesia.

All data used in this study were collected from publicly available sources, specifically Twitter posts that are publicly accessible. No private or direct messages were used, and user identities were anonymized to prevent any potential harm to individuals or groups. The focus was on publicly available discourse that is part of the broader public debate, while respecting the privacy of users. The analysis of the Twitter data was conducted with careful attention to minimize any potential bias. Algorithms used to analyze social media discourse were designed to detect patterns of religious polarization without reinforcing existing biases.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. Religious Issues on Twitter Social Media

The discourse regarding religious issues can be identified through the appearance of the hashtag (#) anti-Pancasila, intolerance, identity politics, the politicization of religion, radicalism, Salafi, Taliban, and Wahabi from 21 July to 21 October 2023 based on preliminary observation with <https://twitter.com/search-advanced>. Information dissemination and the formation of public opinion via Twitter regarding religious issues has recently shown increasing intensity among Twitter users ahead of the democratic party in 2024. Table 1 provides crawling results with 23,433 tweets that contain religious issues, with the top eight hashtags regarding religious issues that Twitter users most discuss.

**Table 1.** Religious Issues and Research Data Sources

Hashtag (#)	Number of Tweets	Percentage (%)
Salafi	6,596	31.274
Wahabi	4,952	23.479
Intoleransi	2,300	10.905
Taliban	2,118	10.042
Anti-Pancasila	1,979	9.383
Politisasi Agama	1,260	5.974
Politik Identitas	960	4.552
Radikalisme	926	4.390

Table 1 states the level of hashtag appearance for the ten religious issues raised in this research, based on their percentage for thirty days. The hashtag #salafi occupies the top position with 6,596 tweets, namely 31.274%. In second place is the hashtag #Wahabi, with a total of 4,952 tweets, namely 23.479%. The third position is occupied by the hashtag #Intolerance with 2,300 tweets, amounting to 10.905%. The top fourth position is occupied by the hashtag #Taliban with 2,118 tweets, amounting to 10.042%, followed by the hashtag #Anti Pancasila with 1,979 tweets, namely 9.383%, and the sixth and seventh positions are occupied by the hashtag #Politicization of religion and the hashtag



#identity politics in each of which received 1,260 tweets, namely 5.974% and 960 tweets amounting to 4.522%. Next, the eighth position is occupied by the hashtag #radicalism with 926 tweets, namely 4.390%.

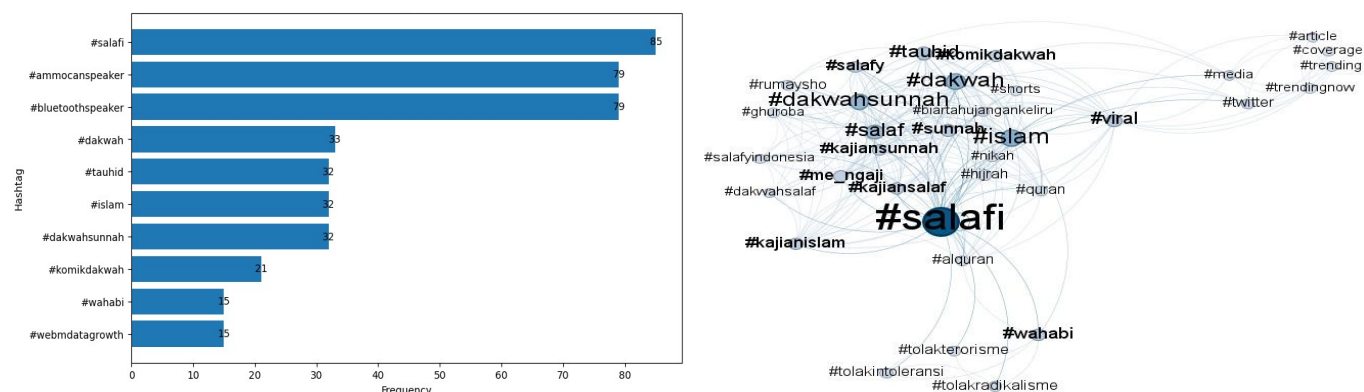
The next sections will explain the engagement of each hashtag with other related hashtags with line chart and text network visualization to illustrate trends, relationships, and the dynamics of religious polarization on social media. A line chart showing the frequency of specific hashtags over time to illustrate the spikes in hashtag usage during specific events or controversies. Meanwhile, a network graph displaying the relationships between hashtag to highlight influential topics and clusters of interaction, showing how polarized discussions form distinct communities.

### 3.2. Polarization of Religious Issues on Twitter Social Media

Twitter user conversations via the hashtag #salafi constitute the highest position among ten other religious issues in this research. The appearance of several hashtags in one tweet illustrates that Twitter users can simultaneously attract several issues, whether directly related or otherwise [39]. The hashtag #salafi has a lot to do with conversations about other religious issues such as Wahabi, hijrah, marriage, Qur'an, terrorism, and so on, which are related to several parts of Islamic teachings. Figure 1 shows the top ten hashtags widely circulated by Twitter users with the keyword #salafi. This section displays ten hashtags in the keyword #salafi, with direct and indirect links to the main issue. In other words, the issue of #salafi does not stand alone but is often accompanied by other issues such as the hashtag (#) dakwah, tauhid, Islam, and sunnah dakwah. And some hashtags do not directly correlate with the main issue, such as #bluetoothspekaer and #webmatagrowth.

Figure 1 demonstrates how the conversation network on #salafi works and interacts with other issues outside the top ten hashtags. There are some hashtags against radicalism, intolerance, terrorism, media, propaganda comics, rumaysho, and so on. The existence of various other hashtags related to #salafi can give rise to positive and negative connotative meanings simultaneously depending on the perception of the Twitter user community.

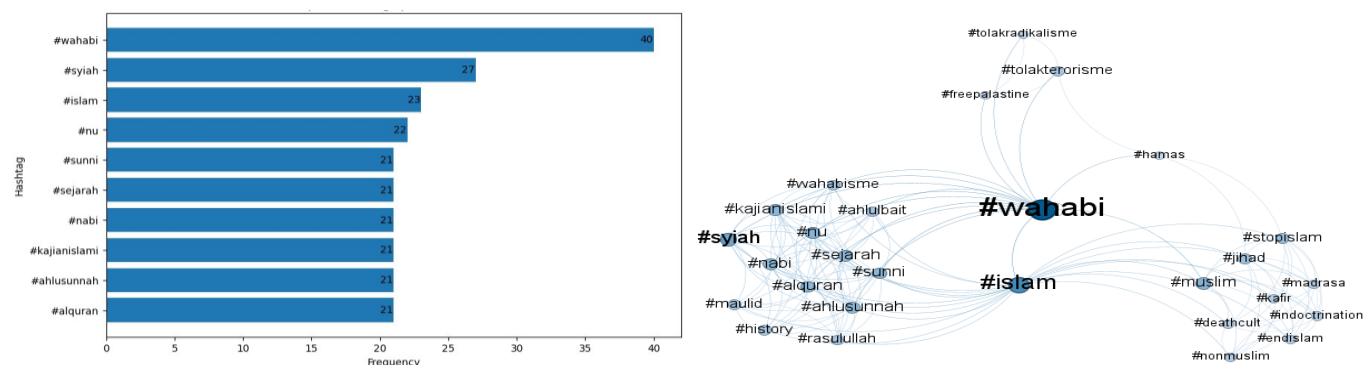
In addition to displaying the top ten hashtags, identifying the accounts that create hashtags is important to see whether the account owners are spreading misinformation, manipulating information, swaying public opinion, selling products, and political campaigns. The following are the top ten accounts involved in tweeting on #Jenggot, which is dominated by the om\_jenggot account, while several other accounts such as the nedisetiadi, f\_fathur, aniesbaswedan, Jokowi, tanya, detikcom, parewaminang accounts have under two hundred tweets each.



**Figure 1.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #salafi

The hashtag #wahabi occupied the second-highest number of conversations among Twitter users regarding religious issues. An interesting thing to observe is the strong relationship between Salafi and Wahhabi issues, which is widely discussed by Indonesian Muslims. These two issues seem to be two sides of a coin and are often linked to the religious schools officially implemented in Saudi Arabia. In this section, ten hashtags that fall under the keyword #salafi are displayed, either associatively or contradictory with Salafi issues. Included in the first group, for example, are the hashtags (#) Al-Quran, Prophet, Ahlus-Sunnah, Islamic studies, and Islam. Meanwhile, the hashtags that have a contradictory relationship are (#) Shia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Sunni, which, in the view of some Indonesian clerics, Wahhabi understanding takes a position that is at odds with the understanding that exists in the archipelago which is friendly towards local culture.

The top ten hashtags circulated in the #wahabi keyword are Shia, Islam, Nu, Sunni, history, prophet, Islamic studies, Ahlus Sunnah, and Qur'an, all correlating directly with the main issue, either associatively or contradictory. In other words, the Wahhabi issue attracts the attention of many Muslims in Indonesia, both those who support and who oppose this ideology. In detail, the following are the top ten hashtags widely circulated by Twitter users with the keyword #wahabi.



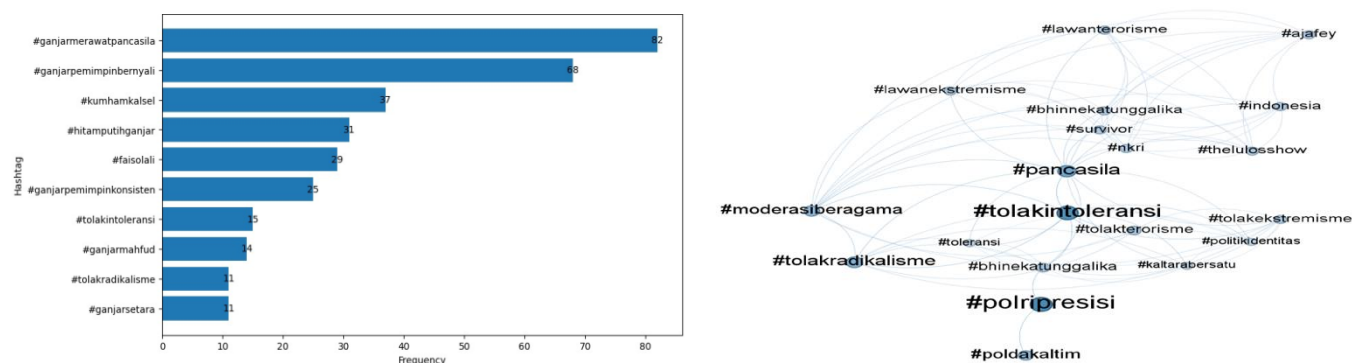
**Figure 2.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #wahabi

Figure 2 illustrates how the top ten hashtags used in the #wahabi conversation network have the same focus as the issue raised, different from the previous issue, namely #salafi. The presence of several hashtags simultaneously in one tweet illustrates that Twitter users can attract several issues at once, whether they have an associative or contradictory relationship. The ten hashtags circulating in the keyword #wahabi can be seen in their relationship patterns in the conversation network in figure 3.

Based on the conversation network above, the hashtag #wahabi is associated with many religious issues apart from the ten main issues. For example, the hashtags (#) Hamas, free Palestine, maulid, ahlulbait, wahabism, madrasa, jihad, non-Muslim, indoctrination, kafir, and so on. Meanwhile, knowing some of the accounts that create hashtags is important to see whether the account owner is spreading true or false information and has pretensions to certain propaganda. The following are the top ten accounts involved in tweeting about #wahabi, which is clearly dominated by the fotodakwah account. Next is the islah\_bahrawi account of a social media activist who often opposes Wahabism, the tubirfess account, addtaufik, edsoekoco, sayid\_machmoed, ahlulqohwah, nashirr, sesixsuch and the \_bungkerwin account.

The third highest religious issue on the Twitter is the hashtag #intolerance. Six of the top ten hashtags circulated in the keyword #intolerance are associated with Ganjar Pranowo as a figure who rejects intolerant practices in society. The other four hashtags demonstrate general intolerant attitudes and behavior. In order, the top ten hashtags related to the issue of intolerance are the hashtags (#) reward for caring for Pancasila, reward for brave leaders, South Kalimantan Hukum dan HAM (kumham), black and white, Ganjar, faisolali, Ganjar for consistent leaders, reject intolerance, Ganjarfud followed by Reject radicalism, and Gangarsetara. Next, the number of tweets from each hashtag can be seen in [figure 3](#).

Based on [figure 3](#), it appears that hashtags affiliated with one of the presidential candidates, Ganjar Pranowo, are a figure who is concerned about the issue of (in)tolerance in Indonesia. In this way, Ganjar received an electoral advantage because he became a headline with a positive image on an widely discussed issue by Twitter users. On the other hand, the issue of intolerance is also intertwined with the issue of radicalism and Pancasila, which upholds the values of equality and mutual respect. The issue of (in)tolerance is not merely dealing with religious problems. Furthermore, it is a major aspect of the nation and state, which is the focus of various elements of the nation and is in the international spotlight. Furthermore, the ten hashtags circulating in the keyword #intolerance can be seen in the conversation network in [figure 3](#).

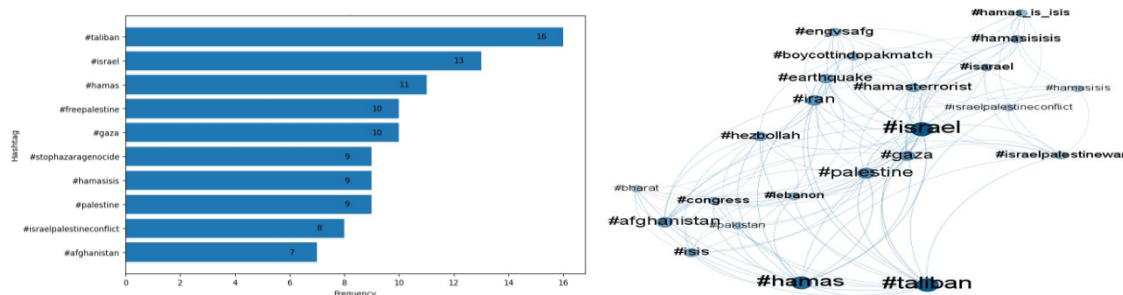


**Figure 3.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #intoleransi

The conversation network in figure 3 above explains how #intolerance is associated with religious, national, and other global issues. For example, the hashtag (#) religious moderation relates to religious attitudes at the midpoint, and the hashtag (#) Pancasila, Bhinneka Singularika, NKRI (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia), polisi presisi, Indonesian identity politics is a national issue that is of concern to various groups. Next, the hashtag (#) reject radicalism, reject terrorism, oppose terrorism, and oppose extremism became a conversation at the global level, even though by applying double standards, some Western countries continue to link this issue with the Islamic movement groups, Arab countries and Muslim people. The top ten accounts involved in tweeting #intolerance belongs to Ganjarpranowo account, which is followed by Kiki\_daliyo, Nikul\_SG, Jokowi, LPNKarangintan, Islah\_bahrawi, MohmahfudMD, Tita, psi\_id, and gus\_raharjo accounts. Some of these accounts are associated with national figures, social media activists, and other accounts belonging to the common people.

In this research, religious issue with the hashtag #taliban took the fifth position in the Twitter users' conversations. The issue of Taliban began to emerge when America invaded Afghanistan in 2021, in which Taliban group, who was trying to apply the Islamic law, were in power and had control over the country. Furthermore, the term Taliban is widely discussed in Indonesian political discourse as a form of stereotype for some Islamic groups who showed religious attributes, such as beards and burkas, and wore middle eastern clothing, such as short trousers and robes. The issue of the Taliban group emerged when there was a split among KPK employees regarding investigating several corruption cases. The interesting thing about the findings of this study is that the ten hashtags associated with #taliban mostly discuss conflict issues in the Middle East, and none of them mention religious issues in Indonesia. Furthermore, the number of tweets from each hashtag can be seen in figure 4.

Figure 4 clearly explains various hashtags related to the Taliban issue, all of which highlight the same problem of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this way, the Palestinian people are in the spotlight and benefit from moral support since they got the headlines as victims of Israeli atrocities that Twitter users widely have discussed. The ongoing war of public opinion was absolutely won by the Palestinian people, it is a weaponless war. Still, the war attracted the sympathy of the Indonesian people and the international community as a whole. Furthermore, the ten hashtags circulating in the keyword #taliban can be seen in figure 4.



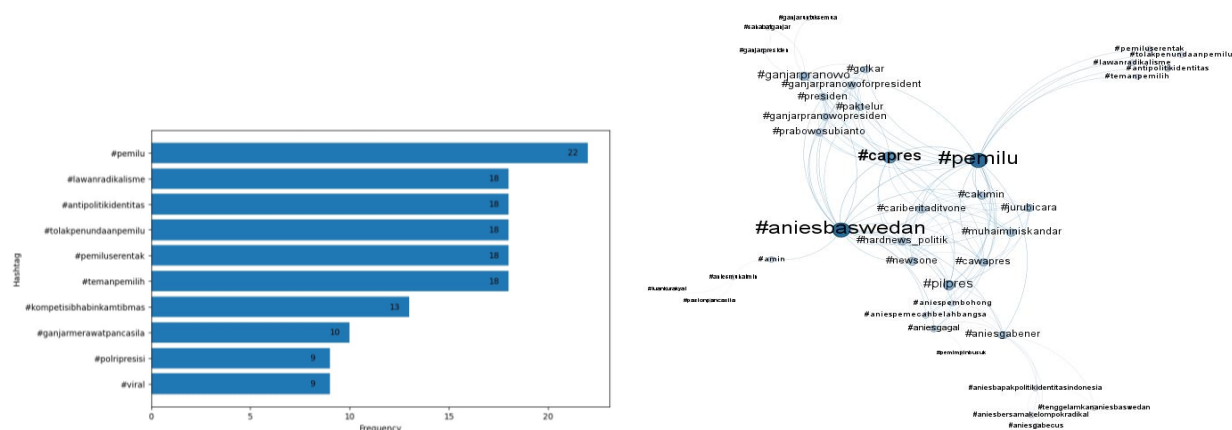
**Figure 4.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #taliban

The conversation network in figure 4 can illustrate how #Taliban is related to current religious-political issues in the Middle Eastern countries. For example, the hashtag (#) Taliban is related to the hashtag (#) Hamas, which is at the



same time related to the hashtag (#) Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Gaza, Pakistan, Hamas terrorists, Hamas Sisi, ISIS, Hezbollah and so on. The relationship pattern between #taliban and existing hashtags is very complex from the development of these issues in the global political arena, as seen in the network on Twitter social media conversations.

The religious issue that occupies the sixth highest position in the conversations of Twitter users is the hashtag #antipancasila, which has always been part of religious discourse in society. In the Indonesian context, Pancasila discourse as the state ideology is final and binding on all citizens. However, the emergence of critical thinking from civil society groups towards the government's performance is often considered an attitude of fighting the values of Pancasila. The emergence of the hashtag #antipancasila cannot be separated from the public debate regarding religious and national issues, such as tolerance, discourse on the caliphate with multiple interpretations, the practice of religious teachings in socio-political life, and so on. In a more critical perspective, the anti-Pancasila issue is vulnerable to be exploited by the people in power for pragmatic political interests to downgrade the cons group who stand against the government. In other words, the anti-Pancasila label emerged for the opposition group.



**Figure 5.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #anti-pancasila

Based on [figure 5](#), the hashtag #election appears to be leading with twenty-two tweets, followed by five hashtags with the same number of eighteen tweets. The five hashtags highlight the issues of radicalism, identity politics, and elections. Next, the hashtag (#) bhabin kamtibnas competition shows that the apparatus acts as a party standing in the middle between several legislative and executive candidates participating in the general election competition. The hashtag (#) Ganjar cares for Pancasila, which is in eighth position with ten tweets, implies that he is a figure who is concerned about the implementation of Pancasila values in society. Hereinafter, the hashtags #policepression and #viral took the ninth and tenth place, with nine tweets each. Furthermore, the ten hashtags related to the keyword #intolerance can be seen in the conversation network in [figure 5](#).

The conversation network in [figure 5](#) depicts how the hashtag #anti-Pancasila is associated with political issues, political parties, presidential elections, the three presidential candidates, mass media, radicalism, identity politics and other national issues. There is only one #hashtag that is directly related to religious issues, and that is #fight radicalism. The most prominent thing from the conversation regarding #antipancasila is the emergence of several hashtags affiliated with Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. Anies is widely described as a bad and divisive figure, whereas Ganjar is viewed as a good figure for the president position.

The seventh highest number of Twitter users' conversations on religious issues belongs to the hashtag #politicization of religion. This issue has long existed in the national political discourse, since the establishment of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) to the reform period in 1998. Such as identity politics which is a political preference based on similarities in race, ethnicity, ethnicity and language. In simple meaning, the politicization of religion is the capitalization of religious issues for electoral purposes. The issue of religious politicization came to the top argument in 2017 when Anies Baswedan won Jakarta's governor election and the losing candidate's supporters accused Anies of exploiting the issue of religious blasphemy for electoral interests. This labelling continued to be attached to Anies Baswedan by his political opponents, and the issue began to fade when Anies appointed Muhaimin

Hashtag	frequency
#tolakpolitikidentitas	37
#sukseskanpemilu	37
#pemilukondusif	31
#aniesmuhammadin	10
#stoppolitikidentitas	7
#pemiludamai	7
#pemiluindonesia	6
#pkbarogan	6
#aniesminout	6
#cakimpengkhianat	6

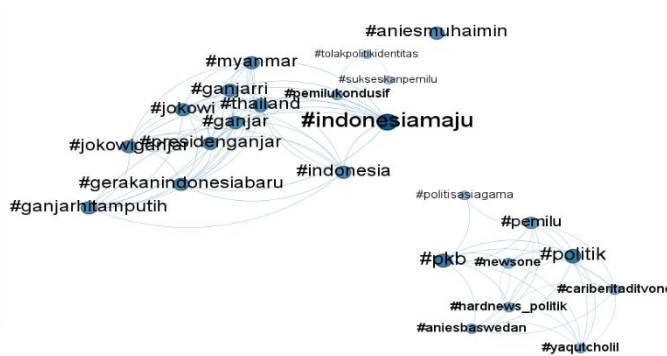
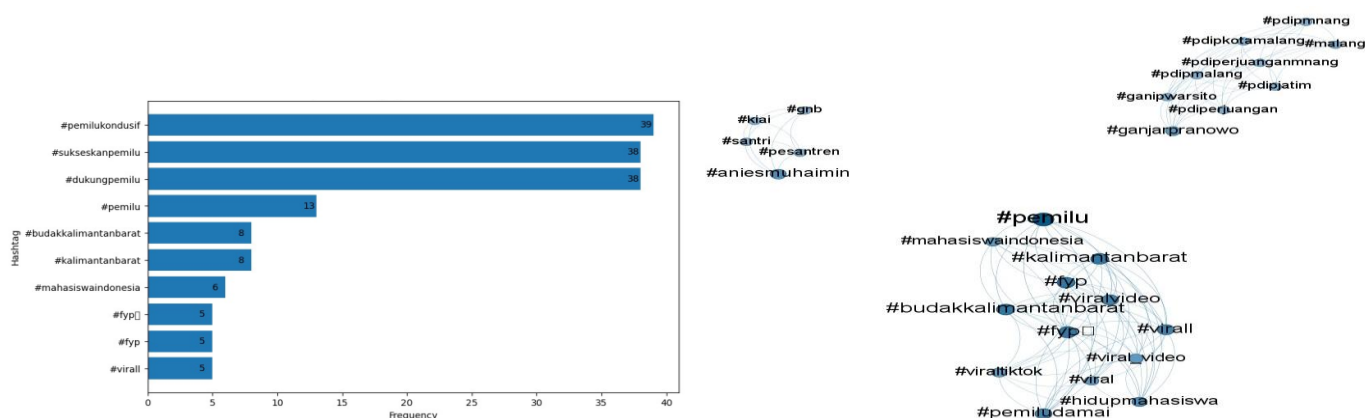


Figure 6 explains the dominance of three hashtags highlighting the discourse of general election that is open, honest, and fair to all candidates in the legislative and executive elections. Netizens, especially Twitter social media users, pay great attention to the fair election process. This made election-related hashtags appear dominant in the top ten hashtags associated with the issue of #politicization of religion. Other hashtags highly related to Anies-Muhaimin as the candidate for president and vice president showed the negative narratives of both figures. For example, some hashtags, such as #cakiminpengkhianat, #aniesiminout, and #pkbarogan attacked Amin as the pair for president and vice president. Furthermore, the ten hashtags circulating in the keyword #politicization of religion can be seen in the conversation network in figure 6.

The religious issue with the hashtag #identity politics occupied the eighth position in Twitter users' conversations. In the context of Indonesian politics, the issue of identity politics is not a new issue; however, it has existed long before the establishment of the Indonesia nation in 1945. Diversity of ethnicity, race, religion, and language naturally becomes the starting point for the identity politics emergence. In a direct election system, a candidate tends to highlight various attributes of his or her own to gain people's votes. In the Indonesian elections, the issue of identity politics became the top spotlight in the 2017 Jakarta's governor election, which was marked by a big number of anti-Ahok protesters, and ultimately, the gubernatorial election was won by Anies Baswedan. The politicization of religion became popular again in the 2019 presidential election, which led to the hard polarization in society between Jokowi and Prabowo's supporters. Furthermore, the number of tweets from each hashtag can be seen in [figure 7](#).

Figure 7 clearly states various hashtags related to identity politics, and the top four hashtags highlight the same issue, that is, the general election. Thus, Twitter social media users hope that the election will run in a successful and conducive manner and receive support from all elements of the nation. People wish an honest and fair election to be a parameter for the success of democracy in Indonesia. The issue of identity politics also received attention from the hashtag (#) West Kalimantan slaves, West Kalimantan, and Indonesian students, which is seen as a concern from local people and young children towards quality elections. Furthermore, the ten hashtags circulating in the keyword #taliban can be seen in the conversation network in figure 7.



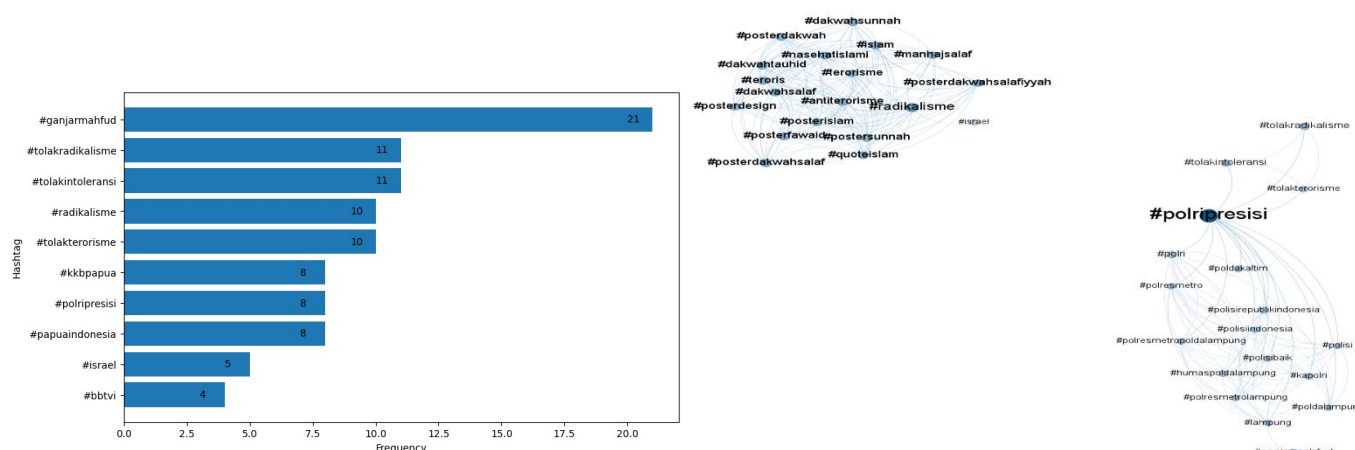
**Figure 7.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #politik identitas

Figure 7 reveals a network of conversations regarding #identity politics, which is associated with the issue of general elections, regional communities, and Indonesian students. The netizens' ongoing conversations on identity politics are strongly linked to several political figures, as reflected in the hashtags #aniesmuhammad and #ganjarpranowo. Furthermore, political parties become a part of the conversation matters, as seen in the hashtags #pdiperjuangan, #pdipjatim. The other group who take part in the conversation represented Islamic boarding school community, such as kiyai and santri. They seemed to participate in the conversational discourse on Twitter social media. This means that one issue cannot stand alone. Instead, it relates to other issues in various patterns, such as associative, contradictory, complementary, etc.

The top ten hashtags circulated under the keyword #radicalism relate to local and global issues. The hashtag (#) reject radicalism, radicalism, reject intolerance, reject terrorism has the message that radicalism interrelated to the act of terror and intolerance that has no room in society. Meanwhile, the hashtags (#) kkbpapua, and Papua Indonesia can be understood as an allusion to the network community towards the separatist movement in Papua which always uses violence as a negotiation tool with the Indonesian government. And the hashtag #polripresisi is interpreted that the Indonesia's police institution is in line with Pancasila and strongly oppose any form of radical attitudes and act. The hashtag #ganjarmahfud conveys the message that the presidential and vice-presidential candidates are against radicalism and acts of violence. The following are the top ten hashtags associated with the keyword #radicalism in figure 8.

Figure 8 displays some hashtags interconnected to pro-caliphate issues, and the ten hashtags highlight several issues but have a direct or indirect link. First, the notion of radicalism has been associated to the problems of intolerance and terrorism, which have frequently occurred in Indonesia in recent decades. Second, the Papua problem is associated with the issue of radicalism since the acts of violence carried out by the Armed Criminal Group (KKB) movement. Third, the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has got the spotlight in Twitter users' discussions. The conversation network regarding radicalism has two separate but related hashtag clusters. Furthermore, all the hashtags circulating in the keyword #taliban can be seen in the conversation network in figure 10.

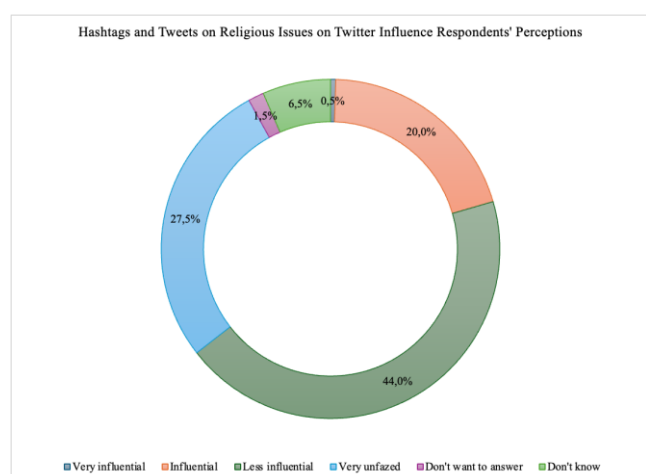
The conversation network in figure 8 illustrates how #radicalism is associated with religious and non-religious issues. For example, the hashtag #polripresisi and its network as seen in #poldakaltim, #poldalampung, #polisibaik, and #kapolri which highlights the issue of radicalism shows the attention of the National Police institution to the problems of terrorism, radicalism, and intolerance. The last three issues have received high attention from religious institutions in Indonesia. Additionally, the issue of radicalism is intertwined with the hashtags for Islamic da'wah, such as #dawahtauhid, #dawahsunnah, #quoteislam, and so on.



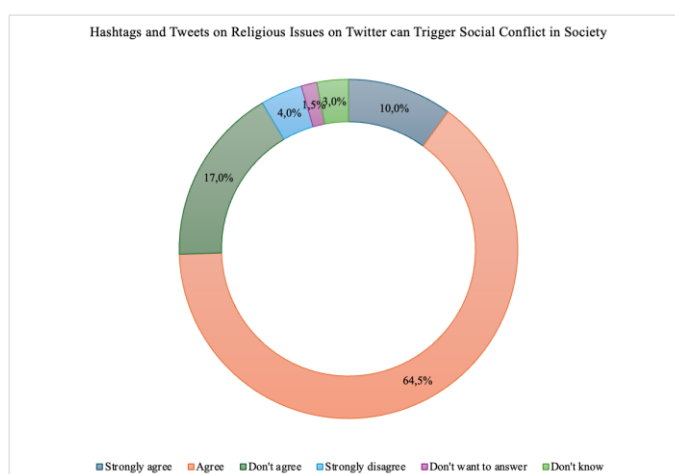
**Figure 8.** Top ten hashtags and social conversation network on #radikalisme

### 3.3. The Impact of Twitter's Religious Issues Polarization on Social Conflict

With the emergence of the top eight hashtags (#) in Twitter users' conversations, this research reveals the eight issues that made people's negative perceptions. A hot debate in cyberspace can change Twitter user's and people's views about religious issues in social life is a piece of evidence that will be elaborated on in this section.



**Figure 9.** The Influence of Religious Issues on Public Perception



**Figure 10.** The Influence of Religious Issues on Social Conflict

The research findings showed that eighty-eight people (see figure 9), that is, 44% of the total respondents, said that the debate of religious issues had little influence on their perception of these issues. Meanwhile, fifty-five people, or 27.5% of respondents, answered that they were not influenced by religious issues widely talked about in Twitter user conversations. On the other hand, 40 people, counted 20% of the respondents, stated that religious issues influenced their perception on these issues, and one person, that is 0.5% of the respondents, answered that the religious issues influenced their mind very much. Next, three people, 1.5% of the respondents, did not answer the questions for their subjective reasons. And finally, thirteen respondents, that is 6.5%, answered that they did not know whether hashtags and tweets in Twitter users' conversations influence their perception of these issues.

After looking at the influence of religious issues on public perception, another thing that is revealed in this research is the effect of religious issues on social conflict. The answer to the second problem can prove whether religious issues influence social (dis)harmony. Figure 10 shows the percentage of respondents' perception who acted as Twitter users and community members on how religious issues have an impact on social conflict. Regarding the research variable that hashtags and tweets about religious issues can trigger social conflict, here are some findings; one hundred and twenty-nine people that is 64.5% of respondents agreed that religious issues can trigger social conflict, and twenty people, that is 10% respondents strongly agreed that religious issues can trigger social conflict. Furthermore, thirty-

four people, that is 17% of the respondents said that they disagreed with the notion that religious issues can trigger social conflict, and eight people, namely 4% of respondents said they strongly disagreed with the notion. Meanwhile, three people or 1.5% of respondents answered that they didn't know the notion.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the function of social media in amplifying religious polarisation and its impact on social strife. The findings highlight the importance of strong social media content regulation policies, particularly where religion and politics overlap. Governments and platforms must work together to combine freedom of expression with measures against hate speech and disinformation. The findings emphasise the importance of continuing to monitor social media trends, especially during politically or religiously sensitive periods. The results underscore the critical need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to reduce the risks of polarisation while capitalizing on the good potential of digital platforms.

### 3.4. The Influence of Religious Issues on Social Conflict

After analyzing the research results regarding eight religious issues that are widely discussed on Twitter social media and their relationship to other issues that are reflected in the social conversation network of eight #religious issues that are also circulated with these keywords, it is necessary to look at the influence of religious issues on social conflicts in the society. To describe this influence, researchers tried to capture two things from Twitter users, namely (a) the influence of religious issues on Twitter users' perception, and (b) the influence of religious issues on social conflict. The instrument used to answer these two points was a questionnaire given to two hundred respondents who acted as Twitter users and community members who could feel whether (or not) there is an influence of religious issues on social conflicts.

Based on the research results regarding netizens' perceptions on the religious issues, there are three clusters of netizens views. Firstly, most Twitter users believe that the narratives of religious issues in the hashtags and tweets do not influence their beliefs and stand on these issues. Secondly, Twitter users whose number is not as big as the first group, believe that religious issues influence their perceptions. Thirdly, Twitter users whose number is the smallest among the two other groups take a neutral position. These respondents stated they did not know the issues and did not want to answer the questions on how religious issues influence their perception.

Concerning the notion whether or not religious issues have influence on social conflict, this research captures a portrait of Twitter users' perceptions of the notion. First, most netizens who use Twitter social media believe that religious issues on Twitter influence social conflicts. Second, quite large number of netizen stated that they disagreed and strongly disagreed that social conflict was influenced by the Twitter conversations on religious issues. They believe that the cyber reality on social media differs from the social facts since the different views on tweets and hashtag become normal in which everyone can act as a digital journalist in the cyber space era. Third, a few netizens stated that they did not know the notion of religious issues and did not want to answer questions on the religious issues have an influence on social conflict.

Finally, what is interesting about the notion on how the religious issues influence social conflict is that netizens' views on these issues seem contradictory. On the one hand, most netizens feel unaffected by religious issues that are widely debated in Twitter conversations and hashtags; on the other hand, they believe that religious issues can trigger social strife. This contradiction at least suggests the netizens' personal perception that they feel not much influenced by the pros and cons of religious issues and that this influence could occur on people outside them. Netizens take a paradoxical view on the impact of religious concerns on social media. This dichotomy highlights social media's dual character as a tool for connecting and a trigger for polarization. This perception paradox reveals the complex interplay of social media's intended and unintended roles in society. For example, some netizens use religious subjects to promote harmony and shared ideals, demonstrating social media's beneficial ability to transcend divisions. Others, motivated by ideological, political, or economic reasons, may use religious concerns to exacerbate differences and gain attention or influence.



## 4. Results and Discussion

As the object of this research, the eight religious issues are always related to each other, to national issues, politics, elections, political figures, and many other issues in direct and indirect ways. Every socio-religious issue will trigger other issues that intersect with a certain level of relationship. These issues become a single large network that influences each other's interactions in cyberspace. The eight religious issues are connected to other hashtags with a complex relationship pattern as seen in the social conversation network for each issue.

Furthermore, most Twitter users believe that the religious issues widely discussed in Twitter hashtags and tweets do not influence their stance to these issues. As a result, they remain in their positive and negative perceptions of the religious issues. Many Twitter users have a negative view of a particular religious issue, and they remain on their stance and are not easily influenced by the strong debating arguments. The fact that religious issues do not influence their perceptions does not mean that the religious issues on Twitter social media have no influence on social conflicts in society.

With the development of communication science and new media studies, it is expected that the research in this field will continue to increase its critical analysis and scope. Since this research focuses only on the conversations of Twitter users, in the future, other researchers need to expand the object of study objects which includes many other social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, and so forth. In addition to increasing the number of media as study objects, future research is expected to set a longer time frame for collecting research data to capture trends in religious issues month-to-month and year-to-year. The longer the research data collection period becomes, the more virtual facts can be obtained to map the triggers for the emergence of religious issues on social media. Future research can provide a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay between social media, religion, and social conflict while also offering actionable insights for policymakers, platform developers, and civil society.

## 5. Declarations

### 5.1. Author Contributions

Conceptualization: B.F., S.A.F., E.A.S., D.S.M., N.R., M.A.R.; Methodology: D.S.M., and N.R.; Software: N.R.; Validation: B.F., S.A.F., and M.A.R.; Formal Analysis: B.F., S.A.F., and M.A.R.; Investigation: B.F.; Resources: S.A.F.; Data Curation: N.R.; Writing—Original Draft Preparation: B.F., D.S.M., and M.A.R.; Writing—Review and Editing: B.F., E.A.S., and M.A.R.; Visualization: B.F, D.S.M, N.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### 5.2. Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

### 5.3. Funding

The authors received financial support from the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### 5.4. Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

### 5.5. Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

### 5.6. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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