



Religion as a source of legitimacy of power and its influence on the distribution of welfare

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Governance; Legitimacy; Politics; Religion; Welfare distribution.</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze how religion is utilized as a source of legitimacy for power and its impact on the distribution of welfare. Religion serves as both a moral and political instrument that can either enhance or hinder social justice. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method and a literature review to examine relevant theories and empirical cases. The findings reveal that religion plays a dual role in governance and welfare policies. On one hand, it is employed by political authorities to legitimize power, shaping policies that reinforce social structures. On the other hand, religious organizations actively contribute to welfare distribution through philanthropy and social services. However, the allocation of welfare resources based on religious identity often leads to exclusivity, deepening socio-economic disparities. The study concludes that while religion holds transformative potential in promoting social justice, its role in governance must be managed inclusively to prevent reinforcing inequalities. Therefore, a collaborative approach between the state, religious institutions, and civil society is necessary to ensure that religion's role in legitimizing power contributes positively to equitable welfare distribution.</p>
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 2025-06-14 Revised 2025-07-05 Accepted 2025-07-07</p>	<p>Contribution: By advocating for collaborative efforts among the state, religious institutions, and civil society, this research provides a valuable framework for promoting equitable welfare distribution and mitigating socio-economic disparities linked to religious identity.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and power is one of the complex dynamics throughout human civilization. Religion, as a deep belief system, has become fundamental in the formation of morals, rules and laws in society. However, behind its constructive role, religion is also often used as a tool to legitimize power, which has an impact on various sectors of life, including social welfare in economic, psychological and political aspects (Firdawaty, 2017). Religion is often positioned as the source of absolute truth and the highest authority. Thus, religious teachings can be used to legitimize political actions, including policies that impact the distribution of power and resources. This phenomenon allows certain parties to justify their actions through religious symbols, sacred texts, or religious figures to achieve their goals. Therefore, there is a close relationship between religion, power and welfare, where each aspect influences the other (Nurdin, 2022).

Theoretically, religion can be a source of motivation to create a just and prosperous society, as reflected in many religious teachings which emphasize the values of love, justice and concern for others. However, religion can also be used to justify injustice and maintain the status quo, where certain groups have greater access to resources and power. When religion is used as a tool to legitimize power, the distribution of welfare becomes uneven (Haryanto, 2017). Groups that have access to dominant religious interpretations often gain greater benefits. They can claim certain privileges on the basis of religion, while minority or dissenting groups risk discrimination and marginalization (Rahman et al., 2024).

Historically, religion has been a powerful tool in legitimizing power, both in monarchies, theocracies and modern countries that adopt religious values in their laws. In classical kingdoms, kings were often considered to be direct representatives of God's will or even had divine qualities (Ismulyadi, 2019). This concept not only gives legitimacy to rulers to hold power, but also makes religion an instrument for maintaining social stability and control over the people. On the other hand, religion-based legitimacy also has the potential to create an unequal welfare distribution structure, especially when access to resources is influenced by the interpretation and application of religious values that favor certain groups. History records many examples of how religion was used to legitimize power and influence the distribution of welfare. During colonialism, for example, religion was often used to justify colonization and the exploitation of natural resources (Setyawan et al., 2024).

Max Weber classified legitimacy into three main types: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. In a religious context, traditional legitimacy is often related to belief in religious values passed down from generation to generation, while charismatic legitimacy is often found in religious leaders who have great influence in society (Weber, 1992). Meanwhile, rational-legal legitimacy in a religious context can emerge when religious values are integrated into the formal legal system (Habermas, 2023). However, although religion-based legitimacy can provide social stability, it also carries risks when used exclusively or manipulatively, especially in the distribution of welfare.

Furthermore, the relationship between religion, power and welfare distribution is also influenced by socio-economic and political dynamics. In societies with high levels of economic inequality, religion can be a tool to justify this inequality or, vice versa, a source of inspiration for social movements demanding justice (Ernawati et al., 2024). For example, in some developing countries, religious organizations are often important actors in providing social services that are not provided by the state. However, the existence of this organization is also often influenced by identity politics, where welfare distribution is given more to groups with the same religious affiliation (Saripudin et al., 2023).

It cannot be denied that religion also has the potential to encourage a more equitable distribution of welfare. In many religious traditions, the concepts of social justice and charity are central values that encourage individuals and institutions to help those in need. In Islam, for example, the concept of zakat is one of the pillars of religion, which directly aims to reduce social inequality. Likewise, in the Christian tradition, teachings about love and solidarity often form the basis of philanthropic efforts. However, the realization of these values in public policy is often hampered by political dynamics, diverse religious interpretations, and the interests of certain groups (Kurniawan, 2009).

This research focuses on how religion is used as a tool to legitimize power and its impact on the distribution of welfare in society. Specifically, this research aims to analyze how the concept of religion-based legitimacy is applied in various government systems and social policies. Apart from that, this research also identifies the impact of using religion as a means of legitimation on the distribution of welfare, both in economic, political and social aspects. In the context of social justice, this research explores the role of religion in promoting community welfare as well as factors that hinder the realization of religious values in public policy. To understand the dynamics of religious legitimacy in the contemporary context, this research also examines social and political theoretical perspectives regarding the relationship between religion and power. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide deeper insight into the role of religion in politics and welfare distribution.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods of analysis and literature review. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth analysis of the concept of religion as a legitimation of power and its impact on the distribution of social welfare. Through a qualitative approach, this research aims to understand and interpret various theoretical perspectives that support or criticize the role of religion in the realm of politics and societal welfare (Moleong, 2018). In collecting data, this research relies on library study techniques as the main source. Library studies allow researchers to access and analyze various

academic references, such as books, scientific journals, articles and other written sources that are relevant to the research topic (Abdullah, 2006). The selection of literature sources is carried out selectively by considering credibility and direct relevance to the issues discussed (Sugiyono, 2013). Thus, it is hoped that this literature study can provide a comprehensive understanding of how religion functions as a tool for legitimizing power and how this has implications for equal distribution of social welfare. Data sources in this research are categorized into two types, namely primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources include books and journals that directly discuss the concepts of religious moderation, pluralism, and the relationship between religion and politics. This source is used to develop the main argument regarding the importance of religious moderation in shaping a more inclusive distribution of welfare. Meanwhile, secondary sources include supporting journals, previous research reports, and news that clarify or complement discussions from primary sources (Rahman, 2025). By utilizing both types of sources, research can provide richer analysis and avoid bias in data interpretation.

In analyzing the data that has been collected, this research applies qualitative data analysis methods as developed by Miles and Huberman. This analysis process consists of three main stages, namely data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Baba, 2017). Data reduction is carried out by filtering the information that is most relevant and in accordance with the research focus, considering that the data obtained through literature study is very diverse and not all of it has a direct relationship to the research objectives. After reduction, the data is then displayed in a more systematic form through the data display stage, making it easier for researchers to identify relationships between the concepts being analyzed. The final stage is drawing conclusions, where this research summarizes the main findings regarding how religion plays a strategic role in shaping power structures and its influence on social welfare.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between religion and the legitimacy of power

The relationship between religion and the legitimacy of power is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, especially in the ASEAN region, which has religious diversity and unique political structures. Religion in various historical contexts has functioned as a means of legitimizing power, both in monarchical, authoritarian and democratic government systems. The concept of legitimacy itself categorized into three main forms, namely traditional, legal-rational and charismatic legitimacy (Weber, 1992). In the ASEAN context, religion is often used by political leaders to build charismatic legitimacy, where leaders position themselves as protectors of religious values in order to gain public support. This phenomenon can be observed in political dynamics in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, where religion is the main factor in the construction of state power and policy (Netanyahu & Sepniwati, 2024).

In Indonesia, the relationship between religion and power has become an integral part of national political history. Pancasila as a state ideology accommodates religious principles within the national corridor, but in practice, the use of religion as a political tool often occurs. In the last few decades, religion-based identity politics has become increasingly stronger, especially during general elections. Candidates who can identify with the majority religious group tend to have a greater chance of gaining electoral support. However, the implications of religion-based politics often create social polarization, which weakens national cohesion (Setyawan et al., 2024).

Malaysia, as a country with a political system that is more structured in accommodating the role of religion, provides a different example. Islam is made the official state religion, and the role of religion in legitimizing power is very evident in government policies. The concept of "Malay Ketuanan," which emphasizes the political and economic dominance of the Malay-Muslim ethnic group, systematically constructs a relationship between religion and power. Political legitimacy in Malaysia not only relies on popular support, but also on religious validation provided by Islamic institutions (Wayeekao, 2016).

Meanwhile, Thailand presents a different dynamic in the relationship between religion and the legitimacy of power. Even though the majority of Thailand's population adheres to Buddhism, the country still maintains a monarchical system that is deeply rooted in religious tradition. The King of Thailand is seen as a holy figure who has spiritual legitimacy, which in the Weberian approach can be categorized as a form of traditional legitimacy. Buddhism is not only a national symbol but also a political instrument used by military regimes and civil governments to control society. However, the conflict that occurred in the southern region of Thailand, where the majority of the population is Muslim, shows how religion-based legitimacy can become a source of social tension when minority groups feel marginalized (Aniqoh, 2022). In this case, the structural conflict

approach is put forward (Galtung, 2009) can explain how inequality in the distribution of power based on religion can trigger social resistance and exacerbate tensions between groups.

Religion not only functions as a tool of political legitimacy, but also has a deep influence on shaping social policies that have a broad impact on the welfare of society. In many contexts, religion acts as a normative foundation that provides direction for the formulation of public policies, especially in countries with a strong religious value base. In Islam, for example, ethical concepts embedded in religious teachings not only shape individual morality but also provide principles of governance that prioritize social justice, trust and deliberation (Setyawan et al., 2024). If implemented well, these principles can encourage the creation of a government system that is more inclusive and responsive to community needs. In practice, several countries that adopt policies based on religious ethics are proven to have better levels of social welfare compared to countries that strictly separate religion from politics.

One important aspect in analyzing the role of religion in social policy is how religious values can be translated into concrete regulations. Weber (Weber, 1992) in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* highlights how certain religious ethics can promote economic growth and social prosperity. In the Islamic context, concepts such as *problem* (public benefit) and *hisba* (religion-based social control) are the basis for directing public policies that favor the welfare of the people. When the government is based on principles, the policies made are not solely oriented towards short-term economic interests, but also take into account long-term social welfare. This can be seen in the policies of several Middle Eastern countries that integrate Islamic economic principles in their financial systems, which have proven capable of creating better economic stability and reducing social inequality (Chapra, 2016).

Furthermore, policies based on religious ethics also play a role in establishing a more equitable wealth distribution system. The concept of justice in Islam emphasizes that prosperity must not only be enjoyed by a handful of economic elites but must be distributed proportionally to all levels of society. One of the instruments used to achieve this goal is zakat, which functions as a mechanism for redistributing wealth from well-off groups to less well-off groups. Empirical studies show that the implementation of an optimal zakat system can reduce poverty rates significantly in various Muslim countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia (Kahf, 2003). In fact, research conducted (Asutay & Yilmaz, 2021), regarding Islamic economics in developing countries, found that when sharia-based financial instruments are applied consistently in public policy, the impact on increasing social welfare is greater compared to conventional economic policies, which are often more oriented towards economic growth alone without paying attention to aspects of equality.

However, the implementation of religion-based social policies also faces various challenges, especially in the context of a multicultural and secular society (Sukenti & Hermawan, 2024). In some countries, there are concerns that policies that are too oriented towards religious values could lead to social exclusion for minority groups who have different value systems. This is in line with the opinion of (Habermas, 2014) which states that in modern society, religion needs to find a space for dialogue that allows inclusivity and mutual agreement in the formation of public policies.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of religion-based policies also depends greatly on how government institutions manage the relationship between religion and the state. In several countries with more authoritarian political systems, religion is often used as a means of justifying power, which ultimately benefits certain groups rather than creating prosperity for society at large (Esposito & Voll, 2001). In contrast, in countries with mature democratic systems, religion tends to play more of a role as a moral inspiration in social policy, without having to be an instrument of political control. For example, in Scandinavia, even though the level of community religiosity is relatively low, many of the social policies implemented actually have similarities with religious ethical values, such as distributive justice and social solidarity (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016). This shows that religious values can be a source of inspiration for progressive social policies, without having to be institutionalized exclusively in the political system.

In addition, this research found that the successful implementation of religion-based policies in improving social welfare also depends heavily on community support. Active community participation in overseeing public policies based on religious values is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of these policies. In several countries with a strong tradition of public participation, such as Turkey and Indonesia, policies based on religious values are more accepted and work well because there is a collective awareness of the importance of social welfare as part of moral and spiritual responsibility (An-Na'im, 2017). On the other hand, in countries that tend to have a more closed bureaucracy, religion-based policies often experience obstacles in their implementation due to the lack of support from various elements of society.

In the Indonesian context, for example, the implementation of Islamic-based social policies has experienced various challenges and dynamics. One example is the sharia-based economic program implemented by the government in the last few decades. Even though the Islamic banking system continues to develop, the challenge of integrating Islamic principles of justice in fiscal and monetary policies is still an issue that needs to be addressed (Ridho & Thibburhany, 2019). Apart from that, in the field of social welfare, religious-based programs such as zakat and waqf have shown positive results in improving the living standards of the poor, but there are still obstacles in terms of managing and distributing them to make them more effective and equitable.

However, the role of religion in legitimizing power does not always have a positive impact. In many cases, religion is manipulated as a tool to maintain the status quo and justify undemocratic policies. This phenomenon can be observed in authoritarian governments that use religious rhetoric to silence political opposition. In several ASEAN countries, religion-based laws are often applied selectively to criminalize groups deemed to be a threat to the ruling regime. In this context, the instrumentalist state concept from (Althusser, 1971) is relevant in explaining how the state uses religious institutions as part of the ideological apparatus to maintain political domination.

In contemporary times, the relationship between religion and the legitimacy of power, for example, in the ASEAN region, is increasingly influenced by the development of information technology, globalization and rapid social change. Globalization has not only changed the economic and political landscape but also influenced the way religion is articulated in the public sphere and in relation to power. In Indonesia, the use of religion in political legitimacy is increasingly visible in electoral contestation and public policy. Religion-based identity politics is often used to gain mass support. This can strengthen the position of the political elite, but on the other hand, it also risks deepening polarization in society. This phenomenon requires the state to be wiser in managing religious diversity so as not to cause horizontal conflict (Ismulyadi, 2019). Malaysia faces similar challenges, where Islam as the official state religion often becomes a political instrument used to strengthen the hegemony of certain groups. This can be seen in public policies, which tend to provide greater space for Muslim majority groups, while the rights of religious minority groups are sometimes neglected. This tension is increasing with issues related to human rights and religious freedom (Muliyah et al., 2020).

Distribution of welfare and access to resources

The distribution of welfare and wealth is a fundamental issue in modern social and economic structures, especially in the context of developing countries like Indonesia. Inequality in the distribution of resources is often rooted in structural factors, whether economic, political or ideological. In this case, religion plays a very important role as a driving factor in moral strength in supporting social welfare policies and economic redistribution mechanisms. Muhammadiyah, as one of the largest community organizations in Indonesia, has very large total assets, reaching around 400 trillion rupiah. These assets cover various strategic sectors such as education, health, as well as extensive land ownership. Muhammadiyah's success in managing these assets not only depends on donor contributions, but also on governance based on Islamic values regarding welfare and fair distribution of resources (Taufani, 2024). Thus, analysis of the distribution of welfare from the perspective of religion and public policy becomes increasingly relevant in understanding how faith-based organizations can be effective instruments in fighting for social justice.

In the sociological theory of religion, Émile Durkheim emphasized that religion is not just a belief system, but also has a social function that is able to regulate collective life and form a welfare structure in a community (Durkheim, 2018). This concept is in line with philanthropic practices in Islam, such as zakat, infaq and waqf, which function as the main instruments in the distribution of welfare. Zakat, for example, is a religious obligation that has significant social and economic dimensions in reducing economic inequality. For example, in various recent studies, the implementation of zakat in countries with large Muslim populations has been proven to be able to reduce poverty levels and improve the welfare of marginalized communities (Ali et al., 2023).

However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of faith-based philanthropy in encouraging the distribution of welfare still faces various challenges, especially in the context of identity politics. One of the main problems in religion-based welfare distribution is the existence of exclusivity in the distribution of aid which sometimes favors majority groups over minorities. A number of studies show that in societies experiencing strong religious segregation, social assistance is often provided by considering the similarity of religious affiliation between the giver and recipient, not solely based on economic needs (Soegiharto, 2022). This shows

that welfare distribution is not only a matter of religious philanthropy, but is also closely related to political dynamics and public policy.

One of the main factors causing uneven distribution of welfare is corruption in the management of public funds and philanthropy. According to reports *Transparency International Indonesia*, corruption in the social assistance sector is one of the issues that hampers the effectiveness of welfare programs in Indonesia. There are many cases where social funds that should be used to help poor communities are actually misused by political actors for personal or certain group interests (Marilang, 2016). In this context, religion can function as an instrument of social control that encourages transparency and accountability in the governance of welfare distribution.

Additionally, concept *Deaconess* in Christianity also provides an interesting perspective on how religion can be a motor in a more inclusive distribution of welfare. *Diakonia* emphasizes the importance of social services, especially in the education and health sectors, as the main instrument in improving the standard of living of underprivileged people (Soegiharto, 2022). In several European countries that have a long history of integrating *diakonia* values into public policy, social welfare has become more equitable because the state collaborates with religious institutions in providing public services. In Indonesia, this approach is also starting to be implemented through various collaboration programs between the government and religious institutions in providing religious-based health and education services (Irfani, 2022).

However, to ensure that welfare distribution is truly equitable, it is not enough to rely solely on religious philanthropic initiatives or top-down government policies. A more holistic approach is needed involving active participation from civil society, academia and the private sector. Model *collaborative governance* proposed (Ansell & Torfing, 2021), emphasizing that effective policies in welfare distribution must be based on close partnerships between government, religious organizations and local communities. In this way, welfare distribution can be carried out with a more inclusive approach, oriented towards community needs, and not only dependent on state policy alone.

Apart from economic and political dimensions, the distribution of welfare and access to resources is also influenced by social and cultural factors. The social inequality that occurs is often exacerbated by stereotypes and prejudice against certain groups, especially religious or ethnic minority groups. Religion can strengthen social cohesion through its teachings which emphasize the importance of mutual help and sharing. In Islam, for example, teachings about brotherhood underscore the importance of solidarity between believers, regardless of ethnic or social background (Casram, 2016). This is also seen in Christian teachings, which teach love and service towards others, especially those in difficult conditions. When these values are implemented in social policies and practices, they can reduce social disparities and increase access to resources for groups that have been marginalized (Latifah, 2018). However, this effort requires a more holistic approach, including strengthening the role of religious institutions as government partners in realizing social welfare. Religious institutions can contribute through philanthropic programs, community empowerment and comprehensive education. In addition, collaboration between religious institutions, civil society and government is also needed to ensure that resource distribution is carried out fairly and transparently. This kind of approach not only increases social justice but also helps prevent potential conflicts caused by economic and social inequality (Farida, 2014).

The role of religious organizations in welfare distribution

Religious organizations have a strategic role in the distribution of welfare, especially in communities that face social and economic inequality. As institutions that have strong roots in the community, religious organizations not only function as moral mobilizers but also as agents of concrete social change. Through philanthropic programs such as *zakat*, *infaq*, *alms* and *diakonia*, religious organizations are able to reach community groups that are often neglected by the state system. Religious organizations also function as mediators between the government and society, especially in voicing the aspirations of marginalized groups (Purwowibowo & Hendijanto, 2019). They can push for more open and fair public policies, using their moral influence. In many cases, religious organizations are effective liaisons in overcoming the gap in trust between the government and society due to slow bureaucracy or a lack of transparency (Kurniawan, 2009). Apart from direct aid distribution, religious organizations also play a role in creating long-term support systems for community welfare. They often initiate community-based empowerment programs, such as job skills training, or entrepreneurship development based on religious rules. This kind of program aims to help people not only get out of temporary poverty but also create economic sustainability (Syahrin et al., 2022). For example,

religious institutions in Indonesia, such as Baznas (National Zakat Amil Agency), not only distribute zakat to beneficiaries but also support training and development programs for small businesses, so that zakat recipients can be economically independent in the future. The role of religious organizations is also seen in supporting education and health, two important pillars of social welfare. Many religious institutions build schools, universities and hospitals to serve the wider community, regardless of religious or social background. In this case, religious values are used to encourage the provision of public services. Religious institutions also often become strategic partners for the government in dealing with crises, such as natural disasters or pandemics, where they provide fast and coordinated humanitarian assistance (Gunawan, 2017).

However, to expand their impact, religious organizations need to pay attention to strengthening their internal capacity. This includes management training, transparent financial management, as well as the use of technology to increase program effectiveness. For example, digital platforms can be used to collect and distribute donations more efficiently, while making it easier for the public to monitor fund allocation (Netanyahu & Sepniwati, 2024). Interfaith collaboration and partnerships with international organizations can also broaden the scope of services and increase social impact. Ultimately, the role of religious organizations in the distribution of welfare is very important to create a civilized, open and just society. By integrating religious values, modern management strategies, and cross-sector collaboration, this organization can continue to be a transformative force in building a more harmonious and prosperous society. This not only reduces social inequality but also strengthens solidarity between various groups in society, thereby supporting broader social and political stability (Boty, 2015).

One of the fundamental aspects in strengthening the capacity of religious organizations is effective management. Good management allows organizations to run their programs in a more structured manner, from strategic planning, implementation, to evaluation. This effectiveness not only reflects the professionalism of the organization, but also increases public trust in the institution. According to recent research, religious organizations that have a clear management structure tend to be better able to manage resources and distribute aid more evenly than those that are still traditional (Petrov & Rahman, 2023). Apart from that, visionary leadership in this organization is the main key to the sustainability of welfare programs. Leaders who have a deep understanding of modern management and high social sensitivity will be able to design strategies that are more innovative and responsive to changing social dynamics (H. A. Hassan, 2022).

Apart from management aspects, transparency in financial management is also a crucial factor in ensuring the credibility of religious organizations. When the public has clear access to information regarding the sources and use of funds, the level of trust in the organization will increase, which ultimately expands public participation in these social programs. This transparency also plays a role in preventing misuse of funds and ensuring that budget allocations are truly used for the benefit of people in need (Hasan et al., 2024). In some cases, religious organizations that implement digital-based financial systems are able to increase their accountability significantly. Blockchain technology, for example, has begun to be adopted by several faith-based philanthropic institutions to create a financial system that is more transparent and less easily manipulated (Khudzaifah Dimiyati et al., 2023).

Moreover, interfaith collaboration and partnerships with international organizations are strategic steps in expanding the scope of welfare services. In the context of a multicultural society, an inclusiveness-based approach is increasingly needed to create a wider social impact. Religious organizations that are able to collaborate with interfaith institutions tend to have higher effectiveness in reducing social conflict and strengthening harmony in society (H. M. F. U. Hassan & Jamal, 2024). This collaboration also opens up opportunities for religious organizations to get support from various international institutions that have wider resources and networks. For example, several Islamic organizations in Southeast Asia have collaborated with global humanitarian agencies to manage aid programs for refugees and community groups affected by disasters (Efendy et al., 2023).

In addition, the integration of religious values with modern management strategies is a factor that can strengthen the legitimacy of religious organizations in the distribution of social welfare. Organizations that are able to balance spiritual aspects with a professional approach tend to be more sustainable in carrying out their programs. This is supported by research which shows that people are more likely to trust religious institutions that not only prioritize moral values, but also have efficient and accountable operational systems (Amin, 2024). Thus, strengthening the capacity of religious organizations is not limited only to increasing internal effectiveness, but also expanding their influence in building a more harmonious and prosperous society.

The important role of religious organizations in the distribution of social welfare can also be studied through the social capital theory developed (Putnam, 2000b). According to this theory, religious institutions play an important role in building trust and social solidarity in society. Religious organizations not only provide material assistance, but also create an environment conducive to strengthening social networks and mutual cooperation. In this context, religious organizations function as bridges that connect various levels of society, both through philanthropic activities and community-based economic empowerment programs (Putnam, 2000a). When this social capital is managed well, religious organizations can become a transformative force that drives more inclusive and sustainable social change.

Ultimately, the role of religious organizations in the distribution of welfare cannot be separated from the social, political and economic dynamics that surround them. By integrating religious values, modern management strategies, and cross-sector collaboration, this organization can continue to be an agent of change in building a more just and prosperous society. Their success in carrying out their social mission not only contributes to reducing social disparities, but also strengthens solidarity between various groups in society, thereby creating broader social and political stability (N. M. Hassan et al., 2024). Therefore, strengthening the capacity of religious organizations is a strategic step that is not only important for their own sustainability but also for the welfare of society as a whole.

4. CONCLUSION

Thus, based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the relationship between religion and the legitimacy of power shows how religious values can be a moral basis for building inclusive and fair policies, but can also become a political tool that gives rise to social polarization when misused. In several countries, including Indonesia, religion is often used as a means of identity politics to gain majority support, which unfortunately often excludes minority groups. However, religion also has great potential as a transformative force in the distribution of welfare and access to resources. Through the values of justice, trust and solidarity, religion can encourage policies that are more oriented towards social equality and welfare. The role of religious organizations is important in this context, because they are able to bridge gaps that are often inaccessible to the government. With philanthropic programs, economic empowerment, and education and health services, religious organizations contribute directly to reducing inequality and improving people's living standards. However, to achieve wider impact, these organizations need to adopt a professional approach and collaborate with various parties, including governments and international institutions. In this way, religion, politics and religious organizations can work synergistically to create a more just, harmonious and prosperous society, while strengthening social and political stability at the national and regional levels.

The implications of this research show that the effectiveness of religion in influencing welfare is very dependent on how religion is institutionalized in public policy. When managed with an inclusive and transparent approach, religious values can strengthen social solidarity and reduce economic inequality. However, when religion is used as an exclusive tool of power, the impact actually worsens social injustice and narrows minority groups' access to resources. Therefore, balanced governance between religion and the state is needed to ensure that the role of religion in legitimizing power can have a positive impact on the welfare of society at large.

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