Navigating Tolerance: An Analysis of Public Responses on Social Media to the MUI Fatwa on Interfaith Greetings

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze people's responses in social media as a space of social interaction to the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) on interfaith greetings that has been considered controversial. The fatwa asserts that using interfaith greetings is not in line with Islamic principles of legitimate tolerance. Given the urgency to discuss this debate in Indonesia's pluralistic society, this study utilized a mixed-methods approach. Data was collected using crawling techniques from X social media platform and analysed with R and Python to perform topic modelling and sentiment analysis, then related tweets were qualitatively analysed. In the various topics discussed, the analysis shows that, despite the controversy and its diminishing regulative authority, MUI's role as a charismatic, traditional, and ethical religious authority is still widely recognized. This research contributes to the understanding of how fatwas are perceived and debated in social media spaces, highlighting the need for MUI to constantly offer religious guidance that observes Islamic tradition while being socially relevant. The study underscores the importance of MUI's active participation in the ongoing discourse on religious tolerance and moderation in Indonesian society.

Keywords: MUI; fatwa; interfaith greetings; tolerance; social media

Introduction

"The MUI once again tests our spirit of tolerance," reads one tweet on platform X, responding to the fatwa on interfaith greetings from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI).[1] This is not the first time MUI's fatwa has caused controversy, especially with regard to interfaith relations. The issuance of such fatwas has repeatedly been perceived as clashing with societal harmony and sparked heated debates, highlighting the ongoing tension between religious doctrine and understandings related to tolerance in Indonesia's diversity.

In its history, MUI's fatwas have sparked debate and controversy several times, especially in the context of plural and modern Indonesia. One of the most debated fatwas is the fatwa on cigarettes, which has generated heated discussions on its social and legal aspects in Islam.[2] In terms that intersect with inter-religious relations, among them are the fatwa on non-Muslim leaders and the fatwa on the use of religious attributes.[3] Some of MUI's fatwas are considered controversial because they use an outdated and exclusive version of maqasid al-shari'ah for the benefit of Muslims only.[4] On the other hand, however, some see some MUI fatwas as a mechanism to maintain social cohesion and harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic society. They ensure that Islamic practices are in line with local customs and promote unity among diverse communities.[5]

MUI has a vital role as a fatwa-giving institution in Indonesia. As a religious authority, MUI is responsible for providing valid and reliable

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[1] Liga Peradaban [@LigaPeradaban], 'Semangat Toleransi Kita (Sekali Lagi) Diuji MUI https://t.co/sM8iSXybz6', Tweet, *Twitter*, 31 May 2024, https://x.com/LigaPeradaban/status/1796567293796999529.

[2] Saifuddin Zubaidi, 'Cigarette Fatwas, Contestation of Religious Authority and Politics in Indonesia', *Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 20, no. 1 (10 June 2020): 61–78, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v20i1.61-78.

[3] Hisanori Kato, 'The Challenge to Religious Tolerance: Fundamentalist Resistance to a Non-Muslim Leader in Indonesia', *Comparative Civilizations Review* 77, no. 77 (8 November 2017), https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol77/iss77/8; M. Subuki, H. Akmal, and S. Hudaa, 'Identity and Piety: Critical Discourse Analysis on Indonesian Ulema Council's Fatwa About the Law Using Non-Muslim Religious Attributes', *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 23, no. 2 (2023): 423–48, https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v23i2.31280.

[4] A. Ansori, 'Controversial Fatwas from Indonesian Ulema Council: A Study of the Legal Sociology Perspective', *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 11, no. 5 (2022): 242–54, https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0139; Z. Syafei, 'Tracing Maqaṣid Al-Shari'ah in the Fatwas of Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI)', *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 1 (2017): 99–124, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2017.11.1.99-124.

[5] M. Rosyid and M.N. Irfan, 'READING FATWAS OF MUI A PERSPECTIVE OF MAṢLAḤAH CONCEPT', *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pemikiran* 19, no. 1 (2019): 91–117, https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v19i1.2726; M. Nashirudin and M. Sa'adah, 'Reviewing Shariah Certificates of DSN MUI (a Study on Shariah Certificate of DSN MUI on Paytren)', *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 19, no. 2 (2019): 169–83, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v19i2.169-183.

religious guidance. MUI functions as a mediator and solution provider for various religious issues faced by Muslims in Indonesia. Through its fatwas, MUI tries to answer various challenges of the times, both related to classical and contemporary issues. MUI was formed in 1975 with the aim of strengthening ukhuwah Islamiyah and fighting for the integrity and unity of the ummah. For more than four decades, MUI has issued various fatwas covering issues such as belief, worship, muamalah, and morals. MUI's authority as a fatwa-giving institution is based on the authority established by the authority-forming agents and the references that shape its authority. [6]

In its position, MUI's fatwas have a significant social impact. They not only serve as religious guidance but also influence people's behavior. An example is the fatwa on the use of social media that provides direction on how Muslims should interact in cyberspace while maintaining Islamic ethics and values.[7] In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, MUI's fatwas played a role in providing guidance on worship practices and health protocols, which helped prevent the spread of the virus and maintain public health. These fatwas include guidelines for congregational prayers in mosques, Eid prayers, and the use of COVID-19 vaccines. As such, MUI's fatwas directly influence the mindset and actions of Muslims in Indonesia, creating a collective awareness of the importance of maintaining collective health and safety. [8]

One of the latest fatwas issued in the decision of the ijtima' ulama of the 8th Indonesian Fatwa Commission states that the pronunciation of greetings by including greetings from six official religions is not an implementation of justified religious tolerance and moderation. This interfaith greeting was previously often used in official events as a form of respect for religious diversity in Indonesia. This decision was made at an ijtima' that took place at the Bahrul Ulum Islamic Center Islamic Boarding School, Sungailiat, Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province on 20-23 Zulkaidah 1445 AH / 28-31 May 2024 AD. This fatwa aims to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings and avoid misunderstandings in the practice of religious tolerance. Although the aim is to maintain the authenticity of the greeting in Islam, this fatwa sparked controversy and invited various reactions from the community

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[6] I. Mustofa and Hasanudin, 'TEXT AUTHORIZATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHARIA ECONOMIC LAW IN INDONESIA: Study of the Fatwa of the National Sharia Council of the Indonesian Ulama Council', *Jurisdictie: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syariah* 13, no. 2 (2022): 210–36, https://doi.org/10.18860/j.v13i2.18935.

[7] M. Shuhufi et al., 'Islamic Law and Social Media: Analyzing the Fatwa of Indonesian Ulama Council Regarding Interaction on Digital Platforms', *Samarah* 6, no. 2 (2022): 823–43, https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i2.15011.

[8] M. Sofwan Jauhari and Abdul Ghoni, 'The Level of People's Obedience to MUI Fatwas (COVID-19, Bank Interest, and Interfaith Marriage)', *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 20, no. 2 (30 December 2020), https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/ahkam/article/view/18685.

and other religious institutions. Among those who expressed opposing views were Yahya Cholil Staquf, Chairman of the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) and his younger brother Yaqut Cholil Qoumas as Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. [9]

This research aims to analyze people's responses to the dynamics arising from the fatwa on interfaith greetings. This research will examine people's reactions, especially through posts on social media platform X as a medium that records various social interactions. This analysis will provide an overview of how the fatwa was received by the public, as well as the various opinions and sentiments that developed. The data obtained will be analyzed to identify key topics and illustrate the sentiments that emerged in public discussions related to this fatwa. By understanding these dynamics, this research not only provides an overview of public perception, but also provides recommendations for MUI and related institutions to manage public communication and formulate religious policies including fatwas. This research is expected to contribute in reinforcing the role of MUI as an institution that provides direction and guidance in religious and social life to emphasize its relevance.

Methods

This research is a descriptive analysis of the community response to the dynamics arising from the fatwa on interfaith greetings issued by MUI. This research will examine people's reactions, especially through posts on social media platform X for a month from May 30, 2024. Crawling techniques collected the data and then topic modeling was conducted to identify the main themes and tree mapping for influential tweets better to understand the themes with the LDA model in R. This research also analyzed the sentiment that emerged in the discussion related to the fatwa by optimizing it with the BERT model through Python.[10] Through content analysis, researchers conducted more in-depth description and analysis, allowing them to understand the context and nuances of each post analyzed. The data obtained from this analysis was then further discussed using relevant theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this fatwa was received and responded to by the community and its relevance to fatwa development in MUI.

Fatwa on Interfaith Greetings

The fatwa on interfaith greetings was issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in response to the widespread phenomenon of public officials

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[9] *Menag Tak Setuju MUI Haramkan Salam Lintas Agama*, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5VQQZ5XZJc; *Ketua PBNU Tanggapi Fatwa Haram Salam Lintas Agama*, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZxAWGqp-0c.

[10] The pandas development team, 'Pandas-Dev/Pandas: Pandas' (Zenodo, 10 April 2024), https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.3509134.

using opening greetings from different religions at official events. This practice is considered an effort to show religious tolerance and respect for the diversity that exists in Indonesia. However, this has led to debate about whether the practice is compatible with Islamic teachings. Earlier in 2019, the MUI of East Java issued a circular letter numbered 110/MUI/JTM/2019 urging officials not to use opening greetings from all religions.[11] This controversy continued until it was finally captured to be discussed in the ijtima' ulama of the 8th Indonesian Fatwa Commission as part of the guidelines for interfaith relations. From here, the background of this fatwa is not just a direct question but also a *lisān al-ḥāl* question.

In the ijtima', which took place at the Bahrul Ulum Islamic Center Islamic Boarding School, Sungailiat, Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province on 20-23 Zulkaidah 1445 AH / 28-31 May 2024 AD, it was decided that the pronunciation of greetings by including greetings from the six official religions in Indonesia is not an implementation of justified religious tolerance and moderation. The fatwa states that each religion has its own unique procedures and prayers, and mixing greetings from different religions can obscure the identity of each religion. Therefore, MUI urges Muslims to continue using the greeting taught in Islam, namely "Assalamu'alaikum," and avoid using greetings from other religions even in official contexts.

The main argument underlying this fatwa is to maintain the purity of Islamic teachings and prevent syncretism, which is the mixing of elements from different religions that can lead to confusion and deviations in religious practice. MUI argues that interfaith greetings can lead to syncretic practices that are not in accordance with Islamic principles. In addition, this fatwa is based on several verses of the Qur'an that emphasize the importance of maintaining religious purity and not mixing truth with falsehood. One of the verses referenced is QS. Al-Kafirun [109]: 6 which reads, "For you your religion and for me my religion." This verse underlines that in tolerance, the boundaries of each religion must be maintained.

Fatwa and its Position in Islam

Fatwa, which comes from the Arabic word with the original letters *fā`-tā`-yā`*, means explanation.[12] In the Qur'an, there are three key words that form the concept of fatwa in terminology, namely *yas'alūnaka* (they ask you), *yastaftūnaka (*they ask for your opinion), and *aftinā* (give us a solution to this or that problem). Although the term fatwa is found in the Qur'ān with various derivations, they all have similar meanings, i.e. answers to questions posed to

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[11] 'MUI Jatim Imbau Pejabat Muslim Tak Ucapkan Salam Agama Lain', CNN Indonesia, 10 November 2019, https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20191110145937-20-447076/mui-jatim-imbau-pejabat-muslim-tak-ucapkan-salam-agama-lain.
[12] Ibnu Faris Al-Qazwini, *Maqayis Al-Lugah* (Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), 474.

the Prophet. These questions tend to be factual and realistic in nature, so the answers are given in clear language and provide solutions to the issues raised.[13]

Terminologically, a fatwa is defined as a legal opinion given by a competent individual or party, usually called a mufti, explaining Shariah law in response to a specific question posed by an individual or group of people.[14] A fatwa is often an opinion given in response to a specific question. A fatwa does not have to explain the basis of its arguments and can be either very concise or more in-depth and detailed. Fatwas are often requested by individuals who need a response or legal advice in the context of litigation or a public issue, and the response can be a short answer, approval, or rejection.

A mufti must be mature, Muslim, trustworthy, reliable, knowledgeable about the law, clear in thinking, firm in thought, correct in behavior and interpretation, and calm. Anyone, regardless of gender, status, or physical ability, can issue a fatwa if they can write or make themselves understood.[15] The criteria for fatwa are simpler compared to ijtihad.[16] A fatwa can be issued by a mujtahid or by a scholar of lesser standing. Fatwas can address matters that have not yet been explained or those that have already been explained. Hence, the scope of a fatwa is broader than ijtihad.

Fatwas can vary in their level of significance, ranging from routine to revolutionary issues, and in their form, ranging from one-line answers to short written works. Fatwas are not only used to confirm already accepted knowledge, but also to warn of errors and determine new responses to changing conditions.[17] In other words, fatwas can pertain to matters that require ijtihad as well as those that do not. However, a mufti needs to consider the consequences and implications of the fatwa he issues. A comprehensive fatwa must take into account the consequences that may arise from its implementation.

In the Islamic legal system, there are two distinct legal authorities: the judge (*qāḍī*) and the consultant (*muftī*). The judge is responsible for legal procedures, evidentiary rules, and the implementation of Islamic law, which is binding. In contrast, fatwas issued by muftis are non-binding personal views. This is the main difference between the authority of the judge and the mufti. It

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[13] Ansori Ansori, 'Position of fatwa in Islamic law: the effectiveness of MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah fatwas', *Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan* 22, no. 1 (29 July 2022): 53–72, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijtihad.v22i1.53-72.

[14] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, Reprinted (Oxford: Oneworld Publ, 2010), 174.

[15] Eugenia Kermeli et al., 'Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas', *Journal of Law and Religion* 15, no. 1/2 (2000): 421, https://doi.org/10.2307/1051538.

[16] Fuady Abdullah, 'Independensi Dari Mazhab: Ijtihad dalam Perspektif Al-Shawkānī', *Al-Mashlahah Jurnal Hukum Islam dan Pranata Sosial* 9, no. 02 (28 October 2021), https://doi.org/10.30868/am.v9i02.1675.

[17] Kermeli et al., 'Islamic Legal Interpretation'.

is important to understand that the non-binding nature of a fatwa does not mean that the fatwa seeker (*mustaftī*) need not follow the fatwa he or she receives. This should be understood in the context that a fatwa has no binding legal force. However, a fatwa carries a religious moral obligation to follow it (*diyānatan)*. In Ushul al-Fiqh, when a person who is incompetent in ijtihad is faced with a legal issue, the only accessible source of truth is the fatwa. Ibn Salah explains that if there is only one mufti, his fatwa is binding on the mustafti regardless of the mustafti's commitments, actions or beliefs towards the mufti. However, if there are other muftis, the mustafti has the option to seek fatwas from other muftis. In this situation, the mustafti must weigh which mufti he trusts more and give preference to him. When the muftis agree on the same ruling, the only religious moral option available to the mustafti is to abide by the fatwa.[18] From the above, the binding force of a fatwa lies in the religious moral obligation although juridically it does not have the binding force of a court ruling.

Religious Tolerance and Moderation in Indonesia

The discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia involves key themes such as national commitment, tolerance, anti-radicalism, and accommodation to local culture. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia initiated the concept of religious moderation and outlined in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN).[19] This is motivated by radicalism, which is considered to have expanded its influence even to Islamic universities in Indonesia, where several research organizations state that this development highlights the urgency of promoting the discourse of religious moderation among students.[20]

Religious moderation is a concept of religious understanding that places itself in the middle, promoting tolerant and peaceful relationships.[21] Religious moderation in Indonesia is strongly rooted in the principles of togetherness, acceptance of differences, and mutual respect among a

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[18] Abu 'Amr Utsman Bin Abdurrahman Ibn Salah, *Adab Al-Mufti Wal-Mustafti* (Madinah: Maktabah al-Ulum wal-Hikam, 2002), 165–67; Abu Zakaria Muhyiddin Yahya Al-Nawawi, *Adab Al-Fatwa Wal-Mufti Wal-Mustafti* (Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, 1988), 80–81.

[19] M. Yusuf et al., 'THE ROLE OF ANAK JALANAN AT-TAMUR ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL IN INTERNALIZING THE VALUES OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION TO COLLEGE STUDENTS IN BANDUNG', *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 23, no. 2 (2023): 132–56, https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v23i1.15358.

[20] B. Afwadzi et al., 'Religious Moderation of Islamic University Students in Indonesia: Reception of Religious Texts', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9369.

[21] Inayatillah, Kamaruddin, and M. Anzaikhan, 'The History of Moderate Islam in Indonesia and Its Influence on the Content of National Education', *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 213–26, https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no2.17.

multireligious society.[22] The Indonesian government has published books, guidelines, and conducted various trainings on religious moderation, especially in institutions associated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. For example, Islamic religious education textbooks at the school level must contain content aligned with the pillars of religious moderation. The implementation of moderation values is also carried out by Islamic religious education teachers to produce a respectful school environment.[23]

The emergence of religious intolerance and conflict in Indonesia has sparked a scholarly debate on the role of religion, particularly Islam, in the modern state, as well as how religion affects relations between majority and minority communities in the process of democratic consolidation. This debate has become increasingly relevant given the challenges Indonesia faces in maintaining social harmony amid religious diversity.[24] Religious moderation serves not only as an effort to reduce inter-religious tensions but also as a foundation for building an inclusive and tolerant society. In this context, religious moderation becomes an important strategy to ensure that democracy in Indonesia can develop peacefully and fairly, where every individual, regardless of their religious beliefs, can coexist in harmony and harmony. Thus, the principle of religious moderation plays a crucial role in navigating the complexities of interfaith relations and maintaining social cohesion in a diverse society.

However, implementing religious moderation in Indonesia also faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the tension between the idea of religious moderation and freedom of religion or belief in Indonesia. Religious moderation policies can conflict with freedom of religion and expression and overlook central weaknesses in the current state of religion governance.[25] In other words, the supposedly responsive nature of this discourse could potentially turn repressive even to the majority community.

Reading Narratives: Topic Visualization and Sentiment Analysis

To describe the evolving discussions on platform X, this study first conducted topic modeling based on the 1020 collected tweets. A topic

[22] M. Daheri et al., 'Strengthening Religious Moderation: Learning from the Harmony of Multireligious People in Indonesia', *Journal of Population and Social Studies* 31 (2023): 571–86, https://doi.org/10.25133/JPSSv312023.032.

[23] R. Mulyana, 'Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Educatiotextbook and Implementation in Indonesia', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023), https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V79I1.8592.

[24] K. Hamayotsu, 'Conservative Turn? Religion, State and Conflict in Indonesia', *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2014): 815–25, https://doi.org/10.5509/2014874815.

[25] S. Cholil, 'First Essay Freedom of Religion amid Polarization and Religious Moderation Policy', *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 6, no. 2 (2022): 196–204, https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.24603.

modeling method using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was applied to identify the main topics.[26] The model results were evaluated and visualized to determine the ideal number of topics. The analysis continued by identifying key words and related documents for each topic. The analysis results were visualized in several topic clusters for easy understanding of keyword distribution and dominance. This method not only helps provide a better understanding of the way the issue is discussed on social media, but also shows the different viewpoints and aspects present in the public discussion.

Figure 1. Chart of tweet topics

From this process, eight topics emerged as indicated by the resulting terms. Discussion on faith and respect for other religions was the first topic with keywords such as "faith", "religion", and "adherents". Although there were various responses, this fatwa was made to safeguard the faith of the ummah. This fatwa was shared by several users. Some said that every religion has its own greetings and that in order to preserve faith, greetings should not be mixed. On the other hand, some including the Minister of Religious Affairs stated that saying interfaith greetings only aims to honor people of other religions and will not disturb their faith. Often, in these discussions, news reports from news portals such as detik.com were used as references.

The second topic relates to the relevance of fatwas and their discussion in the midst of various developing issues. This is among others related to the issue of Hajj and Eid al-Adha celebrations as well as the issue of mining permits. Some tweets questioned whether the MUI fatwa was a distraction while other important issues such as mining and Hajj services were neglected. A criticism was made to the Minister of Religious Affairs who was considered to pay more attention to the issue of interfaith greetings than improving Hajj services. An X user indicated by the word "tita" questioned the relevance of this fatwa as a Muslim attitude towards non-Muslims when non-Muslims have

[26] David M. Blei, Andrew Y. Ng, and Michael I. Jordan, 'Latent Dirichlet Allocation', *Journal of Machine Learning Research* 3, no. Jan (2003): 993–1022.

no problem enlivening the Eid al-Adha holiday by donating half of the animals slaughtered at the Istiqlal Mosque as reported by CNBC Indonesia.

The third topic concerns social aspects, especially the issue of tolerance and religiosity in the context of Islam and interfaith interactions. The main issue raised was the interfaith greeting and how it is perceived by different parties in Indonesian society. Some tweets discussed the importance of tolerance in providing opportunities for people to respect and appreciate each other's religious practices, while others highlighted the disapproval of the pronunciation of greetings from other religions by Muslims. The fatwa on the prohibition of interfaith greetings became a focus of debate, with views varying on whether this was truly a recognized form of tolerance. Some tweets also emphasized that tolerance should not mean interfering in religious matters, but rather respecting the different beliefs of each believer.

The next topic was the aqidah consequences of interfaith greetings. Saidiman sarcastically criticized that this fatwa would portray Islam as a hell-threatening religion rather than a peaceful one by comparing it to other religions. Saidiman responded by reminding that the teachings of the Prophet and the fatwa of scholars emphasize the importance of maintaining aqidah so as not to fall into polytheism, which can lead to hell because it contains prayers addressed to the God of other religions, such as "Namo Buddhaya". This is considered a violation of Islamic principles and can disrupt faith. Moreover, greetings according to each religion's beliefs have become an important identity of its adherents.

The polemic about the argument of inter-religious harmony is related to the fifth topic. The words "pbnu" and "kemenag" that are explicitly mentioned show that there is a strong perception in the community regarding the significant difference in views between PBNU and the Ministry of Religious Affairs with MUI. Although not in an official statement, the response of the Chairman of PBNU and the Minister of Religious Affairs is enough to associate in the public mind as the position taken by their organizations and institutions. It is not a matter of worship that violates the faith, according to PBNU, salam is a good prayer that supports harmony and even fosters national brotherhood emphasized by NU elders as tweeted by @nu_online who also posted the results of the DIY PWNU Bahsul Masail Institute which allows interfaith greetings. Likewise, according to the Ministry of Religious Affairs as posted by @BimasIslam, interfaith greetings are good actions that increase tolerance and harmony between people and spread goodness.

The sixth theme was related to the use of greetings in everyday life. Some tweets suggested using more general greetings, such as "good morning," "afternoon," or "evening," when speaking at events attended by large crowds. While some people believe that religious greetings such as "assalamualaikum" are only used in internal religious contexts and emphasize that general

greetings are more practical and inclusive in interfaith forums, others encourage each religion to use their religious greetings to show their identity.

Still related to the previous topic, the next topic touched on the use of greetings in official state events. Some suggested that religious greetings should not be used in state events and those attended by the general public. This is considered more reasonable and neutral as it reflects diversity and respects every citizen regardless of their religion. It also avoids controversy, ensuring that all parties feel valued and respected in the context of nationhood and statehood.

In relation to the last topic, terms such as "ijtima", "ulama" and "result" indicate that the debate and controversy are strongly linked to the fatwa on interfaith greetings as a result of the Ijtima Ulama. This fatwa is the trigger for the strong debate on interfaith greetings. Therefore, Ijtima Ulama, MUI, and its position as an authority also become the object of discussion.

The various topics above illustrate the dynamic discussion related to interfaith greetings with MUI's fatwa that triggered various reactions from various layers of society and other religious authorities in Indonesia including the Ministry of Religious Affairs and PBNU. This shows the complex and diverse dynamics in society. These tweets not only show the tensions that exist between religious authorities and the government, but also a medium for the general public to express their responses. To better illustrate this discussion, the following tree map chart shows the most influential tweets from the available tweets based on the number of retweets and likes.
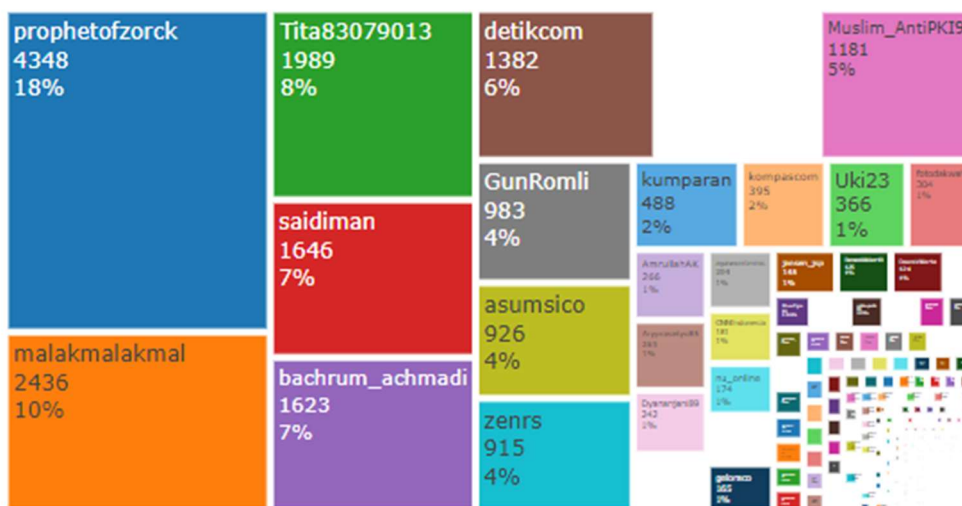

Figure 2. Tree Map Chart of Influential Tweets

In this discussion about the fatwa on interfaith greetings, the tweets show a variety of positions that reflect people's responses. In general, the top ten tweets can be categorized into responses supporting the fatwa and those

rejecting it. From the first category, @prophetofzork's tweet, which has the highest influence, expresses an argument that criticizes the emergence of this controversy as a form of inconsistent attention to other major issues and highlights this attention as a distraction from the mining issue, making this controversy also political. Another user, @malakmalakmal, after underlining the difference in views between MUI and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, corroborated MUI's fatwa by quoting news of MUI's response to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' criticism that the greeting in Islamic conception has a dimension of worship. Likewise, @Muslim_AntiPKI's tweet responded emotionally to a Member of Parliament by criticizing his criticism of MUI's fatwa.

On the other hand, account @Tita83079013 questioned the social consequences of the fatwa by contrasting the fatwa with the news "The Beauty of Tolerance, Almost Half of the Cows at Istiqlal from Non-Muslims" from CNBC Indonesia. According to @GunRomli, banning interfaith greetings will only cause controversy and chaos in society. He also stated that the fatwa is a non-binding legal opinion. His tweet calls for a more open view of diversity and emphasizes the importance of maintaining social harmony. In addition, @saidiman questioned the theological implications of interfaith greetings and questioned the justice if such greetings lead to hell.

Other influential tweets came from news portals, particularly @detikcom and @asumsico. In the news from @detikcom, Cholil Nafis emphasized that Muslims must obey this ijtima fatwa. Rais Syuriyah PBNU supported the fatwa by stating that the fatwa was correct. In response to this, Minister of Religious Affairs Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, in other news, stated that saying interfaith greetings does not interfere with faith, but is a form of respect between religious communities. Meanwhile, the news from @asumsico only reported that MUI through the Ijtima Ulama of Fatwa Commission VII throughout Indonesia had issued a haram fatwa against greetings that have the dimension of special prayers for other religions, so Muslims are prohibited from saying them.

The tweets thus show a spectrum of diverse views on MUI's fatwa on interfaith greetings. Positive responses emphasize the importance of maintaining the purity of faith and trust in religious authorities, while negative responses highlight the need to prioritize inclusiveness and accommodate cultural and social conditions to maintain social harmony. This difference in views reflects the complexity that must be considered by MUI in looking at such issues in Indonesia.
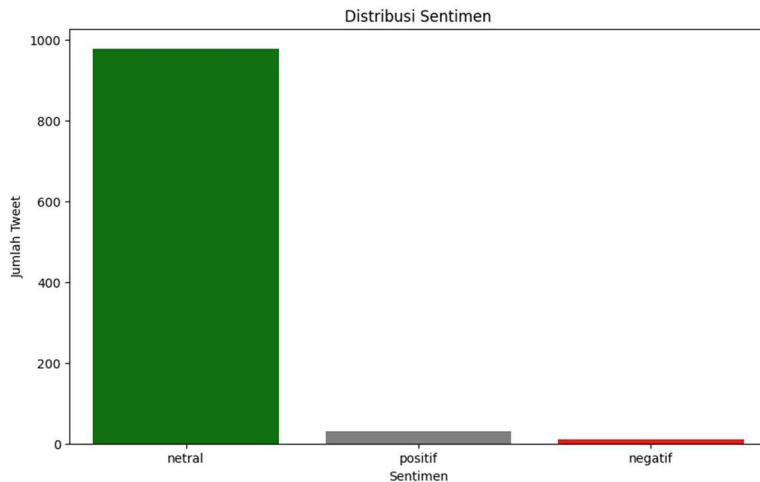
Figure 3. Sentiment Distribution Using Textblob

To better see the sentiment shown by the tweets, sentiment analysis was performed using the textblob package in Python to assess the polarity and subjectivity of the tweets. As the chart above shows, this method was only able to find the polarity of a small number of tweets. However, positive sentiment is noticeably higher than negative sentiment. The positive tweet with the highest polarity score was by @Sophia_Labora who responded to @saidiman by providing an alternative solution to the form of greeting that could be used and stating that this need not be a polemic. Meanwhile, one of the negative tweets based on the polarity value was posted by @WarezHimawan, who stated that this fatwa was a form of insecurity, also mentioning the issue of using loudspeakers as loudly as possible. For a more in-depth and accurate analysis of the text's context and nuances, a follow-up analysis utilized the BERT model using the previous results as practice material. This analysis showed the predominance of positive sentiment in the tweets.
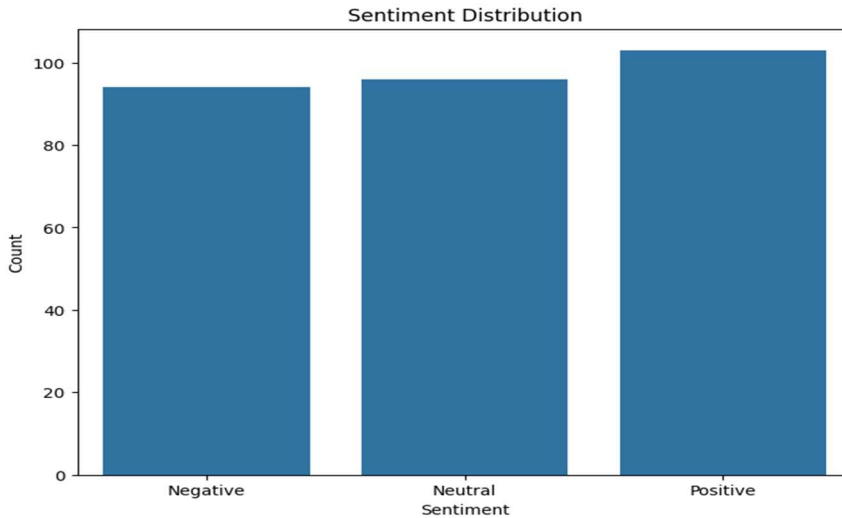
Figure 4. Sentiment Distribution Using the BERT Model

Despite getting counter opinions from various parties including the Ministry of Religious Affairs and PBNU in this controversial issue, the dominance of positive responses to MUI's fatwa shown by tweets supporting the fatwa shows a good level of public trust in MUI's authority although it should also be noted that the difference in sentiment is not too significant.

Diving into the Dynamics of Authority: MUI and the Navigation of Religious Tolerance

Opponents of the fatwa argue that the pronunciation of greetings from different religions should be seen as a form of respect and tolerance between religious communities. This party believes that an inclusive approach and mutual respect between followers of different religions should be prioritized. Interfaith greetings are a form of implementation of the principles of religious moderation that characterize Islam Nusantara. Interfaith greetings should be seen from a sociological rather than theological perspective.[27] They argue that an inclusive approach to greetings can strengthen social harmony and reduce the potential for interfaith conflict.

Looking back, the issuance of the fatwa on interfaith greetings by the MUI illustrates the institution's ongoing commitment to ensuring that religious principles remain an integral part of public life. Rather than relegating religious matters to the private sphere, the MUI actively rejects the distinction of religion

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[27] Zaenal Mustakim, 'Menimbang Fatwa Larangan Salam Lintas Agama: antara Agama dan Harmoni', https://kemenag.go.id, 3 June 2024, https://kemenag.go.id/opini/menimbang-fatwa-larangan-salam-lintas-agama-antara-agama-dan-harmoni-fHX25.

from other social spheres.[28] This stance does not stand alone, but is consistent with the MUI's broader ideological framework, as evidenced by other fatwas such as those on religious liberalism and secularism.[29] Even in this case, interfaith greetings are not only considered a matter of ordinary fiqh but go further into matters of worship. The fatwa on interfaith greetings is a reaffirmation of MUI's position that religious guidance must permeate all aspects of social interaction, emphasizing that the greetings used in daily interactions are not just cultural or social courtesy, but also have significant theological implications. Thus, the discussion surrounding this fatwa cannot only be understood to revolve around the issue of maintaining faith versus promoting religious tolerance, but also the discourse on the role of religion in the social sphere versus the neutrality of the social sphere.

These opposing views then sparked fierce controversy in society. The public and various other religious authorities respond to this fatwa with various perspectives. Not only related to religious aspects, the debate can also enter the social and even political realms. X users who support the fatwa see their stance as an effort to maintain faith, while those who oppose it see their stance as part of an effort to create an inclusive and tolerant society. This debate shows the increasing complexity of fatwas in the context of a pluralistic society like Indonesia. This debate also shows the dynamics that continue to occur in Islamic discussions in Indonesia. The discussion on this fatwa reflects that Islam in Indonesia is not static, but continues to be dynamic and adapt to the social and cultural context. In other words, the issue of interfaith greetings reflects the broader and ongoing dynamics in Indonesian society, where religious values and laws dynamize with societal values and the need to maintain harmony and inclusiveness. This debate shows how these two aspects must be navigated by MUI in the making and delivery of future fatwas.

This difference of opinion then leads to differences in responding to this fatwa. For those who reject it, the dominant argument is that a fatwa is a non-binding legal opinion. As for those in favor, a fatwa is something that must be obeyed. In response to the argument against the fatwa, Cholil Nafis from MUI tweeted that the non-binding nature of the fatwa means that it is not obligatory for those who do not believe in its truth because they get other stronger arguments. But for those who believe the fatwa is true or do not get other stronger arguments, the fatwa is obligatory and binding.[30] In other words,

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[28] Jeremy Menchik, 'The Politics of the Fatwa: Islamic Legal Authority in Modern Indonesia', *Indonesia* 114, no. 1 (2022): 75–97.

[29] Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 'FATWA MAJELIS ULAMA INDONESIA Nomor: 7/MUNAS VII/MUI/11/2005 Tentang PLURALISME, LIBERALISME DAN SEKULARISME AGAMA' (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 28 July 2005).

[30] cholil nafis [@cholilnafis], 'Tdk mengikat itu menurut kajian fatwa tdk mewajibkan yg tdk yakin krn mendapat dalil lain yg lebih kuat menurut ahli fikih. Tapi bagi yg meyakini

the bindingness of a fatwa depends on the truth value of the fatwa itself. According to fatwa theory, there are some things that need to be clarified. Fatwas have two sides. While juridically (*qada'an*) fatwas are not binding, morally religious (*diyanatan*) fatwas are binding, especially for the laity. Cholil Nafis's statement needs to be understood accordingly for people who have the competence of ijtihad who seek the truth value of a law. As for a layman, he must obey and follow the fatwa of those he considers to have integrity as an authority in Islam. Even in a fatwa based on ijtihad, although the truth value is relative, practically it must still be obeyed if the party issuing the fatwa is seen by the laity as the most authoritative party. In other words, the value of a fatwa for the general public is not the truth value in the fatwa itself, but lies in the value of trust in the authority that issued the fatwa.

From here, this case can actually be used to measure and reassess the authority of MUI. The public response to this fatwa indicates the level of trust and recognition of MUI's authority. There are several contexts that support this. The fatwa did not receive significant amplification from other Islamic institutions and organizations, indicating that there are different views among religious entities, even PBNU seems to reject this fatwa. In addition, MUI's position of regulative authority appears to have decreased, especially after the introduction of new provisions in halal certification that are more controlled by the government. The fatwa is also not strong enough to encourage mass mobilization or physical action in response. Thus, the impetus for obedience to this fatwa is more based on the authority attached to the fatwa. Moreover, this fatwa puts MUI face to face with the government. In addition to the fact that this fatwa corrects the common practice of the government elite, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has openly shown its disapproval of this fatwa. Following Max Weber's classification of authority types, this fatwa shows the tension between the traditional and charismatic authority held by MUI and the rational-legal authority represented by the government as shown by the Ministry of Religious Affairs[31].

Analyzing interactions around the interfaith greetings fatwa on social media can provide a nuanced lens that can be used to assess and evaluate the authority of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The dominance of positive sentiments in social media responses can be used as a basis to argue that the level of public trust in MUI's Islamic authority is still significant. This trust allows MUI to maintain an important role in guiding the ummah. Beyond traditional and charismatic authority, some tweets also show the ethical

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fatwa itu benar atau tak mendapat dalil lain yg lebih kuat apalagi hanya krn malas atau fatwa diundangkan mk fatwa itu wajib/mengikat', Tweet, *Twitter*, 3 June 2024, https://x.com/cholilnafis/status/1797428262731448447.

[31] Martin E. Spencer, 'Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority', *The British Journal of Sociology* 21, no. 2 (1970): 123–34, https://doi.org/10.2307/588403.

authority dimension of MUI, which suggests that compliance with fatwas is seen as a means for Muslims to cultivate personal piety and obedience.

However, it is also important to recognize that the not significantly different levels of negative sentiment highlight the need for MUI to evaluate its performance and improve. Ensuring that the MUI's authority remains relevant and responsive to the evolving context and diverse perspectives within Indonesian society is crucial to maintaining its influential role. Moreover, both positive reception and critical feedback demonstrate the dynamic interaction between MUI and the Muslim community, reflecting the complex nature of religious authority in a pluralistic modern society that must be addressed.

The controversy over the fatwa on interfaith greetings also underscores the importance of MUI's contribution to the discourse of religious tolerance and moderation in Indonesia. As an institution with important religious authority, MUI has an important role in guiding people towards an understanding that is in accordance with religious values, principles and provisions. MUI's active participation in the public discourse on tolerance and moderation will ensure that the resulting meaning and its implementation come from an inclusive and representative conversation, not a monopoly of certain parties.[32] If values such as religious tolerance and moderation are recognized as part of Islamic principles or even made as maqasid al-syariah, MUI as a religious authority is not only entitled, but obliged to be active in interpreting and implementing them in society. Community values such as religious tolerance and moderation, justice, and human rights, although conceptually can be agreed upon as universal, but substantively still leave various questions and problems in their meaning and application.[33] The implementation of these values often poses challenges because they must be adapted to specific anthropological and historical contexts. In this case, MUI has an important role to ensure that the meaning and application of these values are in accordance with Islamic teachings while remaining relevant to social conditions in Indonesia. This effort needs to be strengthened by improving the quality of communication and socialization to avoid misunderstandings, as well as conducting dialogue with various elements of society and other religious organizations.

Conclusion

The research found that MUI's fatwa on interfaith greetings triggered mixed responses from Indonesians. Analysis of tweets on platform X showed eight main topics of public discussion, with sentiment divided between

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[32] Cholil, 'First Essay Freedom of Religion amid Polarization and Religious Moderation Policy'.

[33] Jack Donnelly, 'The Relative Universality of Human Rights', *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2007): 281–306.

supporting and opposing the fatwa. The majority of positive tweets reflected people's trust in MUI as a charismatic, traditional and ethical authority, while negative tweets pointed to the need for MUI to navigate issues of religious tolerance and moderation in the Indonesian context.

The research contributes to understanding the fatwa as an instrument that is not only theological but also sociological and exposes the dynamics between layers of society and various authorities. In terms of methods, the use of topic and sentiment analysis through social media platform X with LDA and BERT models provides a comprehensive picture of the public's perception of the fatwa.

This study has limitations in that the data only comes from platform X so it may not cover the views of all levels of society. Future research is suggested to expand the analysis by including data from various other social media platforms and conducting qualitative studies through in-depth interviews with community leaders and scholars. This research is expected to strengthen the role of MUI as an institution that provides direction and guidance in religious and social life, and emphasize its relevance in the midst of evolving social dynamics.

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