



**PESANTREN AND POLITICS:  
Fostering Civil Society-Oriented Political Consciousness  
in a Muslim Society**

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**Abstract:** Political polarization has occurred in Pesantren in the 1999 election, where the kiai involved various political parties. This study aims to examine the politics of the pesantren Annuqayah in Madura and analyze the contribution of it in political democratization and civil society. Although the kiai have different political affiliations, the relationships among kiai, santris, and alumni remain harmonious without open conflict. This phenomenon is crucial to study because it demonstrates the pesantren's role in fostering healthy and constructive political awareness in society. This article is based on a field study employing a qualitative approach, drawing on the perspectives of social capital and phenomenology. The results show that political democratization in the pesantren is built on respect for the moral authority of kiai, the practice of citizenship values based on the principles of *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah* (*aswaja*), and the strengthening of the tradition of "*silaturahim*" among kiai, alumni, and the community. These values serve as the foundation for forming an inclusive, religious, and democratic civil society at the local level.

**Keywords:** Pesantren, Political-consciousness, Democratization, Political Parties.

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## **Introduction**

IN "PONDOK PESANTREN and Strengthening Civil Society," Marzuki Wahid explains how some people still view the focus of pesantrens (Islamic boarding schools) solely on traditional education, making it appear resistant and uninterested in innovations from outside. The fact that one or more kiai seem to have a firm grip on a pesantren makes it appear that there is only

one kiai (the religious leader of a pesantren) at the center of a pesantren. Nevertheless, a pesantren is very important today for the development of civil society. These urgent demands put a burden on a pesantren.<sup>1</sup>

From a sociological perspective, there is a strong relationship between pesantrens and civil society. A pesantren has various elements that support their existence, including mosques, dormitories, institutions for studying the Holy Scriptures, kiais, and santris. However, if explored further, these components of a pesantren have a vast potential to build civil society.<sup>2</sup>

According to Soebardi<sup>3</sup> and Johns, a pesantren plays an essential role in the spread of Islam and the increase of community adherence to Islam in Java. A pesantren plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of Islam in Islamic kingdoms and spreading Islam to remote areas. At the end of the 16th Century, Dutch and English trading companies began to collect several manuscripts about Islamic teachings in Southeast Asia from pesantrens.<sup>4</sup> It is essential to study pesantren institutions, which are at the forefront of the spread of Islam, to understand the historical process of Islamization in the Java region.<sup>5</sup> André Feillard states that both NU administrators and the government view the existence of

<sup>1</sup>Marzuki Wahid, *Masyarakat Sipil Pondok Pesantren Dan Penguatan* (Media Sunda Kelapa, 1999), 18–19.

<sup>2</sup>Clifford Geertz, *Abangan, Santri, Priyayi Dalam Masyarakat Jawa* (Pustaka Jaya, 1983); Ahmad Rofiq, “NU/Pesantren Dan Tradisi Pluralisme Dalam Konteks Negara-Bangsa,” in *NU/Pesantren Dan Tradisi Pluralisme Dalam Konteks Negara-Bangsa*, ed. Ahmad Suaedi (P3M-LKiS, 2000), 209.

<sup>3</sup>Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Peran Kyai Dalam Pemeliharaan Islam Tradisional Di Jawa* (LP3ES, 1994), 17; S. Soebardi, “The Place of Islam,” in *Studi Sejarah Indonesia*, ed. McKay (Pitman, 1976), 42; S. Udin, *Pesantren Tarikat Suryalaya Surabaya* (Dian Rakyat, 1978), 215.

<sup>4</sup>Agus Syakroni et al., “Motivation And Learning Outcomes Through The Internet Of Things; Learning In Pesantren,” *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 1363, no. 1 (2019): 012084, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1363/1/012084>.

<sup>5</sup>Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Peran Kyai Dalam Pemeliharaan Islam Tradisional Di Jawa*, 17–18; Anthony H. Johns, “Islam in Southeast Asia: Reflections and New Directions,” *Indonesia* 19 (April 1975): 33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350701>.

pesantrens and madrasas as a highly beneficial advancement, albeit with their various advantages.<sup>6</sup>

Pesantrens have successfully built a civil society that can exert a positive influence both internally and externally. Pesantren Annuqayah in Sumenep is recognized as a pesantren that fosters civil society.<sup>7</sup> The cooperation between Pesantren Annuqayah and its surrounding community has been established well, particularly in terms of greening arid areas. As a result, in 1987, Pesantren Annuqayah received the prestigious Kalpataru Award.

Over the last decade, experts have observed an interesting phenomenon indicating the effectiveness of public awareness in politics. Before the reform era, one political party had a monopoly of power, making pesantrens the primary source of electoral support in every election. However, since the 1999 election, there has been a significant shift at Pesantren Annuqayah, leading to increased party polarization. K.H. A. Warits Ilyas from Lubangsa Raya supports PPP; K.H. Basyir AS from Latee is a member of the DPC Syuro Council of PKB; K.H. Mahfud Husnaini from Sabajarin supports PBB; and K.H. Muksin Amin supports PKU. However, there is no political conflict among alumni, students, or kiai.

The condition above highlights the emergence of political awareness in society, particularly when a political gap exists among kiai, alumni, and santris. Amidst various issues, each Nahdliyyin member tends to align politically with one side but does not turn these differences into a source of conflict. This background allows researchers to examine further how Pesantren Annuqayah contributes to the realization of civil society through

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<sup>6</sup> Andre Feillard, *NU Vis a Vis Negara, Pencarian Isi, Bentuk Dan Makna* (LKiS, 1999); For more recent studies on various aspects of the pesantren, see, for example, Ratna Dewi and Muslim Ansori, "Fostering Religious Harmony through Islamic Boarding Schools at Islamic Boarding School Darussolah IV and Dalilul Khoirot an-Nawawi Bangka Belitung," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 47, no. 2 (2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v47i2.992>; Saepudin Mashuri et al., "Spiritual Base of Pesantren for Building Multicultural Awareness in Indonesian Context," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 1 (2024): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i1.17141>.

<sup>7</sup> Raihani, "Report on Multicultural Education in Pesantren," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 42, no. 4 (2012): 585–605, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2012.672255>.

political democratization. This article outlines the values of Pesantren Annuqayah in fostering a civil society. The authors also discuss the impacts of these values in building civil society in the context of political democratization. In addition, the authors describe how Pesantren Annuqayah mitigates and resolves various political issues, including those among the pesantren leaders, between the pesantren leaders and alumni, and among alumni themselves.

The phenomenon of political polarization in Pesantren Annuqayah, Sumenep, and Madura, particularly since the 1999 election, warrants further in-depth study. In this context, the kiai and the pesantren figures openly show diverse political affiliations, such as involvement in the Masyumi Party, PPP, PKB, PBB, PKU, and PK, while maintaining harmonious social relations without generating internal political conflict. There is no visible division or dispute among the kiai, students, or alumni. This reality reflects mature political awareness and specific social values that enable democratization in the pesantren atmosphere, which remains peaceful and inclusive. Therefore, this research is essential for exploring how social-religious values developed by the pesantren contribute to the formation of a democratic civil society.

To comprehensively examine the phenomenon, this field research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing social capital theory and phenomenology as the primary analytical tools. The social capital theory is used to see how social networks, norms, and beliefs held by the pesantren community shape social cohesion and ethical and political behavior. The social capital encompasses relationships between individuals, adherence to shared values, and the presence of trust in moral authority figures, such as kiai, who serve as primary references in social and political life. Meanwhile, the phenomenological theory is used to understand the meanings of social-political experiences of the pesantren community, directly capturing reality as they experience it without theoretical preconceptions. This approach enables researchers to examine the consciousness, perceptions, and subjective experiences of kiai, santri, and alumni in the realm of politics.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document studies. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including the kiai, notable alumni, and senior santris, who are actively involved in social and political activities. Observations were conducted by directly engaging in pesantren activities and the social life of santris to capture their daily dynamics. In addition, institutional documents, alumni organization archives, and internal pesantren publications were examined.

This research was conducted from July 2022 to October 2023. The data were updated in April 2025 at Pesantren Annuqayah, with central locations in several regional pesantren complexes. The data were analyzed thematically using a phenomenological approach to identify patterns of meanings and values underlying the actors' social and political practices. This approach enables researchers to construct a holistic understanding of how Islamic values, pesantren traditions, and social relations are integrated to support political democratization in a unique local context.

### **Social Capital and Phenomenology: Two Pillars of Participatory Political Analysis in Pesantren**

Pesantren originated from Java and is the oldest educational institution in Indonesia. Most experts agree that pesantren education in Indonesia is traditional and essential. Therefore, they emphasize that pesantren is this country's focal point of traditional Islamic education.<sup>8</sup> While the origin of pesantren can be traced back to a distant past, the emergence and growth of pesantren, as described by Dhofier, can be traced back to the early 19th Century. Dhofier identifies five fundamental elements of a pesantren. First, a decent accommodation for students, sometimes referred to as a *pondok*, was necessary. Second, a mosque is a must for students' learning. Third, classical Islamic books written in Arabic, commonly referred to as *turats*, serve as valuable sources of

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<sup>8</sup>Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara, Jaringan Global Dan Lokal* (Mizan; Steenbrink, 1986), 30; See also Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam Dalam Kurun Modern* (Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial (LP3ES), 1986), 50.

knowledge. Fourth, some students participate in academic activities under the guidance of a kiai. Fifth, a kiai plays roles as an administrator and educator in a pesantren.<sup>9</sup>

Learning in pesantren has unique characteristics, particularly in the use of *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods. The *bandongan* method is applied, in which a kiai reads, translates, and explains an Islamic classical book printed on yellow paper. Thus, it is called "*kitab kuning* or yellow book" or "*turats*," while santris listen attentively and take notes on the main points. Conversely, the *sorogan* method is applied, in which a santri reads a *kitab kuning* in front of a kiai.<sup>10</sup>

The *bandongan* method emphasizes a kiai's dominant role in teaching and learning processes, while students listen passively. A kiai reads classical Arabic literature and translates it into the local language, so that students can understand. Furthermore, a kiai explains the meaning of the Arabic texts. Students diligently copy and absorb critical aspects of a kiai's explanation without seeking clarification or challenging it. All students show a united and respectful response to a kiai's explanation. In Middle Eastern countries, this method is known as *halaqah*, derived from an Arabic word for a circular formation in the learning process, where students gather around a teacher.

Marzuki Wahid highlights pesantren as a subject of endless discussion due to its multifaceted nature and interesting perspectives. Pesantren stands out for its ability to withstand the ongoing impacts of globalization on the Indonesian education system while being recognized for its traditional approach to learning. Certain groups view pesantren as a bastion against the expansion of modernism and ongoing globalization.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Peran Kyai Dalam Pemeliharaan Islam Tradisional Di Jawa*, 15–16.

<sup>10</sup>Ani Aryati and A. Suradi, "The Implementation of Religious Tolerance: Study on Pesantren Bali Bina Insani with Bali Hindus Communities," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, no. 2 (2022): 471–90, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i2.646>.

<sup>11</sup>Said Aqiel Siradj et al., *Pesantren Masa Depan: Wacana Pemberdayaan Dan Transformasi Pesantren* (Pustaka Hidayah, 1999), 145.

On the other hand, the pesantren leadership adhering to traditional practices is considered incompatible with contemporary democratic principles.<sup>12</sup> The pesantren leadership uses the charismatic authority of a kiai, thus being seen as feudalistic. Nevertheless, *kitab kuning* shows pesantren's extraordinary level of independence in social interactions that transcend its boundaries, even surpassing institutions that claim to be independent.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, although classified as a social-religious elite, kiais have a populist ethos that fosters unique relationships with the lower strata of society, posing a challenge for institutions officially referred to as "the people" or "society" to emulate. Meanwhile, especially in Java, pesantrens are usually exclusively owned by individual kiai-ulama groups, making them vulnerable to being seen as a form of nepotism.<sup>14</sup>

In areas outside Java, such as South Sulawesi, a pesantren is usually not owned by a kiai. A kiai or anrégurutta is the primary entity responsible for initiating or supporting the construction of the pesantren curriculum. The government and local entrepreneurs typically provide the pesantren with land, buildings, and educational equipment. A foundation is established to oversee the administration of the pesantren, with its management consisting of scholars, officials, traders, and local community leaders.<sup>15</sup>

According to Martin van Bruinessen, a Dutch scholar who has extensively studied pesantrens, these institutions have significant potential to foster civil society and promote democracy in

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<sup>12</sup>Yayan RAHTIKAWATIE et al., "Investigating The Role of Religious Leadership at Indonesia's Islamic Boarding Schools in The Sustainability of School Management," *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 21, no. 96 (2021): 51–65, <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2021.96.4>.

<sup>13</sup>Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Peran Kyai Dalam Pemeliharaan Islam Tradisional Di Jawa*, 16.

<sup>14</sup>Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Peran Kyai Dalam Pemeliharaan Islam Tradisional Di Jawa*, 16.

<sup>15</sup>Claire-Marie Hefner, "Models of Achievement: Muslim Girls and Religious Authority in a Modernist Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 4 (2016): 564–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1229266>.

Indonesia due to their independence and large support base.<sup>16</sup> Van Bruinessen argues that while pesantrens exhibit patterns of democratic relations in their dynamic movements, it is unreasonable to anticipate village democracy emerging from pesantrens. He further explains that the kiai-ulamas in pesantrens are seen as authoritative and influential figures, yet the qualities of charisma and democracy do not align.<sup>17</sup>

Fajar Falakh presents a distinct perspective on the kiai's position and role. He asserts that kiai can function as intermediaries and facilitators, bridging the gap between the poorer strata of society and the government or external entities.<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz refers to ulama as cultural intermediaries, highlighting their role as mediators between society and ulama.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Hiroko Horikhoshi emphasizes kiai as catalysts for social transformation due to their strong power and charismatic influence.<sup>20</sup> According to Michael Walzer, autonomous and accountable relationships and associations are essential components of civil society. As a result, kiai can influence and shape civil society in the political realm and other domains.<sup>21</sup>

According to Ubeidillah and Abdul Razak, civil society must possess several key characteristics. These characteristics include a free public space, democracy, tolerance, pluralism, and social justice.<sup>22</sup> A free public space is a publicly accessible area designed for the expression of thoughts. In this open and accessible public

<sup>16</sup>RAHTIKAWATIE et al., "Investigating The Role of Religious Leadership at Indonesia's Islamic Boarding Schools in The Sustainability of School Management."

<sup>17</sup>MMartin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren Dan Tarekat*, Revision (Gading Publishing, 2012), 5.

<sup>18</sup>Muhammad Fajrul Falaakh, "Nahdlatul Ulama Dan Masyarakat Sipil Di Indonesia," in *Islam Dan Masyarakat Sipil Di Asia Tenggara*, ed. Mitsuo Nakamura et al. (ISEAS, 2001), 10.

<sup>19</sup>Clifford Geertz, "Kijaji Jawa: Peran Perantara Kebudayaan Yang Berubah," *Studi Komparatif Dalam Masyarakat Dan Sejarah* 2, no. 2 (1960): 15.

<sup>20</sup>Hiroko Horikoshi, *Kiai Dan Perubahan Sosial*, Translatio, ed. Umar Basalim and Andy Muarly Sunrawa (P3M, 1987), 30.

<sup>21</sup>Michael Walzer, "Civil Society Theory," in *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society* (Springer, 1991), 10.

<sup>22</sup>A. Ubaidillah and Abdul Rozak, *Pancasila, Demokrasi, HAM, Dan Masyarakat Madani* (Premadia Group, 2016), 225.

domain, individuals of equal status can engage in political discussions and practical exchanges without facing any forms of distortion or concern. Arendt and Habermas emphasize this prerequisite. Furthermore, a public space can be characterized as an area where individuals, as members of the public, have unrestricted access to all public activities and events. Individuals have a right to engage in actions involving the independent expression of their viewpoints, forming associations, gathering together, and disseminating information to the general public.<sup>23</sup> The existence of a free public space must be prioritized. The denial of accessible public space in civil society allows tyrannical and authoritarian rulers to silence citizens' rights to express their desires for the common good.<sup>24</sup>

Social capital is a form of capital that influences the actions of individuals and groups within a social context. Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as actual and potential resources associated with the ownership of networks of institutional relationships that are mutually recognized and acknowledged. In this context, social capital refers to the social relationships and benefits associated with membership in these networks.

Robert D. Putnam, in his study of democracy and institutional effectiveness in Italy, asserts that social capital—encompassing trust, norms, and networks—is crucial for fostering mutually beneficial cooperation in society. In societies with high social capital, citizens tend to be more engaged in social and political activities, exhibiting higher levels of participation in public life.

In Pesantren Annuqayah, social capital is present in the form of close relationships between kiais, santris, alumni, and the surrounding community. Trust in kiais as a moral and spiritual authority becomes the central pillar in the social structure of the pesantren. A kiai not only serves as a teacher of religious knowledge but also as a mediator of conflicts, a moral guide, and a role model in social and political decision-making. The charisma

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<sup>23</sup>Ubaidillah and Rozak, *Pancasila, Demokrasi, HAM, Dan Masyarakat Madani*, 225.

<sup>24</sup>Robert O. Wyatt et al., "Bridging the Spheres: Political and Personal Conversation in Public and Private Spaces," *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 1 (2000): 71–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02834.x>.

and status of a kiai become the center of gravity that unites various political viewpoints within the pesantren.

This social capital facilitates high social cohesion, differentiating political choices among santris and alumni without causing disintegration or conflict. Different political choices are viewed as an expression of citizen responsibility, rather than a threat to community unity. For example, in the last few general elections, the alumni of Pesantren Annuqayah were involved in various political parties while maintaining communication and solidarity as part of the pesantren's extended family.

The values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* taught in the pesantren also strengthen political ethics encompassing politeness, inclusiveness, and deliberation. These ethics reinforce the belief that politics is not just about power, but also a means of advocating for communal values and social justice. Within this framework, social capital in Pesantren Annuqayah supports political engagement and shapes a political character that is ethical and oriented towards the common good.

While social capital theory emphasizes social structures and networks, the phenomenological approach provides space to understand the subjective meanings held by social actors. Alfred Schutz states that understanding the social world must be built from within through the direct experiences of the actors. Phenomenology focuses on how individuals interpret, experience, and live in social reality on a daily basis.

This research employs a phenomenological approach to understand how the kiai, santris, and alumni of Pesantren Annuqayah interpret their involvement in politics. For most members of the pesantren, politics is not something foreign or contradictory to religious values. On the contrary, political involvement is seen as a part of social and spiritual responsibility. It is evident from the attitude of the kiai, who do not prohibit their santris from being active in any political party as long as they maintain the morals and ethics of the pesantren.

This political involvement is not the result of doctrine or structural mobilization but individual and collective reflections on the pesantren's role in society. Through in-depth interviews, some alumni stated that they chose to join certain parties because they

felt that the pesantren's values could be advocated through political channels. Some saw their involvement as a form of social service rooted in the pesantren education, emphasizing the importance of caring for others and social justice.

In this political context, the relationship between kiais and santris is dialogical, not merely hierarchical. Santris and alumni continue to respect kiais as a reference for values, while having autonomy in determining their political choices. Trust and communication are keys to maintaining harmony amidst differences. This phenomenon indicates a new dynamic in power relations within a pesantren, where authority is not used to dictate political choices but to guide and uphold political morality.

Phenomenology helps us understand that the political involvement of pesantren citizens cannot be reduced to mere statistical numbers or electoral preferences. Behind these political actions lie dimensions of meanings, values, and life experiences that shape their political orientation. Thus, Pesantren Annuqayah demonstrates that pesantren-based political practices are meaningful and reflective, not merely a pragmatic exercise of power.

### **Pesantren Annuqayah as a Model of Political Involvement Based on *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* Values**

In Pesantren Annuqayah, every individual has access to a public space where they are free to express their opinions about politics. Pesantren Annuqayah residents participate actively in various political parties. Kiai Ilyas is active in Masyumi, Kiai Basyir in PKB, Kiai Warits in PPP, and Kiai Mahfurdz in PBB. However, Kiai Ishomuddin is not affiliated with any party and is only active in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). It exhibits an open and easily accessible public space within Pesantren Annuqayah, designed for political discussions and debate. K.H. Hanif Hasan stated,

"Kiai Ilyas, a steadfast kiai, remained with Masyumi from the beginning until his death because he was a student of K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari Tebuireng, who became a member of the Masyumi Party's Syuro Council. Before Kiai Ilyas responded to Kiai Wahid Hasyim's letter to apologize that he would not leave the Masyumi Party, Kiai Wahid Hasyim died in an accident in December 1959."

According to K.H. Hanif Hasan, Kiai Ilyas's political stance reflects a moral commitment and strong principles that are not bound by political pragmatism. Even when faced with important decisions, he prioritized unity among the people and ideological loyalty. The letter from Kiai Wahid Hasyim inviting Kiai Ilyas to join the NU Party was not answered immediately because he wanted to convey his apology respectfully. However, before he could send a response, Kiai Wahid Hasyim passed away due to an accident.

This narrative emphasizes that Kiai Ilyas's political approach is not merely institutional or partisan but based on the pesantren's values and ethics. It is a model that remains relevant in pesantren politics today, where pluralism of political choices can still operate within the framework of unity and Islamic morals. His passing marked the end of a significant era in the political involvement of pesantren based on values and principles, not just electoral interests. This exemplary behavior is inherited as critical, independent, and socially ethical attitudes in pesantren political education.

K.H. Hanif Hasan, the kiai of the pesantren for females in Latee, is also known for promoting a polite and open political understanding based on *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* values. From the social capital theory, these cross-alumni relationships create a strong network of solidarity amidst the diversity of political choices. Meanwhile, their involvement in political parties is phenomenologically based on meaningful personal experiences—not merely practical strategies, but a form of devotion to the values inherited from the pesantren. It aligns with his statement below,

“The main moral message from the life journey of Kiai Ilyas is the courage for upholding principles in high-pressure situations while maintaining harmony and etiquette in differences. The majority of political currents did not easily sweep away Kiai Ilyas, nor did he sever ties with other groups or figures. He stood for the values of honesty, independence, and loyalty to the trust of religious leadership. He also respected all party groups, so that this teaching is now applied in this pesantren as a democratic form of the pesantren.”

The characteristics depicted in Annuqayah Pesantren are one of the traits of a civil society, which is defined by its democratic

nature. Democracy is a system that encourages the exchange of ideas and fosters discussions within civil society while carrying out routine activities that involve engagement with its environment.<sup>25</sup>

Democracy refers to the ability of society to engage in respectful and considerate interactions with the broader community, regardless of ethnicity, skin color, or religion. Some scholars specializing in civil society have proposed these essential conditions for democracy. Democracy is a necessary prerequisite for the formation of civil society. The focus on democracy in this context encompasses several dimensions of political, social, cultural, educational, and economic fields. Despite their differing political tendencies, the absence of conflict among political parties within the Pesantren Annuqayah community indicates that political democratization has been successfully implemented and functions effectively.<sup>26</sup>

Hazmi Basyir explains two main benefits of the plural political model in Pesantren Annuqayah. First, this pluralism fosters awareness that differences in political attitudes are a natural part of democratic life. Second, this diversity educates students and alumni to uphold harmony in differences by respecting one another and avoiding fanaticism towards any particular party. He stated,

“The multiparty phenomenon in Pesantren Annuqayah has at least two benefits. First, differences in political attitudes are necessary. Second, it provides wisdom not to argue or to remain harmonious in differences.”

Tolerance towards differences is the third characteristic that defines a civil society. Tolerance is a mindset cultivated in society to foster mutual respect and appreciation for the actions of others. This tolerance level enables individuals to recognize and appreciate the perspectives and actions of diverse community groups. As defined by Nurcholish Majid, tolerance conveys teachings and the responsibility to practice those teachings. If

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<sup>25</sup>Abdul Karim et al., “Spiritual Leadership Behaviors in Religious Workplace: The Case of Pesantren,” *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, May 27, 2022, 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2076285>.

<sup>26</sup>Karim et al., “Spiritual Leadership Behaviors in Religious Workplace: The Case of Pesantren,” 226.

tolerance leads to harmonious social interactions among different groups, the outcome should be interpreted as “wisdom” or “benefit” derived from the successful application of accurate teachings. In Annuqayah Pesantren, tolerance towards political party diversity is highly valued. Kiai Hasyim said,

“Kiai Hazmi Basyir shared an interesting story regarding the 1999 election, in which, although K.H. A. Waris Ilyas was the Chairman of the DPC of PPP and the kiai of the pesantren, he did not force his students to vote for his party. Five of his students were elected as members of the Sumenep Regional House of Representatives from PKB. In formal forums such as faction meetings or plenary sessions, the students still showed respect to the kiai even though they came from different parties. There was never a fatwa or policy that discredited students because of their differing political choices.”

Political pluralism is even evident within Kiai Ilyas’s family. One of his sons, K.H. A. Waris Ilyas, is the Chairman of the DPC of PPP and has served as the Deputy Chairman of the Sumenep Regency DPRD. Although K.H. A. Waris Ilyas participated in the PKB’s declaration in Sumenep, he remains steadfast in the PPP. This diversity does not create tension because personal political choices are respected and political human rights are guaranteed.

Azyumardi Azra further emphasizes that civil society encompasses more than just pro-democracy movements. Civil society also includes high living standards and *tamaddun* (cultural refinement and politeness). Politeness requires tolerance, particularly the individual’s readiness to accept various political perspectives and social attitudes.<sup>27</sup>

A deep understanding of pluralism is fundamental to building a civil society. Pluralism means creating a social structure that values and accepts differences in everyday life. To understand pluralism, one must acknowledge and accept the existence of a diverse society and be willing to view diversity as a beneficial attribute and a divine blessing. At Annuqayah Pesantren, pluralism is also practiced. Kiai Afif Hasan stated,

“The historical roots of political pluralism in Pesantren Annuqayah can be traced back to Kiai Ilyas, known for his egalitarian approach to differing

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<sup>27</sup>Azyumardi Azra, *Menuju Masyarakat Madani; Gagasan, Fakta, Dan Tantangan* (Remaja Rosdakarya, 1999), 100.

political choices. Kiai Ilyas has been active in the Masyumi Party since 1950, following the Yogyakarta Congress, which established Masyumi as the primary political platform for Muslims. Nevertheless, Kiai Ilyas did not impose his choice on his brothers. When asked by K.H. Wahid Hasyim to form an NU Party in Sumenep, Kiai Ilyas politely declined and even encouraged his younger siblings to participate in NU. This attitude demonstrates personal steadfastness as well as structural openness to other parties.”

Nurcholish Madjid argues that pluralism is essential for the formation of a civil society. He believes that pluralism embraces diversity while maintaining a respectful and polite approach. Pluralism is crucial for ensuring human safety, as it involves the application of oversight and balancing mechanisms to maintain stability.<sup>28</sup> Madjid emphasizes the need to adopt a receptive mindset towards others in a pluralistic society, which refers to a culture characterized by diversity rather than homogeneity. Furthermore, a pluralistic society is indeed a divine command and a deliberate creation of God for humanity. There is no single, uniform, egalitarian, and consistent civilization.<sup>29</sup> Abrori said,

“Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) is not a spontaneous decision but rather based on a reflection of political momentum and the intention to counter stigma. Political struggle can be conducted from both outside and within the system, and 2019 is the ideal time to build the momentum. One strong motivation is to change the perception that PDIP is an ‘*abangan*’ party, far from the pesantren world. He carries the spirit of ‘PDI Syariah’ as a form of renewal and a new approach to the party from the perspective of pesantren.”

In Pesantren Annuqayah, practical politics is applied. In this context, there is a connection between the community and specific characters. For example, when a former student, now involved in PDIP, sought advice or a fatwa, he approached two kiai of Pesantren Annuqayah. The two kiai allowed their alumni to be active in PDIP, provided they uphold the principles of the pesantren and *aswaja*. Certain attitudes become the foundation for forming the pesantren community in politics. Hazmi Basyir stated,

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<sup>28</sup>Nurcholish Madjid, *Kebebasan Beragama Dan Pluralisme Dalam Islam, Passing Over: Melintas Batas Agama* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama dan Paramadina, 2001), 75.

<sup>29</sup>Madjid, *Kebebasan Beragama Dan Pluralisme Dalam Islam, Passing Over: Melintas Batas Agama*, 76.

“The political freedom granted by the kiais to the students and alumni is a tangible form of the pesantren’s contribution to strengthening civil society. The kiais of Pesantren Annuqayah do not implement formal programs for socializing democratic values but organically convey the values of *rahmatan lil ‘alamin, aswaja*, and nationalism through *halaqah*, social gatherings, and other social meetings. This movement is unstructured yet strong because it grows from the kiais’ personal value awareness.”

Justice is realizing a fair and proportional distribution of rights and responsibilities for all individuals, encompassing all aspects of life. It facilitates the absence of monopoly and the consolidation of one life aspect within one community group. Essentially, the community has the same rights to obtain policies set by the government (authorities). Pesantren Annuqayah fosters justice by creating a multiparty pesantren that avoids internal conflicts. Asy’ari described,

“The practice of civil society in Pesantren Annuqayah grows naturally and not by design. The kiais are not structurally assigned to convey democratic values or empower the community. However, they actively provide enlightenment through various forums, such as social gathering invitations, *halaqah*, and study sessions.”

Furthermore, Asy’ari revealed an interesting phenomenon, the informal “political barter” among the kiais of the pesantren. For example, K.H. Waris Ilyas allows his students to support PKB. In contrast, the students of K.H. Basyir Abdullah Sajjad, under the leadership of the Chairman of the PKB Syura Council, are directed to support PPP. This pattern shows that despite party differences, the kiais still respect each other and create ethical coordination across parties.

Four main reasons serve as a unifying force amidst the political diversity in Pesantren Annuqayah. First, all parties understand that parties are merely tools for social struggle, not the goal. Second, they remain steadfast in the values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah*. Third, parties are used as a medium for Islamic preaching. Fourth, all activities remain within the framework of Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). This principle becomes a social and political consensus that maintains the stability of relationships among the kiais, alumni, and students.

In *aswaja*, the attitude of fairness is referred to as the value of *i'tidal*, which means being impartial and fair according to one's primary duties and roles.<sup>30</sup> The attitude of *i'tidal*, which means maintaining balance, is evident in the pesantren environment when its members consistently act reasonably and adhere to their respective roles and circumstances. He stated,

"It can be seen in the 2019 Sumenep Regional Election, where Kiai Sholahuddin was initially designated as the candidate for regent from PPP. However, along the way, PPP nominated Kiai Fikri as the vice-regent candidate. In response to this situation, the alumni chose to remain silent and waited for directions from the management of Pesantren Annuqayah. The alumni have adopted an *i'tidal* mentality even though they had previously given full support to Kiai Sholahuddin."

Experts have identified several key characteristics of the Pesantren Annuqayah community in practical politics. These characteristics, both in attitude and action, indicate that the pesantren has successfully built a civilized society or community in politics.

Based on the explanations of several experts regarding the relationship between pesantren and civil society, the authors agree with the views of Fajrul Falakh, Clifford Geertz, and Hiroko Horikhoshi, who suggest that the role and function of kiai in society can contribute to the development of a civil society in all fields.<sup>31</sup> The example of Pesantren Annuqayah's success in civil society development is its achievement of the Kalpataru Award from President Suharto in 1981 for its environmental preservation efforts. Pesantren Annuqayah strives to foster a civil Islamic society by offering education that prioritizes faith, piety, and noble characters. This education is based on a firm adherence to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, as understood by *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. The micro perspective encompasses those who possess faith, piety, and noble characters, as reflected in

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<sup>30</sup>Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Al-Tawassut Wa-l I'tidāl: The NU and Moderatism in Indonesian Islam," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 40, nos. 5–6 (2012): 564–81, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685314-12341262>.

<sup>31</sup>Hasse Jubba et al., "Reorienting Moral Education for Millennial Muslims: The Changing Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia," *The Islamic Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2021): 423–41.

humility and the ability to integrate general and religious knowledge through the teachings of the Ahl as-Sunnah Shafi'i School.

Pesantren Annuqayah is far from the city. Van Bruinessen argues that while the pesantren shows a dynamic tendency towards democratic relations, it cannot be relied upon to foster village democracy. He explains that the kiai-ulamas in a pesantren hold significant power and charismatic qualities. However, he affirms that charisma and democracy cannot be combined. Nevertheless, their influence extends beyond the religious realm and contributes to the development of civil society.

The Pesantren Annuqayah community tends to have several political parties within the political sphere. However, there are no records of internal or external conflicts, which indicate the community's success in building a cohesive and organized community.<sup>32</sup> Lyda Judson Hanifan argues that the success of community groups in achieving their goals is directly related to their ownership of social capital. Social capital encompasses more than just assets or tangible goods; it also includes collaborative relationships between different groups or between groups and individuals.<sup>33</sup> According to Putnam, forming trust establishes cooperation between individuals and groups. The success of community groups is closely tied to their ownership of social capital, the foundation upon which their achievements are built.<sup>34</sup>

Pesantren Annuqayah relies on social capital in promoting the democratization of political parties. Social capital is manifest in the presence of a charismatic kiai, Ilyas Syarqawi, who serves as a political reference. In addition, the pesantren emphasizes the application of *aswaja* values and fosters strong bonds of friendship among its community members. The pesantren facilitates various meetings, including regular gatherings and assemblies. These

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<sup>32</sup>Erwan Nurtawab and Dedi Wahyudi, "Restructuring Traditional Islamic Education in Indonesia: Challenges for Pesantren Institution," *Studia Islamika* 29, no. 1 (2022): 55–81, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v29i1.17414>.

<sup>33</sup>Lyda Junson Hanifan, "The Rural School Community Center," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 67 (1916): 130–38.

<sup>34</sup>Robert D Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65–78, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002>.

values are transformed into social capital, enabling Pesantren Annuqayah to maturely cultivate its members' ability to respond to theoretical and practical political processes.

The Pesantren Annuqayah community possesses three fundamental qualities in their approach and behavior towards practical politics: openness, tolerance, and a commitment to justice, as seen in their perspectives. The Pesantren Annuqayah community also prioritizes the welfare and ethical behavior of the pesantren over individual or collective interests. Moreover, enduring family customs play a crucial role in fostering a politically literate civil society that effectively mitigates potential sources of division. The absence of conflict among kiai, students, and alumni is a success in itself, inseparable from the training provided to the students. Kiai Ramdhan stated,

“Students need to be equipped with civil political education. In reality, Pesantren Annuqayah scholars are active in various parties, including PKB, PPP, PBB, PKS, PDIP, and PAN. Without an adequate understanding, students can become entangled in conflicts or ideological stigmas. Political education helps students understand that differences are part of Pesantren Annuqayah’s history.”

Pesantren Annuqayah has internalized high social capital to maintain political diversity without sacrificing unity. Through a phenomenological approach, it was found that political harmony is not due to the absence of differences but because the values of the pesantren create a social space that tolerates differences as a form of democratic maturity. Annuqayah is a real-life example of a pesantren as a participatory and tolerant civil society, rooted in the political realm. Below is a table regarding the involvement of Pesantren Annuqayah’s kiai in political parties.

**Table 1**  
**The Political Party Affiliation of Kiai**  
**at Pesantren Annuqayah**

No	Name	Political Party	Area	Description
1	K.H. Ilyas	Masyumi	Lubangsa Raya	
2	K.H. Amir Ilyas		Al-Amir	Not active in political parties

No	Name	Political Party	Area	Description
3	K.H. Ashiem Ilyas	Masyumi	Kebun Jeruk	Not active in political parties
4	Drs. K.H. A. Warits Ilyas	PPP	Lubangsa Raya	Chairman of the DPC PPP Sumenep Regency, period 2000-2005, and 2005-2010 Member of the Sumenep Regency DPRD, PPP Faction
				Member of the MPR RI
5	K.H. Basyir AS	PKB	Latee	Chairman of the Syuro Council of DPC PKB Sumenep Regency,
6	K.H. Ishomuddin AS	PKB	Lubangsa Selatan	Management of DPC PKB Sumenep Regency,
7	K.H. Mahfud Husaini	PBB	Sawajarin	
8	K.H. Tsabit Khazin	PKB	Sawajarin	Chairman of the Syuro Council of DPC PKB Sumenep Regency, Member of the DPR RI PKB Faction Period 1999-2004
9	K. Hazmi Basyir	PKB	Latee	Management of DPC PKB Sumenep Regency, Member of the Sumenep Regency DPRD, PKB faction for the period 1999-2004
10	K.H. Muhsin Amir	PKU	Al-Amir	Member of the Sumenep Regency DPRD for the period 1999-2004
11	K.H. Mutam Mukhtar	PKB	Al-Idrisy	Management of DPC PKB Sumenep Regency,

No	Name	Political Party	Area	Description
12	Moh. Asy'ari Muthhar	PPP	Al-Idrisy	Management of DPC PPP Sumenep Regency for the period 2020-2025 Member of the Sumenep Regency DPRD, PPP faction for the period 2024-2029
13	K.H. Sholahuddin A. Warits	PPP		Chairman of DPC PPP Sumenep for the period 2015-2020
14	K.H. Busiri Ali Mufi	PK		
15	K.H. Muqsith Idris	PPP	Latee	Chairman of the Sharia Council of DPC PPP Sumenep 2015-2020, 2020-2025
16	K.H. Syafi'ie Ansori	PPP		Treasurer of DPC PPP Sumenep for the period 2015-2020 Member of the Sumenep DPRD for the period 1999-2004
17	Ahmad Majdi Tsabit	PKB	Sawajarin	Management of DPC PKB

The data above show that the pesantren has become a dynamic social space regarding political involvement. Several key figures from various pesantren branches, such as Lubangsa Raya, Al-Amir, Latee, Sawajarin, and Al-Idrisy, are active in multiple political parties, including PKB, PPP, PBB, and PKU. Some even hold pivotal positions, such as K.H. A. Warits Ilyas and K.H. Tsabit Khazin, who serve as members of the DPR/MPR and Moh. Asy'ari Muthhar, who will have been active in the Regional House of Representatives from 2024 to 2029.

Interestingly, there are also figures from large pesantren families who choose not to be directly active in parties, such as K.H. Amir Ilyas and K.H. Ashiem Ilyas. It shows the freedom to

determine political stances and a strong tolerance for differing political choices within the pesantren environment.

Pesantrens have been essential institutions in Indonesia for centuries, especially in Java.<sup>35</sup> These institutions have significantly influenced the national education system and contributed to the development of high-quality human resources in the predominantly Muslim nation.<sup>36</sup> This setting implicitly indicates that pesantrens have shaped national character and morality.

Notably, pesantren-affiliated higher education institutions (PaHEIs) have endeavored to confront unfavorable preconceptions linked to religious institutions. They have achieved this by carefully integrating secular and religious expertise to cultivate bilingual, open-minded graduates with a global perspective and a robust dedication to community service.<sup>37</sup> This method may indirectly enhance political awareness by promoting critical thinking and involvement with broader societal concerns.

The context suggests that pesantrens have a significant influence on the character and perspective of their students; however, it does not explicitly examine the relationship between these institutions and political consciousness in East Java. By integrating religious teaching with contemporary curricula and promoting community involvement, pesantrens may indirectly enhance the political awareness of their students. Nonetheless, additional research on political consciousness inside East Java's pesantrens is essential to formulate more conclusive insights.

This gap in understanding presents an opportunity for future studies to explore the specific mechanisms through which pesantren education may generally shape political attitudes and

<sup>35</sup>Imam Syafe'i, "PONDOK PESANTREN: Lembaga Pendidikan Pembentukan Karakter," *Al-Tadzkiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2017): 61, <https://doi.org/10.24042/atjpi.v8i1.2097>.

<sup>36</sup>Ahmad Bukhori Muslim et al., "Indonesian Pesantren -Affiliated Higher Education: Universal Islamic Values to Develop Locally Engaged but Globally Oriented Multilingual Graduates," *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 29, no. 1 (2024): 138–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2023.2285633>.

<sup>37</sup>Bukhori Muslim et al., "Indonesian Pesantren -Affiliated Higher Education: Universal Islamic Values to Develop Locally Engaged but Globally Oriented Multilingual Graduates."

engagement among students in East Java. Research can involve surveys, interviews, or ethnographic observations to capture how religious education intersects with political socialization in this context. Additionally, comparative studies between pesantrens and non-pesantren-educated youth could provide valuable insights into the unique contributions of these institutions to the development of political consciousness in the region. Overall, this narrative affirms that Pesantren Annuqayah has successfully managed the diversity of political affiliations peacefully, based on the values of knowledge, social trust, and a strong network among its alumni.

## Conclusion

Pesantren Annuqayah aims to contribute to the realization of a civil society through political democratization. It is achieved by adhering firmly to three fundamental values. First, the pesantren views Kiai Ilyas Syarqawi as a political figure who guides them. Second, it prioritizes civil values within the Pesantren Annuqayah environment, in line with its vision and mission to produce an academically knowledgeable and morally upright society, rooted in the teachings of *Alh al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah*. The pesantren fosters a tradition of closeness between kiais and alumni. The emergence of a civil society in the pesantren environment is driven by three fundamental values: openness, tolerance, and fair partisanship. Additionally, the interests of the pesantren are prioritized over those of individuals and groups. Pesantren Annuqayah can mitigate and resolve political conflicts among its students.

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