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Symbolic opposition by religious organizations to global diplomatic policies: a case study of Indonesia's membership on the board of peace

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Abstract

The controversy surrounding Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace in early 2026 has created tension between the government's global diplomatic strategy and the critical response of religious civil society organizations, driven by transnational solidarity regarding the Palestinian issue. This study aims to analyze how the symbolic opposition of religious civil society organizations is constructed as a form of pressure on the state's foreign policy. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model to analyze coverage in national online media. The findings indicate that the media serves as a discursive arena that not only represents state policy but also channels narratives of opposition grounded in moral and religious identity. This symbolic opposition has proven capable of shaping public opinion and generating domestic pressure on the government. These findings confirm that global diplomatic policy is not entirely technocratic but is influenced by social legitimacy constructed through public discourse. Practically, this study highlights the importance of communication strategies and sensitivity to domestic social dynamics in the formulation of foreign policy to ensure continued public support and maintain national political stability.

Keyword: *Symbolic Opposition, Religious Organizations, Global Diplomacy, Critical Discourse, Political Legitimacy*

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Introduction

Global political developments over the past two decades have revealed an increasing complexity in international relations, marked by the intensification of geopolitical conflicts, the transformation of multilateral diplomacy, and the involvement of non-state actors in global policymaking. The globalization of communication and information technology has expanded the scope of public participation in responding to a country's foreign policy (Fatkurrohman et al., 2024). Data from Internet World Stats indicates that global internet penetration has reached over 67% of the world's population by 2024, accelerating the cross-border dissemination of political information. In the Indonesian context, digital transformation has also amplified public opinion dynamics regarding international geopolitical issues. According to a 2024 report by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the number of internet users in Indonesia reached approximately 221 million people, or about 79.5% of the total national population. This high level of internet penetration has made online media the primary space for the production and distribution of political discourse, including discourse related to global diplomatic policy (CNBC Indonesia, n.d.). Consequently, every government foreign policy is not only understood as a national geopolitical strategy but also becomes the subject of public debate constructed through digital media.

In this context, Indonesia's participation in international forums such as the Board of Peace (BoP) forms part of a global diplomatic strategy to strengthen the country's position within the international political architecture. However, this policy has not been uniformly accepted by the domestic public. A number of religious civil society organizations, particularly those with an Islamic foundation, have voiced criticism regarding the potential geopolitical and ideological implications of Indonesia's involvement in such forums (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2024). This is inseparable from the character of Indonesian society, which has a strong religious foundation. According to 2023 data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), approximately 87.2% of Indonesia's population is Muslim, giving religious organizations significant social legitimacy in influencing public opinion (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). Furthermore, major religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah possess extensive social networks with millions of members across Indonesia. This situation positions religious organizations as key actors in the public sphere capable of shaping moral and ideological discourse regarding state policies. Consequently, the critical responses of these organizations to global diplomatic policies can be understood as part of the dynamics of identity politics within a democratic society (Hartono & Hamdi, 2026).

In political sociology, the phenomenon of civil society organizations criticizing state policies often takes the form of symbolic opposition (Rizky & Indriastuti, 2026). Symbolic opposition refers to a form of resistance that is not always manifested through direct political action, but rather through the production of meaning, symbols, and ideological narratives in the public sphere. Research by (Bukhari, 2026) shows that religious authorities such as the Indonesian Ulema Council produce

normative discourses containing moral legitimacy in response to social and political issues. These discourses serve as instruments to influence public perception of state policies. On the other hand, (Masitoh, 2025) found that religious media play a significant role in framing global political issues through narratives of religious identity and solidarity. These findings indicate that identity politics and religious morality are key elements in shaping the public's critical attitudes toward state policies. Therefore, an analysis of the symbolic opposition by mass organizations cannot be separated from the discourse production process occurring within the mass media. In this context, online media serves as a discursive arena where the interests of the state, religious mass organizations, and public opinion converge.

A number of previous studies have examined the relationship between the media, discourse, and civil society organizations using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach. (Huda, 2022) demonstrate that the media plays a significant role in representing civil society organizations as moral actors confronting state power through the construction of language and social symbols. Such representations are not neutral but are influenced by power relations, ideologies, and political interests underlying the production of media texts. (Antonakaki & Ioannidis, 2026) also found that conflicts between government policies and religious authorities are often mediated by the media through discursive framing that sparks public debate. Meanwhile, research by (Okaka, 2026) indicates that global geopolitical issues, particularly the Palestinian conflict, resonate strongly in digital discourse and can influence public opinion across various countries. Nevertheless, most of this research remains focused on domestic political issues or identity conflicts at the national level. Studies that specifically link the symbolic opposition of religious organizations to a country's global diplomatic policies remain relatively limited. Therefore, research on media discourse regarding Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace is crucial to fill this research gap.

Previous studies have shown that religious institutions play an important role in political and social discourse, but they have focused solely on domestic and internal issues. This study builds upon that research. According to recent research, religious groups possess strong discursive capabilities to shape social legitimacy through symbols, moral values, and collective identity. Islamic organizations in Indonesia can revitalize religious concepts such as jihad as discursive tools capable of critiquing and monitoring state policies during public crises (Erekata & Chekuba, 2025) . The results indicate that religious organizations not only act as normative entities but also participate in political discourse within the state-society relationship. Furthermore, (Elin Wijaya, 2025) demonstrate that religious fatwas can produce meaning through symbolic legitimization and trigger social mobilization. Conversely, research on how religion interacts with state policy is also conducted within the context of discussions on hegemony and political legitimacy. The state actively constructs a discourse of

“religious moderation” as a means of controlling religious narratives and enhancing national political stability (Andriansyah, 2025). This indicates that the relationship between the state and religion is not only dialogic but also conflictual; both sides create and mimic each other’s discourses to maintain their respective legitimacy. Meanwhile, (Rahmat et al., 2025) found that differences in discourse between the state and religious authorities often arise regarding sensitive issues such as tolerance and identity, which are then mediated through the media as a site of contestation over meaning. In addition, research on religion-based diplomacy has also begun to emerge, particularly regarding interfaith diplomacy. A study by (Khaldun et al., 2026) indicates that religious actors are increasingly involved in global forums such as the World Peace Forum, suggesting that public diplomacy is increasingly incorporating religious elements as a soft power tool. Furthermore, according to (Subuki et al., 2023) research, Indonesia’s foreign policy regarding international conflicts such as the Palestinian issue often clashes with realpolitik interests and religious solidarity, leading to domestic public debates. However, this study focuses more on the role of religion as a tool of state diplomacy rather than as a source of opposition to diplomatic policy (Darwis & Setiawan, 2025).

This study specifically examines how religious organizations construct symbolic opposition to the state’s global diplomatic policies, particularly regarding Indonesia’s involvement in the Board of Peace. This study views religion as a tool for state legitimization and as a source of criticism and resistance to international policies. This study employs Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explain how symbolic opposition is constructed, circulated, and interpreted in the public sphere. This method integrates three levels of analysis: text, discursive practices, and social practices. This method brings CDA, which was previously used more in domestic political studies, into the context of global diplomacy (Ishaq et al., 2025).

Conceptually, this study reinforces the argument that foreign policy has now become part of a public contestation involving various social actors, including religious organizations, and is no longer exclusive to elites in the era of digitalization and the globalization of information. The symbolic opposition emerging in online media demonstrates that power achieves legitimacy and meaning beyond formal policy (Hanumbhawono, 2025). Therefore, this study not only builds upon previous research but also offers a new perspective on how religion plays a significant role in global politics. These findings are crucial for enriching the current literature in political sociology, particularly in understanding the relationship between the state, religion, and the media in the era of globalization (Herdiansah, 2026).

Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. This approach was chosen to conduct an in-depth examination of the construction of meaning, ideology, and power relations in media discourse regarding Indonesia’s

membership on the Board of Peace (John Creswell, 2018). Critical discourse analysis views language as a social practice that is not neutral but rather laden with interests and power. Fairclough's model emphasizes three dimensions of analysis text, discursive practice, and social practice which enable a comprehensive and contextual reading of discourse. Using this approach, the study aims to uncover how the media frames the symbolic opposition of religious organizations to Indonesia's global diplomatic policies. This approach is also relevant for examining the interaction between religious ideology and geopolitical interests in the public sphere.

The research data sources consist of national online news articles covering the controversy surrounding Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace and the responses of religious organizations, published during February 2026. The media outlets referenced include VOI, RMOL, Detik, and Kompas, selected based on their national reach, frequency of coverage, and institutional credibility. Data collection was conducted through digital documentation, specifically the systematic archiving of relevant news texts (Bowen, 2009). The data was then selected based on thematic relevance, the involvement of religious organizations, and the presence of ideological symbolism. This process aimed to ensure that the analyzed data possessed significant discursive depth and high empirical relevance.

Data analysis was conducted through three main stages according to Fairclough's model: text analysis, discursive practices, and social practices. Text analysis focused on the media's choice of diction, metaphors, sentence structure, and rhetorical strategies in constructing meaning. Discursive practices analysis examined the processes of discourse production and distribution, including the relationships between the media, sources, and the audience. Meanwhile, the analysis of social practices links discourse to the socio-political context and power relations between the state and religious organizations. Data validity is ensured through triangulation of sources and theory to enhance the validity and credibility of the finding.

Result and Discussion

This study is based on a critical discourse analysis of national online media that highlights the controversy surrounding Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace (BoP) and religious organizations' responses to the policy. Norman Fairclough's framework was used to conduct the analysis, which encompasses three main dimensions: text, discursive practices, and social practices. This allows for a comprehensive examination of the construction of meaning in the media. The results of the study indicate that the media functions not only as a conveyor of information but also as a forum

for discussion that considers the power dynamics between the state and religious organizations. Moral narratives, religious identity, and critiques of the legitimacy of global diplomatic policies serve as sources of symbolic opposition constructed by religious organizations. Previous studies indicate that the media plays a strategic role in mediating ideological conflicts in the public sphere and shaping the representation of social actors (Ivansyach et al., 2026). Furthermore, the resonance of international geopolitical issues within domestic discussions also drives the formation of symbolic opposition rooted in religious solidarity.

Representations of Global Diplomatic Discourse in Media Coverage

In media coverage, Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace (BoP) is often portrayed as a diplomatic policy that has sparked domestic controversy. For example, a report from *Hukumonline* noted that the government invited the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and several Islamic mass organizations to a dialogue at the State Palace to explain the reasons behind Indonesia's participation in this international forum. This dialogue initiative indicates that the government is aware of social resistance to the global diplomatic policies it has adopted. In news texts, the use of terms such as "polemic," "criticism," and "dialogue" depicts a discursive situation revealing conflicting perspectives between the state and civil society groups (Fasinu et al., 2026). This representation indicates that the media not only reports events but also frames the relationship between the state and religious organizations within the context of negotiating the legitimacy of foreign policy.

In media coverage, Indonesia's membership in the Board of Peace (BoP) has been portrayed as a diplomatic policy that has sparked domestic controversy. Reports such as those published on *Hukumonline* highlight the government's efforts to engage religious organizations in dialogue, reflecting an awareness of public resistance. The use of terms such as "polemic," "criticism," and "dialogue" frames this issue as controversial yet still manageable through institutional channels. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, this representation operates on three levels. At the textual level, the use of the term "dialogue" softens conflict and portrays the state as a rational and responsive party, while the term "criticism" limits opposition to a controlled form of dissent. At the level of discourse practice, the media selectively highlights government initiatives, thereby positioning religious organizations as participants rather than as opposition actors (Ridwan et al., 2024). At the level of social practice, this reflects a broader struggle over legitimacy, in which the state promotes diplomatic rationality while religious groups emphasize moral criticism.

Media discourse does not merely report on events; rather, it actively shapes perceptions of the relationship between the state and religious organizations, thereby reinforcing the negotiation of foreign policy legitimacy in the public sphere (Anshorah & Khotimah, 2025). In addition, several

media outlets have also presented the narrative that Indonesia's membership in the BoP is part of the government's global diplomatic strategy. An opinion piece on CNBC Indonesia emphasized that Indonesia's participation in the forum is viewed as an effort to strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic position in the Middle East conflict (Sumarlan et al., 2025). However, this narrative is also accompanied by concerns that Indonesia's involvement could affect the country's foreign policy independence. This discourse reveals two main frames in media coverage: the strategic diplomacy frame and the geopolitical risk frame. These two frames shape how the public understands government policy within the context of international relations. From a critical discourse perspective, the media functions as a space for the production of meaning, enabling various political actors to compete in defining social reality.

The Symbolic Opposition of Religious Organizations in Media Discourse

In the case of the Board of Peace controversy, symbolic opposition from religious organizations was primarily expressed through official statements, religious sermons, and organizational stances, which were then disseminated via online media. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), for example, openly called on the government to reconsider Indonesia's involvement in the BoP, as it was deemed inconsistent with Palestinian interests. This statement underscores that the criticism from religious organizations is not merely political in nature, but also carries moral and ideological legitimacy rooted in religious solidarity (Sutrisna et al., 2025). Through the production of such discourse, these organizations seek to construct an alternative narrative that challenges the legitimacy of state policies. This discursive practice demonstrates that opposition is not always manifested through direct political mobilization, but also through the production of symbolic meanings that influence public opinion. In this context, the media serves as the primary distribution channel that expands the reach of this oppositional discourse (Ernada, 2024). Tables and graphs, if any, are numbered consecutively with the table title and number placed above the table. This narrative of symbolic opposition also appears in opinion pieces criticizing the potential for global political hegemony underlying the establishment of the Board of Peace. Some articles argue that this forum could become a geopolitical instrument reinforcing the dominance of major powers in Middle Eastern conflicts. Such criticism demonstrates that the discourse of opposition is produced not only by religious actors but also by intellectuals and alternative media outlets that view the policy critically (Siswadi, 2024). From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, such discursive practices reflect a process of intertextuality, wherein various texts and narratives mutually influence one another in shaping social meaning. This indicates that the Board of Peace (BoP) controversy is not merely a foreign policy issue but also serves as an arena for ideological contestation among various social actors. Previous research indicates that

discourse production by religious actors often utilizes moral symbols to build social legitimacy for political criticism (Bianda et al., 2025).

Social Practices and Power Relations in the Board of Peace Controversy

In the controversy surrounding the Board of Peace, the discourse unfolding in the media reflects the tension between the country's global diplomatic interests and the ideological aspirations of certain social groups. A number of academics believe that Indonesia's involvement in this forum could affect perceptions of Indonesia's neutrality in the Middle East conflict. A Professor of International Relations at Gadjah Mada University, for example, stated that Indonesia's position in the BoP has the potential to create a perception of bias that could reduce Indonesia's chances of becoming a mediator in conflicts in the region (Kaunda et al., 2025). The perception of neutrality is a crucial factor in the success of peace diplomacy, as a mediating state must be viewed as having no specific political interests. When a country is perceived as belonging to a particular geopolitical bloc, its diplomatic legitimacy as a mediator diminishes significantly (Lauve-Moon, 2024). In this context, the BoP controversy demonstrates that foreign policy cannot be separated from the dynamics of domestic legitimacy. Furthermore, this controversy also reflects the power dynamics between the state and civil society actors in shaping the direction of public policy. The government seeks to uphold its global diplomatic policies through strategic arguments, while religious organizations produce a counter-narrative that emphasizes moral dimensions and interfaith solidarity (Rachman, 2021). This contestation demonstrates that foreign policy is not only determined by geopolitical considerations but also by social pressure from societal groups possessing cultural legitimacy (Yuniarti et al., 2026). From a political sociology perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as a form of hegemonic negotiation between the state and civil society in the public sphere. The media then functions as the primary arena where these various actors produce and distribute their discourses. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that the media is a crucial space for the production of political identity and the ideological legitimization of social actors (Brajshori, 2026).

Research Implications

This study provides a significant theoretical foundation for the advancement of political sociology research, particularly regarding the relationship between critical discourse analysis, identity politics, and global diplomacy (Damayanti et al., 2022). The study demonstrates that religious organizations engage in symbolic opposition, which is not only an expression of social resistance but also a useful discursive strategy for creating and maintaining power in the public sphere. This expands upon previous perspectives that tended to view civil society opposition as collective action or direct mobilization. According to this study, discourse grounded in moral symbols and religious identity can function as an effective tool for shaping public opinion and influencing state policy. Religious

institutions possess the capacity to establish legitimacy through value-based normative discourse.

This study makes a methodological contribution to the application of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis in the context of global diplomacy studies, a field that remains underdeveloped. To investigate domestic issues such as identity conflicts or national policies, most previous research has employed critical discourse analysis. However, this study extends this method to the field of international relations by demonstrating how domestic discourse shapes and debates international policy. The media functions not only as a medium of information but also as a space where ideologies and power relations are constructed (Syahbudi, 2025). International geopolitical debates resonate strongly in the digital world. This reinforces the idea that discursive processes can be used to understand international issues within a local context (Marchenko, 2025).

This study presents empirical evidence that symbolic opposition from religious organizations genuinely influences public policy processes, particularly regarding political legitimacy. Symbolic pressure generated by moral narratives and religious solidarity can create social pressure that compels the state to speak out, resolve issues, or even change policies. This occurred in the case of Indonesia joining the Board of Peace. This phenomenon indicates that geopolitical rationality and domestic public acceptance are two factors that determine the legitimacy of international policies. Media framing.

This study provides empirical evidence that symbolic opposition from religious organizations does indeed influence the public policy process, particularly in terms of political legitimacy. The symbolic pressure generated by moral narratives and religious solidarity can create social pressure that compels the state to speak out, resolve issues, or even change policies. This occurred in the case of Indonesia's accession to the Board of Peace. This phenomenon indicates that geopolitical rationality and domestic public acceptance are two factors that determine the legitimacy of international policy. Media framing based on religious identity can have a significant impact on public perception. Furthermore, a study (Agustinus Santiago Eca Fernandes, 2025) shows that disputes between the state and religious authorities are often mediated by media discourse that shapes public opinion.

In practical terms, this study offers important implications for international policymaking that takes greater account of domestic social change. Governments should consider the perceptions and desires of socially legitimate groups, such as religious organizations, rather than treating global diplomatic policy as the exclusive domain of the political elite. Thus, maintaining domestic political stability depends on policy framing strategies and public communication. This study demonstrates that a lack of public discourse management can lead to symbolic resistance, which can undermine the legitimacy of state policies. This is reinforced by the finding that the media serves as the primary

mediator in shaping the relationship between the state and society.

Furthermore, this study has implications for the development of research on modern social movements, particularly those related to the New Social Movements. Religious organizations' opposition to symbols demonstrates that contemporary social movements seek to transform structures through mass action, but also to create meaning and symbols in the public sphere. This supports the belief that identity, culture, and morality are essential components of modern social movements. According to recent research, identity-based movements possess an extraordinary ability to generate emotional resonance and collective solidarity within society. This finding is consistent with the findings in this study.

Conclusion

The study's conclusions show that the dispute surrounding Indonesia's participation in the Board of Peace represents both a contestation of discourse between the state and religious civil society organizations in the public domain as well as international diplomatic policy discussions. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis technique, it was discovered that online media both channels symbolic opposition created by moral narratives and religious identity and functions as a strategic venue for structuring government policy. This opposition is expressed through the creation of meaning that can affect the public's opinion of the legitimacy of foreign policy rather than through direct political mobilization.

These results demonstrate that social constraints and cultural legitimacy from civil society actors also have an impact on global diplomatic policy, which cannot be regarded exclusively as the outcome of geopolitical reasoning. Religious organizations use symbolic opposition as a powerful social control tool to keep an eye on state policy. In order to preserve popular support and guarantee long-term political stability, the state's capacity to control public discourse and take into consideration domestic social dynamics is crucial to the success of foreign policy.

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