



AL VADAUKAS
Journal of Education and Islamic Studies

Vol. 1 No. 1 August (2025)
ISSN: XXXX-XXXX (Print) ISSN: XXXX-XXXX (Electronic)
Open Access: <https://jurnal.ypiskhairulimam.com/al-vadaukas/index>

All Because of Love or Because of Neglect? Fuel Crisis, Religious Populist Leadership, and the Failure of Crisis Management in Local Islamic Politics in Jember

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Article Info :

Received:
30-07-2025
Revised:
31-07-2025
Accepted:
01-08-2025

ABSTRACT (10 PT)

The fuel scarcity crisis in Jember at the end of July 2025 revealed a serious failure in regional leadership oriented towards religious populism. The closure of the Gunitir Route as the main distribution route had been announced long in advance, but it was not followed by adequate logistical anticipation from the district government. The leadership style of the Jember Regent, which emphasizes religious symbols and moral narratives through the slogan "All Because of Love," has collided sharply with the reality of poor crisis management. This article explores the relationship between religious symbolism and policy response structures within the local Islamic political landscape. With a qualitative approach through field observations, digital documentation, and semi-structured interviews, a sharp dissonance was found between symbolic legitimacy and policy effectiveness. The response of the citizens in the form of satire, memes, and digital criticism reflects a symbolic eruption that erodes public trust. This event highlights the urgency of transforming Islamic politics from mere religious rhetoric to accountable and solution-oriented governance.

Keywords : Religious Populism, Crisis Management, Symbolic Legitimacy.



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INTRODUCTION

The fuel oil scarcity crisis that occurred in Jember Regency from July 26-30, 2025, does not merely reflect technical disruptions in the energy distribution system, but rather highlights the weak institutional readiness and local leadership capacity in facing logistical disruptions. Vehicle queues extending over 500 meters at various fuel stations indicate that no risk mitigation scheme was in place, despite the announcement of the closure of the Gunitir Route being made well in advance. This incident highlights acute gaps in local energy distribution governance and the weak anticipatory capacity of local governments towards potential crises in strategic sectors (Yusuf & Anjani, 2023).

So far, studies on Islamic populism have mostly focused on national political dynamics or electoral strategies, while the dimension of religious governance performance at the local level is still rarely discussed. The existing literature tends to emphasize aspects of affective mobilization and moral legitimacy (Hamid et al., 2021; Mujani & Liddle, 2020), but there has been little discussion on how religious populist leaders respond to material disruptions such as energy and distribution crises. The disparity between symbolic rhetoric and policy performance in the Jember case reveals a void in the local technocratic structure. This tension has serious implications for the public's trust in religious authorities (Azhar & Fauzi, 2023).

Previous studies provide an important foundation for building the theoretical framework of this research. Nasution, (2025) concluded that the main weakness lies in the absence of a coordination

system and leaders who are responsive to field data. Rahman Tahir, (2025) found that local leaders who promote a religious populism agenda tend to emphasize identity and moral affection, but fail to formulate *maslahat*-based policies that are adaptive to crises. Meanwhile, Akmal (2023) states that effective energy distribution in the region heavily relies on data-driven leadership and the readiness of the bureaucratic structure. Although these three studies highlight important dimensions in governance and leadership, none have explicitly linked the failure of energy distribution to the legitimacy crisis in the context of local Islamic populism. This is where the strategic position of this research comes into play.

There is a clear gap in the scientific study of religious populist leadership, especially in responding to material crises such as energy shortages. Most previous studies have focused more on symbolic aspects, such as political legitimacy and religious identity, without directly linking them to technocratic performance in emergency situations. However, in the context of religious regions, leaders are not only expected to convey moral values but also to respond to the real needs of the community.

This research attempts to fill that gap by combining discursive, institutional, and performative approaches. By examining the fuel crisis in Jember Regency as the main case, this study explores how religious discourse, public emotions, and government policies are interconnected. The aim is to make a tangible contribution to the development of public governance studies rooted in values and responsive to crises.

The novelty of this research lies in its perspective, which combines the theory of religious populism with the concepts of performative legitimacy and crisis management. Unlike previous research that only viewed Islamic populism as a movement based on emotion and morality, this study focuses on how religious leaders act in addressing real issues. By making the fuel crisis the focal point of analysis, this study shows that local Islamic politics also plays a role in technical aspects that directly impact the welfare of the community.

The analysis method used also offers a new approach, namely by examining how the crisis is responded to through public discourse and institutional actions. From here, this research hopes to provide a foundation for a model of religious leadership that is not only normative but also effective and capable of responding to challenges in a technocratic manner.

This research aims to analyze the Jember 2025 fuel crisis as an event that reveals the limits of religious populist leadership in public governance. By exploring the dimensions of discourse, residents' emotional responses, and the lack of technical capacity in distribution management, this article offers a new interpretation of local Islamic politics that has so far tended to be supported by symbols rather than solutions. The uniqueness of this research lies in its approach, which combines the theory of religious populism, performative legitimacy, and crisis accountability in a single case study that is current and socially-political relevant.

By placing the energy distribution crisis as a window to understand the dynamics of discourse and performative failures in religious populist leadership, this article contributes to the literature on public governance based on religious values and the crisis of symbolic legitimacy. Furthermore, this article aims to highlight the importance of the transformation of local Islamic politics from affective symbolism to policy ethics rooted in the principles of *maslahat*, professionalism, and justice as the main pillars in the Islamic governance system.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to enable an in-depth exploration of the symbolic dynamics and public responses in the BBM crisis event in Jember. This approach was chosen because it is capable of capturing the affective dimensions, power narratives, and the socio-political experiences of the residents that cannot be reduced to quantitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection techniques include field observation, documentation of digital media (including memes, social media posts, and online news), as well as semi-structured interviews with affected residents, local activists, and government officials. The selection of these techniques is based on the need to obtain multiple perspectives and direct public articulation, which represent perceptions of the symbolic legitimacy of local leaders. The data analysis technique used is critical discourse analysis, as this method allows for the exploration of power structures, symbolic constructions, and representation practices in the political communication of leaders during times of crisis (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2018). All these methodological decisions are aimed at establishing the validity and

relevance of the analysis regarding the phenomenon of religious populist leadership in the local political landscape.

Data were collected through three main techniques. First, limited field observations were conducted at five gas stations in Jember Regency during the crisis period (July 25–30, 2025), to record fuel queues, residents' expressions, and symbolic activities such as posters and sarcastic writings. Second, digital media documentation was collected through monitoring social media posts (Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok), particularly memes, videos, and public comments related to the slogan "All Because of Love" used by the Jember Regent as a symbol of his administration. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 key informants, including affected residents, student activists, local policy observers, and interviews with the regent in the media.

The thematic analysis approach was used to categorize the data based on meaning patterns that emerged from the narratives of the residents and the symbols of power that circulated during the crisis. To read the symbolic dimensions and power communication, the Fairclough model of critical discourse analysis is also applied, which allows researchers to capture the processes of symbolic representation and the rhetorical strategies of leaders in the crisis landscape. This combination allows for the mapping of the articulation of meaning between the material crisis and the legitimacy crisis (Wibowo & Hamid, 2020).

Geertz's (1973) theoretical foundation on the symbolic meaning in religious power is used to interpret the use of slogans and religious symbols by regional heads as instruments of legitimacy. On the other hand, the recent approach by Sari & Amal (2022) shows how religious populism at the local level often wraps weak policies in emotional spiritual appeal. Such a qualitative approach is effective in uncovering the intersection between emotional politics and symbolic Islamic politics, especially in regions with a strong religious ecosystem.

This study also considers theories regarding crises in local Islamic political systems, as discussed by Hasyim (2021), which highlight how distribution and logistics crises can expose the limitations of populist leaders in managing material realities. Additionally, the research by Mahendra & Fauzan (2023) shows that in the dynamics of local Islamic politics, religious claims are not always accompanied by adequate policy ethics, especially in public risk management.

With this framework, the research seeks to interpret the fuel crisis not merely as an energy shortage, but as a symbolic-political event that reflects a failure in the architecture of local Islamic leadership, which relies too heavily on symbols without technocratic strength.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of a qualitative approach in this study has proven relevant to uncover the dynamics of religious populist leadership during the fuel crisis in Jember. This is because the qualitative approach allows for the exploration of symbolic meanings, power structures, and citizen perceptions that cannot be captured through quantitative instruments (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). The selection of a single case study method was also considered because the crisis that occurred is a distinctive and localized socio-political phenomenon, with unique leadership structures, public narratives, and citizen responses. The research findings are as follows:

Table 01. Techniques and Objectives of Data Collection

Data Collection Techniques	Research Objectives
Digital Media Documentation	Identifying symbolic expressions of citizens (memes, satire, religious comments)
Field Observation	Observing real responses of citizens and institutions to the crisis
Semi-Structured Interviews	Exploring the perceptions and experiences of citizens, activists, and local officials

Data collection through digital media documentation and field observation was chosen because this crisis is accompanied by an explosion of symbolic expressions in the online space, such as memes, satirical videos, and comments with religious or critical tones. Semi-structured interviews with affected residents, activists, and local officials were also conducted to explore personal experiences and

perceptions regarding the discrepancy between the leaders' religious rhetoric and the weak policy response. This technique is considered the most appropriate for obtaining variations in narratives and social positions in interpreting the crisis (Patton, 2015).

The collected data were analyzed using the technique of critical discourse analysis because this crisis is both symbolic and political. CDA allows for the reading of how leaders use religious rhetoric to build legitimacy, while also revealing citizen resistance in the form of counter-narratives and social criticism (van Dijk, 2018). Therefore, the selection of these methods and techniques is not merely a technical consideration, but an integral part of the effort to understand the crisis as an event that encompasses conflicts of authority, symbolic meanings, and struggles for power legitimacy within the local Islamic political landscape. The results and discussion of the research obtained using the above methods are as follows:

Table 02. Key Findings Based on Discourse Analysis

Analysis Dimensions	Main Findings
Leadership Rhetoric	Emphasis on symbols of love, religiosity, and morality without a clear technocratic strategy
Digital Public Reaction	The emergence of satire, memes, and sarcastic critiques of the slogan "All Because of Love"
Counter-Narrative	Citizens are forming alternative discourses on effective leadership and crisis responsiveness
Symbolic-Policy Disparity	Symbolic legitimacy is not followed by real policies, eroding public trust

Fuel Crisis as a Failure of Risk Management

The scarcity of fuel oil (BBM) that hit Jember Regency at the end of July 2025 was not merely a technical distribution disruption, but rather a manifestation of the weak structure of anticipatory policies at the local government level. The closure of the Gunitir route, which had been previously announced, was not followed by an adequate alternative distribution scheme. This indicates a lack of preparedness within the risk management framework, especially in strategic sectors such as local energy (Ardiansyah & Wiratama, 2023). This crisis created vehicle queues stretching 500 meters at almost all gas stations in Jember, with waiting times reaching eight hours. Field data shows that the community is experiencing losses in time, finances, and psychological well-being due to the unavoidable disruption of fuel supply.

In the theory of public risk management, as developed by Ulrich Beck in (Beck, 1992), the government's failure to anticipate predictable threats reflects what is called a "risk society," which is a society that becomes a victim of the negligence of the system that is supposed to protect them. Local governments not only neglected to prepare logistical mitigation but also failed to read local dynamics that could trigger social instability. As emphasized by Nugroho and Sihombing in (Nugroho & Sihombing, 2021), the local government's unpreparedness in managing infrastructure risks directly impacts the decline in citizens' trust in the state as the protector of basic rights.

One of the root problems lies in the weak design of emergency policies and the limited cross-sector coordination. No alternative distribution routes were prepared to anticipate the closure of the main access from Banyuwangi, even though this scenario had been socialized long in advance. Research by Firmansyah et al. (Firmansyah et al., 2022) shows that most local governments in Indonesia still rely on reactive responses rather than preventive approaches in addressing energy distribution vulnerabilities. The situation in Jember reflects a similar pattern: minimal risk simulation-based planning and a high dependence on a single strategic supply route without logistics diversification.

On the other hand, the political aspect further exacerbates the situation. Religious populist leadership built on a narrative of love and faith, as seen in the slogan "All Because of Love," fails to meet the expectations of the citizens when their basic needs are not fulfilled. This creates a dissonance between the moral image of the leader and the reality on the ground. According to Latief and Zain in (Latief & Zain, 2023), the crisis of trust in local leaders tends to increase when religious symbolism is

not accompanied by real technocratic competence. In the case of Jember, the Bupati's "surprised" acknowledgment of the long lines for fuel only added to the public's anger, feeling neglected.

From the perspective of energy governance, the scarcity of fuel should be mitigated by the availability of logistical reserves at local depots or by redirecting distribution from other routes. However, according to Riswanda and Hartini in (Riswanda & Hartini, 2020), the structural weakness in Indonesia's energy logistics system is the lack of supply flexibility at the district level. Without the active role of regional heads in establishing inter-regional coordination or designing crisis scenarios, the community will always be in a vulnerable position. This fuel crisis is not an incidental event, but rather a result of the neglect of institutional configuration in mapping potential risks and adaptive capacity.

From a socio-political dimension, this crisis also shows how local dynamics can quickly shift from a semblance of stability to an eruption of public dissatisfaction. The people who previously accepted a spiritual narrative in leadership now demand the presence of the state in its most concrete form: available fuel and responsive services. As stated by Hidayat & Maulida in (Hidayat & Maulida, 2022), the public's response to the logistics crisis is not only determined by physical scarcity but also by the perception of the government's care and ability to solve problems.

In the framework of Islamic governance ethics, the provision of basic needs such as energy is not only an administrative task but also a public trust. The principle of *maslahah* (public interest) demands protection of the vital needs of society, especially in times of emergency. According to Fahmi in (Fahmi, 2021), leadership in Islam must be balanced between *akhlaqiyah* (morality) and *kifayah* (technical capacity), so as not to get trapped in empty rhetoric that actually diminishes the dignity of leadership itself.

Thus, the fuel crisis in Jember reflects three major failures: the weak technical readiness of the local government, the absence of a flexible alternative distribution design, and the disparity between religious symbolism and policy effectiveness. This reinforces the importance of transformation in public risk management based on Islamic ethics that not only emphasizes values but also expertise and robust distribution strategies. If Islamic politics wants to remain relevant in the public sphere, it must demonstrate adaptive capacity in facing real emergency dynamics, not just emotional narratives.

Religious Populist Leadership and Symbolic Politics

The leadership of the Jember Regent, who promotes a religious narrative through the slogan "All Because of Love," represents a typical style of religious populism at the local government level. This strategy emphasizes emotional closeness and symbolic spirituality as sources of legitimacy, but is lacking in technical policy instruments when facing real crises (Hamid & Latif, 2022). In such a leadership landscape, the presence of a leader is not only seen as a public official but as a moral and spiritual figure who frames power in a context of religious nuance and emotional romanticism. However, as seen in the BBM crisis in Jember, that symbol-based legitimacy falters when faced with concrete administrative failures.

In the dimension of religious populism discourse, leaders often build closeness with the people through narratives of piety, simplicity, and spiritual commitment, which are claimed as solutions to power imbalances. This style refers to a configuration of populism based on affection and moral representation rather than policy rationality. In Jember, the slogan "Everything Because of Love" became a focal point of political communication that built the perception of the leader as someone who genuinely loves the people. However, when the crisis of fuel scarcity struck and the public was forced to queue for up to eight hours without a clear solution, this rhetorical strategy turned into a symbolic burden.

This phenomenon shows symptoms that Bourdieu refers to as "symbolic power" in (Bourdieu, 1991), which is a form of domination that is not physically visible but operates through the internalization of meaning by society. Religious populist leaders rely on the affective trust of the citizens as a tool of legitimation, rather than technocratic performance. However, such symbolic power is fragile: it quickly loses its authority when the meanings instilled do not align with the daily realities of the citizens. In a situation of fuel scarcity, where basic needs are not met, the people are no longer influenced by slogans or religious symbols, but instead demand concrete administrative evidence.

This is where symbolic politics shows its limits. As stated by Rohman and Suharto in (Rohman & Suharto, 2022), the use of religious symbols in public communication is often effective in mobilizing

support, but does not always align with the ability to design policies. In the case of Jember, no adequate managerial response was found, such as alternative distribution orders, coordination with the province, or transparency of information to the public. The regent's reaction of being "shocked" by the long queues actually reveals the gap between the constructed symbol and the reality of governance on the ground.

The effect of this dissonance is not just temporary disappointment, but a legitimacy crisis. When citizens feel that emotional promises do not align with the performance of their leaders, public trust declines drastically. Research by Zahra and Salim (Zahra & Salim, 2023) in several regions shows that religious figures in local politics tend to be vulnerable to losing support when they fail to meet basic service expectations. In the digital public space, the people of Jember have turned the slogan "All Because of Love" into satire, demonstrating a reversal of meaning that serves as a form of symbolic resistance against power.

Meanwhile, Islamic populism in local politics in Indonesia often emphasizes the connection between morality and the sovereignty of the people. However, according to Mahfud and Izzati (Mahfud & Izzati, 2022), in practice, Islamic populism often replaces policy capacity with symbolic performances that are easily reproduced on social media and public stages. Figures like Gus Fawait, who come from pesantren backgrounds and are active in Islamic organizations, receive strong support from segments of the religious community. But that support tends to be fluctuating if not accompanied by the ability to handle logistical, economic, or other public service crises.

In such situations, religious-based political promises must be tested in the arena of technical policy. The reality of the fuel crisis proves that the image of piety cannot replace expertise in resource distribution. A leadership landscape that overly relies on religious narratives without being supported by functional policy structures will only accelerate the decline of legitimacy. This simultaneously marks a significant challenge for local Islamic politics: how to maintain the authenticity of spiritual values while strengthening the technocratic capacity of governance.

Reflection on this phenomenon also demands a reorientation of the role of local Islamic leaders. Rather than continuously building emotional narratives, it is more urgent for them to integrate the principle of *maslahah* into real policies, especially in the fields of energy, food, and public access crises. When symbols lose their power due to lack of systemic support, the only way to maintain public trust is by demonstrating effective, responsive, and measurable leadership capacity.

Public Response and Symbolic Eruption

The disappointment of Jember residents regarding the scarcity of fuel did not stop at logistical protests, but expanded into a form of symbolic resistance. The slogan "All Because of Love," which previously built an emotional connection with the residents, has instead become an object of public satire. On social media, the expression was turned into a satire against the local government's unpreparedness in anticipating the closure of the Gumitir Route. Digital memes, parody posts, and cynical comments fill the digital space, showing how citizens' discourse expressions are shifting from acceptance to emotional resistance.

The public's affective response to the scarcity of fuel shows the tension between the religious symbols used by local leaders and the practical needs of everyday citizens. In a crisis situation, religious symbols lose their cohesive power if not followed by concrete actions that address the fundamental issues. A number of citizens referred to the slogan "All Because of Love" as "all because of carelessness," indicating a symbolic dissonance between spiritual rhetoric and managerial performance. This phenomenon reinforces Tanjung's findings that religious populism often faces resistance when the moral symbols used do not align with actual policy outcomes (Tanjung, 2022).

Digital media has become the main articulative space in shaping the structure of public perception towards power based on religious narratives. When the distribution of fuel failed and the queues reached hundreds of meters, social media became the main outlet for emotional expression. In this landscape of social response, citizens not only complain about physical conditions such as waiting times or difficult transportation access but also criticize the leaders' absence in the form of concrete policies. As explained by Mujani (Mujani & Liddle, 2022), digital media today is not just an information channel, but an arena for opinion formation and symbolic political articulation by citizens towards the elites.

Criticism of the religious-populist leader in this case also shows a shift from performative legitimacy to demands for competence-based legitimacy. When leaders fail to provide concrete

solutions to the energy distribution crisis, the trust initially built through emotional and spiritual approaches becomes fragile. The concept of performance legitimacy (Nathan, 2020) emphasizes that legitimacy is not only built through identity or symbolic proximity but must be tested in the leader's capacity to solve real problems. In this case, the fuel crisis becomes a moment of testing where religious-populist leaders must prove that symbolic morality is not a substitute for technical management.

Some citizens are also starting to create counter-narratives against the dominant symbols of religious power. This example can be seen from the emergence of hashtags like #CintaTanpaSolar and #CintaKokNgantre, which mock the government's failure to maintain fuel distribution. This counter-narrative shows that the public does not fully submit to symbolic domination and has the capacity to disrupt the stability of hegemony through satire. This aligns with Bourdieu's analysis, which states that symbolic power can only endure as long as the audience continues to acknowledge the legitimacy of that representation.

The disparity between symbolic expressions and the technical needs of citizens also reveals a new dynamic in power relations. In emergency situations, trust is no longer determined by a leader's religious identity, but by the speed and precision in managing public risk. This shows that religious populism, although effective in building emotional loyalty, still faces limits when confronted with the demands of technocracy. A recent study by Hamdan and Fauzi (Abidin & Fauziah, 2022) confirms that symbolic legitimacy in Islamic-based local governance often wavers when tested by logistical or infrastructural crises.

The highly vocal response of citizens on social media also shows that the community is no longer passive in facing inequality. The digital landscape allows citizens to reproduce meaning, redefine power narratives, and create public pressure in new forms. This marks a shift from symbolic loyalty to critical affective participation. In this affective dimension, religious-populist politics are tested: whether they can withstand when sentiments begin to turn.

Thus, the fuel crisis in Jember not only presents a technical issue regarding energy distribution but also unravels the symbolic relationship between leaders and citizens. The rhetoric of love and religiosity that initially bound support, in a crisis situation, instead triggered a symbolic eruption. Society demands harmony between the claimed religious values and the technical capacities being implemented. In today's local political landscape, religiosity is no longer sufficient; effectiveness is a necessity.

Reflections on Local Islamic Politics

The fuel scarcity incident in Jember reveals deep gaps in the local Islamic political landscape. When religious leaders fail to demonstrate the capacity to handle basic logistical crises, symbolic credibility is no longer sufficient as a foundation for power legitimacy. All this time, the architecture of leadership built on the basis of religious symbols seemed promising electorally, but fragile in terms of technical policy. Therefore, the fuel crisis is not just a failure of energy distribution, but a crisis of the representation of political Islam itself.

The populist-religious leadership style in Jember shows a tendency to rely on affective closeness and spiritual jargon such as "All Because of Love" as a device of legitimacy. Such rhetorical strategies affirm religious authority as a substitute for technocratic capacity. However, as Yasmin and Haris have pointed out, when policy challenges arise, such as the need for alternative energy distribution due to the closure of the Gunitir Route, religious narratives are unable to address structural issues. When a crisis comes, the public does not seek symbols, but rather solutions (Yasmin & Haris, 2023).

This failure highlights the importance of integrating the principles of *good governance* in the Islamic perspective into region-based religious leadership. In this framework, principles such as *amanah* (responsibility), *fathanah* (competence), and *maslahah* (public benefit) become indispensable indicators of policy ethics. The architecture of leadership that neglects these elements will experience an erosion of legitimacy when confronted with the reality of public risk management. As stated by Al-Khattab and Rahman (Al-Khattab & Rahman, 2020), Islamic leadership is not merely based on moral rhetoric, but must be built on a foundation of responsive and professional governance.

This reflection also reveals the stagnation of local Islamic politics, which has been too focused on religious symbols as electoral differentiators, but lacking in policy innovation. The disparity between symbols and substance is what creates a gap in public trust. In their study, Abidin and Fauziah (Abidin & Fauziah, 2022) show that in many regions, the performance of Islamic parties or figures drastically

declines when they fail to provide adequate administrative solutions, even though they remain symbolically dominant. The basis of public trust can no longer be supported solely by moral legitimacy, but demands crisis accountability and policy precision.

The phenomenon of the fuel crisis also highlights the importance of accountability as an essential dimension of religious leadership. In emergency situations, the public has the right to demand accountability for their leaders' technical performance, not just their personal piety. The theory of crisis accountability asserts that the government's capacity to explain, respond to, and rectify a crisis will determine whether public trust will endure or collapse (Scott, 2021). In this dimension, the absence of adequate explanations from the Jember local government regarding the delay in fuel distribution exacerbates the previously fragile crisis of symbolic representation.

Populist-religious leadership tends to rely on collective emotions and religious identity as instruments of legitimacy. However, without being supported by policy capacity and governance, that legitimacy becomes fragile. This phenomenon shows that symbols cannot replace the system.

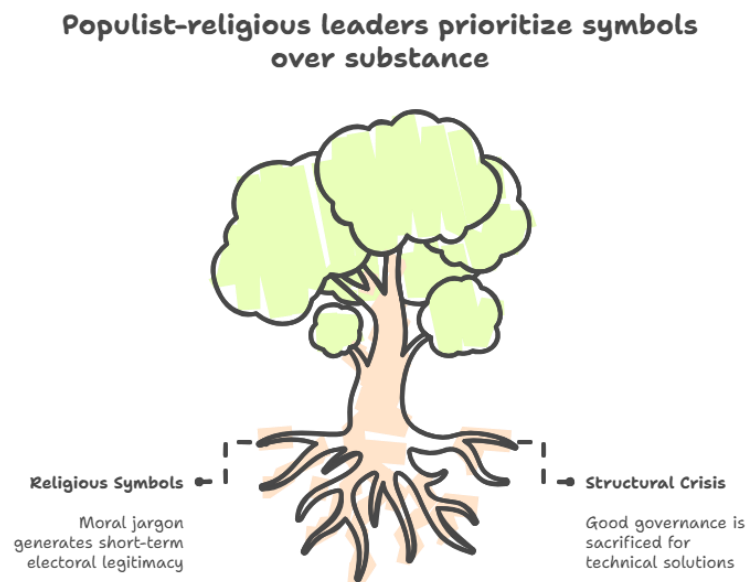


Figure 01. The Imbalance of Symbol and Substance in Populist-Religious Leadership

Local Islamic politics in the future must be able to move from symbolic dominance towards structural improvement. Leaders with a religious background must prove that Islamic values do not stop at spiritual communication, but manifest in robust logistics systems, well-thought-out disaster planning, and fair public services. This idea aligns with the increasingly critical aspirations of the community: it is no longer enough for religious leaders to merely give a good impression from the pulpit; they must demonstrate a solution-oriented work ethic in the field.

In addition, it is important to build a structure for Islamic leadership cadre development that combines religious literacy with managerial and administrative skills. Strengthening this capacity has become a strategic necessity so that Islamic politics no longer gets trapped in religious aesthetics, but instead enters the realm of policy ethics. The failure in Jember should serve as a collective mirror that religion is not a campaign tool, but a guideline for organizing an efficient and just system.

Thus, the 2025 fuel crisis becomes a reflective moment for local Islamic politics: whether to continue clinging to empty symbolism or to transform into a responsive, professional, and accountable force. Without this transition, religious populism will lose its appeal, and public trust in religion-based political projects will continue to erode.

CONCLUSION

The fuel crisis in Jember at the end of July 2025 unveiled the failure of populist religious leadership that overly emphasized moral symbols and public affection, but was weak in the technocratic dimension. A leadership style that relies on religious slogans like "All Because of Love" has proven

incapable of providing adequate policy responses to basic logistical disruptions. This failure is not just about energy distribution, but also about dismantling the symbol-based legitimacy structure that has long supported power.

Theoretically, this finding enriches the discourse on performance legitimacy within the local Islamic political landscape, and demonstrates that religious symbols are insufficient as a buffer for social stability during crises. This study also makes a practical contribution to the agenda of local government reform based on Islamic values, emphasizing the importance of managerial capacity as part of the moral responsibility of power. Islamic visionary leaders cannot rely solely on moral messages; they are also required to build a policy architecture that is solution-oriented and expertise-based.

Further research can explore how the support base for religious populism responds to the dissonance between symbols and policy performance longitudinally. Comparative studies across regions led by religious figures are also important to measure the extent to which local Islamic populism can transform into a substantive force, not just a symbolic one. The research can also expand into the analysis of the role of religious organizations in strengthening crisis governance at the local level.

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