
TRACING THE POLITICAL CONFLICT OF KYAI Analyzing the Conflictual Relation among Local *Kyai* in Bondowoso, East Java

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menelusuri jejak konflik politik di kalangan kyai lokal di Bondowoso sebagai fenomena penting dalam dinamika politik lokal berbasis otoritas keagamaan. Latar belakang penelitian berangkat dari meningkatnya keterlibatan kyai dalam politik praktis yang memicu fragmentasi sosial di tingkat masyarakat pesantren. Secara akademik, studi ini menyoroti bagaimana otoritas religius tidak bersifat tunggal, tetapi dinegosiasikan melalui relasi patronase, jaringan pesantren, serta afiliasi partai politik. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi lapangan melalui observasi dan wawancara mendalam terhadap kyai dan massa pengikutnya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa konflik politik kyai dipicu oleh perbedaan pilihan partai, asal almamater pesantren, patronase kyai panutan, serta ikatan kekerabatan politik. Konflik tersebut muncul dalam bentuk laten atau manifest, internal maupun antarpolisi, serta menghasilkan respons massa yang terbagi antara pola emosional dan rasional. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa konflik politik kyai tidak hanya mencerminkan kontestasi kekuasaan, tetapi juga proses redefinisi otoritas religius dalam politik lokal Indonesia.

kata kunci: *konflik; kyai; otoritas keagamaan; politik lokal; pesantren; Bondowoso*

Abstract

This study traces the trajectory of political conflict among local kyai in Bondowoso as a significant phenomenon within the dynamics of religious authority-based local politics. The research background departs from the increasing involvement of kyai in practical politics, which has triggered social fragmentation at the pesantren community level. Academically, this study highlights that religious authority is not singular in nature but is negotiated through patronage relations, pesantren networks, and political party affiliations. The research employs a qualitative approach using field study methods through observation and in-depth interviews with kyai and their followers. The findings show that political conflict among kyai is driven by differences in party preferences, pesantren alma mater backgrounds, patronage toward respected kyai figures, and political kinship ties. These conflicts emerge in latent or manifest forms, both internal and inter-party, and generate mass responses divided between emotional and rational patterns. This study confirms that political conflict among kyai reflects not only a contestation of power but also a process of redefining religious authority within Indonesian local politics.

Keywords: *conflict; kyai; religious authority; local politics; pesantren; Bondowos.*

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Introduction

Many researchers have conducted studies on patterns of Islamic leadership in Indonesia, particularly concerning *kyai* (Clifford Geertz, 1960; Horikoshi, 1967; Turmudzi, 2003; Dhofier, 1983). In general, these researchers identified a similar common thread that places the *kyai* as a central and strategic figure within society. This central and strategic role is related to the position of the *kyai* as an educated Muslim and relatively affluent individual within traditional rural Islamic communities. Their capacity as an educated elite group within largely lay societies is utilized to transform knowledge, particularly concerning religious sciences and their systems of implementation. Meanwhile, as members of the economic elite, *kyai* are able to position themselves as economic patrons for segments of village society. Therefore, the central position of the *kyai* as a cultural broker (Geertz, 1960) as well as a mediator of social change (Horikoshi, 1967) is broadly accepted.

In addition to deep religious understanding and sufficient material wealth compared to ordinary community members, another significant basis for the extensive authority and central role of the *kyai* lies in the community's system of belief, in which Muslim society perceives the *kyai* as a chosen Muslim and heir of the prophets (*warasatul ambiyaa*), thereby possessing strong, if not exclusive, authority in religious interpretation (Alatas, 2021). Among certain traditional Muslim communities (Wahid, 1999), *kyai* are even believed to possess supernatural powers. Through such supernatural knowledge, *kyai* are considered capable of bestowing *barakah* (grace) upon their students (*santri*) and followers, closely resembling beliefs concerning prophetic intercession (*syafa'at*). From a Weberian perspective, the authority of the *kyai* does not operate solely within profane spatial and temporal dimensions but extends into transcendent realms beyond worldly affairs (Stark, 1965). Consequently, *kyai* are frequently relied upon as ultimate references in matters beyond common rational explanation; practices such as consulting *kyai* regarding spirit possession, unsuccessful harvests, or determining marriage dates demonstrate the strength of public belief in the *kyai*'s perceived sixth sense.

According to Nur Syam (2004), the source of the *kyai*'s central role and authority within society derives from the charisma inherent in the *kyai* himself. However, the charisma forming the basis of the *kyai*'s influence is not something suddenly given or naturally attached, but rather emerges through processes of internalization and externalization of the *kyai*'s personal existence. These processes relate to demonstrable personal qualities.

Numerous cases confirm the assumption that the lower the quality of a *kyai*, the weaker his charisma becomes, resulting in declining public trust and its gradual erosion. A direct implication of this process is the decreasing number of students studying at the *pesantren* under such leadership. This gradual decline may ultimately lead to the dissolution of a *pesantren*, regardless of whether the *kyai* originates from a prominent *kyai* lineage or from an *ustad* whose social status elevated him to the position of *kyai*. The phenomenon of declining charisma and influence reflects what has been described as *the fracturing of religious authority* (Bano, 2018).

Within studies of Javanese Islam, the title *kyai* is understood as the result of a process of self-proof and social recognition. The title is not merely a construction based on hereditary lineage but rather a “gift” granted by society to individuals whose capabilities generate collective belief and trust (Yani, 2022). Thus, not all individuals descended from *kyai* families can maintain the title, and not all individuals possessing deep religious knowledge automatically receive the designation. Public trust remains the most decisive factor in the use of this title (Faisal et al., 2022).

Based on charisma, trust, recognition, and extraordinary public respect, *kyai* possess the capacity to transform societal perspectives and behavior. In many situations, *kyai* can shape opinion, consciousness, and even community choices, including positions that may contradict prevailing rational logic. Political mobilization undertaken by *kyai* during the impeachment of Abdurrahman Wahid—where followers were willing to risk their lives, illustrates the effectiveness of opinion formation and mass mobilization conducted by *kyai*.

The relationship between the *pesantren* world and politics is not extraordinary. Beyond classical, historical, and objective reasons, a contemporary explanation concerns the pursuit of political power as a means to establish Islamic values through state authority. The justification that Islam represents the most complete (*kaffah*) and true religion provides a logical basis for *kyai* and *pesantren* involvement in political arenas. Interestingly, such involvement is not only legitimized by religious justification but also finds support within modern political theories traditionally distant from *pesantren* environments.

In voting behavior studies, political scientists commonly employ sociological and psychological approaches to explain voter preferences toward

political parties. One sociological model emphasizes that social characteristics and social groupings significantly influence voting behavior. Social characteristics, such as occupation and education, and social backgrounds such as religion, region, gender, and age, constitute important determinants of political choice (Asfar, 2006). In short, sociological attachments remain highly relevant in explaining political preferences. Within this framework, devout Muslims and *kyai* are expected to support political parties grounded in religious doctrines. In Indonesia, *santri* communities tend to support Islamic parties, particularly Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) and Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB).

The relationship between religious devotion and preference for right-leaning political parties is not unique to Indonesia. In Israel, militant Jewish groups tend to support right-wing parties, while in the United States Protestant Christian groups more frequently support the Republican Party rather than the Democratic Party (Asfar, 2006).

The crucial question, however, concerns whether political logic, rules of the game, and political ethics can be understood within the framework of patron–client relations between *kyai* and followers (Aspinall & As’ad, 2015). This issue becomes important because political competition requires arenas of contestation aimed at maximizing political performance through political articulation. If political conflict is understood as constructive competition within patron–client systems, *kyai* involvement in politics may not pose significant risks. Conversely, political immaturity and limited capacity for political articulation among *kyai* and followers may generate ironic social conflicts potentially leading to social disintegration.

In the Tapal Kuda region, particularly Situbondo and Bondowoso, empirical phenomena support the reality of *kyai* political involvement and resulting conflicts. During the 1999 election, PPP in Situbondo failed to secure any legislative seats due to minimal vote acquisition, while in Bondowoso the party gained only one seat. However, conflict between KH. Fawaid As’ad (Chairman of the PKB Syuro Council in Situbondo) and H. Chairul Anam (Chairman of PKB East Java Tanfidz Council) resulted in KH. Fawaid As’ad’s defection to PPP, significantly increasing PPP’s electoral performance in 2004. PPP subsequently obtained twelve seats in Situbondo and six seats in Bondowoso. This electoral increase largely resulted from KH. Fawaid’s mobilization of followers.

Political conflict fragmentation in the Tapal Kuda region became increasingly complex during the 2004 election. While the 1999 conflicts largely reflected retaliatory tensions, especially toward Golkar, the 2004 election witnessed broader polarization, including intra-Nahdlatul Ulama conflicts, particularly between NU members affiliated with PKB and PPP.

Within the context of inter-*kyai* conflict, this study examines *kyai* leadership in cultural and political dimensions related to regional boundaries, ideological orientations, and religious politics. The Tapal Kuda region has also been recorded as a politically “heated” area frequently marked by physical violence. Although many studies have explored political conflict in Indonesia (Wangge, 2023; Bakker, 2023; Hilmy, 2015), research specifically tracing inter-*kyai* political conflict remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the trajectory and forms of political conflict among local *kyai*, particularly within the *santri* society of Bondowoso.

The term local *kyai* here refers to Bondowoso *kyai* characterized by two typologies. First, local *kyai* who maintain patronage relations formed through *kyai*–*santri* bonds, particularly within *pesantren* networks. Although they are *kyai*, they simultaneously position themselves as *santri* maintaining patron–client relations with their former teachers. For example, alumni of Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi’iyah Sukorejo continue to position themselves as *santri* who remain obedient and respectful toward the *kyai* leadership and Sukorejo family.

Second, *kyai* who, due to their institutional positions as *pesantren* caretakers or Nahdlatul Ulama organizational leaders, possess followers or *jama’ah*. As *kyai*, they function as patrons whose political choices influence the political behavior of their *santri* and congregational followers. Thus, the local *kyai* examined in this study possess dual status: as *kyai* because they lead followers and congregations, and simultaneously as *santri* because they remain disciples of the *kyai* associated with their *pesantren* alma mater.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at obtaining a holistic understanding of information-rich field realities (Seow et al., 2021)). Several reasons underlie the use of this qualitative approach. First, this research concerns the meanings underlying actions performed by *kyai*, therefore interpreting the facts behind observable facts becomes an essential prerequisite. Second, the study does not merely examine the visible realities

reflected in the behavior and actions of *kyai*, but also explores the beliefs, consciousness, and motivations that underpin those actions. Third, qualitative research provides opportunities to investigate phenomena holistically. The phenomena under study are understood not merely as the result of causal relationships between two proximate factors, but rather as outcomes shaped by multiple interacting factors.

As in other qualitative studies, the researcher determined informants and research locations based on preliminary studies. The researcher's position as a *santri* who has long been involved in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization, as well as the researcher's physical proximity as a resident of Bondowoso, constitutes a particular advantage in conducting this research. This means that the preliminary study process has been conducted over an extended period, including the researcher's previous research on patriarchal culture within *pesantren* communities in Bondowoso.

To obtain field data, observation and interview techniques play a decisive role. The researcher's residence in Bondowoso represents a significant advantage, as the researcher, serving as an NU organizational member and *pesantren* alumnus, was to some extent involved in various important moments during elections. Intensive interactions were conducted with *kyai*, both those directly engaged in political processes such as mass mobilization and those entirely uninvolved in political activities. Accordingly, participant observation could be effectively undertaken. Meanwhile, in order to capture the meanings behind political behaviors performed by *kyai*, as well as followers' interpretations of those political actions, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews.

The analysis in this study utilizes a sociological conflict perspective. Specifically, the conflict theories of Ralf Dahrendorf and Lewis A. Coser are employed to understand the forms and intensity of conflict. Regarding forms of conflict, this research adopts Dahrendorf's concepts of *manifest interest* and *latent interest* (Dahrendorf, 1958). *Latent interest* refers to groups possessing interests in the form of potentials that may lead to the emergence of open conflict. When these interest groups enter into open confrontation, what emerges is referred to as *manifest interest*.

In addition, Coser's concept of conflict intensity is utilized in the analysis. His proposition, "*the closer the relationship, the more intense the conflict*" (Coser,

1964), explains how conflict intensity tends to increase precisely in situations involving parties bound by close social relationships.

Understanding and Political Behavior of *Kyai*

To understand the forms of *kyai* political understanding, the researcher intentionally began by tracing information from the early stages of *kyai* involvement in politics. One informant interviewed by the researcher explained that his political engagement began in the post-Reformasi period, particularly when Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) openly established and declared a political party, namely Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB). As an NU administrator, he expressed strong enthusiasm toward the decision of the NU central board. His expectation was that the political aspirations of NU members could be fully channeled through the party, enabling NU constituents—who had been marginalized during the New Order era—to have their interests accommodated once again.

Another informant, recorded as a board member of the Bondowoso branch of NU, stated that *kyai* involvement in politics represents an effort to fulfill religious obligations. According to him, anyone entering politics ultimately aims to obtain power. While such power may be pursued for worldly purposes—such as personal enrichment or expansion of individual influence—for *kyai*, political power is understood primarily as a means to uphold divine commandments and prevent immoral acts prohibited by religion.

When the researcher asked about the possibility of differences in party affiliation alongside differing interpretations of Islamic teachings within political contexts, informants offered varied responses. Some considered interpretative differences as normal, especially since such interpretations revolve around political interests; therefore, disagreements should not be excessively exaggerated. Others argued that the only truly legitimate regulations are those derived from God. Consequently, political party choices are considered valid only when directed toward Islamic parties, namely parties that adopt Islam as the ideological foundation of their political structure. Otherwise, such parties are not regarded as obligatory for Muslims to support.

According to informants, the theological motivations inspiring their political involvement were acquired not only during their education in Islamic institutions while studying or residing in *pesantren*, but were primarily shaped by the political behavior of their own *kyai* or respected teachers. One example frequently mentioned concerns KH. Achmad Sufyan, caretaker of PP. Sumber Bungah in Situbondo, whose political support for PKB encouraged many local

kyai in Bondowoso, who were his students or followers, to collectively align themselves with PKB.

For these followers, the political choice of Kiai Sufyan, regarded as a wali (saintly figure), could not be considered mistaken. In addition to possessing broad political insight, he was believed to maintain a close spiritual relationship with God; therefore, his political *ijtihad* was assumed to be free from error. A similar pattern appeared among supporters of Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP). Beyond PPP's explicit Islamic ideological orientation, the most persuasive justification for support was the political migration of KH. Fawaid As'ad to PPP. Divergent political orientations among several kyai ultimately produced political polarization not only among ordinary community members but also among local kyai in Bondowoso

Political Conflict among Local Kyai

Misalignment and differences in perspectives, attitudes, and behavior constitute primary sources of polarization or conflict within society. Such dynamics also occur within patterns of interaction among kyai at the local level in Bondowoso society. Differences among kyai became more pronounced when they became directly involved in struggles over political power and entered the arena of practical politics.

Conflict itself is not an unusual phenomenon within political life; indeed, conflict is a natural element of political processes. However, political conflict becomes particularly significant and analytically interesting when it occurs among kyai, whose social position is highly central in shaping community attitudes and behavior.

Before examining the conflicts themselves, it is important to identify the factors functioning as stimulants and mediators of conflict among kyai. The researcher's investigation indicates several primary triggers of political conflict.

First, political conflict among kyai may arise directly from differences in political party affiliation. Although differing political preferences are common among kyai, local-level conflicts become more significant because they place kyai and their respective followers in direct opposition. Such conflicts are considerably more risky than national-level elite conflicts, since they involve the immediate mobilization of grassroots followers. Political fragmentation intensified after the fall of the New Order regime, when numerous political parties emerged (Pratama, 2026).

According to one informant, differences in political party choice represent one of the strongest causes of conflict. This condition, he argued, results from the inability of some *kyai* to distinguish clearly between the politically strategic sphere—characterized by intrigue—and the transcendent sphere of religion. While harmonious and peaceful coexistence remains an ideal aspiration, such harmony becomes increasingly difficult when polarization occurs among local elites, including *kyai*.

Second, conflict is also triggered by differences in *pesantren* alma mater. This factor remains closely related to political differences. Divergent educational lineages become potential sources of conflict when parent *pesantren* institutions themselves adopt differing political alignments. During the 2004 legislative and presidential elections, for example, variations in party affiliation and *pesantren* background became visible causes of local *kyai* conflict in Bondowoso.

An alumnus of one *pesantren* explained that his decision to move to a different political party reflected obedience to his *kyai*. Although no explicit instruction was given, the political shift of his teacher was interpreted as a symbolic signal that students (*santri*) should follow similar political steps. Beyond obedience, strong belief in the correctness of the *kyai*'s political judgment became the dominant reason guiding such decisions.

The fourth factor identified by the researcher concerns differences in patronage toward respected reference *kyai*. This factor resembles the previous one, as political choices remain closely tied to the political orientation of respected religious figures. Nevertheless, not all *kyai* alumni automatically follow the political preferences of their former *pesantren* leaders. Some local *kyai* maintained independent political positions because they adhered to other charismatic figures within particular political parties. For instance, several *kyai* who remained loyal to Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB) in 2004 justified their stance by referring to the continued presence of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) within the party. Admiration for Gus Dur ultimately outweighed their obedience to former teachers.

The fifth contributing factor concerns political choices shaped by kinship ties. In several cases documented by the researcher, considerations of family relations became decisive causes of conflict among *kyai*, even generating tensions between students and their own teachers. When kinship relations become entangled in political conflict, such disputes tend to persist for extended

periods, as they involve personal ego and collective family identity. In some instances, political conflict evolves into intergenerational or inherited conflict.

The political divisions and conflicts among local *kyai* in Bondowoso possess deep historical roots. Within the history of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Bondowoso, two well-known factions, the Kauman group and the Wonosari group, emerged from historical struggles over organizational leadership. Due to the strong influence of these networks and overlapping *kyai* affiliations, such conflicts endured for considerable periods.

The researcher further found that these structural causes were intensified by additional stimulants. The most dominant triggering factor often originated from individuals closest to the *kyai* themselves. These close associates frequently acted as effective “whisperers,” sustaining and even escalating conflicts between *kyai*. Motivations ranged from emotional antipathy toward opposing groups to strategic political interests pursued by intermediaries seeking to capitalize on the influence and mass support commanded by the *kyai*.

The Forms of Political Conflict of *Kyai*

The research’s findings indicate that political conflict among *kyai* can broadly be classified into two arenas. The first consists of conflict occurring within organizational or political party structures (intra-party conflict), while the second involves political conflict among *kyai* situated across different political parties (inter-party conflict).

These differing arenas of conflict produce distinct implications for political interaction among *kyai*. The study finds clear differences in *kyai* attitudes across these two spaces. In intra-party conflicts, the atmosphere of conflict tends to be less visible. *Kyai* demonstrate greater caution in displaying disagreement. In what may be described as the “front stage” before the public (de Casanova et al., 2021), they project behavior suggesting the absence of conflict. The impression of tension is carefully managed and suppressed. They remain capable of sitting together in shared forums, including ritual gatherings such as *tahlilan*, *sholawatan*, *istighasah*, and broader socio-community activities such as meetings of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

A different pattern emerges when conflict originates from inter-party rivalry. In such cases, conflicts among *kyai* become more explicit and heavily infused with political intrigue. Rather than merely avoiding shared forums, some *kyai* may even refuse simple social gestures such as meeting or shaking hands.

The researcher observes that intra-party conflicts among *kyai* largely remain personal disputes. Consequently, their scale and frequency are relatively limited and rarely institutionalized. These conflicts do not evolve into organized struggles representing broader political interests under party banners. In many intra-party conflicts documented by the researcher, reconciliation (*islah*) processes tend to occur more quickly. The involvement of senior and highly respected *kyai* within the party often proves effective in resolving tensions.

In contrast, conflicts involving *kyai* affiliated with different political parties operate on a larger and more organized scale, since they inevitably involve party institutions themselves. Conflict dynamics are sustained within broader structures of political competition. Disputes cease to be merely personal disagreements and instead transform into clashes between competing political interests embodied in party organizations. As long as party mechanisms continue to reproduce political rivalry, conflict persists. The presence of political actors who benefit strategically from sustaining tensions among *kyai* further prolongs these inter-party conflicts.

Both intra-party and inter-party conflicts manifest in several forms. For analytical purposes, this study categorizes them into two primary types; manifest conflict (open and explicit) and latent conflict (hidden and operating beneath the surface). Latent conflict among *kyai* is considerably more difficult to identify.

The researcher encountered significant challenges in uncovering such conflicts, as they required patience and extensive in-depth interviews with *kyai* and their close associates (*santri*). Open acknowledgment that a *kyai* is in dispute with another *kyai* is rarely expressed directly. A frequently emphasized reason is the moral obligation of *kyai* to preserve Muslim unity. Because *kyai* regularly preach values of brotherhood, unity, and cooperation among Muslims, they are generally reluctant to publicly disclose existing tensions.

Latent conflicts do not arise solely from political disagreement; they may also originate from personal issues. Nevertheless, within the scope of this research, political conflict remains the primary focus. Such latent conflicts usually appear only within limited internal communities, where criticism toward rival *kyai* is expected to remain confidential and not reach opposing political camps.

Several factors encourage the emergence of latent conflict. Kinship relations between conflicting *kyai* may render open confrontation socially

taboo. Similarly, conflicts involving teacher–student relationships encourage concealment. A *kyai* positioned as a student is unlikely to publicly challenge a teacher, while a teacher may avoid open confrontation to preserve authority and dignity.

These difficulties disappear when examining manifest political conflict. Because such conflicts are openly displayed and frequently involve mobilized supporters, they become more accessible for observation. Interviews reveal that differences in interpretations of party platforms constitute the most dominant trigger of manifest conflict. The most significant case in Bondowoso occurred between *kyai* supporting Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB) and those supporting Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP). Although both parties draw their mass base largely from NU communities, conflicts between them occurred frequently. Precisely because they compete for the same socioreligious constituency, rivalry intensified and culminated in open conflict. This finding reinforces the thesis that the closer the social relationship, the greater the intensity of conflict.

Manifest political conflict among *kyai* is also easily observed during community religious events such as *tahlilan*, *slametan*, and other ritual gatherings. It becomes difficult to find conflicting *kyai* seated within the same assembly even when both are invited by the host. If forced into the same forum, one *kyai* may leave before the event concludes.

In one village in Cermee District, a *kyai* even constructed a new mosque after administrators of the previous mosque, where he regularly led Friday prayers, shifted political affiliation. Beyond ritual activities, manifest conflicts are also visible in broader social arenas, including contests over leadership within NU branches, village head elections, and various other community activities where political competition intersects directly with religious authority.

Mass Followers and Political Conflict among *Kyai*

Various responses were demonstrated by the mass followers of *kyai* in relation to political conflicts involving religious leaders. In this discussion, the researcher categorizes followers into two groups as observed in the field. The first group consists of emotional masses. Emotional masses refer to followers who possess strong psychological and spiritual attachment to their revered *kyai*. They perceive their *kyai* as a sacred, morally pure, knowledgeable, and protective figure who safeguards their collective interests.

Even when members of this emotional mass do not personally know the *kyai*, feelings of closeness and protection remain deeply experienced, forming a powerful spiritual bond. Several dominant factors underpin the emergence of such emotional relationships. The researcher's findings indicate that most emotional followers are connected to their *kyai* through teacher–student relationships. This relationship does not necessarily arise from direct interaction in formal learning settings; indirect educational lineage is often sufficient.

For instance, followers may develop loyalty toward a young *kyai* at a *pesantren* even without studying directly under him, simply because they once studied under the young *kyai*'s father. Through this genealogical transmission of religious authority, the symbolic teacher–student bond becomes firmly established.

Another influential factor is the role of local *kyai* or *ustadz* who act as loyal followers of a prominent reference *kyai*. Communities surrounding these local religious figures often adopt similar perceptions and loyalties toward the central *kyai*. Narratives concerning the greatness of a *kyai*, including religious scholarship, spiritual power, or sainthood, are typically disseminated through networks of local *kyai* and religious teachers.

When emotional followers perceive political conflict involving their *kyai*, their responses frequently manifest in equally emotional forms of behavior. The study documents several cases illustrating emotionally driven acts of defense. One example involves marital divorce resulting from political differences between a son-in-law and father-in-law, each aligned with different *pesantren* traditions and following different *kyai* political orientations.

Another example concerns collective delegitimization directed at *kyai* or community leaders perceived as disloyal to the dominant reference *kyai*. The researcher identified a case in which the number of *santri* in a particular *pesantren* declined significantly because its caretaker did not support the political party endorsed by the community's preferred *kyai*. Consequently, the *kyai* was labeled as disobedient toward senior religious authority and judged to lack proper ethical conduct, rendering him unworthy of serving as a religious teacher.

Alongside these emotional reactions, another group of followers responded to *kyai* political conflict in a more rational manner. Rational responses were influenced not only by followers' educational background but also by the

leadership style of the *kyai* they followed. Not all *kyai* favor hierarchical or feudalistic relationships; some promote more egalitarian relations with their followers.

Rational responses are evident in family relationships where members maintain different political affiliations without disrupting domestic harmony. Despite clear differences in party preference, familial relations within the same household remain stable. This attitude reflects cognitive maturity that recognizes political disagreement as legitimate, while educational attainment plays a significant role in shaping such tolerant perspectives.

Conclusion

The causes of political conflict among *kyai* identified in this study are primarily rooted in differing perspectives regarding existing political party platforms, which subsequently stimulate the emergence of other sources of conflict. First, political conflict among *kyai* may arise directly from differences in political choices. Second, differences in *pesantren* alma mater constitute another important factor. This second factor remains closely related to the first; differences in *pesantren* educational background become increasingly conflictual when the parent *pesantren* (the *kyai's* alma mater) supports different political parties. The third cause concerns differences in patronage toward respected senior *kyai*. A further cause is political preference grounded in kinship ties. In several cases identified by the researcher, considerations of familial relations were sufficient to trigger conflict among *kyai*, and such conflicts could even occur between a student and his own teacher.

The forms of conflict occurring among *kyai* take place both within intra-party spaces and in inter-party political arenas. Political conflict among *kyai* occurring across different parties tends to be more manifest, whereas intra-party conflict generally remains latent. From these forms of political conflict, several responses emerged among followers' masses in reacting to *kyai* political disputes.

One prominent response is that of the emotional mass. This emotional mass refers to groups maintaining very close emotional and spiritual bonds with their respected *kyai*. They perceive the *kyai* as a sacred, morally upright, knowledgeable, and protective figure who safeguards their interests. Even when members of this emotional mass do not personally know the *kyai*, a strong sense of closeness and protection is experienced, forming a powerful spiritual

attachment. Consequently, their responses to political conflict involving their *kyai* tend to be expressed through emotional forms of behavior.

In addition to emotional responses demonstrated by the majority of followers, there are also groups that respond rationally to political conflicts among *kyai*. Rational responses are influenced not only by the educational level of the followers but also by the characteristics of the *kyai* they regard as role models. Not all *kyai* favor feudalistic relationships; some prefer to promote more egalitarian relations with their followers.

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