The Use of Religious Issues in Election Campaigns:
A Bibliometric Analysis

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Keyword: Identity Politics, Election Campaigns, Religious Issues, Bibliometric Analysis, Social Polarization.	**Abstract:** The politicization of religion in election campaigns has become a global phenomenon with significant implications for voter behavior and democratic stability. This study aims to fill the gap in systematic understanding by conducting a bibliometric analysis of scholarly publications on religious issues in electoral contexts. Using data from the Scopus database (1980–2023), the study employs VOSviewer and RStudio to map publication trends, citation impact, geographical distribution, institutional contributions, and thematic networks. A total of 244 articles were analyzed, revealing a sharp increase in publications since 2000, with peaks in 2021. The United States and Indonesia emerged as dominant contributors, while Southeast Asian institutions showed strong local engagement. Thematic mapping identified "religious identity" and "voter behavior" as central themes, while topics like "digital religion" and "religious extremism" appeared as emerging or declining. The findings highlight the global relevance of religious discourse in political campaigns and its role in shaping polarization and identity politics. This study contributes to the academic field by offering a structured overview of the intellectual landscape and suggesting future research directions emphasizing cross-cultural collaboration and methodological innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The use of religious issues in election campaigns has a significant impact on voter behaviour and political strategies. In the United States, religion was a key indicator in the 2004 and 2020 elections, where evangelical voters showed high participation and moral issues such as abortion became decisive factors in political choices (Campbell et al., 2021; Denton, 2005). In Indonesia, the politicization of religion in the 2019 elections created polarization and social conflict, demonstrating how religion can be exploited to attract public sympathy or antipathy (Zainnuddin et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, the exploitation of religion in campaigns exacerbated political polarization and violence against minorities (Hossain, 2024). This phenomenon highlights the importance of religious issues as a tool for political mobilization but also poses risks to social stability and democracy.

Although substantive studies on the role of religion in electoral contests have demonstrated strong empirical relevance, the bibliometric approach to this theme

remains very limited. The available literature tends to be scattered and not systematically integrated, making it difficult to identify publication patterns, conceptual evolution, and the academic impact of the research that has been conducted (Prakash & Dwivedi, 2022). Furthermore, there is no comprehensive mapping of the geographical distribution of research, which could reveal regional dynamics in the use of religious issues as political campaign strategies. This approach is important for understanding how social, cultural, and institutional contexts influence the politicization of religion in various countries (Schwörer, 2024; Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2023).

Furthermore, there has been no analysis of the institutional affiliations and local contributions of authors active in this field, which could provide insights into centers of knowledge production and their influence on public policy (Guth, 2014; Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2021). Additionally, co-existence network analysis and thematic mapping have not been optimally utilized to identify interconnections between themes such as "religious commodification," "political pragmatism," and "identity politics" (Coe & Chapp, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps through bibliometric analysis encompassing publication and citation trends, geographical distribution, institutional impact, co-existence networks, and thematic mapping to establish a more structured and in-depth conceptual framework for studying the use of religious issues in election campaigns.

This study aims to comprehensively examine the dynamics of the use of religious issues in election campaigns through a bibliometric approach. The main focus includes analyzing publication trends and citation impact, the geographical distribution of studies, the institutional and local influence of authors, as well as thematic mapping and concept co-existence networks. By combining these dimensions, this study seeks to uncover how religious rhetoric shapes political behaviour, campaign strategies, and voter perceptions across various social and cultural contexts. This approach is crucial for understanding the evolution of religion-based political discourse and its contribution to polarization and electoral mobilization.

The ongoing research offers methodological innovation by integrating bibliometric analysis, thematic mapping, and co-existence networks to identify dominant patterns and unexplored research gaps. Additionally, this study expands its geographical scope by comparing the politicization of religion in the United States, Western Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia (Chapp & Coe, 2019). The findings from this research are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in formulating more inclusive campaign strategies and public policies that are sensitive to religious diversity. Thus, this research is relevant in the context of an increasingly complex and fragmented global democracy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a bibliometric analysis approach to analyze trends and topics of the use of religious issues in election campaigns. This study uses literature sourced from the Scopus database (Lawelai et al., 2023). This research aims to identify influential trends and topics and the development of scientific works in the field. Scopus is widely known

for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature in various fields, making it a suitable base for conducting literature reviews on election studies (Abbas et al., 2023). The use of Scopus facilitates detailed examination of the development and dissemination of research results related to the topic of the use of religious issues in election campaigns.

For systematic collection and analysis of relevant literature, the Scopus database is searched, and the resulting dataset is exported in CSV format. This data is then imported into VOSviewer, and RStudio for visualization and analysis. These tools are an integral part of the methodological framework of scientific review and allow researchers to visualize patterns, map bibliometric networks, and synthesize data efficiently. The use of VOSviewer and RStudio helps to improve the understanding of the literature collected (Guo et al., 2023), thus allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of data taken from Scopus. This methodological approach is consistent with standard practices in data collection and analysis in bibliometric research and emphasizes the importance of visual tools in data extraction and synthesis.

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology is used to determine the stages of data screening and selection (Wang et al., 2019) Only peer-reviewed papers published in English from 1 January 1980 to 31 December 2023) are included in this review. This criterion ensures the inclusion of high-quality and relevant literature that reflects the current discourse on the use of religious issues in election campaigns. By following PRISMA guidelines, this study provides a transparent and iterative selection process, thereby increasing the credibility and reliability of the findings.
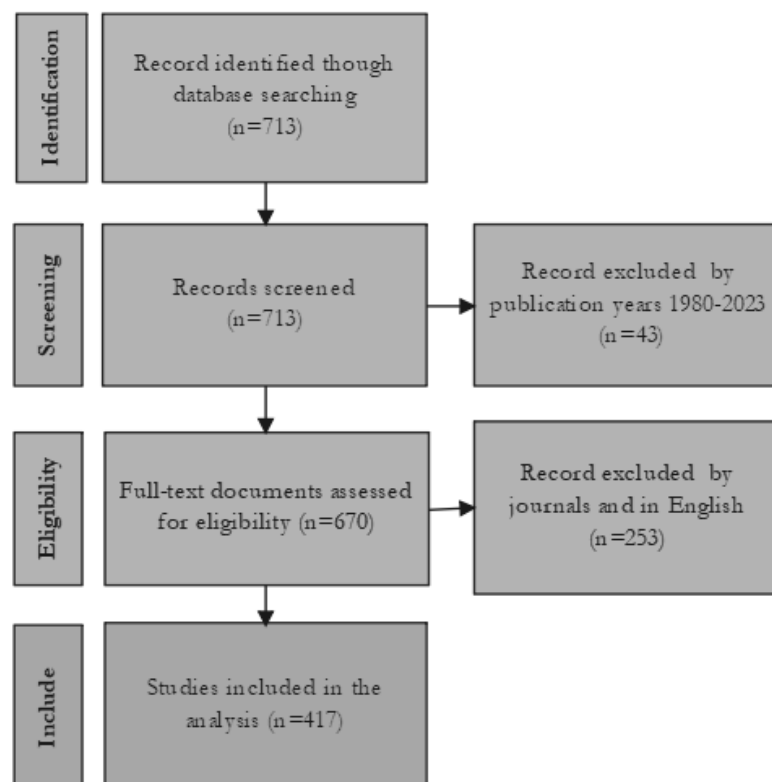
Figure 1. Modified PRISMA charts the article selection process in a systematic review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trends in Publication and Citation Impact of Religious Issue Studies in Election Campaigns

The study of religious issues in election campaigns demonstrates a consistent publication trend since 1956, with 244 articles reflecting global attention to the politicization of religion (Teyssier & Côté, 2014). Research was conducted in various countries such as the US (Brooks & Manza, 2004; Denton, 2005; Hirschl et al., 2012), Canada (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2016), Indonesia (Zainnuddin et al., 2022), and Russia (Shcherbak & Ukhvatova, 2023). The impact of citations shows the influence of religion on voter behavior, political polarization (Guth et al., 2006), as well as campaign strategies based on religious symbols (Leaha & Canals, 2024). Studies also highlight methodological challenges and the need for new approaches in measuring religious influence more accurately (Banwart, 2010), making this topic relevant in contemporary political analysis.

Timespan	Sources	Documents	Annual Growth Rate
1980:2023	265	417	7.67 %
Authors	**Authors of single-authored**	**International Co-Authorship**	**Co-Authors per Doc**
627	264	6.235 %	1.59
Author's Keywords (DE)	**References**	**Document Average Age**	**Average citations per doc**
1139	15788	11.8	8.441

Figure 2. Main Information

Figure 2 shows the dynamics of citations, and the number of publications related to religious issues in election campaigns from 1980 to 2023. There are significant spikes in the average citations per article in 1997 (33) and 2002 (36.5), indicating highly influential publications. The number of publications increased sharply since 2000, peaking in 2021 with 31 articles. This trend reflects the increasing academic attention to religious issues in politics, along with global social and political complexities (Schwörer, 2024). This data indicates that the topic is not only relevant but also has a major impact in the scientific literature.
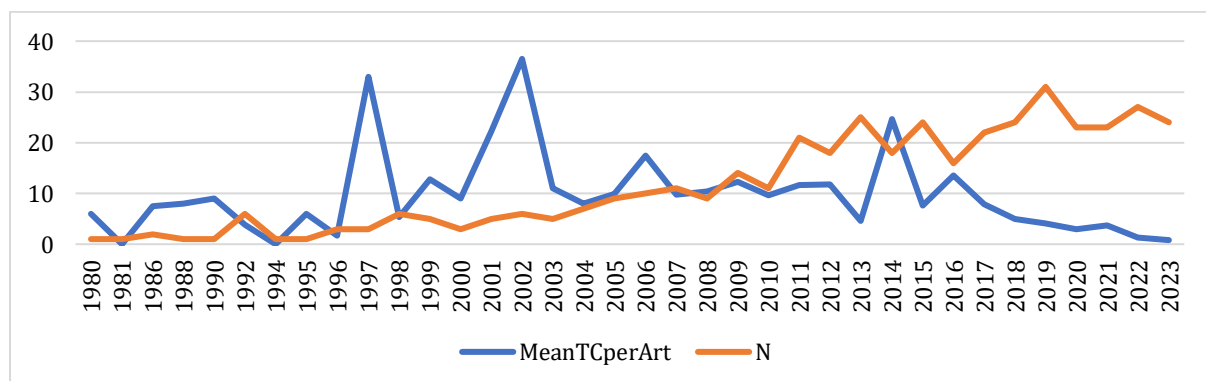
Figure 3. Number of Publications and Number of Citations per Year

Figure 3 shows the annual trends in the number of publications and citations in the study of religious issues in election campaigns from 1980 to 2023. Since the early 2000s, the number of publications has increased significantly, reflecting the increasing academic attention to this topic. The peak of publications occurred in 2021 with 31 articles, indicating a surge of interest that may have been triggered by global political dynamics and the increasing relevance of religious issues in electoral contestation (Salahudin et al., 2020; Sembiring et al., 2023). This surge also shows that religious issues are no longer local, but rather part of a complex transnational political discourse.

However, while the number of publications increased, the average citations per article showed sharp fluctuations. Years such as 1997 and 2002 recorded high spikes in citations (33 and 36.5), signalling the presence of highly influential articles in the academic literature. Conversely, years with a high number of publications were not always followed by a large citation impact, suggesting that quantity is not always directly proportional to quality or scientific influence (Michalska-Smith & Allesina, 2017). This pattern indicates the need for a critical evaluation of the contribution of individual publications (Fazel & Wolf, 2017), as well as the importance of a robust methodological approach to producing impactful work in the study of politics and religion.

Geographical Distribution, Institutional and Local Impact of Authors on Religious Issue Studies in Election Campaigns

The geographic, institutional and local impact distribution of authors in bibliometric analysis reflects global and local patterns of scientific contributions. Geographic distribution shows the dominance of countries in scientific publications and collaborations (Roy & Basak, 2013). Institutional impact is seen from the role of major universities in producing influential works (Bornmann, 2018). Meanwhile, local impact emphasizes the importance of research relevance to policy, professional practice and the needs of local communities (Ullah & Ameen, 2021). These three aspects complement each other in assessing the quality, reach, and tangible benefits of bibliometric research. Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 provide a comprehensive overview of scholarly contributions to the study of religious issues in election campaigns from geographical, institutional and individual perspectives.

Table 1. Top 10 Corresponding Author's Countries

Rank	Country	Articles	SCP	MCP	Freq
1	USA	43	40	3	10,3%
2	Indonesia	38	38	0	9,1%
3	Malaysia	16	14	2	3,8%
4	Australia	13	11	2	3,1%
5	Turkey	12	11	1	2,9%
6	United Kingdom	12	11	1	2,9%
7	Canada	7	5	2	1,7%
8	Germany	5	5	0	1,2%
9	India	4	4	0	1,0%
10	Iran	4	4	0	1,0%

Notes: SCP (Single Country Publications), MCP (Multiple Country Publications)

Table 1 shows the geographical distribution of scientific publications related to religious issues in election campaigns. The United States and Indonesia rank highest, with 43 and 38 articles, respectively. The high SCP figures in Indonesia indicate the dominance of national collaboration, reflecting a strong research focus on the local context and domestic policy (Cugmas et al., 2020). Conversely, countries such as Malaysia and Canada show higher MCP figures, indicating active involvement in international collaboration networks (Ramezani et al., 2021). This pattern indicates that research on religious issues in politics is not only developing locally but is also part of a global discourse involving cross-national knowledge exchange.

The distribution of SCP and MCP provides important insights into the nature of scientific collaboration. High SCP tends to produce more homogeneous and contextual research (Bozzo & Tomassini, 2024), as seen in studies in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the dominance of MCP in countries such as United States indicates the potential for comparative analysis and more diverse methodological approaches (Anuradha & Urs, 2007). International collaboration enriches understanding of religious issues in election campaigns with cross-cultural and political system perspectives. Therefore, SCP and MCP patterns are important indicators in assessing the depth, scope, and global relevance of bibliometric research.

Table 2. Most Relevant Affiliations

Rank	Affiliation	Articles	Percent
1	Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta	8	2,37%
2	Universitas Padjadjaran	7	2,08%
3	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	7	2,08%
4	The University of Texas at Austin	6	1,78%
5	University of Malaya	6	1,78%
6	Universitas Sumatera Utara	5	1,48%
7	Universiti Utara Malaysia	5	1,48%
8	Deakin University	4	1,19%
9	Diponegoro University	4	1,19%
10	Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci	4	1,19%

Table 2 shows the most productive institutions regarding publications on religious issues in election campaigns. Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta ranks first with eight articles, followed by Universitas Padjadjaran and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia with seven articles each. The dominance of institutions from Indonesia and Malaysia shows that political and religious studies are an essential focus in Southeast Asian academic circles (Kingsbury, 2016; Mashuri et al., 2022; Muhtador & Ulya, 2024; Ross et al., 2020). The high number of publications from these institutions reflects institutional support for religious-based socio-political research and demonstrates strong academic capacity in producing relevant and impactful literature.

The presence of international institutions such as the University of Texas at Austin and Deakin University in this list indicates global contributions to studying religious issues in politics. This suggests that the topic is not only of local concern but also attracts the interest of academics worldwide (Cianitto, 2016; Montero et al., 2008, 2023). This

pattern of affiliation is essential for understanding how institutions function as centers of knowledge production and scientific collaboration networks. Additionally, the diversity of institutions in the list shows that this research is multidisciplinary and transnational, enriching perspectives in understanding the role of religion in electoral dynamics.

Table 3. Top 10 Authors' Local Impact

Authors	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Jubba H.	2	4	0,286	19	4	2019
Qodir Z.	2	4	0,286	19	4	2019
Ghobadzadeh N.	3	3	0,214	30	3	2012
Nurmandi A.	2	3	0,286	19	3	2019
Sanadjian M.	2	3	0,069	12	3	1997
Ali N.	2	2	0,2	12	2	2016
Darwin RL	2	2	0,25	11	2	2018
Golkar S.	2	2	0,133	48	2	2011
Hadiz VR	2	2	0,222	115	2	2017
Hamayotsu K.	2	2	0,125	30	2	2010

Notes: TC (Total Citations), NP (Number of Publications)

Table 3 shows the authors with the highest local impact in religious studies during election campaigns, based on bibliometric metrics such as h-index, g-index, m-index, TC, and NP. Authors such as Jubba H. and Qodir Z. stand out with relatively high h and g indices, and consistent publication counts since 2019 (Fernando et al., 2023; Nashir et al., 2019). This indicates their sustained contribution to the development of local literature relevant to the political and religious context in Indonesia. Additionally, authors such as Hadiz V.R. have high total citations despite fewer publications, indicating that their work has a significant influence within the academic community (Diprose et al., 2019; Hadiz, 2021).

Variations in the m index reflect differences in the pace and consistency of scientific contributions among authors. For example, high m values for some authors reflect rapid productivity from the outset of their publications. This table is important for identifying key actors in the local knowledge network and assessing the extent to which their contributions impact scientific discourse. Thus, Table 3 not only reflects the quantity of publications but also their quality and influence in shaping academic understanding of the role of religion in electoral politics, particularly at the national and regional levels.

Co-Occurrence Network Religious Issues in Election Campaigns

Co-occurrence networks in bibliometric analysis are visualizations of relationships between entities such as keywords, authors, or terms that frequently appear together in scientific documents. These networks help identify dominant themes, collaboration patterns, and the intellectual structure of a field of study (Ji et al., 2018). Using tools like VOSviewer, researchers can map the interconnections between concepts and observe the evolution of topics over time (Lawelai et al., 2024; Sadat & Lawelai, 2023). This analysis is useful for understanding the dynamics of scientific knowledge, uncovering research clusters, and strategically formulating future research directions (Lawelai, 2023).

Figure 4. Co-occurrence Network of Religious Issues in Election Campaigns

Figure 4 shows a visualization of the co-occurrence network of keywords that frequently appear together in literature related to religious issues in election campaigns. This network was constructed using software such as VOSviewer, which enables the mapping of relationships between concepts based on their frequency of co-occurrence in scientific documents. Each node represents a keyword, while the connecting lines (edges) indicate the strength of the relationship between the words. The larger the node size, the more frequently the word appears, and the thicker the line, the stronger the co-occurrence relationship. This visualization provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure and focus of this study.

Analysis of this network reveals several prominent thematic clusters. For example, keywords such as religion, election, identity, and political communication form the core of the network, indicating that religious issues in election campaigns are often studied in the context of political identity and communication strategies (Chapp & Coe, 2019; Hossain, 2024; Santos & Bicho, 2016; Schwörer, 2024). Other clusters may reflect specific methodological approaches or geographical contexts, such as case studies in Indonesia or the United States.

Furthermore, this co-occurrence network serves as a strategic tool for identifying research trends, thematic collaborations, and new exploration opportunities. For example, if there are keywords that appear separately or are less connected, this could indicate that the topic has not been extensively studied in an integrated manner. In the context of election campaigns, "law" might refer to legal regulations affecting campaigns, "economy" to economic policies or conditions influencing voter behavior, and

"minorities" to the political mobilization and participation of minority groups (Scott & Medeiros, 2021; Sobolewska et al., 2015). Additionally, this mapping helps researchers understand how religious issues in politics are positioned within the global scientific discourse.

Thematic Mapping Religious Issues in Election Campaigns

Thematic mapping using RStudio-Biblioshiny is a process of visualizing and analyzing the main topics in a collection of scientific literature based on bibliographic metadata (Ghorbani, 2024). By utilizing the graphical interface of Biblioshiny, users can identify dominant research themes. This mapping is performed through analyses such as thematic maps, as shown in Figure 5. The outputs assist researchers in understanding the intellectual structure of a field, identifying research gaps, and formulating systematic and data-driven directions for further studies.
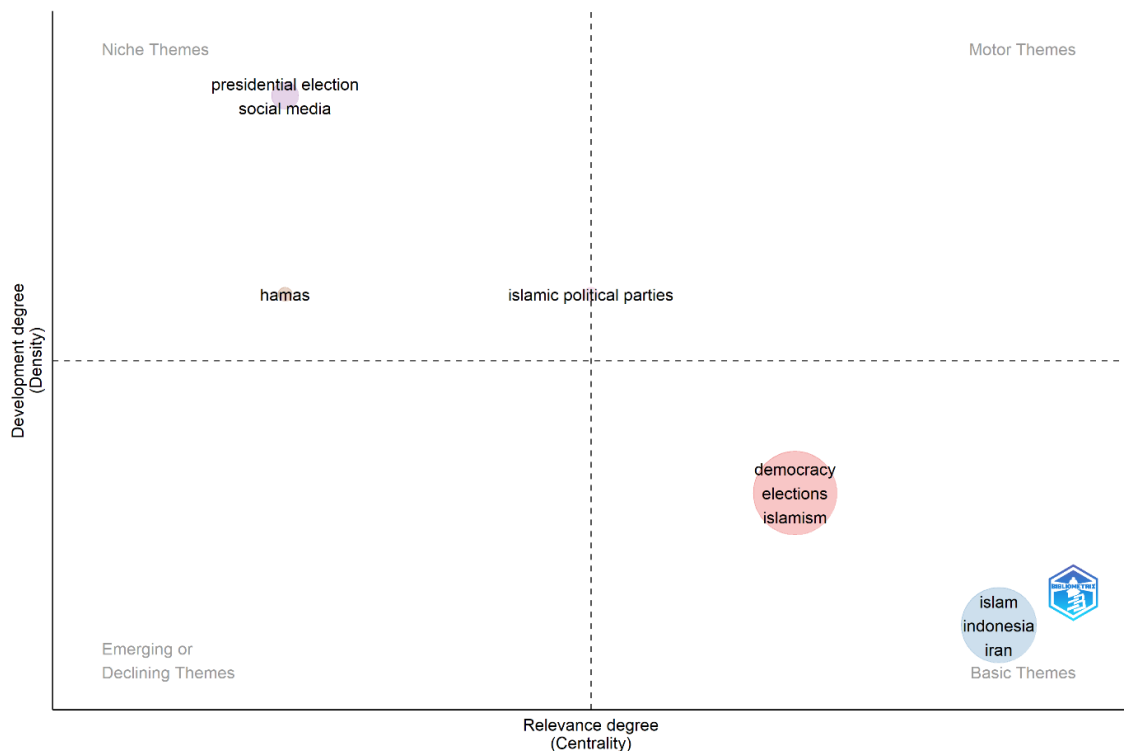
Figure 5. Thematic Map of Religious Issues in Election Campaigns

Figure 5 shows a thematic map divided into four quadrants: motor themes, niche themes, emerging or declining themes, and basic themes. The upper right quadrant (motor themes) shows topics that are strong in terms of centrality and density, such as "religious identity" and "voter behavior," meaning that these themes are not only popular but also developing conceptually (Campbell et al., 2021; Piacentini et al., 2024; Wilkins-Laflamme & Reimer, 2019). This indicates that issues of religious identity and voter behavior are the focus of attention in the literature and have a major influence on electoral political dynamics.

Meanwhile, the upper left quadrant (niche themes) features themes such as "Islamic populism" and "sectarianism," which, although developing conceptually, are less connected to other themes (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2016; Yilmaz & Shukri, 2023). This indicates

that while these themes are deep and specific, they have not yet become mainstream in academic discourse. On the other hand, the lower right quadrant (basic themes) includes topics such as "religion and politics" and "campaign strategy," which are highly connected to other topics but have not yet been explored in depth (Kulachai et al., 2023; Wise & McLaughlin, 2016). This means that although these themes are frequently discussed, the approaches to them remain general and require further exploration.

The lower left quadrant (emerging or declining themes) contains topics such as "religious extremism" and "digital religion" which have low density and centrality (Okolie et al., 2021). This can be interpreted as themes that are emerging or, conversely, beginning to be abandoned. In this context, it is important to examine the global socio-political dynamics that may drive the resurgence of these themes, particularly in the context of digital campaigns and religion-based radicalization. This study not only maps the conceptual position of themes in the literature but also provides strategic direction for future research in understanding the role of religion in electoral politics.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the dynamics of the use of religious issues in election campaigns through a comprehensive bibliometric approach. The results of the analysis show a consistent trend in publications since 1956, with a significant spike in 2021, reflecting increased academic attention to the politicization of religion. The geographical and institutional distribution shows the dominance of contributions from the United States and Indonesia, as well as the active involvement of academic institutions in Southeast Asia. These findings suggest that religious issues are not only a tool for local political mobilization, but also part of a complex transnational discourse. Visualization of co-existence networks and thematic mapping identify dominant themes such as religious identity and voter behavior, and reveal research gaps on issues such as religious extremism and digital religion.

The implications of these findings are significant for the development of more inclusive campaign strategies and public policies that are sensitive to religious diversity. This research confirms that a bibliometric approach can reveal the intellectual structure and direction of the evolution of the global political-religious discourse. A general claim that can be drawn is that the politicization of religion in elections is a cross-cultural phenomenon that impacts social polarization and electoral behavior. Going forward, this study opens up opportunities for further exploration of emerging themes and encourages international collaboration in understanding the impact of religion on contemporary democracy.

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