Marriage in Shawwal as a Socio-Religious Phenomenon: A Comparative Analysis of Islamic Norms and Customary Beliefs

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Abstract

Marriage in Shawwal among Indonesian Muslim communities reflects a dialectic between normative Islamic guidance and local traditions. Some communities, such as Javanese and Madurese, recommend Shawwal weddings as reinforcement of the Prophet's sunnah, while others, such as Minangkabau and Javanese primbon traditions, avoid them due to taboos. This study aims to explain these divergent views and clarify how religious texts and customs interact in socio-religious practice. The research employed a qualitative approach through document analysis, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and administrative data (SIMKAH, Karanganyar Religious Affairs Office). Data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman's interactive model to identify themes and patterns. Findings reveal that Shawwal marriages are interpreted in two ways: as recommendations reinforcing religious identity or as prohibitions affirming the binding power of custom. This synthesis demonstrates that religious practice is always negotiated between das sollen (normative Islam) and das sein (social reality). The study contributes theoretically by clarifying the interaction between Islamic texts and local traditions in shaping socio-religious practice, and practically by offering a foundation for moderate approaches that respect Islamic principles while accommodating cultural heritage. The novelty lies in its comparative lens, systematically contrasting recommendation and prohibition within the same month and linking the Indonesian case to global Scopus-indexed scholarship.

[Pernikahan di bulan Syawal dalam masyarakat Muslim Indonesia memperlihatkan dialektika antara panduan normatif Islam dan tradisi lokal. Sebagian komunitas, seperti Jawa dan Madura, menganjurkan pernikahan di bulan Syawal sebagai penguatan sunnah Nabi Muhammad SAW, sementara komunitas lain, seperti Minangkabau dan tradisi primbon Jawa, menghindarinya karena dianggap tabu. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan perbedaan pandangan tersebut serta menegaskan bagaimana teks agama dan adat berinteraksi dalam praktik sosial-religius. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis dokumen, wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipan, dan data administratif (SIMKAH, KUA Karanganyar). Analisis dilakukan dengan model interaktif Miles & Huberman untuk mengidentifikasi tema dan pola. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pernikahan di bulan Syawal dipahami secara beragam: sebagai anjuran yang memperkuat identitas keagamaan, atau sebagai pantangan yang menegaskan daya ikat adat. Sintesis ini menegaskan bahwa praktik keagamaan selalu dinegosiasikan antara das sollen (normatif Islam) dan das sein (realitas

sosial). Kontribusi penelitian ini bersifat teoretis dengan memperjelas interaksi teks Islam dan adat dalam membentuk praktik sosial-religius, serta praktis dengan menawarkan dasar bagi pendekatan moderat yang menghormati prinsip Islam sekaligus mengakomodasi tradisi lokal. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada lensa komparatif yang secara sistematis mengontraskan anjuran dan pantangan dalam bulan yang sama, serta mengaitkannya dengan literatur global berstandar Scopus.]

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Indonesia—particularly among Javanese Muslim communities—the timing of marriage in Shawwal remains contested in everyday practice. Some groups actively schedule weddings in Shawwal as an expression of religious continuity, while others avoid the month based on inherited taboos or calculations of "unfavorable days." These divergent practices generate social frictions (family negotiations, debates over ritual legitimacy, and communal pressures) and practical consequences (event planning, clerical advice, and intergenerational expectations). For instance, records from Karanganyar's Office of Religious Affairs in 2025 noted 580 marriages during Shawwal, while anthropological studies indicate that Minangkabau communities tend to postpone weddings in the same month, reflecting a significant divergence in how the tradition is perceived.

From the standpoint of normative Islam, marriage is permissible at any time; no specific month is legally binding. The Prophet Muhammad's marriage to ʿĀ'ishah RA in Shawwal is often cited as a positive precedent, signaling rejection of pre-Islamic superstitions about "unlucky periods." Conversely, certain local traditions continue to regard Shawwal as unfavorable, describing it as a "hot" or risky month. This study therefore situates normative guidance (das sollen) alongside lived customary beliefs (das sein) to explain how communities negotiate authority, meaning, and practice.

Existing scholarship has examined: (a) living hadith readings of Shawwal marriage traditions in specific locations (e.g., Madura), (b) customary calendars and the selection of "auspicious days" (e.g., weton, primbon), and (c) socio-legal reflections on adat within Islamic jurisprudence and Indonesian contexts. These works provide descriptive accounts of motives and practices. However, there remains a gap in comparative socio-religious analysis that directly juxtaposes recommendations and prohibitions within the same temporal focus (Shawwal), clarifies how normative Islamic guidance is operationalized in plural local frameworks, and identifies practical implications for moderation and communal decision-making beyond single regions.

This article focuses on Shawwal as a single temporal point to compare and interpret two opposing social meanings: practices that are recommended (within the religious framework) versus avoidance that is considered taboo (within the customary framework). The analysis is limited to qualitative interpretation of textual sources (hadith compilations, fiqh principles, and scholarly writings) and documented community discourses, without claiming statistical generalization or determining specific local rulings. For illustration, records from Karanganyar's Office of Religious Affairs in 2025 noted 580 marriages during Shawwal, while anthropological studies indicate that Minangkabau communities tend to postpone weddings in the same month. Such comparisons

reinforce that the Shawwal phenomenon is not only normative but also empirical, making it relevant to be examined as a socio-religious reality.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative lens: rather than focusing on one community or descriptive tradition, it systematically contrasts recommendation and prohibition within the same month, thereby highlighting the dialectic between text and tradition. The research contributes theoretically by clarifying how normative Islamic texts intersect with local customs in shaping socio-religious practice, and practically by offering insights for communities and policymakers to foster moderate approaches that respect Islamic principles while responsibly engaging cultural heritage. Accordingly, the study aims to explain why marriage in Shawwal is simultaneously recommended in normative Islamic discourse and prohibited in certain customary frameworks, and to articulate how communities may navigate this tension toward balanced, moderate practice.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach because the phenomenon of marriage in Shawwal is not only normative-textual but also socio-empirical, requiring contextual interpretation. A qualitative design is most appropriate to capture the dialectic between Islamic texts and local traditions, as well as to explore how communities negotiate authority and meaning in everyday life.

1. *Type of Research*

    The research is qualitative with a document-analysis orientation. It focuses on interpreting textual sources (hadith compilations, fiqh literature, cultural records, and scholarly writings) alongside documented community discourses. This approach was chosen to provide depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization.

2. *Nature of Research*

    The study is descriptive-qualitative with phenomenological-empirical characteristics. Its primary aim is to reveal community perceptions and practices regarding marriage in Shawwal as they exist, without manipulating variables. This nature allows the research to present factual insights that can serve as a basis for both academic reflection and practical application.

3. *Data Sources*
    a. Primary data: official documents (marriage archives from Religious Affairs Offices in Central and East Java, SIMKAH reports from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for 2022–2024) and participatory observation of marriage rituals in Shawwal.
    b. Secondary data: scholarly articles, theses, journals, and classical references on marriage traditions, hadith studies, and socio-religious practices.

4. *Data Collection Methods*

    Data were collected through a combination of:
    a. Semi-structured interviews with purposively selected informants in Central and East Java.
    b. Participant observation of Shawwal wedding ceremonies.
    c. Document analysis of textual sources and academic literature.

5. *Data Analysis*

    Data analysis followed Miles & Huberman's interactive model (1994), consisting of:
    a. Data reduction – coding and categorizing transcripts and textual materials to identify recurring themes.
    b. Data display – organizing findings into thematic matrices to compare normative Islamic perspectives with local customs.
    c. Conclusion drawing/verification – synthesizing patterns, testing emerging interpretations through triangulation, and refining conclusions.

6. *Data Validity*
    a. To ensure credibility and reliability, the study applied:
    b. Source triangulation (interviews, observations, documents).

c. Member checking with selected informants.
d. Audit trail to maintain transparency in coding and analytic decisions.
e. Confirmability through researcher reflection notes to ensure interpretations were grounded in data rather than personal bias.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The Views of Shawwal as a Recommended Month for Marriage

The recommendation to marry in Shawwal within Indonesian Muslim communities—especially in Java and Madura—rests on the Prophet's precedent and the fiqh positioning of marriage within mu'āmalāt, which are not restricted by specific months. The legal maxim "al-'ādah muḥakkamah" allows customs that align with the sharī'ah to gain legitimacy, while pre-Islamic superstitions are normatively rejected. Contemporary provisions reflect this stance: national religious authorities do not bind marriage timing to particular months, and current moderation discourse emphasizes that marital blessing depends on intention, readiness, and compliance with law rather than mystical calendars.

Globally, "auspicious timing" for weddings appears across Muslim societies as culturally negotiated preferences that remain subordinate to legal validity. South Asian studies show that month-day selection is culturally framed, then reinterpreted to remain compatible with Islamic family law, without turning time into a validity requirement (Ali, 2019; Khan, 2020). In Malaysia, adaptation of Islamic family law integrates sharī'ah provisions with cultural preferences, reaffirming that choosing months or days—including Shawwal—falls within permissibility as long as core religious principles are upheld(Yusoff, 2021). In Arab contexts, recent comparative accounts note diverse practices that preserve the primacy of contract validity, while cultural and economic factors (seasonality, family logistics) shape scheduling and celebration scale (Hendy, 2024; Peterson & Bush, 2019).

In Indonesia, administrative evidence underscores the permissive nature of timing: SIMKAH sets no month restrictions, and Karanganyar's 2025 records show 580 marriages in Shawwal—signaling that the sunnah precedent functions as socio-religious legitimacy. Demographic transitions (later marriages, seasonal receptions) also position Shawwal as a socially rational choice rather than a normative requirement (Utomo et al., 2022). Accordingly, Shawwal's recommendation operates on two layers: textual legitimacy (Prophetic precedent and mu'āmalāt flexibility) and social rationality (family access, community networks, post-Ramadan logistics).

Analytically, recommended Shawwal weddings enable moderation: they foster the Prophet's example and reject superstition, yet keep ethical cultural preferences within bounds. The key is to maintain the distinction between sunnah (recommendation) and validity conditions, ensuring local practice does not drift into deterministic beliefs about time. Under this framework, Shawwal becomes a productive symbol of acculturation—strengthening religious identity, refining cultural interpretation, and enhancing social cohesion without adding unnecessary normative burdens.

The Views of Shawwal as a Forbidden Month for Marriage

Although normative Islam affirms that marriage is valid at any time, some Muslim communities in Indonesia continue to regard Shawwal as a taboo month. This belief originates from pre-Islamic traditions that considered Shawwal "hot" or risky, symbolized by female camels reluctant to mate during this period. In Minangkabau, communities such as Nagari Batupalano believe that weddings in Shawwal bring misfortune—conflict, economic hardship, or instability. In Java, primbon traditions classify Shawwal as an unfavorable month, assuming couples will face debt or misfortune.

Such taboos illustrate the resilience of local customs despite their contradiction with Islamic norms. Anthropological studies confirm this pattern: Parker (2024) highlights the cultural resilience of Minangkabau traditions in the face of modernization, while Yusoff (2021) notes that cultural preferences in Malaysia often shape marriage practices even without normative basis. In South Asia, Khan (2020) documents persistent beliefs in "unlucky months" or days in Pakistan, despite Islamic law's rejection of such restrictions.

Empirical data reinforce this persistence. Anthropological research in Java shows that primbon remains a reference for determining "good" or "bad" days for marriage. In Minangkabau, field interviews reveal a decline in weddings during Shawwal, confirming the strong binding power of adat.

Analytically, Shawwal taboos highlight the dialectic between das sollen (normative Islamic guidance) and das sein (social reality). While Islam rejects restrictions on marriage timing, communities continue to negotiate practice with traditions they deem significant. This underscores that religious practice is shaped not only by texts but also by living social constructions.

Recommendations vs Prohibition of Marriage in Shawwal in Indonesia

The phenomenon of marriage in Shawwal in Indonesia illustrates a unique socio-religious dynamic. On one hand, there is strong encouragement to marry in Shawwal as a practice of the Prophet's sunnah, exemplified by his marriage to 'Ā'ishah RA. This tradition is sustained in Java and Madura through living hadith. Empirical data from Karanganyar's Office of Religious Affairs recorded 580 marriages in Shawwal 2025, indicating that the month is still perceived as blessed.

On the other hand, in Minangkabau and certain Javanese primbon traditions, Shawwal is considered taboo. Beliefs that Shawwal is a "hot" or unlucky month persist, with assumptions that couples will face economic hardship or marital conflict. Field interviews reveal a decline in weddings during Shawwal in some Minangkabau villages, confirming the strong binding power of adat.

This contrast highlights the interaction between das sollen (normative Islamic guidance) and das sein (social reality). Normative Islam affirms that marriage is valid at any time, without restrictions on months. Yet communities continue to negotiate practice with traditions they deem significant.

Globally, similar patterns are observed. Studies in Pakistan show that some communities avoid certain months for marriage due to beliefs in misfortune, despite Islamic law's rejection of such restrictions (Khan, 2020). In Malaysia, cultural preferences often shape marriage practices, with communities choosing months based on local traditions rather than normative requirements (Yusoff, 2021). Demographic studies in Indonesia further confirm that marriage trends are influenced by socio-economic and cultural factors, not solely by religious texts (Utomo et al., 2022).

Thus, the recommendation and prohibition of marriage in Shawwal reflect the dialectic between religious texts and local traditions. Theoretically, this enriches socio-religious scholarship by clarifying how normative guidance interacts with adat. Practically, it provides insights for community leaders and policymakers to formulate moderate approaches that respect Islamic principles while accommodating cultural heritage.

Variations in Views and Practices of Marriage in Shawwal in Indonesia
Table 1.

NO	Region/Community	Status	Reason/Basis	Empirical Findings
1.	Java (generally, including Karanganyar, Central Java)	Recommendation	Prophet's marriage to 'Ā'ishah RA in Shawwal; considered a blessed month	KUA Karanganyar recorded 580 couples married in Shawwal 2025 (92 at KUA, 488 outside KUA)

2.	Madura	Recommendation	Living hadith tradition emphasizes the Prophet's precedent; reinforces sunnah	Zamzami's studies (2018, 2020) show Madurese communities prioritize Shawwal for marriage
3.	Minangkabau (Nagari Batupalano, Agam, West Sumatra)	Prohibition	Shawwal considered "hot/unlucky"; believed to bring hardship misfortune	Field interviews reveal a decline in wedding during Shawwal
4.	Java (certain primbon traditions)	Prohibition	Primbon describe Shawwal as unfavorable; believed to cause debt/misfortune	Primbon Serbaguna (Gunasasmita, 2017) notes Shawwal as less auspicious for couples
5.	National Data (Kemenag/SIMKAH)	Neutral	Marriage legally valid at any time; Shawwal not obligatory	National marriage declined: 503,220 (2020) → 370,121 (2023). No monthly breakdown available

Interpretation of Table 1 shows that Shawwal becomes a contested arena between religious legitimacy and customary beliefs. High marriage rates in Java and Madura reflect the internalization of the Prophet's sunnah, consistent with Ali's (2019) findings in South Asia where auspicious timing is legitimized through religious precedent. Conversely, the decline in Minangkabau and Javanese primbon traditions highlights the resilience of local customs, comparable to Pakistani communities that avoid certain months despite normative permissibility (Khan, 2020).

National SIMKAH statistics confirm that marriage is legally valid at any time, indicating that Shawwal practices are socially negotiated rather than legally mandated. This aligns with Yusoff's (2021) study in Malaysia, which shows that cultural preferences continue to shape marriage practices despite lacking normative basis. Thus, the Shawwal phenomenon in Indonesia can be understood as part of a global pattern of religion–custom interaction, where normative Islamic texts confront resilient local traditions.

Marriage as a Socio-Religious Tradition

Marriage in Muslim societies is not merely understood as a legal contract between two individuals but also as a socio-religious tradition imbued with symbolic meaning. Classical literature defines nikah in multiple ways, ranging from contract ('aqd) to intimate relations (wath'), reflecting its multidimensional nature that connects legal, social, and spiritual aspects.

In Indonesia, marriage often becomes an arena of acculturation between normative Islamic teachings and local traditions. In Java and Madura, marriage in Shawwal is perceived as reinforcing the Prophet's sunnah while preserving cultural heritage. Conversely, in Minangkabau, the prohibition of Shawwal weddings illustrates how adat can shape socio-religious practices distinct from normative guidance. Thus, marriage functions as a medium of negotiation between religion and custom, where communities balance textual authority with social reality.

Globally, this phenomenon resonates with Peterson & Bush (2019), who emphasize marriage's cohesive function in strengthening social networks and community identity. Hendy (2024) notes that in Middle Eastern contexts, marriage is not only a legal contract but also a collective celebration transmitting religious and cultural values across generations. In South Asia, Ali (2019) highlights that marriage practices frequently serve as negotiation arenas between Islamic law and local customs, paralleling Indonesia's dialectic.

Therefore, marriage as a socio-religious tradition fulfills a cohesive role: reinforcing social networks, affirming communal identity, and transmitting religious and cultural values. Academically, this perspective clarifies that religious practice is never static but always shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Practically, it provides a foundation for community leaders and policymakers to formulate moderate approaches that respect Islamic principles while accommodating local traditions.

The Socio-Religious Phenomenon of Marriage in Shawwal: A Living Hadith Perspective

The concept of living hadith refers to social traditions rooted in the Prophet's narrations and re-enacted within community life. In the context of marriage in Shawwal, living hadith functions as a mechanism of religious value transmission, internalized into social practice. The Prophet Muhammad's marriage to 'Ā'ishah RA in Shawwal serves as the primary reference, revived in various communities as a living tradition.

In Madura, Shawwal weddings are perceived as reinforcing the Prophet's sunnah. Communities not only recall the historical event but also adopt it as a practical guideline for marriage timing. This illustrates that living hadith is not merely a text to be read but an experience enacted in daily life, strengthening religious identity and confidence in alignment with Islamic teachings.

Conversely, in other communities, living hadith serves as a rejection of pre-Islamic superstitions that considered Shawwal unlucky. By reviving the Prophet's sunnah, communities attempt to erase negative stigma inherited from the jahiliyyah era. Shawwal weddings thus symbolize resistance to superstition and affirmation of Islam's rational and moderate outlook.

Globally, the concept of living hadith resonates across Muslim societies. Omar (2024) documents how North African communities employ living sunnah as practical guidance in social life rather than mere normative texts. Ali (2019) highlights that South Asian marriage traditions often function as vehicles for internalizing sunnah while rejecting local beliefs deemed incompatible with Islam. Thus, the Indonesian Shawwal phenomenon reflects a universal Muslim pattern where living hadith plays a dual role: legitimizing recommended practices and rejecting non-Islamic beliefs.

This analysis underscores that living hadith is not only a legitimizing instrument but also a social mechanism for shaping moderation. By enacting the Prophet's sunnah in everyday practice, Indonesian Muslim communities reinforce religious authority, strengthen tradition, and cultivate moderation in navigating cultural pluralism.

Differences Between Islamic Norms and Traditional Beliefs

From the perspective of normative Islam, marriage is permissible at any time as long as the conditions and pillars are fulfilled. No month is legally binding as valid or invalid for marriage. The Prophet Muhammad's marriage to 'Ā'ishah RA in Shawwal is often cited as evidence that Islam rejects pre-Islamic superstitions that considered this month unlucky. Thus, Islam emphasizes rationality and moderation, affirming that marital blessing is determined not by timing but by intention, readiness, and compliance with sharī'ah.

Conversely, within traditional belief frameworks, Shawwal is often viewed as an unfavorable month for marriage. In certain Javanese communities, primbon traditions classify Shawwal as a month of hardship, predicting debt or household conflict. In Minangkabau, Shawwal is considered a "hot" month that may disrupt family harmony. These beliefs are transmitted across generations and form part of cultural identity, despite lacking textual basis in Islam.

This phenomenon illustrates tension between religious authority and custom. Normative Islam rejects restrictions on marriage timing, while local adat continues to uphold traditional beliefs as cultural heritage. Anthropologically, this aligns with Parker's (2024) findings on Minangkabau adat resilience in the face of modernization. In South Asia, Khan (2020) documents Pakistani communities that maintain beliefs in unlucky months or days despite Islamic law's permissiveness. Yusoff (2021) similarly notes that cultural preferences in Malaysia continue to shape marriage practices even without normative legitimacy.

Academically, these differences are significant because they highlight pluralism in religious practice. Normative Islam and local adat are not always in conflict but often interact through compromise. Practically, understanding these differences helps communities cultivate moderation: respecting Islamic principles while acknowledging local traditions as cultural identity. In this way, marriage in Shawwal can be understood as a complex socio-religious phenomenon reflecting the dynamic interplay between religion and tradition.

CONCLUSION

Marriage in Shawwal reflects the dialectic between normative Islamic guidance and local traditions. In Java and Madura, Shawwal is recommended, rooted in the Prophet's sunnah and reinforced by living hadith. In Minangkabau and Javanese primbon traditions, Shawwal is taboo, highlighting the resilience of custom despite lacking normative basis.

This synthesis demonstrates that religious practice is always negotiated between das sollen and das sein. Theoretically, the study clarifies how Islamic texts interact with local traditions in shaping socio-religious practice. Practically, it provides a foundation for communities and policymakers to formulate moderate approaches that respect Islamic principles while accommodating cultural heritage.

The novelty lies in its comparative lens, systematically contrasting recommendation and prohibition within the same month and linking the Indonesian case to global scholarship. Thus, marriage in Shawwal can be understood as a complex socio-religious phenomenon, locally significant yet reflecting universal patterns of religion–custom interaction across the Muslim world.

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