

How Criminalization of Blasphemy on Social Media Intensifies Social Division: A Critical Criminology Perspective

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ABSTRACT Existing studies on Indonesia's blasphemy law have primarily focused on its constitutional foundations and judicial interpretation, particularly through analyses of decisions by the Constitutional Court. This study examines the intricate dynamics of blasphemy laws in Indonesia, with a particular focus on their implications in the digital era. Building on this body of work, including Melisa Crouch's influential study on law and religion in Indonesia, this article shifts attention to the practical criminalization of blasphemy in the context of social media. While these laws aim to protect religion and religious values, they often result in the criminalization of certain expressions, particularly in virtual spaces. This research scrutinizes the intersection between blasphemy laws and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, highlighting the tensions between freedom of expression, the right to practice religion and belief, and the role of technology in modern legal frameworks. The primary analysis adopts a critical criminological perspective, suggesting that those in power can legislate and criminalize anyone. This study examines the impact of public perceptions on legal processes in blasphemy cases. Data collection techniques include searching and sorting related news articles and legal text documents. Thematic analysis is employed to uncover patterns and dynamics of power embedded in the narratives. The findings indicate how these legal tools exacerbate societal divisions and contribute to the escalation of inter-religious tensions, especially in the context of online content, reflecting broader sociopolitical dynamics and moral judgments. The research results underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of blasphemy law and a critical re-evaluation of its application, taking into account both legal and philosophical perspectives. The media plays an important role in shaping narratives and influencing judicial outcomes, emphasizing the intersection of law, media, and society in the context of blasphemy allegations.

KEYWORDS *Blasphemy Law; Criminalization; Social Media; Critical Criminology.*

INTRODUCTION

The enforcement of Indonesia's blasphemy law reveals persistent tensions between freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, particularly in cases involving public and digital expression. Although both rights are recognized under international human rights law, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as articulated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (UN General Assembly,

1948). Their coexistence in practice is often shaped by political influence and religious sensitivities (Graham, 2009, p. 74). In Indonesia, these tensions become especially visible in blasphemy cases, where expressions incorporating religious ideas or symbols—frequently disseminated through social media—may result in criminalization following objections from offended groups (Hicks, 2015, p. 51). This creates a conflict between freedom of speech, which protects



expression, and freedom of religion, which safeguards belief.

While freedom of religion or belief is constitutionally protected in many democratic states and universally affirmed through international conventions (van Schaik, 2016, p. 177), its application varies significantly across jurisdictions. The United States stands out for its strong emphasis on free speech as a constitutional right, where any legislation that constrains this freedom is generally viewed unfavorably (Holzaepfel, 2014, p. 599). Similarly, blasphemy laws are considered less relevant or morally inappropriate in Europe, particularly in modern and secular nations (Cox, 2020, p. 34). There were anti-blasphemy, anti-apostasy, and anti-defamation laws in force in about 59 countries in 2011 (Holzaepfel, 2014, p. 599). The global diversity in approaches to blasphemy laws raises critical questions about their compatibility with universal human rights.

Studies of blasphemy cases in Indonesia reveal that judicial decisions are often influenced by religious authorities and social pressure (Tyson, 2021). This has led to biased rulings, legal uncertainty, and repeated infringements of fair trial principles. Also, it highlights a sentiment from the majority toward individuals they perceive as degrading the dignity of their faith (Hicks, 2015, p. 53). Although the prejudice may seem subtle, on a larger scale, it can lead to greater conflict. Panggabean (2014) advocates for an approach centered on common interests when addressing religious conflicts, emphasizing conflict resolution, mediation, dialogue, and negotiation as essential components

of a comprehensive strategy to tackle the complexities of religious tensions (Bagir, 2017). However, in practice, the state appears reluctant to address the ongoing polemics stemming from the law's enactment. In this case, the police's role is also significant, as they swiftly respond to reports from the majority religious group who feel their faith has been tarnished (Miles-Johnson et al., 2021, p. 5). This is evident in the Constitutional Court's frequent rejection of efforts to review the Blasphemy Law, indicating a lack of willingness to engage with these contentious issues.

The Constitutional Court's ruling rejecting the request for a material review of Law Number 1/PNPS/1965 serves as an illustration of recent legal developments. The court highlighted the relationship between this statute and Criminal Code Article 156a, displaying the difficulties in interpreting and contesting laws pertaining to blasphemy (Argawati, 2023; Mursal & Zarzani, 2024, p. 265). Furthermore, the relationship between religion and the state is complicated by Indonesia's distinct socio-political environment, where religious values form the cornerstone of the country's ethics and spirituality. In this sense, Indonesia aspires to reconcile different religions and beliefs within societal, national, and state life as a non-secular nation (Argawati, 2023; Butt, 2023, p. 200). Consequently, the Constitutional Court's decisions have adversely affected the phenomenon of blasphemy cases, fostering an environment where accusations of blasphemy can result in widespread criminalization.

In the context of Indonesia's complex blasphemy law, this paper aims to conduct a comprehensive exploration, focusing specifically on the country to uncover the various implications of this legislation. The central thesis posits that, although blasphemy laws may have the stated purpose of protecting religious sentiments, their enforcement often leads to the criminalization of individuals exercising their freedom of expression. In this sense, their actions are recorded on social or digital media, and the public's reaction provokes religious leaders to take action by reporting them or initiating legal procedures. This analysis situates the discussion within the broader tension between safeguarding religion and upholding freedom of expression, emphasizing how the law's practical application can produce unintended constraints on personal liberties. In order to underline the moral ramifications of these problematic laws for the general public, the author will use a media studies approach to examine the public's responses to the parties who created them, in addition to legal and criminological perspectives.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

The Blasphemy Law in Indonesia has its roots in a highly political context. According to the literature, the initial presidential decree of 1965, issued by President Sukarno, emerged amid growing tensions and fears of communism prior to the so-called attempted Communist coup. The decree was motivated in part by demands from Islamic organizations to protect the major recognized religions against what they viewed as threats from mystical or indigenous beliefs (Indrayanti &

Saraswati, 2022). The regulation was initiated by Oemar Seno Aji during the First National Conference of Law in 1963, grounded in the first principle of Pancasila, "belief in the one and only God," and Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution, which formally recognizes religion in Indonesia, emphasizing equality and mutual respect among religious communities (Siddik, 2022). According to Melissa Crouch (2012a), following the political upheaval of 1965–1966, Suharto, Sukarno's successor, banned communism but retained the blasphemy decree, formalizing it as law in 1969. This law empowered religious leaders to protect the status and interpretation of the six official religions and allowed the State to monitor and regulate religious practice.

Today, the appropriateness and subject matter of the blasphemy law are still prominent topics of public discourse in Indonesia, where there is ongoing debate (Crouch, 2012b, p. 518). In Indonesia, dozens of people are still reported to the police each year on charges of blasphemy. Concerns regarding the Blasphemy Law's potential to criminalize religious dissent and violate the constitutional right to freedom of religion have led to scrutiny of the law's application and interpretation (Crouch, 2012a, p. 1; Hicks, 2015, p. 55). This problem not only creates heated discussion but also poses substantial questions about how Indonesian law must combine the protection of human rights with religious principles. President Sukarno issued a decree in 1965 establishing the Blasphemy Law, which has since evolved, frequently reflecting the political dynamic and state authority of the time (Crouch, 2012a, p. 25). Indonesia's blasphemy law has

evolved through multiple legal instruments, including the 1945 Constitution, the Criminal Code, PNPS No. 1 of 1965, and the Law on Information and Electronic Transactions or UU ITE (Rokhmad et al., 2024). This layered legal framework has expanded the reach of blasphemy regulation into digital spaces, enabling the criminalization of expressions circulated through social media.

Previous studies on criminalization related to social media content and blasphemy have highlighted multiple dimensions of how the law operates in practice. Lucchesi & Cerase (2023) notes that criminalization can function to maintain control over the narratives and images of marginalized groups, offering insights into discursive shifts in identity and the rise of populist dynamics. The widespread use of social media further complicates this landscape, as platforms increasingly become sites for criticism, bullying, and the policing of expression, limiting the practical exercise of freedom of opinion and expression (Saeed, 2025). The virality of content transforms legal processes, as public pressure and viral outrage increasingly influence law enforcement, contributing to penal populism and undermining the rule of law by prioritizing emotional responses over impartial legal principles (Rustamaji et al., 2025). At the same time, scholars have stressed that the law's scope remains specific: only offenses that profane objects of worship or places of religious ritual fall under criminal sanction (Sitarz, 2021). Collectively, these studies illustrate the complex interplay between social media, public sentiment, and legal enforcement in shaping contemporary blasphemy criminalization.

This research adopts a critical criminology perspective to analyze the practical enforcement of blasphemy laws in Indonesia. Critical criminology emphasizes how law is not neutral but functions as a tool of social control, reflecting power dynamics and the interests of dominant groups rather than purely objective principles (Rusche & Kirchheimer, 1939). Critical criminologists argue that traditional approaches to criminology overlook the structural inequalities that shape how laws are made and enforced, and that definitions of deviance and criminality are deeply influenced by society's broader power structures and institutions (Taylor et al., 1973). In the context of social media and blasphemy, this framework helps to examine how legal mechanisms intersect with public sentiment, political influence, and technological mediation to criminalize certain expressions. By focusing on the everyday application of the law, critical criminology reveals how the enforcement of blasphemy provisions can disproportionately target marginalized groups, amplify penal populism, and shape discursive norms around religion and identity.

Methods

This study manually collected data using a web search engine with the keyword "religious blasphemy," focusing on blasphemy cases that went viral on digital media in 2023-2024. In this context, "viral" refers not to the news per se but to how content allegedly containing blasphemous elements gained widespread public attention and subsequently became the subject of criminal cases. The emotional factor plays a significant role in driving the virality of such content,

as strong public reactions often amplify the visibility and impact of these cases (Al-Rawi, 2019, p. 4; Denisova, 2023, p. 1926). News articles serve as a critical reference to understand these cases chronologically and in detail, including the profiles of both the complainant and the reported individual, the legal articles involved, and the actions taken by law enforcement.

To ensure comprehensive analysis, filtering, and sorting were carried out manually by selecting news stories that presented a complete narrative of blasphemy cases that sparked significant public discussion in Indonesia. Only cases that included details about the legal process, blasphemy application, Electronic Information and Transactions laws, and public reactions were selected for further examination.

Table 1. Most Viral Blasphemy Cases in Indonesia (2023-2024)

Date	Accused	Complainant	Charge
March 15 2023	Lina Mukherjee (TikTok Content Creator)	Sapriadi (Legal advisor)	Article 28 paragraph (2) in conjunction with Article 45 paragraph (2) of Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions as amended by Law Number 19 of 2016
June 23 2023	Panji Gumilang (Founder of Al Zaytun Islamic Boarding School)	Forum Advokat Pembela Pancasila (Pancasila Defenders Advocate Forum)	Article 14 paragraph 1 of Law Number 1 of 1946 concerning Criminal Law Regulations, Article 45a paragraph (2) in conjunction with Article 28 paragraph (2) of Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, and Article 156a of the Criminal Code
December 10 2023	Aulia Rakhman (Stand-up Comedian)	Komunitas Advokat Lingkar Nusantara (Lingkar Nusantara Advocate Community)	Article 156a of the Criminal Code
January 12 2024	Arya Wedakarna (Member of the Bali Regional Representative Council)	Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) Bali	Article 45A Paragraph (2) of Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to the Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions and/or Article 156 of the Criminal Code
April 16 2024	Gilbert Lumoindong (Priest)	Farhat Abbas (Lawyer) and Indonesian Youth Congress	Article 156a of the Criminal Code, and Article 28 paragraph 2 in conjunction with Article 45A of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law
April 22 2024	Galih Noval Aji Prakoso or Galih Loss (TikTok Content Creator)	Police Cyber Patrol	Article 45A Paragraph (2) of Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to the Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions and/or Article 156 of the Criminal Code
October 4 2024	Ratu Thalisa or Ratu Entok (TikTok Content Creator)	Christian congregation association	Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions

Thematic analysis was then employed to systematically categorize and interpret the key themes that emerged in the media (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allowed for a deeper understanding of the underlying messages, power dynamics, and social implications of media portrayals of blasphemy, providing critical insights into how these narratives contribute to criminalizing such acts.

DISCUSSION

Religious Blasphemy in Social Media

Reports of cases allegedly involving religious blasphemy remain relatively high in Indonesia. Statistics from the SETARA Institute (2024) show a stagnant trend, with the past 3-4 years revealing no significant change in the frequency of religious blasphemy accusations, which continue to threaten individuals' freedom of expression.

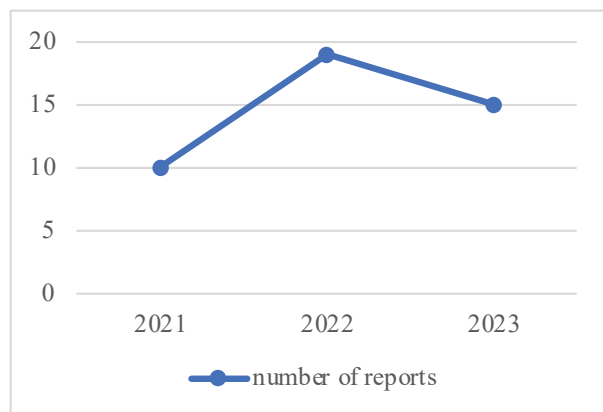


Figure 1. Reported Religious Blasphemy

The data shows a significant increase in blasphemy cases from 2021 to 2022, nearly doubling. While there has been a slight decrease since then, the ongoing allegations of blasphemy indicate that societal attitudes, particularly a tendency to be easily

offended by religious matters, have not changed significantly. Furthermore, cases of blasphemy now surpass those related to the prohibition of religious worship or the halting of house of worship construction, which also constitute violations of the right to freedom of religion (SETARA Institute, 2024, p. 10). In this context, the state becomes an actor in infringing on Freedom of Religion and Belief, as its law enforcement agencies receive and process reports, enacting policing measures against those deemed perpetrators.

Although there are dozens of cases, only a few can be categorized as viral. The table below presents some of the cases that gained significant attention on social media during 2023 and 2024. Top of Form Bottom of Form At the beginning of 2023, TikToker Lina Mukherjee was charged with blasphemy not for making offensive statements but for posting a video in which she recorded herself eating pork while saying “*bismillah*” (in the name of God) in advance. The Palembang District Court sentenced her to two years in prison under the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, showcasing the evolving legal approach to blasphemy cases and the influence of digital platforms on public narratives (Hendrawan, 2023). Various news reports indicated that Lina’s actions were viewed as an affront to the term “*bismillah*,” which Muslims consider sacred for initiating good things.

Meanwhile, the case that occurred in mid-2023 involving an Islamic figure was not based on words but on actions. It began at the Islamic Boarding School he founded, where a video circulated online showing female congregants in the front row behind the

imam during the Eid prayer (BBC Indonesia, 2023). This led to a report being filed against him, and an investigation was launched. Following the investigation, the police named him a suspect, and as a result of the trial, he was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison.

Towards the end of 2023, stand-up comedian Aulia Rakhman faced accusations of blasphemy during a presidential campaign for mentioning the name “Muhammad” in his comedy material. The Lampung Police designated him as a suspect, igniting outrage among netizens who perceived his remarks as disrespectful to the Prophet within the Islamic context (CNN Indonesia, 2023). The statement he made was focused on how many people now use the Prophet’s name, yet engage in criminal behavior, without directly insulting the Prophet himself.

Not long after, reports of a blasphemy case dragged Arya Wedakarna, a member of the Bali Regional Representative Council (DPD), who faced blasphemy charges after refusing to wear an Islamic symbol, the hijab, at a promotional event. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) of Bali Province officially reported the case to the National Police Criminal Investigation Unit, highlighting the ongoing intersection of personal choice, religious expectations, and legal consequences (Rohmawati, 2014). Arya’s statement regarding the hijab was captured in a video that circulated widely online.

In April 2024, a Christian pastor, Gilbert Lumoindong, became involved in a blasphemy case. In a circulating video clip, he mentioned prayer and zakat, which are Islamic practices, during his sermon. He was reported by two different parties with

separate charges. Although the police opened a case, it appears that the investigation was not pursued further, partly due to societal pressure for him to make a public apology (BBC Indonesia, 2024). Additionally, several Islamic religious leaders responded by urging that the situation not be escalated further.

In the same month, a police report on alleged blasphemy targeted a TikToker known as Galih Loss or Galih Noval Aji Prakoso. In his content, he made a pun on the word “*taawudz*” (a phrase used to begin reading the Quran), as well as puns using the word “*ustad*” (Islamic teacher) (Ayu & Hasan, 2024). He was not arrested because someone reported him but because that time, the cyber police were conducting a patrol. However, his fate differed from that of the pastor. Despite publicly apologizing, the legal process was not halted. He was named a suspect and detained, partly due to the growing public criticism that considered his actions excessive.

A unique case emerged at the end of 2024 involving a TikToker named Ratu Thalisa, better known as Ratu Entok. This case stands out because, unlike previous cases where the majority religion was the complainant, it involved a different religious group. Ratu was reported for insulting Jesus; in the content she created, she joked that Jesus should cut his hair because it resembled a woman’s long hair (Hasibuan, 2024). This offended Christians, who subsequently reported her to the police. She was charged, but she filed an exception against the penalty.

Recent cases illustrate the intricate network connecting freedom of expression, freedom of religion, public reaction, and

legal action. This demonstrates the legal complexities surrounding the interpretation of freedom of expression in a religiously sensitive environment. These cases reveal a deviation from the conventional application of Article 156 of the Criminal Code. The state plays a role in facilitating offense-based accusations by enacting laws that are often perceived as overly broad and open to interpretation, such as the Law on Electronic Information and Transactions, commonly known as the ITE Law (Argawati, 2023). Critics argue that the ITE Law functions like a “rubber article,” as it can be stretched to cover a wide range of offenses, including blasphemy and defamation (Hicks, 2015; Uddin, 2011). This flexibility allows for the criminalization of online content based on subjective interpretations, often leading to misuse for personal or ideological agendas (Crouch, 2023). As a result, these laws are being used more frequently in legal proceedings. The rise of social media platforms has acted as a catalyst for the rapid spread and misinterpretation of individual statements, paving the way for the criminalization of blasphemous expressions.

Ambiguity of Legal Aspect

The legal landscape surrounding blasphemy in Indonesia, particularly under Law 1/PNPS/1965, has undergone several judicial reviews in 2010, 2012, and most recently in 2023, revealing ongoing concerns and problematic aspects. The relationship between this law and Article 156a of the Criminal Code is closely intertwined, but critical analysis highlights inherent difficulties. A central debate focuses on the necessity for a comprehensive review

of the law. Constitutional Court judges have underscored the importance of careful interpretation of Article 156a by law enforcement officials, including police, prosecutors, and judges (Hasan, 2017, p. 118). The absence of clear guidelines for interpreting the article raises constitutional concerns, as varied interpretations can result in legal ambiguity and uncertainty.

Further examination of the Blasphemy Law’s Explanation deepens its complexity. The requirement that the accused must have intentionally insulted or shown hostility towards a religion introduces subjectivity into the legal framework. This subjectivity calls into question the objectivity and neutrality of legal assessments, creating opportunities for arbitrary application of the law (Crouch, 2012a, p. 5). Additionally, the emphasis on avoiding offensive words or phrases establishes subjective standards that may not be consistently applied in legal processes. Moreover, the characteristics of the law allowing government interference in religious matters are a significant concern (Crouch, 2012a, p. 28). These characteristics challenge the principle of separation between state and religion, potentially jeopardizing individual freedoms and the autonomy of religious communities (Cohen, 2015, p. 170). This delicate balance between state governance and religious autonomy raises fundamental constitutional concerns.

Experts have identified two problematic elements embedded in the Blasphemy Law. The vague definition of offenses, including ‘deviant’ interpretations, creates ambiguity in legal proceedings. Simultaneously, the implied standard of orthodoxy, which

references the ‘basic principles of religion,’ suggests that each faith should have its representative authority (Bagir, 2013, p. 4). This implicit recognition can lead to preferential treatment and discrimination in the enforcement of the law, favoring more populous groups while marginalizing smaller ones. Furthermore, even without legal action, labeling an act as blasphemy or defamation poses a significant challenge. Certain religious groups may use such nomenclature to criminalize differences of opinion or dissent from the majority (Hicks, 2015; Uddin, 2011). This undermines tolerance and dialogue, justifying complaints regarding the alleged misuse of religious symbols or expressions (Bagir, 2013, p. 5; Hakim, 2021, p. 368). Consequently, the law has become a tool for fostering intolerance rather than promoting understanding and peaceful coexistence. The issues, from unclear definitions to potential state overreach, reveal the complexity of creating a legal framework that respects both individual freedoms and religious diversity.

Public Reactions Toward Alleged Religious Blasphemy

The intersection of human rights and moral considerations in Indonesia’s blasphemy law raises complex questions, highlighting the complicated relationship between free expression and conforming norms. This tension demonstrates the fragility of free expression within the context of innate societal and cultural values (Clarke, 2011, p. 114). Recent cases show the inherent conflict between protecting the ‘dignity’ of religion and protecting individual liberties, leading to a disputable public discourse.

Indirect blasphemy, particularly through the identification of common characteristics, complicates the notion of insulting a specific group. The subjective nature of defining defamation through these characteristics makes it difficult to comply with laws intended to protect their credibility rather than moral sensibilities (Cohen, 2015, p. 209). The extent to which authorities can determine that an act of blasphemy equates to an insult remains subjective, illustrating the tension between reputation protection and moral sensitivity (Van Noorloos, 2014, p. 357). This subjectivity in labeling actions or speech is particularly problematic when the law lacks clear definitions for what constitutes insulting expression.

Moreover, the lack of detailed explanation surrounding the blasphemy law in Indonesia merits attention. While Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, it stipulates that this freedom must not conflict with public order or morality (Bagir, 2013, p. 10). This stipulation introduces a moral dimension into the legal framework, complicating the relationship between individual freedom, social order, and moral considerations. A person’s expression may clash with another individual’s or group’s religious freedom, enabling the use of offense as a means of criminalization.

Article 28J Paragraph 2 of the Constitution further emphasizes the need to balance rights by considering morality, religious values, security, and public order within a democratic society. In contrast to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Indonesian Constitution expands the parameters of

freedom of expression by incorporating “religious values” (Crouch, 2012a, p. 21). This inclusion highlights a particular emphasis on safeguarding religious sentiments, indicating a distinct moral and cultural dimension within the legal framework.

Blasphemy laws differ from those that primarily address modes of expression; they focus on alleged blasphemous messages capable of inciting public outrage. The rejection of blasphemy stems from moral judgments regarding the disrespectful treatment of what many consider sacred. When a country enacts a blasphemy law, it effectively embeds a specific moral vision into its legal framework, restricting speech under the guise of public morality (Rokhmad et al., 2024). This dynamic raises significant human rights concerns, as these restrictions are often based on moral considerations rather than actual acts of blasphemy, defamation, or threats to public order (Cox, 2020, p. 35; Holzaepfel, 2014, p. 628). Numerous cases reveal that law enforcement often arrests suspected blasphemers not for their actions but in response to public outrage.

In this context, it is crucial to incorporate a critical perspective that emphasizes the power dynamics that influence social stigma or criminalization of dissenting views that may arise from the inability to conform. This creates challenges, particularly when considering that moral obligations based on religious beliefs may not align across different groups (Millie, 2016, p. 27). The integration of religious values into the legal moral order necessitates careful consideration of the diverse beliefs within society and their implications for human rights.

A Critical Criminology Perspective on Blasphemy Enforcement

In critically examining Indonesia's blasphemy law, it becomes clear that public moral perspectives significantly influence its formulation and application. According to Kant, moral actions arise from obligations based on reason, independent of emotional impulses or personal desires (Kant, 1908). These obligations stem from universal principles that extend beyond individual situations (Manik et al., 2023, p. 71). cases like Lina Mukherjee (March 2023) and Galih Noval (April 2024) illustrate how enforcement is grounded in varying moral perspectives, not universal principles. When the criminalization of ‘blasphemy’ is based on moral judgments that can vary widely, it potentially infringes on individual freedoms. Ethical considerations suggest that violations of established rules and standards by those in authority can be deemed corrupt (Walsh, 2013, p. 135). This approach emphasizes the motivations behind actions rather than their consequences.

Blasphemy laws are frequently used as social control tools by dominant groups to maintain their authority over marginalized communities. As Hall (2013) argues, laws governing morality often reflect the interests of those in power, reinforcing existing inequalities (Hall et al., 2013, p. 62). These laws protect established religious or cultural norms while also suppressing dissent. It is reflected through Panji Gumilang (June 2023) and Arya Wedakarna (January 2024), where enforcement serves dominant religious interests. The application of blasphemy laws can stigmatize those who are labeled

as blasphemers or defamers. According to Becker (1963), the labeling process establishes a social identity that can lead to marginalization and exclusion (Becker, 1963, p. 9). Furthermore, it can have severe social consequences that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

A deeper examination of intentions is essential when evaluating individuals expressing their opinions rather than solely focusing on the societal turmoil that may follow statements deemed offensive to specific religious groups. Cases like Ratu Thalisa (Oct 2024) or Aulia Rakhman (Dec 2023) demonstrate how viral outrage shapes law enforcement. Public attention and social media virality influence police and prosecutor decisions, aligning with penal populism. Society often biases individuals toward moral decision-making, thereby reinforcing the influence of societal norms on ethical perspectives (Bostyn & Roets, 2017). Additionally, psychological factors indicate that individuals typically make more principled judgments about their own moral choices compared to their perceptions of others' choices (Li & Rao, 2019). This inclination towards personal ethical considerations reflects an intrinsic tendency driven by a sense of obligation.

The concept of critical criminology, in this case, differs from traditional criminology. It focuses more on the harms that occurred rather than just on legal violations (Presser & Sandberg, 2019, p. 6). In blasphemy cases, there is often no real harm, and the violation of the law is unclear, with reports and accusations typically stemming from personal offense by a complainant or group.

Additionally, the actions of law enforcement, influenced by public pressure from the majority, reveal the unfairness of the criminal justice process. Data confirms that the law disproportionately affects ordinary citizens and content creators, despite their social media fame. Meanwhile, those with authority selectively enforce laws with their power, processing only those they consider to have committed similar offenses (Brown & Schept, 2017, p. 4). This perspective underscores the limitations and injustices of the legal system in addressing offenses like blasphemy.

CONCLUSION

Public reactions to blasphemy cases in Indonesia illustrate the profound societal tensions surrounding freedom of expression and religious sentiments. Instances of perceived blasphemy often provoke strong community responses, leading to demands for legal action against individuals accused of offending religious beliefs. Social media plays a significant role in spreading content quickly and widely. Public outrage becomes inevitable, as people can react in real time to the content circulating in cyberspace. This not only reflects collective moral indignation but also contributes to a broader societal trend toward intolerance, where dissenting opinions can swiftly be met with accusations and potential criminal charges. Such a climate of fear can silence voices that might otherwise contribute to meaningful dialogue about religious and social issues.

Furthermore, the ambiguity inherent in Indonesia's blasphemy law raises critical concerns about its application and interpretation, often resulting in the

criminalization. The lack of clear definitions surrounding what constitutes blasphemy allows for subjective interpretations that can vary significantly between different authorities and community members. This vagueness can lead to inconsistent enforcement, where individuals may be prosecuted not for genuine threats to public order but rather for challenging prevailing social norms. This analysis shows that viral public outrage and social media dynamics actively influence law enforcement decisions, creating a form of penal populism that disproportionately targets less powerful individuals.

By examining high-profile cases from 2023–2024, this study reveals the structural biases and selective application of the law, demonstrating how critical criminology can uncover the social and political mechanisms behind criminalization. Ultimately, these findings serve a new perspective on the intersection of technology, morality, and state power, emphasizing the need to consider practical, everyday enforcement when evaluating the implications of blasphemy laws. This highlights the importance of incorporating social and technological contexts into legal and policy reforms to ensure the protection of freedom of expression and religion in contemporary Indonesia.

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