



Revisiting the Power of *Kyai* in Determining Indonesia Local Political Leaders: A Case from Regent Election in Situbondo and Gresik

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Abstract. The article analyzes the *kyai*'s political roles in the 2020 Head of the Region Election in two areas in Situbondo and Gresik. This paper analyzes the *kyai*'s source of political power which becomes a political bargaining power with political parties in determining who is to be elected as head of the region candidates and how to win the election. The analysis results show the *kyai*'s strong influential power in directing the head of the regional election. It is so strong that political parties do not seldom comply with the *kyai*'s requests on who should be selected as a candidate, even though their choices differ from the political parties' wishes. When opposing a party's decision, a *kyai* will build opposition power fronts by using the *pesantren* network and by collaborating with local political figures. However, the source of *Kyai*'s strength has shifted and does not apply the same in other areas.

Keywords: *Kyai*, Politics, Local Leaders, Indonesia, Authority.

1. Introduction

Analysis of the *kyai* and their roles in society became popular when Geertz [1] researched Pare, East Java, and published his most popular work, *The Religion of Java*. In that book, Geertz divided the Javanese people into three variants based on their spiritual orientations: *santri* (devout Muslims), *abangan* (nominal Muslims), and *priyayi* (Javanese aristocrats). In the *santri* community, the *kyai* figure has a central position. The *kyai* do not only teach Islamic knowledge which must be mastered by devout Muslims, but they also have an important position in showing the road to secure life in the Hereafter.

The term *Kyai* came from Javanese – *Yai*, and *Ki* – which literally means an old person or a mature adult [2]. Then, this title is given to one who has profound knowledge of religions in general. Then, its usage is narrowed down to only be used for Muslims. The *kyai* title is naturally given to someone as a form of acknowledgment and respect from society. The term *kyai* in Java is parallel to the term *Ajengan* in the Sundanese culture, *guruta/anreguruta* or *Tengku* among Aceh people, or *Tuan Guru* in West Nusa Tenggara [3] [4].

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An advantage of the *kyai* is their skills in developing communication with the society, which is gapless, low profile, and using simple words and sentences, making them easily accepted by all levels of society. Moreover, their houses and their *pesantren* are usually located in the middle of villages or *kampung*, thus there is no gap between them and non-*pesantren* people. As explained by Geertz [1] and Turmudi [5], almost all domestic affairs are consulted to the *kyai*, asking for their prayers and consideration, including affairs in seeking a partner, giving birth, naming a child, healing sick children, seeking jobs, easing businesses, and moving houses.

There have been many pieces of research on the relations between *Kyai* and politics (Dhofier [2], Steenbrink [6]; Horikoshi [7], Bruinessen [8], Feillard [9], Haidar [10], Fealy and Barton [11], Turmudi [5], Fealy [12]). Generally, the author describes how the *kyai* – both through the *pesantren* they lead or through Nahdlatul Ulama (Indonesia's largest Muslim organization) –negotiate with political authorities or carry out certain political maneuvers both to obtain benefits or to avoid regime repression. The researches of [13] [14], [15] highlighted the *kyai's* role as a cultural broker, but ignored the *kyai's* gait in the local-level electoral politics. The studies of Fealy [16], Rosanti [17], and Mietzner [18] on the practice of democracy in Indonesia have not touched the specific roles of the *Kyai* in local democracy, especially in determining head of the region candidates.

This article analyzes the *Kyai's* role in determining the head of the region candidates in 2020 in two areas of East Java province: Situbondo and Gresik Regencies. Situbondo Regency is an important area of Islamic life in the eastern area of East Java Province. Situbondo people have strong Madurese culture. Apart from using the same language, the people also originated from Madura. Here, there is a great old *pesantren* which becomes the main reference of Islamic life in that area, namely Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah. Its influence even reached outside of Java. In Situbondo Regency, there are 187 *pesantren*.

The authors regard that in direct head of the region elections, the role of political marketing is mostly carried out by figures with massive followers, who are influential, and who have mass mobilization powers. With their sources of power, the *kyai* is able to play and use them for political interests. In this context, *kyai* is an important figure in marketing and in bringing success to the head of the region candidate figures. When a *kyai* with massive followers and great influence does not elect himself as a head of the region candidate, he will use his power as an instrument of bargaining power to political parties as institutions who have the right to propose candidates. Here, *kyai* have significant power in determining which candidate must be carried by the political parties.

2. Research Method

The data of this writing is obtained through participant observation, interviews, and literature review. The author interviewed some key informants, such as Kyai Robbakh Ma'shum, administrator of Ihyaul Ulum *Pesantren* who had experiences in becoming Head of PCNU (Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Branch Manager), Head of the Regional

Legislative House, and Gresik Regent for two periods (2000-2010); also, Kyai Qosim, Head of Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB/The National Awakening Party) Party and Vice-Regent of Gresik for two periods (2010-2021). He was a candidate who lost in the 2020 Head of the Region Election. In Situbondo, the author interviewed two key figures, namely Kyai Mashudi, who is often the spokesperson of Kyai Cholil and who is an active administrator of NU and Majelis Ulama Indonesia (The Indonesian Islamic Scholar Assembly). Meanwhile, Kyai Isfi is an educator at Pesantren Salafiyah and is very close to Kyai Zaim (administrator of Salafiyah *pesantren*)—by accompanying him in various activities. Meanwhile, to cross-check and strengthen the data, the researcher profounds it through information from the head of the bearing party, the success team, and influential local figures.

3. Result And Discussion

3.1. Supporting the Power of Kyai: Pesantren and Nahdlatul Ulama'

Kyai, *pesantren*, and NU are a unit that is difficult to separate. *Pesantren* is an Islamic education institution that contains hundreds and even thousands of *santri* who study and live in dormitories. The *pesantren* is established by *kyai*, who is also a teacher and a mentor for the *santri*. But there are also some *pesantren* that are developed by non-governmental organizations [19]. Because they live in one dormitory, and even in the same house as the *kyai* and the family members, their relations are very close, resembling a family. In its development, *pesantren* keeps on carrying out educational system modernizations. In line with the development of scientific knowledge and technologies, some *pesantren* also adapt themselves.

Apart from *pesantren*, the *kyai* cannot be separated from NU, namely the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. It was established by *pesantren kyai*, spearheaded by *Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari* in 1926 [10]. From NU, the *kyai's* gait is publicly organized in the Islamic missionary endeavor, educational, social, up to political sectors. NU has become a political party that participated in the 1955 General Election. The party obtained a rather significant percentage of votes, namely 18,41 %, and in the 1971 General Election, it obtained 18,68 % of the votes (Baswedan, 2004). In 1973, NU fused with Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP/The United Development Party) as a result of the 'party fusion' policy of the New Order regime. In 1984, though the 27th Muktamar (grand meeting of organization representatives) in Situbondo, NU officially left politics, with the jargon 'Returning to Khittah 1926', i.e., returning to Islamic missionary and social practices. But, when Reformation rolled in 1998, NU was dragged back to the political stage, and it gave birth to the establishment of PKB [20].

Kyai, *pesantren*, and NU are interrelated institutions that form complex relations as shown among the Javanese and Madurese people [21]. Through *pesantren* and NU, *kyai* become highly considerable political and social power in the national universe. In the context of the General Election, the *kyai* may easily support, propose, and become the determinator of legislative members and head of the region candidates, and they are even involved in the winning process. Is the *kyai's* charisma influential enough in facing neoliberal politics – that justifies all means to attain political goals,

and is the *kyai*'s power through *pesantren* and *tarekat* (the path to take someone closer to God) still able to stir the voters' votes?

3.2. Revisiting the *Kyai*'s Power in Local Election

Generally, the *kyai* are affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest traditional Islamic organization in Indonesia, and even in the world. In the relational context with political parties, the *kyai* are grouped into four. *First*, the *Kyai* who are both administrators of PKB and NU. PKB is a political party established by KH Abdurrahman Wahid, ex-General Manager of Nahdlatul Ulama Great Administration (PBNU) for three periods and the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia, in 1998, mandated by PBNU. NU prohibited NU administrators to concurrently become head of the party. But in reality, some NU administrators concurrently became party administrators, especially as advisors [22]. *Second*, *Kyai* who are separately administrators of PKB or NU but they have intense relations [23]. *Third*, *Kyai* who became administrators of parties other than PKB who have good relations with other *Kyai* outside of PKB due to alumni factors or as both have been NU administrators before. *Fourth*, *Kyai* who are neither administrators of NU nor of other parties, but they have emotional bonds with NU figures due to similarities in religious practices [12]. The fourth group usually originated from alumni of non-*pesantren* education who are affiliated with NU religious traditions. These four relations may mutually or separately involve the *kyai*'s roles.

The *Kyai*'s role in PKB may be strongly sensed as this party was actually established by the *kyai*. Apart from that, this party is identical to NU, a traditional Islamic organization established by the *kyai*, thus until now, it is identical to the organization of traditional *kyai* and ulama. Apart from PKB, many NU *kyai* have become administrators of PPP, which was formed due to the *depolitization* policy of the New Order regime. PPP is a fusion of some Islamic parties, including NU, in 1973. The two parties often bring NU as their political marketing strategy. These two parties do not seldom place *kyai* figures to net votes, especially from the *santri* community. This phenomenon is clearly seen in general elections, especially in the election of regional leaders, as the character is very close to voters, influential figures such as the *kyai* are placed in important positions, both because of their desires to be involved in political practices, or because they were pulled in by parties or head of the region candidates as part of their political marketing strategies.

In Situbondo, the late *Kyai* As'ad Syamsul Arifin figure, a legendary *kyai* who administered *Pesantren* Salafiyah Syafi'iyah is very influential in every event of electoral politics. After his death, the local politicians still place his family as an important part in reaching victory. Situbondo's political breath depends on two figures who are descendants of *Kyai* As'ad, namely Kiai Fawaid (deceased in 2012)—substituted by *Kyai* Ahmad Azaim Ibrahimy (Gus Zaim)—and *Kyai* Kholil As'ad (younger brother of *Kyai* Fawaid). *Kyai* Fawaid is the oldest son of *Kyai* As'ad. After *Kyai* As'ad died in 1990, the *pesantren* were administered by *Kyai* Fawaid. Meanwhile, *Kyai* Kholil married the daughter of *Kyai* Sofyan, administrator of Sumber Bunga Sletreng Kapongan *pesantren* Situbondo. *Kyai* Sofyan still has familial ties with *Kyai* As'ad and is one of the important figures in the history of

Ulama and NU in Situbondo. Then, *Kyai* Kholil established Wali Songo pesantren which is located close to the city, specifically at Panji District.

Basically, Pesantren Salafiyah is a chief *pesantren* of many *pesantren* in Situbondo and around it. This *pesantren* has given birth to thousands of alumni, and some of them then became *kyai*, both by establishing *pesantren* in their villages or by becoming teachers of the Koran in mosques or *mushala* in their villages. Many among them also became professionals, bureaucrats, and even rulers of local politics [24]. The alumni formed a network through IKSASS (*Ikatan Keluarga Santri dan Alumni Salafiyah Syafi'iyah*/Network of Santri Family and Alumni of Salafiyah Syafi'iyah). They spread to all areas of the Indonesian archipelago. But the alumni dominantly came from Situbondo, Banyuwangi, Bondowoso, Probolinggo, Madura, West Nusa Tenggara, Borneo, and South Sulawesi.

Meanwhile, Pesantren Wali Songo led by *Kyai* Kholil also has a strong influence on society. This *pesantren* currently has more than five thousand *santri*. This great number of *santri* added with *Kyai* Kholil's charisma in the society makes *Kyai* Kholil and Pesantren Wali Songo become new idols among politicians and political parties to use their influences to obtain support. In some political events, *Kyai* Kholil partnered up with *Kyai* Muzakki, son of the late *Kyai* Sofyan as well as his brother-in-law. Their communication is very smooth as they are son and son-in-law of *Kyai* Sofyan

Even though these two *pesantren* are still bound in strong familial ties, the two are often different in giving political support. For example, in 2015, Gus Zaim tended to give his support to regent/vice-regent candidates Hamid-Fadil, meanwhile, *Kyai* Kholil gave support to the Dadang-Yoyok Wahyudi pair [25]. In the 2020 Regional General Election, Gus Zaim tended to support Karna-Khaeroni candidate pair, while *Kyai* Kholil gave support to Yoyok-Abdi. The common society perceives that the differing supports of the two *kyai* blocks were carried out deliberately because no matter who comes out as winners, the influence and roles of *Kyai* As'ad Syamsul Arifin's descendants are still dominant [26].

The *kyai-santri* relations are no different from those in Madura. Culturally, Situbondo and its surroundings use Madurese language. They have familial relations as their ancestors came from the same area. Also, *Kyai* Syamsul Arifin who established Salafiyah *Pesantren* in 1908 is of Madurese descent. "As a pioneering *pesantren*, the *kyai's* position is crucial in Situbondo's history. Society regards the *kyai* and the families as the father or the parent. Moreover, most of the small *pesantren* around Situbondo was established by Salafiyah *Pesantren* alumni" [24]. If there are *pesantren* with differing opinions or choices with Salafiyah *Pesantren*, they usually come from a different *pesantren* network, such as Nurul Jadid Probolinggo or Sidogiri Pasuruan. They generally represent individuals instead of an organized alumni network.

In Situbondo, competition happened between *kyai* pesantren and *kyai* pesantren, even under the ancestry of *Kyai* As'ad, meanwhile, in Gresik Regency Head of the Region General Election in 2000, there was a competition between *kyai* pesantren and *kyai* kampung. *Kyai* pesantren are the *kyai* who have the background as leaders of large

pesantren with hundreds and even thousands of *santri*. Among the many *kyai*, one of the most notable one in the public space is *Kyai* Robbach Ma'shum. He is the younger brother of *Kyai* Mahfudh Ma'shum, head of Syuriah PCNU and administrator of Ihyaul Ulum *Pesantren*. *Kyai* Robbah has a protruding social and political career and position. One of them is that he became the Regent of Gresik for two periods (2000-2010). Even though he has retired, his political roles are still considered. For example, at the national and regional levels, he became the driving force in making President and Governor candidates win. Meanwhile, at the local level, he became the driving force in the candidacy and the winning of Fandi Ahmad Yani (FAY) as the Gresik Regent (2021-2024).

With *Kyai* Mahfudh Mashum, *Kyai* Masbuhin Faqih, *Kyai* Mulyadi, and *Kyai* Iklil, he became the driving force in collecting support from various parties, especially political parties to support FAY as the Regent, who teamed up with Aminatun Habibah—daughter of the late *Kyai* Ahmad Muhammad, administrator of Qomarudin Bungah *pesantren*. In an interview, he stated that the *kyai*'s roles in various fields, including political ones, are not merely for the sake of worldly affairs. But it is because the religion orders its embracers to save people [27]. Being in politics means worshipping and it has values of worship in the face of God. Moreover, Gresik is known as a city of *santri* and *wali* (people who are close to God). Thus, the political roles of *kyai* are absolutely required to maintain the ancestral values with very strong Islamic traditions [27].

Apart from that, he also explained that in Gresik that is identical with *pesantren* and *kyai*, it is inappropriate if the *kyai* do not participate in thinking about the future of the government through General Elections. According to him, the *kyai* must be at the front line of these affairs as in reality, society still trusts the *pesantren*. They still enroll their children in Islamic education institutions, and they still invite *kyai* to religious events. "It is wrong if the *kyai* do not participate in thinking about politics. *Kyai* must work together with political parties, and political parties must understand that Gresik is different from other areas, where the roles of *kyai* and *pesantren* are highly considered" [27]. This statement aims to emphasize that the *kyai*'s position in Gresik cannot carelessly be ignored in political processes, especially in regional general elections.

Even though his position in PKB was highly strategic as the Head of the Syura Assembly, *Kyai* Robbach did not support Qosim who was PKB's General Manager. This condition cannot be separated from the rivalry that did not only happen in the 2020 General Election but also at the 2010 and 2015 General Elections. In the 2010 and 2015 General Elections, *Kyai* Robbach and the structural *kyai* of NU gave support to Khusnul Khuluq, Head of PCNU as well as a Regional Secretary officer. But this support failed to bring their choices to become Regent as the *Kyai* who are at the mainstream course as he were not solid, and they even tend to fail from taking sides.

The *kyai*'s support in the electoral process happens at all stages, starting from the candidate determination, the development of support networks, up to the mobilization of support to win the supported candidate. In many cases, the *kyai*'s political power may be so dominant that it may control the strategic political knots so that they suit

their interests. As the *kyai*'s power is outside of the political parties, they may act more freely. The *kyai* are free to determine the head of the region candidates. Even though they must still use the political party vehicle, they do not have to be bound to the various organizational procedures of political parties. "The *kyai* make their own network which involves their colleagues who are also *kyai* and also political figures to formulate the suitable candidate criteria. Then, the criteria are *mursyid* proposed to the political parties who have the administrative right to propose a suitable candidate" [28]. Then, the party carries out a public test to see the electability level of the candidate. But, these networking processes of political parties may only be formalities when faced with the highly dominant political powers of the *kyai* [24]. In the end, the political parties will merely be stamps of the *kyai*'s decisions, especially if these *kyai*'s decisions have become a network of power with other influential elements.

How do the *kyai* maintain and sustain their influences, exceeding the religious issues which *traditionally* became their basis authority? As a holder of religious authorities, the *kyai* may freely use these authorities without depending on other parties – including other *kyai*. That authority does not fade easily even when it is against common sense. One of the reasons is that the *kyai* own *pesantren* [19]. This role is not easily shifted so long as the society still trusts it, marked by the fact that they leave and they enroll their children in the *pesantren*. In Madura or areas with Madura culture – including Situbondo – the relations between *kyai*, *pesantren*, and *ulama* organization is a unity which is difficult to be separated [21]. Through the *pesantren*, the *kyai*'s authority will not be substituted, even though there is the emergence of new *ustaz* (Islamic religion teachers) or religious figures from the *salafi* group, who often display their religiosity through tight religious symbols or practices [3], as they do not have a special room, unlike the traditional *kyai*. Through *pesantren* and NU, *kyai* become the symbol and the sustainers of Islam among the society [29].

Apart from *pesantren*, the relations between *kyai* and the society are formed through *tarekat* or Koran recitation congregation [30]. *Tarekat* is a road to obtain God's blessing through remembrance of God. The relations between *mursyid* (*tarekat leader*) and students (congregation) in the *tarekat* are formed through *bai'at* (allegiance) thus their relations are very strong. Apart from *tarekat*, relations are also formed through routine Koran recitation in several mosques. The relations through *tarekat* and Koran recitation also happened in Situbondo and Gresik.

There are no differences between the *kyai*'s source of authority in Madura and Java, especially that sourced from the economic sector, *pesantren*, *tarekat*, and network of Islamic scholar organizations. Meanwhile, the authority that is sourced from charisma differs between *kyai* in Madura and Java. In this context, authority means a form of order that may be obeyed by other people [31]. Weber divides authority into three parts: rational authority that is based on the consideration of normative regulations, the traditional authority that is based on culture and traditional beliefs, and also charismatic authority that is sourced from the belief in superior figures. In this case, Situbondo *kyai* has charismatic-traditional authority, where the *kyai*'s power is sourced from the belief that the *kyai*'s thought, including on politics, has gone through careful calculation; thus, society will comply with their decisions. The slogan, "*Mateh odik paggun noro' Kyah*" (live-die follow the *kyai*) is believed by the society, as they

believe the *kyai*'s political choices have spiritual and divine values that will bring blessings and virtue. This charismatic-traditional authority is very prominent in the various head of the region elections.

Table 1. Pesantren in Situbondo and Gresik

VARIABLE	GRESIK	SITUBONDO
Social-Culture	Javanese	Madurese
Affiliation	Nahdlatul Ulama/NU	Nahdlatul Ulama/NU
Political affiliation	PKB (majority)	PKB and PPP
Amount of Pesantren	204	148
Amount of student/santri	24.000 santri (2022),	45.058 (2022)
The dominant's pesantren	Pesantren Salafiyah, Syafi'iyah, Pesantren Walisongo and Sumber Bunga	Pesantren Manbaus Sholihin, Pesantren Qomarudin and Ihyaul Ulum
Kyai figure	Kyai Masbuhin, Kyai Robbah (alm)	Kyai As'ad Syamsul Arifin family
Relationship Kyai-Santri	Traditional-Rational Pragmatic	Traditional-Pragmatic

Sources : kemenag.go.id, emis (2021-2022)

Meanwhile, the *kyai*'s authority in Gresik or in Java is prominently charismatic-traditional-rational. On one hand, society complies with the *kyai*'s orders as the compliance of *santri* and *tarekat* congregation to the *mursyid*, but this compliance is not carried out blindly. The *kyai*'s choice will be followed by the *santri* and the congregation if it does not contradict the norms that have future legal implications. The *kyai* also does not coerce his interests if the *santri* objects – for example – if the choice contradicts norms. Even so, when the *santri* are encouraged to choose the candidate that is supported by the *kyai*, it is no guarantee that the candidate will be chosen if he/she is regarded as incapable or if other candidates are more capable with the same background, even without the support of the mainstream *kyai*. The case of the 2010 and 2015 regional general elections is a real example where *Kyai* Robbach who supported Khusnul Khuluq did not obtain the support of his *santri* nor his congregation, as the people of Gresik gave their support to Qosim who also has the background as *santri*. Even so, differing choices do not mean opposing to the *kyai*'s orders. There are many methods carried out by the *santri* to show political attitudes without hurting the *kyai*'s feelings, as in the case of Istifa'iyah [32] and [33]. The two are *santri* of *Kyai* Masbuhin and *Kyai* Robbach. They have different choices with their husband and wife who are both *santri*. To maintain the humbleness to the *kyai*, they split their votes. They chose according to their conscience, meanwhile, their husband/wife chose the choice recommended by the *Kyai*. Thus, the *kyai*'s charisma and the *santri* culture are maintained, but the *santri*'s independence as an owner of sovereignty is also maintained.

There are many aspects which may explain why the authority that is sourced from charisma-tradition but that is also rational is still maintained. One of the reasons is the impact of *pesantren* education modernization and the spread of the alumni to various professions. Also, many of the *kyai*'s children have obtained modern education both in and outside of the country; thus, they are more open towards the dynamics outside

of the *pesantren* [3] [5]. Meanwhile, another fact shows that the *santri*'s political choice does not only go to the parties that have historical ties with *kyai*, namely PKB and PPP. At the local level, some nationalist parties, either religious or secular, are led by *santri* or family members of the *kyai*.

The *kyai*'s political behaviors in the local electoral processes which seem like they develop their own political power may be seen from three perspectives. *First*, it is a form of resistance against the political party hegemonies which often market the names and the organizations of *kyai* for their political interests. This warning is especially directed to Islamic parties such as PKB and PPP, who always relate the ideological, historical, and sociological aspects with NU and *pesantren* which become the *kyai*'s homes. This resistance is at least a warning that there are many *kyai* and their families who do not only become administrators of PKB and PPP, but also nationalist-secular political parties such as Gerindra, Nasdem, Demokrat dan Golkar. On the other hand, there are the phenomena where the nationalist parties move to become religious parties that strive for the interests of the *kyai* and the *pesantren* [34].

Second, it is a form of resistance against neo-liberal politics which 'allow all means' to obtain power. In several studies, practices of money politics, vote-buying, and dowry politics have become an ordinary thing and are regarded as normal in social life [35]. As the sustainers of moral ethics, the *Kyai*'s roles as a form of protection to maintain the balance of political tendencies have started to become wild. *Third*, the effort to maintain the *kyai*'s dignity and authority as considerable religious leaders in public spaces. The *kyai* want to state their existence, that they have a role, that they still exist, and that they cannot always become objects, especially in local politics.

Seeing these tendencies, it can be said that the *Kyai*'s role in the local politics does not experience a shift – even, it is becoming stronger. The local politics give room for the *Kyai* to directly communicate with alumni and the congregation without going through mediators or the ulama' organization path. Apart from going through the *pesantren* alumni network, the *kyai* also use their capacities as preachers, who give routine sermons in Mosques and *mushalla* (small mosque), and also at local radios. As an elite group, the *Kyai* may directly interact with the congregation (the mass) on many issues [36]. Many alumni live in one area. The proximity of their residences eases the coordination between the *kyai* and the alumni. It must also be considered that currently, there are many *kyai* who own economic businesses, where their employees are the alumni or people around the *pesantren*. These businesses even strengthen the bond between *kyai* and society. It is no longer mere teacher-student bonds, but it also encompasses the employer-employee bond.

4. Conclusion

Generally, the head of the region election in Situbondo and Gresik regencies in 2020 shows how the *kyai*'s political power determines local-level political processes. In several cases, the interests of *kyai* institutions may diametrically face the political parties' interests. In such cases, it is not uncommon that the *kyai* develop their own political power fronts to face the political parties' power.

The *kyai*'s position as a local elite has very strategic influences in determining who must become the head of the region. The strength of the *kyai*'s influence may exceed the political parties' powers. When facing highly influential *kyai*, political parties often face a problematic situation, especially for Islamic-based political parties. So far, the Islamic parties use the *kyai* figure as an important part of their political marketing strategy, including in bringing victory to candidates proposed by the political parties. When the *kyai* have their own candidates, it is not uncommon that the political parties are forced to bow to the *kyai*'s desires.

Even though there are *kyai* who become political party administrators, the *kyai* are not always bound by the selection of candidates determined by political parties. The *kyai*'s authority is basically outside of the political party network. Because of that, it is not uncommon that the *kyai*'s political decisions are based on the *kyai*'s interests which are outside of the political party. The *kyai* have a network outside of the political parties' formal structure, to mobilize the masses which may be used as a bargaining tool against the political parties. Because of that, it is no wonder that a *kyai* is very flexible in giving support to candidates, even if that *kyai* is a party administrator. What is important for the *kyai* is that whoever wins, he may still channel his interests and reinforce his influence in the political processes in his area.

On the other hand, in cases where the political behaviors of *kyai* are faced with those of the political parties, it may be seen as a form of the *kyai*'s resistance against the domination and the hegemony of political parties. The political parties only make the *kyai* names and figures into mere tools to scoop the votes of Muslims without adequate reciprocity to the *kyai* nor the *pesantren* institutions. This may be read as the *kyai*'s way of stating their existence, that there cannot be any political decisions which influence the people's lives without considering their voices and their moral considerations.

The *kyai*'s power actually mainly originates from the authority that is attached to them. The sources of authority that show the *kyai*'s power does not change, including charisma, economy, and supported by the *pesantren* network, *tarekat*, and *ulama* organization. But, the source of authority that comes from charisma does not apply in general, as only in certain areas does that it has high influence, such as in Madura or among the society that strongly intersects with Madurese culture. Meanwhile, in other areas such as among the Javanese society in general, the *kyai*'s authority is not merely sourced from charisma, but rational considerations encourage the people to comply. In the political context for instance, the *kyai*'s political choice is not necessarily followed by the *santri* nor the congregation if the proposed candidate is incapable or if they are not close enough to the society. They will have different choices, as long as the cultural and ideological backgrounds are the same. In some cases, if a husband and the wife come from the same *pesantren*, they will split the vote between the choice of the *kyai*'s orders and the choice that is based on conscience. In one place – in the context of this research – the *kyai*'s authority is sourced from charisma and tradition. Meanwhile, in other, wider areas – such as in Java – charisma, tradition, and rationality become one. This source of authority will continue to be maintained even though the dynamics of cultural change outside of the *kyai* and *santri* community keep on rolling. Even if it experiences changes, it will not go to extremes.

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