

## The *Tarekat* Network and Political Determination of Nahdlatul Ulama

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper aims to fill the gap in the study of tarekat (Sufi orders) and politics in Indonesia. It specifically wants to reveal the determination of the tarekat network and movement within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and their influence on the socio-political dynamics of this organization. The hypothesis that underlies this paper is that tarekat not only has religious potential, but also holds social, political, economic, and cultural potential. Socio-religiously, tarekat becomes a medium for instilling and transmitting religious values; it becomes a transmitter for ethical and spiritual values in society. Meanwhile, institutionally, tarekat is also a vehicle for articulating social interests and power. In this sense, the tarekat figures are not only active in religious activities but also able to form and be involved in the political arena. They created undercurrents to promote democratization and even collaborated with power holders to control political agendas and respond to socio-religious issues. The 2019 electoral political contestation shows that NU has succeeded in becoming the channel for democratic forces when competing with the forces of Islamism. Next, this study also indicates that the tarekat networks, as a force that can gather spiritual and political support, make NU a socio-religious organization that helps determine politics in Indonesia. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework of social capital, this paper shows that the tarekat movement, as a religious institution in dialectic with social and political situations, will be primarily determined by habitus, capital, and arena. In general, these findings imply that the conception of tarekat often seen as apolitical mysticism needs to be reviewed and reconceptualized since, in fact, it is socio-politically relevant.*

**Keywords:** *Tarekat, Nahdlatul Ulama, General Election, Social Capital*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sufism and tarekat (Arabic: thoriqoh) in Indonesia had existed long before the country was founded, especially since the 16/17th century (Azra, 2013; Bruinessen, 1999; Suryanegara, 1995, 159). Meanwhile, as a social phenomenon and an organized political force, tarekat confederation has slowly emerged since the 1970s. Until the 1990s, this phenomenon had not attracted the attention of scholars, compared to their attention to the phenomenon of Islamic revival since the 1970s. The attention and study of these scholars have created a view that has helped encourage Indonesia to have a modernist orientation because of its compatibility with Suharto's authoritarian development goals (1966-1998). This kind of attention increased in the 1990s, especially when Indonesian Muslims showed extraordinary zeal, as can be seen in daily piety, worship rituals, recitation of the Qur'an, use of Arabic, Islamic education, support for sharia law, da'wah, construction of mosques, and various Islamic cultural festivals. Julia Day Howell (2001) gave a little attention to Sufism and said that, in the midst of the revival of Islam in Indonesia, Sufism appears in

various forms of religiosity and Islamic thought. Howell writes, “Like the scripturalist forms of Modernism and Islamist ideology originating in the Near East, Sufism attracted great interest among students, intellectuals, and artists of the 1970s” (2001: 710). This Howell's account, which pays attention to the symptoms of Sufism, remains in a modernist framework.

On the other hand, studies on the relationship between Islam and politics (state) emphasize the compatibility aspect between Islam and democracy (Effendy, 1998; Abdillah, 2015), as well as the relationship between community and democracy (Stepan, 2000). Countries with a Muslim majority have become the object of case studies related to the role of religion and the state, such as Senegal, Turkey, and Indonesia, which implement electoral democracy. These countries have developed a mutually beneficial pattern of tolerance relationships between religious leaders and state authorities, which is one of the prerequisites for democracy and secularism. Caseri's study (2014) shows that the nationalization of Islam in several countries, such as in Tunisia and Turkey, has given the said religion a hegemonic status in society. Meanwhile, in contrast to Senegal and Indonesia, Tunisia and Turkey face serious obstacles to democratization. This notion is indicated by the provision of legal privileges for Muslims that other community groups cannot enjoy.

Meanwhile, as a country with a Muslim majority and the Pancasila as the basis of the state, Indonesia is considered successful in creating a democratic order. Later, this case raises a widely held hypothesis that a Muslim-majority state has the ability to democratize if the state can ensure the prerequisites for secularism; that is, the state maintains an equal distance from all religions. However, relative tolerance and the prerequisites for secularism are not the only factors that can explain the role of Muslim societies in promoting democratization. Although a country has been relatively consistent in implementing tolerance and maintaining equal distance between all religious groups, in reality, there are variations in the attitude of Muslim groups towards democratic and authoritarian regimes. It is possible for an Islamic political force to shift political attitudes by withdrawing support for authoritarian regimes and mobilizing power in order to create a space for political contestation, or, conversely, supporting authoritarianism and ignoring democracy.

This phenomenon has given rise to other analyses in looking at the dynamics of attitudes and political orientations of Muslim society and resulting in a new taxonomy of Muslim society based on the chosen political orientation. Asep Bayat's (2007) study, for example, finds different models of Islamism and post-Islamism in Islamic political movements in Egypt and Iran. Baker (2003) optimistically calls the new Islamist orientation in Egypt 'Islam without fear' indicated by the transformation of Islamists from a radical orientation to a moderate orientation. In contrast to Bayat and Baker, Tibbi (2012) reminded of the need to clearly distinguish between Islam and Islamism in order to avoid excessive optimism in viewing the changes in the strategy of political Islamist groups. Based on a study of various Muslim countries for three decades, according to Tibbi, Islamism has become a political ideology based on the latest interpretation of Islamic law. Therefore, apart from instrumental changes, Islamism has the same basic view and is difficult to change. This notion can be seen from his views on Islam and democracy, jihadism, sharia law, constitutional order, and the spirit of religious and cultural purification. Further, suspicion of the rise of Islamism has prompted several studies (Jamil, 2021; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018).

One thing that has escaped the attention of scholars is the tarekat movements and networks that have strongly determined contemporary Indonesian politics amid the

struggle for religious populism and Islamism in Indonesia. This article attempts to fill in the gaps in the study of Sufism, especially tarekat, in relation to politics in contemporary Indonesia. This paper aims to reveal the tarekat networks and movements within Nahdlatul Ulama and their significance in the contestation of contemporary Indonesian politics. The hypothesis underlying this paper is that the tarekat not only has religious potential, but also holds social, political, economic, and cultural potential. Socio-religiously, tarekat becomes a medium for instilling and transmitting religious values in the midst of society. Tarekat is a transmitter of ethical and spiritual values. Meanwhile, institutionally, tarekat is also a medium for articulating social interests and power. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1977, 1984, 1992), this paper attempts to analyze the habitus, capital, and arena that help determine the praxis of the tarekat as a religious institution in dialectic with social and political situations.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Relationship between Tarekat and Politics**

The study of the relationship between tarekat and politics has revealed various dimensions, such as tradition, organization, and key figures. Dang's (2017) study, for example, has explored the tradition of love rooted in Sufi piety as a means to draw political boundaries. His study of the largest tarekat in West Africa, the Tijaniyya, explores the liturgical tradition rooted in love poetry as the basis of piety. According to Dang, the Tijaniyya liturgical traditions that are firmly entrenched in Senegal can be used as a way for the Tijaniyya group -through vocal training- to arouse the imagination of incompatibility between spiritual authority and political authority. By paying attention to the vocal style, Dang describes how liturgical poetry that expresses the Sufi cosmology of spiritual unity and transcendent love has been mobilized by the Tijaniyya group to establish differences between culture and politics, to draw boundaries for themselves, and to convey aspirations in terms of direction and form of postcolonial citizenship. Through public musical performances, the construction of this difference is broadcast to a wider audience. With this, the Tijaniyya group competed to increase the political influence of their vocal practice.

Meanwhile, Diallo and Kelly (2016) pay attention to the connection between the Tijaniyya group and power and its impact on democratization in Senegal. For example, Senegal is often used to show that Muslim-majority countries can democratize if the state imposes an equal distance on all religions. Historically, Islam has not had a hegemonic status in the Senegalese legal order. Likewise, national politics demonstrates "twin tolerance," i.e. mutual respect between religious and governmental authorities necessary for democracy. This continuity cannot explain why the tarekat (Sufi order) changed from being a supporter of the one-party authoritarian system in the 1960s until the 1980s to being a supporter of serious electoral contestation in the 1990s. In this context, the economic crisis is driving change. During the structural adjustment of the 1980s, economic shocks weakened the ruling party and prompted it to negotiate democratic elections with political opponents. Reforms increased election uncertainty in the late 1990s and changed the state behavior and religious actors. Abdoulaye Wade broke the president's tradition of neutrality towards religion; he prefers to be a murid (student or follower) of the Tarekat Tijaniyah in the hope of being re-elected by the followers' electorate. Tarekat followers often create siding politics (to oppose or cooperate with the president) or grassroots movements (to denounce government corruption and anti-democratic practices). The history of the "social

contract” suggests why movements are more successful in channeling democratic energies, whereas parties led by Sufis have had limited impact.

Another study was conducted by Salvatore (2018), who provides an analysis of the life and organization of the Sufis as an urban phenomenon, which in its development gave rise to trans-territorial sovereignty. The Sufi brotherhood, according to Salvatore, is at the forefront of proto-globalization that is based on extensive networks in various parts of the world, between metropolitan areas, rural areas, and even nomadic areas. Urban Sufism became a knot in broader circulation with an open pattern of politeness, balanced inner cultivation, communicative skills, and outward etiquette. Salvatore's study also explains how this global politeness is translated into the local language more leniently. In the history of its spread, millenarian universalism, inspired by Sufi holiness, was supported by the centralized sovereignty of the early modern Islamic empire. Sufi's contributions nurtured a cosmopolitan culture and facilitated commercial exchange and intellectual linkages between Europe and China. As Europe rose to global hegemony, the neo-Sufi movement was involved in a state-building process that challenged European colonial presence. Salvatore explores how post-Sufi developments in post-colonial Muslim-majority societies are oriented back to state power and led to the emergence of trans-territorial sovereignty.

The phenomenon of Sufism in Indonesia seems to have also begun to attract the interest of scholars. Notable studies on tarekat in Indonesia are concerned with tarekat and pesantren (Bruinessen, 1995, 1998) and Sufism as an early Islamic channel (Shibab, 2001). Meanwhile, a specific study on tarekat and politics has been carried out by Thohir (2002), focusing on the anti-colonial movement of the Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah in Java. The study of Sufism in contemporary Indonesia focuses on the symptoms of urban Sufism (Howel, 2008, 2018). Endang Turmudi (2003) concluded that the tarekat was used as a vehicle to mobilize the masses for the political interests of the kyai. Like Turmuzi, Mahmud Sujuthi (2001) found that there was a tendency in the political behavior of the *murid* (followers) of the Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah in Jombang during the New Order government that was different, even though they were in the same leadership figure. According to Suyuthi's analysis, the relationship between politics and tarekat can be categorized into three models of socio-political relations, namely accommodative, antagonistic, and moderate.

In the context of contemporary Indonesia, the temporary alliance between Sufis and Islamism in relation to the massive rally in protest of incumbent Jakarta Governor Basuki Cahaya Purnama (Ahok) has become the focus of Michi's (2019) study. Michi's study shows a unique and absurd phenomenon, as seen in the rally. According to Michi, the massive demonstrations organized by the Islamists at the end of 2016 in Jakarta attracted a scholarly debate, especially regarding the increasing influence of Islamists in Indonesia. Michi maintains that members of such Islamic groups in question are still a minority in Indonesia. His examination of Islamic groups can hardly explain why so many middle-class individuals outside Islamist organizations support and take part in the protests. Michi argues that the Islamic leaders intentionally create an atmosphere like a *majlis dhiker* to attract followers of the *dhiker* communities. In this way, ordinary Muslims will be moved to take part. Michi then examined the response of Majelis Rasulullah -the largest Sufi *dhiker* association in Jakarta- to the Anti-Ahok movement. Majelis Rasulullah gave in to its followers' extraordinary demands and pressures who wanted to take part in the political rally. The said majlis announced permission for the members of the *majlis dhiker* to participate in the rally to demote the governor of Jakarta. In this case, although the

relationship between Islamists and Sufis has been conventionally understood as antagonistic, their temporary alliance is still possible in the case of contemporary Indonesia.

From the studies above, it appears that there has been no attention to a confederation of tarekat which brings together various sects of tarekat and, as such, becomes a very broad socio-religious network as in the case of Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah an-Nahdliyyah (abbreviated as JATMAN) in Indonesia.

### **NU and the Confederation of Tarekat**

The process of Islamic development in the Archipelago that lasted for centuries has formed socio-cultural roots that are important for the development of the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, i.e. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The socio-cultural roots in question are pesantren and tarekat. At the pesantren, the *santri* (students of pesantren) learn from the teachers, the kyai, and sometimes the *syekh* of a tarekat. In the pesantren, the kyais hold enormous authority. In the countryside, they have a very strong influence because they become role models in the field of religion and are often advisors in the personal affairs of their followers. Therefore, the kyais' authority can only be taken by other more influential kyais (Jamil, 2005. 97-102).

Through the efforts of a very dynamic figure who had studied in Mecca, i.e. Kyai Abdul Wahab Hasbullah with the support of a well-respected kyai from Jombang named Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari, a network of *santri* communities and tarekat that had been formed during the process of Islamic development until the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century succeeded in establishing Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) on January 31, 1926. NU is now the largest socio-religious organization in Indonesia with followers of around 60 percent of the total Muslims in the country, or equivalent to 87 percent of the total population of 265 million people in 2020. NU's religious basis includes the Qur'an, Sunnah, *ijma*, and *qiyas* which are approached with the school of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah. The school follows the thoughts of Abu Hasan Asy'ari and Abu Manshur al-Maturidi in the field of *aqeedah*, the four schools of thought (Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) in the field of *fiqh*, as well as Imam Junaid al-Baghdadi and Imam Al-Ghazali in the field of *tasawwuf* (Asy'ari, n.d., Munir, 1989: 44). It was clear from the start that although NU accepted popular religious practices, such as the tarekat which was growing rapidly in Indonesia and other parts of the world, it approached them through Islamic orthodoxy. NU's efforts to base and return the tarekat to Islamic orthodoxy were carried out by establishing the confederation of Jam'iyyah Ahl al-Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah.

Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah is the largest confederation in Indonesia and even the world, which was founded in 1957. Its members are mainly composed of kyai tarekat from East Java and Central Java, and most of them are NU people. At the congress held in Semarang in 1979, the word *an-Nahdliyyah* was added to the organization's name, so that it became Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah an-Nahdliyyah (JATMAN). Then, based on the list of tarekat issued by the *Idaroh Aliyah* (highest leadership) of JATMAN in 2018, there are at least 45 tarekats joining this organization. Thus, JATMAN is a confederation of tarekat which is considered *mu'tabar* (legitimate) as a spiritual path according to the standards of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah. The names of the tarekat in the JATMAN confederation are as follows:

**Table List of Tarekat Names that are Members of JATMAN**

No.	Tarekat Names	No.	Tarekat Names	No.	Tarekat Names
1.	Abbasiyah	16.	Idrusiyah	31.	Sa'diyah
2.	Ahmadiyah	17.	Isawiyah	32.	Samaniyah
3.	Akbariyah	18.	Jalwatiyah	33.	Sumbuliyah
4.	Alawiyah	19.	Junaidiyah	34.	Syadziliyah
5.	Baerumiyah	20.	Justiyah	35.	Sya'baniyah
6.	Bakdasiyah	21.	Khodiriyah	36.	Syathoriyah
7.	Bakriyah	22.	Khalidiyah- Naqsabandiyah	37.	Syuhrawiyah
8.	Bayumiyah	23.	Khalwatuyah	38.	Tijaniyah
9.	Buhuriyah	24.	Kubrawiyah	39.	Umariyah
10.	Dasuqiyah	25.	Madbuliyah	40.	Usyaqiyah
11.	Ghozaliyah	26.	Malamiyah	41.	Usmaniyah
12.	Ghoibiyah	27.	Maulawiyah	42.	Uwasiyah
13.	Haddadiyah	28.	Qadiriyah- Naqsabandiyah	43.	Zainiyah
14.	Hamzawiyah	29.	Rifaiyah	44.	Mulazamati wa Qiratul Qur'an
15.	Idrisiyah	30.	Rumiyah	45.	Mulazamatu wa Qiratul Kutub

Source: JATMAN 2018 Mukhtar Report

In addition to accommodating various tarekats, JATMAN has also formed a tarekat body (*lajnah*) for women. The *lajnah* of Muslimat Thoriqiyah is a body within JATMAN whose members consist of Muslim women. Muslimat Thoriqiyah is a guided organization because its members must go through a *bai'at* (oath of allegiance) or through a *mursyid* (teacher) of Muslimat Thoriqiyah; it is not a free organization that accepts just any member. Muslimat Thoriqiyah is internal and puts forward the values of women who follow the path of Sufism and morality. Officially, Muslimat Thoriqiyah was established on the basis of the decision of the Mukhtar X on March 25 to 30 in 2005.

Like its 'parent', the Muslimat Thoriqiyah's vision and mission combine the Indonesian national insight with deep religious passion, as follows: (1) Defending the Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution as the ideology of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. (2) Fostering a love for the homeland and the spirit of nationalism among university students to defend the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. (3) Developing Indonesian national insight among women. (4) Preventing the growth of extremist movements and latentism in society. (5) Preserving the Aswaja-based Islam that is moderate and inclusive under the guidance of the *mursyids*. (6) Instilling heart education among women based on spiritual values through sharia, *tarekat*, *hakikat*, and *ma'rifat*. (7) Following and maintaining the legacy of *salafius sholihin* and *thoriqotul baidho'*. Article 7 of the Muslimat Thoriqiyah' AD/ART (Memorandum and Articles of Association) states that the purpose of this *lajnah* is: "to bring balance between spiritual and intellectual aspects among women and harmony between action and spirituality to form a religious soul, build the nation, and maintain the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia."

In addition to the tarekat body for women, Mahasiswa Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah an-Nahdliyyah (MATAN) has also been declared by JATMAN in the Mukhtar XI at

Pesantren Bululawang, Malang Regency on January 14, 2012. MATAN is a *lajnah mustaqillah* (autonomous body) from JATMAN which has a mission to develop tarekat among youth and teenagers in universities, pesantren, or other educational institutions. The establishment of MATAN is intended as an effort of regeneration in JATMAN. Through MATAN, the *jam'iyah* cadres and the tarekat cadres, who have the ability and organizational skills, intellectual height, good morals, and spiritual depth, are expected to emerge. With such abilities, MATAN cadres are expected to become the jam'iyah cadres who are professional, militant, with integrity, and become tarekat cadres (mursyid) as they aspire to. MATAN now has 15 managements at the regional (provincial) level, 23 branches in the regency/city, 24 commissariats in higher education.

The closeness of the tarekat and the socio-political dynamics seems to have prompted the highest leadership (Idaroh Aliyah) of JATMAN 2018-2013 to state that Jam'iyah Ahlith Tariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyyah is not a political organization, not a political discourse, nor is it a political forum. In his remarks at the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress (Muktamar), Habib Lutfi stated:

“Jam'iyah Ahlith Tariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyyah plays a role in increasing *'ubudiyah* (worship), awareness of religion, awareness of state, and readiness to be led. We, Jam'iyah Ahlith Tariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyyah, are very aware of the weakening of nationalism which has an impact on the weakening of love and sense of belonging to the Republic. From that point, Jam'iyah Ahlith Tariqah al-Mu'tabarah an-Nahdliyyah called for collectively raising patriotism in a non-political way. Everything is for the sake of unity and the strength of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.”

What the JATMAN leader stated above is a form of political commitment at a high level (high politics), or what is often referred to as national politics. In contemporary Indonesia, such a commitment is urgently needed amidst the strengthening symptoms of religious conservatism, radicalism, intolerance, and Islamism that want to replace the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and the Pancasila.

### **Politicization of Tarekat**

Although JATMAN has made efforts to maintain political neutrality, in reality, the involvement of members of the tarekat confederation in political support is practically unavoidable. In the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election, it is obvious that efforts to use religion as an instrument to mobilize mass support can be found. The strengthening of religious populism and identity politics has marginalized other strategic issues, such as the economy and developmental agendas. In this context, Sufism becomes an attractive group for contestants to be capitalized as social capital. The political involvement of the Sufis created a perception that politics in Indonesia was never fully profane. On the other hand, political processes and choices are always intertwined with sacred experience and prophetic practice.

The rally of the “politik dzikir” through *Subuh Berjama'ah* and a series of 212 Movements before and ahead of the 2019 Presidential Election in Indonesia are a surface expression of the politicization of sacred things in contemporary Indonesian life. Behind that, there are actually many events that show the deeper involvement of the forces and movements of Sufism, especially tarekat, in the contestation of democratic politics in Indonesia. When the candidates for the president and the vice president campaigned through an open stage, efforts to raise support from the spiritual ranks were also carried out at the same time even though it often

escaped the public's attention. One of the groups that are active in raising votes among the tarekat is SAMIL (Santri Millennial or the Millennial Santri), or a group of volunteers who support the Presidential Candidate Pair Number 1 Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin. In fact, this volunteer group was directly trained by a highly respected *mursyid* and an elderly cleric named Kyai Haji Abuya Muhtadi Dimyathy Al-Bantani, a *mursyid* of Tarekat Syadziliyah as well as the owner of Pondok Pesantren Ciudahu, Pandeglang Banten.

SAMIL is a large community consisting of *santris*, kyais, and ulama from various tarekat backgrounds. Therefore, the youth volunteers who are members of SAMIL are mostly santri from the tarekat. They come from different tarekat, such as the Naqshabadiyah, Syatariyah, Syadziliyah and others. There is no excessive excitement in the campaign against the presidential and vice-presidential candidates because these Sufis support Jokowi through spiritual movements, such as praying and *dhikir* together guided directly by the *mursyids*. In *dhikir* and prayer forums, the elderly kyais encouraged SAMIL to continue to be united and work together to win Jokowi and Ma'ruf Amin. The *kyai sepuh* (elderly kyais) also control the supporters of the tarekat to prioritize the politics of politeness and dignified ways in campaigning for the incumbent candidate. They forbid hate speech and slander against political opponents. With a reassuring message on occasion at the Mahadria Hotel Serang Banten on 4 February 2019, the Mursyid Abuya Muhtadi stated, "SAMIL that contains youth groups must help win Pak Jokowi and KH. Ma'ruf Amin in polite ways, not in bad ways."

According to Fuad al-Author, SAMIL coordinator and Naqshabadiyah Tarekat activist, SAMIL gathers millennial students from various parts of Indonesia. In addition to carrying out spiritual movements to support Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin, SAMIL members are also actively campaigning through social media. They campaigned by spreading memes and good content to ward off hoaxes that attacked Jokowi-Ma'ruf. However, they do not want to be called buzzers on the grounds that they still position themselves as santri who hold Islamic ideology and critical views. For Fuad and his friends, the spiritual movement to support Jokowi-Ma'ruf has a clear basis and does not want to be used as an object of the struggle for influence.

"We are different. We come as subjects. We are millennials and represent a tradition of critical thinking; we represent a particular political and ideological point of view. We are still *santris* (students of pesantren). That is, here we are not innocent people without content, not a floating mass. Here we lead and invite the millennial generation not to float (in political choices). Besides, after all, we must still have a grip or principle. So far, SAMIL fully adhere to NU values, such as in *kitab*, ways of thinking, *madzhab*, and *harakah* (movements)." (Suara.com 9/2/2019)

SAMIL is also active in countering various issues that have cornered NU, such as in the case of the burning of the flag bearing the *Shahada* done by a member of Banser because it was seen as an ISIS flag and not to insult monotheism. The reason is that we should not get hung up on symbols. *Tawhid* is a spiritual process implanted in the heart, pledged by words, and implemented in actions.

SAMIL also countered various narratives, developing in the community and designed by Jokowi's opposition, which stated that Islam was being persecuted, and the ruling regime oppressed Muslim citizens and ulama. The narrative, according to Fuad, is the product of a way of thinking and ideology imported from the Middle East, especially from Hasan Al-Banna's Ikhwan al-Muslimin. This kind of view is considered irrelevant and not contextual to the Indonesian situation. Fuad argues that the Arab situation is different from the current situation in Indonesia where the freedom to practice one's religion is fully guaranteed.



Further, to expand and strengthen support for Jokowi-Ma'ruf, SAMIL held *dhiker* activities in various cities, such as in Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta, with youth as the main target. This step was done because based on the survey, the number of novice voters reached 30 percent. The SAMIL movement seems to have the support of elders within NU. This is evidenced by the support of the supreme leader (*idaroh Aliyah*) of JATMAN, i.e. Habib Luthfi, to Joko Wdidodo and KH. Ma'ruf Amin. Although Habib Luthfi's close relationship with the incumbent candidate is well known, he does not appear to be in a hurry to give political support. Only when attending the Presidential Election Campaign in Brebes held April 4, 2019, Habib Luthfi gave his support to Joko Widodo ([www.dutaislam.com](http://www.dutaislam.com) April 4, 2019).

The 2019 election contestation was finally won by the pair Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin. The effectiveness of various support movements for presidential and vice-presidential candidates is certainly an interesting survey field. The survey from Indikator Politik shows NU's big contribution in winning Jokowi. According to the survey results, NU was the decisive factor in the victory of Pair 01 in the 2019 Election, especially in Central Java and East Java. In these two provinces, Pair 01 won significantly. Indikator Politik's exit poll data shows that 56 percent of NU followers admit to voting for Jokowi-Ma'ruf. This number is up 12 percent compared to the 2014 presidential election, at which time only 44 percent of NU followers voted for Jokowi. Besides, the Alvora Research Center survey results also show the significant contribution of NU voters to Jokowi's victory. Data from Alvora shows that 54.3 percent of Nahdliyin (NU followers) are Jokowi voters. The figure of KH. Ma'ruf Amin was a factor that shaped the solidity of NU followers in electing Joko Widodo.

### **Sufism, Religious Authority, and Politics**

The tarekat influence on political actions and choices is contextual and determined by other conditions outside the tarekat. However, the very strong relationship between *mursyid* (teachers) and *murid* (students), between fellow *mursyids*, and between fellow *murids* remains an attraction in the tarekat institution. Not to mention, traditional beliefs are also attached to members of the tarekat *jami'yah* regarding the privileges of the *mursyids* who are considered *wali* (a saint) and have spiritual power and blessings. Among tarekat members, there is a belief that following the tarekat means following a spiritual path whose connection can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, it is not surprising that political authorities always try to establish closeness with tarekat figures. Tarekat Alawiyin, for example, is a tarekat that has a political affinity with the rulers from time to time. The leader of this tarekat, Habib Ali bin Abdurrahman al-Habsyi (1870-1968), was a charismatic cleric who was highly respected and had an accommodative attitude towards political power since the colonial period, including since the Sokerano-Hatta era after the independence period (Al-Athas, 2008, 31; Benda, 1958, 243). Tarekat Alawiyin's closeness and accommodative attitude towards the rulers in Indonesia was continued by the son and successor of Habib Ali bin Abdurrahman al-Habsyi, namely Muhammad Ali Al-Habsyi who supported the Golkar Party in 1971 in the Soeharto era after the political chaos of 1965-1966. This support continued even until the fall of the New Order regime in 1998.

Although tarekat is one of NU's religio-cultural bases, efforts to gather it into a single confederation have only been realized 56 years after NU was founded. In 1957, two years before the 1959 General Election, NU established an association that brought together various tarekats under the name Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarah. This organization is a large tarekat association, mainly because it consists of tarekat kyais from East Java and Central Java. In 1970, the head of this association, named Kyai Musta'in

Ramli, made a controversial decision by declaring political support for Golkar, amid pressures that required NU to enter into the fusion of political parties ahead of the 1971 General Election. This move led to protest from many NU clerics who at that time had not yet decided to return to the *Khittah 1926*. The protest was manifested by some kyais within NU by making efforts to suppress the influence of Kyai Mus'tain Ramli as they made *bai'at* (allegiance) to other kyais. Most of the followers and bodies of the *jam'iyyah* led by Kyai Muta'in Ramli moved to Kyai Adlan Ali. As a result, in the 1977 and 1982 Elections, the *jam'iyyah* large votes could be given to PPP (The United Development Party) instead of Golkar (Bruinessen, 1999: 342). Jam'iyyah Ahlith Thariqah al-Mu'tabarrah an-Nahdliyyah (JATMAN) is an example of a tarekat phenomenon with real political power –not a political institution– for this matter. The vast network that accommodates 45 tarekats with millions of members is undoubtedly a social and political resource that cannot be ignored.

The wide network of NU's tarekat confederation, both in terms of number and area representation, makes this confederation a major faction within NU with political potential. This fact has made the organization and figures in the NU's confederation network develop into a very influential "block" in the process of NU's journey. This block also greatly determines the dynamics of the journey in determining national political attitudes from time to time. Fealy and Barton (1997) have shown well about the political dynamics of NU in the 1970s which he called 'radical traditionalism' because of its opposition to the state under the New Order ruler. After the Reformation, NU experienced various important political events, such as the election of Gus Dur as the 4<sup>th</sup> President of Indonesia, the nomination of Hasyim Muzadi (the chairman of NU at that time) as vice president accompanying Megawati Soekarno Putri in the 2004 presidential election, and the election of KH. Ma'ruf Amin as Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia accompanying President Joko Widodo in 2019.

### **Tarekat as a Religio-Political Power**

Sufism and tarekat (Sufi order) were originally a moral opposition and religious concern for the practice of life imprisoned by the charms of the world. The Islamic world's wealth and power in the 2 H/ 8 AD century have triggered the emergence of Sufism discourse and practice with the primary orientation to reaching personal piety. In the 3 H/ 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, Sufism began to be taught openly in the centers of Islamic power in Baghdad. It then became a kind of popular religion that often had to deal with the religion of the royal elite. At this time, Sufime experienced a shift from a political attitude to resistance to rational Islam, dominant in the 9th century AD to the 13th century AD.

There are two opposing views in the study of tarekat and politics (Bruinessen, 1992: 3-14). The first is the view that sees tarekat as a political force or, at least, a politically dangerous fanatic group. Dutch, French, Italian, and British colonial officials were usually suspicious of the tarekat because -in their view- fanaticism for teachers could easily turn into political fanaticism. For this reason, it is no coincidence that the first Western studies of the tarekat were more like reports of intelligence investigations than scientific research. Because of the political dangers that it might pose, many officials have advocated forbidding or restricting the activities of the tarekat.

On the other hand, the second view considers the development of tarekat as a symptom of depoliticization or an escape from social and political responsibilities. In this view, the tarekat is more oriented towards *ukhrawi* affairs than worldly matters. The critics of the tarekat emphasize the ascetic aspect (*zuhd*) and the hereafter orientation; that is, in

an effort to get closer to God, it is said that the tarekat followers usually distance themselves from society (called *khalwah* or *uzlah*). While the "traditional" Muslims (Aswaja-based Islam followers) are considered more conservative, accommodating, and apolitical than modernist Muslims, the tarekat are considered the most conservative of the conservatives and the most averse to politics. These two views, as we will see, are too simple. The diametrical separation of tarekat as political or non-political certainly negates a vital aspect of how organizations adapt to a dynamic socio-political environment.

Fazlurrahman (1979: 156) offers an integrative view in looking at the tarekat. The powerful appeal of Sufism requires that religious and socio-political factors explain it. From a religious perspective, Sufism leads its followers to a direct encounter with God. This religious appeal was so strong that Sufism gradually became a kind of "religion in religion" with its own exclusive structure of ideas, practices, and organization. As an *ordo* (tarekat), Sufism has succeeded in formulating teachings in such a neat and concrete manner regarding the stages of the journey to God that must be carried out by a disciple (*salik*). Meanwhile, from a socio-political perspective, Sufism offers a pattern of social life that meets certain socio-political needs through its organized rites and mystical gatherings. Through rituals and socio-religious celebrations, Sufism was then associated with organized social and professional groups. Sufism in its organized form, therefore, functions socio-politically, as in protest against political tyranny as is evident in the case of the tarekat in medieval Turkey, North and West Africa, and modern-day East Sudan. Meanwhile, the tarekat as a political accommodation force can be seen in the case of Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah in various countries and Tarekat Alawiyyin in Indonesia (see Rijal, 2019).

Analysis of certain actors shows that political and non-political attitudes are determined by subjects, leaders, figures within the tarekat, and other competitors, i.e. people or other organizational groups outside the tarekat. Meanwhile, factor analysis can explain the determinant factors of the social, cultural, economic, and political environment that affect the life of the tarekat. Using Bourdeou's (1977, 1984) theoretical parameters, the tarekat movement will be largely determined by habitus, capital, and arena. In the perspective of social movements, tarekat must be understood from its constituent elements, such as capital, networks, and frameworks that frame the movement.

In the case of the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election contestation, we witnessed the use of political opportunities by NU political actors who succeeded in placing one of its central figures (KH. Ma'rif Amin) as a vice-presidential candidate. Social capital in the form of kyai-santri relations, especially through the tarekat network in the confederation, has made NU an effective force in determining political victories in Indonesia from time to time. By playing the available democratic arena, NU takes political action based on cultural references that have formed a collective habitus of moderate Sufistic reasoning and are able to adapt to the dynamics, challenges, and political changes it faces.

In the end, the broader socio-political conditions also greatly determine the relative success and failure of the tarekat's political movement. In this context, the strengthening of NU's support for Pair 01 cannot be separated from the increasing influence of the issue of religious populism. It is well known that the two contestants share the issue of religious populism and sects. When both of them use the issue, then a large mass organization like NU, which accounts for more than 60 percent of Indonesia's Muslim population, can certainly be the winner. Indeed, Prabowo won big on the island of Sumatra. However, Jokowi's defeat in Sumatra was converted by significant victories in NU-based regions, such as Central Java and East Java. Furthermore, the strengthening of the narrative of

religious populism and identity politics has made other issues unsold. Issues related to millennial voters and the economy are barely audible. In the case of Joko Widodo's success team, the emergence of SAMIL (Santri Millennial) is sufficient to answer the needs of youth groups as potential voters from among Muslims.

## CONCLUSION

This current study has shown that tarekat not only offers religious activities but also shapes and engages in political arenas. It creates undercurrents to promote democratization and even collaborated with power holders to control political agendas. The 2019 electoral political contestation has proven that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has succeeded in becoming a channel for democratic forces that compete with Islamism. This study of tarekat in relation to political dynamics also shows that the tarekat network, which gathers spiritual and political support, has made NU a socio-religious organization that greatly determines Indonesian politics. With this finding, In general, these findings imply that the conception of tarekat often seen as apolitical mysticism needs to be reviewed and reconceptualized since, in fact, it is socio-politically relevant.

This study has also shown that the tarekat's influence on political actions and choices is contextual; it is determined by other conditions outside the tarekat, such as political opportunities. However, the very strong relationship between *mursyid* (teachers) and *murid* (students), between fellow *mursyids*, and between fellow *murids* remains an attraction in the tarekat institution because such a relationship is able to form a solid bond. For example, there is a traditional belief attached to followers of the tarekat about the privileges of *mursyids* who are considered to have spiritual power and blessings. For its members, following the tarekat means following a spiritual path whose connection can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, it is not surprising that the holders of political authority always try to establish closeness with the tarekat and its key figures.

Further, the existence of tarekat within NU proves that tarekat can emerge as a depoliticizing force and a forum for political interests. The ulama's interest in protecting Sufism from deviations and ensuring that it remains within the framework of the Sharia has encouraged NU to incorporate Sunni Sufism in a confederation of tarekat that is legitimate (*mu'tabarah*). This confederation is a tarekat network wider than other formal socio-religious organizations. In the case of the 2019 RI Presidential Election contestation, we witnessed the use of political opportunities by NU political actors who succeeded in placing one of its central figures (KH. Ma'rif Amin) as a candidate for vice president. Social capital in the form of kyai-santri relations, especially through the tarekat network within the NU confederation, has made NU an effective force in determining political victories in Indonesia from time to time. By playing the available democratic arena, NU takes political action based on cultural references that have formed a collective habitus of moderate Sufi reasoning and are able to adapt to the dynamics, challenges, and political changes it faces. With the approach of social action (*praxis*), we photograph the cognitive map formed by the ideology and model of religious thought in the tarekat which is used effectively in the fight for religious populism.

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