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The Fragmentation of *Pesantren* Authority in Electoral Politics: Shifts in Power Relations during Post-Reformasi Elections in Tasikmalaya City

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to analyze the fragmentation of authority within *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and the shifting power relations between these institutions and the political sphere during post-Reformasi elections in Tasikmalaya City, by examining the evolving connections among *kiai* (Islamic scholars/leaders), *santri* (students), and political actors, as well as the dynamics of electoral support.

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative strategy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation, then analyzed via data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing of conclusions and verification. The analysis utilizes Michel Foucault's perspective on power relations, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social and symbolic capital, and Max Weber's notion of charismatic authority to examine the relationship between *pesantren* and the local political arena.

Main Findings: The findings indicate that the relationship between *pesantren* and politics in Tasikmalaya City has undergone a transformation. The dominance of the united development party during the 2004–2014 elections was followed by a shift in the electoral configuration in 2019 and 2024. This change reflects a transition from a relationship that was primarily cultural and symbolic toward one that is increasingly pragmatic and strategic, accompanied by a fragmentation of the *kiai* authority in influencing the political orientations of *santri*, alumni, and the broader community.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The novelty of this research lies in the concept of the fragmentation of authority within *pesantren*, which explains why the enduring socio-religious legitimacy of *kiai* does not necessarily result in uniform electoral choices. The study links the shift from cultural-symbolic relations toward pragmatic-strategic ones with the dissemination and negotiation of political influence among actors within *pesantren* networks, set against the backdrop of local democracy in the post-Reformasi era.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren are socio-religious institutions that hold a significant position in the lives of the Indonesian people [1]. Their role extends beyond religious education, encompassing social, economic, and political spheres. In the context of local politics, *pesantren* possess social resources that facilitate their involvement in electoral political processes—most notably through the figures of *kiai*, networks of *santri*, inter-institutional relationships,

and religious legitimacy [2]-[6]. The transformation of the political system following the 1998 reform era expanded the space for social actors—including *pesantren* and *kiai*—to enter the arena of practical politics. This openness, in turn, created new avenues for the development of relationships between *pesantren*, political parties, and candidates within electoral contests.

The city of Tasikmalaya serves as an compelling empirical case for examining these shifts. The city boasts a strong foundation of *pesantren*, and its post-reform political trajectory reveals a dynamic relationship between these institutions and political forces. One indication of this is the experience of the united development party. In the 2004, 2009, and 2014 general elections, the united development party held a strong position in Tasikmalaya's electoral politics—a status attributable, in part, to the significant role played by *pesantren* within the party's political sphere. However, this pattern shifted during the 2019 and 2024 elections, as the united development party experienced a decline in both its vote share and legislative seats, while simultaneously facing a changing configuration of political power—including the rise of the Gerindra Party.

These changes do not necessarily signify the disappearance of *pesantren* influence in politics. Rather, this phenomenon raises questions regarding how the sources of *pesantren* power function and evolve within the realm of electoral politics. While religious legitimacy and the authority of *kiai* once served as a crucial foundation for shaping the political orientation of a community, the evolution of electoral politics in the post-Reformasi era reveals an increasing diversity of political actors, interests, networks, and strategies [7]-[9]. Consequently, shifts in electoral support should be understood not merely as changes in party preference, but as potential transformations in the structure of power relations connecting *pesantren* to the political arena.

To explain this phenomenon, this study employs three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Michel Foucault's concept of power relations is used to understand power not as something possessed exclusively by a single actor, but as a set of relations that unfold through interactions, practices, knowledge, and strategies among various parties. Second, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social capital and symbolic capital [10] are utilized to analyze the resources that enable *pesantren* and their associated actors to secure legitimacy and establish a position within the political arena [11]. Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority is applied to explain the position of the *kiai* as a figure who derives legitimacy from personal qualities, religious standing, and social recognition [12]. Together, these three perspectives allow this study to examine how the power of *pesantren* is constructed, maintained, negotiated, and transformed within the local political arena.

Existing research has highlighted the significance of *pesantren* in Indonesian politics. Studies on *pesantren* politics in the Reformasi (post-1998) era demonstrate that *kiai* serve as pivotal actors in political communication and mobilization [13], while *pesantren* possess social networks that can be leveraged for practical political purposes [14]. Furthermore, previous research indicates that the relationship between *pesantren* and political parties is not entirely independent; the political openness that emerged following the Reformasi created space for increasingly intensive interaction between religious institutions and political forces [15]. In the context of Tasikmalaya, studies on the history and development of the united development party have highlighted the significant relationship between the party and local political dynamics during the 2004, 2009, and 2014 general elections.

However, these studies have largely framed *pesantren* as political actors, bases for mobilization, or sources of political legitimacy. While this perspective is valuable, it does not fully explain how the authority of the *pesantren* itself evolves when the structure of the political arena shifts. In other words, the compelling issue is not merely whether *pesantren* remain influential, but rather how this influence functions, who articulates it, and how political authority—previously concentrated in the figure of the *kiai*—undergoes negotiation and potential fragmentation.

Based on this, the present study identifies a gap for new inquiry. It does not view political shifts within the *pesantren* sphere merely as changes in party affiliation or fluctuations in vote counts; rather, it interprets them as shifts in power relations and the fragmentation of authority within electoral politics. The fragmentation of authority is understood as a condition where the sources of political legitimacy and influence are no longer entirely concentrated in a single figure or institution, but are instead dispersed across a network comprising *kiai*, *pesantren*, *santri*, political parties, candidates, social organizations, and the political considerations of the broader community. Through this approach, political change within the *pesantren* milieu can be interpreted as a process of transforming power relations, rather than simply a change in electoral behavior.

The significance of this research lies in an empirical contradiction between the robust socio-religious foundation of *pesantren* in Tasikmalaya City and the shifting configuration of political support in post-Reformasi elections. This contradiction invites a critical examination of the assumption that the social influence of *pesantren* automatically translates into electoral power concentrated behind specific parties or candidates. Consequently, this study aims to explain how *pesantren* authority functions within electoral politics, how the nature of this relationship has evolved—shifting from a predominantly cultural and symbolic pattern toward one that is increasingly pragmatic and strategic—and the factors driving the fragmentation of such authority.

Given these issues, this research seeks to analyze the fragmentation of *pesantren* authority within the context of electoral politics and the shifting power dynamics during post-Reformasi elections in Tasikmalaya City.

Academically, this study is intended to broaden the discourse on the relationship between religion and politics by positioning the transformation of authority as a crucial element in understanding the political evolution of *pesantren* at the local level.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative strategy to analyze the fragmentation of authority within *pesantren* and the shifting power relations in post-Reformasi electoral politics in Tasikmalaya City. This approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation involves complex, context-dependent socio-political relations, as well as interactions among various actors, interests, and sources of legitimacy—aspects that cannot be captured solely through quantitative indicators. The research focuses on the evolving relationships among *pesantren*, *kiai*, *santri*, political parties, candidates, and local political actors throughout the post-Reformasi electoral process.

The research subjects are individuals or actors who possess knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the intersection of *pesantren* and electoral politics in Tasikmalaya City. Informants were selected using purposive sampling—a method in which participants are chosen based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives [16]. The criteria for informants include: (1) having an association with the management or institutional activities of a *pesantren*; (2) possessing knowledge regarding the authority and influence of *kiai* within the socio-political sphere; (3) being involved in or having experience with electoral political activities; and (4) understanding the dynamics of the relationship between *pesantren* and political parties, candidates, and local political actors.

The research data consist of both primary and secondary sources [17]. Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with actors possessing knowledge and experience regarding the relationship between *pesantren* and politics in Tasikmalaya City. Informants were selected purposively based on their level of involvement, knowledge, and relevance to the research focus. The interviews were designed to explore the informants' experiences and perspectives concerning the nature of *pesantren* authority, the relationship between *kiai* and political parties, patterns of political mobilization, shifts in support orientations, and the factors driving changes in power relations. Secondary data were obtained through documentation, including academic literature, institutional records, political archives, and other information relevant to the evolution of elections and the interplay between *pesantren* and politics in Tasikmalaya City. Data analysis was conducted interactively through three cyclical stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification [16]. In the reduction stage, data from interviews and documentation were selected, categorized, and grouped according to research themes. Data display followed, aimed at identifying patterns of relationships among *pesantren* authorities, political actors, sources of legitimacy, and shifts in political strategy. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn through a process of interpretation and continuously verified by comparing various data sources. If the information proved insufficient, the data collection process was revisited to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

The interpretation of data employed three theoretical perspectives: Michel Foucault's concept of power relations, Pierre Bourdieu's notions of social and symbolic capital, and Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority. These perspectives were used complementarily to analyze how *pesantren* authority is established, maintained, negotiated, and fragmented within the arena of electoral politics. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation across sources and by comparing interview findings with documentation. Through this design, the research aims to provide an understanding of the shifting patterns in the power relations between *pesantren* and politics, as well as the process of authority fragmentation within the electoral politics of Tasikmalaya City.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that *pesantren* occupy a significant position within the local political configuration of Tasikmalaya City. This position is not solely derived from their status as religious educational institutions; rather, it stems from the social and symbolic resources—as well as the networks—that *pesantren* possess, which facilitate their engagement in the political life of the community. These findings contribute to the fields of political sociology and religious studies by demonstrating that shifts in the relationship between *pesantren* and electoral politics do not necessarily entail a decline in religious authority. Instead, such changes can occur through transformations in the mechanisms by which authority is distributed and converted into political influence. In the context of Indonesia's post-Reformasi democracy, the openness of electoral competition has provided *kiai* and *pesantren* with opportunities to participate more actively in the political arena. However, this involvement also brings religious authority into contact with the interests of political parties, the strategies of candidates, existing social networks, and the individual preferences of voters. This suggests that the relationship between religion and politics cannot be understood merely through a dichotomy between religious dominance and political

secularization; rather, it should be viewed as a process of power negotiation unfolding within the arena of local democracy.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, resources can be understood as forms of social and symbolic capital that hold value within a specific arena. Social capital is forged through the networks of relationships and trust possessed by an actor, while symbolic capital relates to the legitimacy, recognition, and prestige accorded within a social environment [18]. In the post-Reformasi era, the openness of the political system has created an expanding space for *pesantren*, *kiai*, and their socio-religious networks to interact with political parties and candidates during electoral contests.

The strategic position of *pesantren* originates from the social relationships already embedded in the life of the community. A *kiai* is not merely viewed as the head of an educational institution, but also as a figure who commands both religious and social authority. The interconnectedness among *kiai*, *santri*, alumni, the *pesantren*'s extended family, and the surrounding community creates a social network that can serve as a source of political influence. Thus, the influence of *pesantren* in politics does not primarily operate through formal structures, but rather through social relationships and legitimacy established within daily life. This finding aligns with Bourdieu's [18] perspective that social capital functions through networks of relationships, enabling individuals or groups to gain access to specific resources. In the context of *pesantren*, these networks serve not only social and educational functions but can also form the basis for political engagement when interacting with political actors and institutions.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this phenomenon can be understood through the concepts of social capital and symbolic capital. *Pesantren* possess networks of social relationships that can be converted into political resources, while the position of a *kiai* derives legitimacy from symbolic capital—rooted in religious knowledge, reputation, and public recognition. This capital grants *pesantren* a distinct standing within the political arena, even though they are not formal political institutions. However, such capital conversion does not occur automatically; the value of any given capital depends on the arena in which it is deployed and the recognition accorded to it by the actors within that space [18]. Consequently, the involvement of *pesantren* in politics should be viewed as a process of converting social and symbolic resources into political resources, rather than as an automatic consequence of their existence as religious institutions.

This phenomenon can also be interpreted through Weber's concept of charismatic authority. In the context of *pesantren*, the authority of a *kiai* stems not merely from an administrative position, but from the community's trust in and recognition of the *kiai*'s personal and religious capacities. Weber [19] explains that charismatic authority is rooted in the recognition of extraordinary qualities attributed to a leader by their followers. Under such conditions, the political decisions or preferences of a *kiai* are likely to garner attention from the community with whom they share social ties. Nevertheless, the existence of this authority does not imply that *pesantren* automatically exert total control over the public's political choices. Electoral politics is an arena where various sources of influence converge; political parties, candidates, social organizations, the media, family, social circles, and the individual considerations of voters all play a role in shaping political preferences. Therefore, it is more accurate to view the position of *pesantren* as one of several sources of authority and legitimacy within the local political arena, rather than as the sole determinant of the public's electoral choices.

This context is essential for understanding political developments in Tasikmalaya City following the reform era. In the early post-reform period, the relationship between *pesantren* and politics in this region was characterized by a strong connection to the united development party. The united development party victories in the 2004, 2009, and 2014 general elections serve as a key indicator of this relationship. The strength of the united development party during this period can be attributed to the significant role *pesantren* occupied within the party's socio-political landscape. Thus, in the initial post-reform phase, the relationship between *pesantren* and politics can be understood as an intersection of religious authority, social networks, and electoral interests. *Pesantren* provided sources of legitimacy and social networks, while political parties offered a space for formal political articulation. This relationship created a power configuration in which the authority of the *pesantren* held substantial weight in electoral politics. Within Bourdieu's framework, this situation demonstrates that the social and symbolic capital possessed by *pesantren* can acquire political value when converted within the electoral arena [18].

These findings do not necessarily imply that a party's electoral strength is entirely the result of *pesantren* influence. The relationship between *pesantren* and political parties should be understood as an interaction involving processes of exchange, negotiation, and the conversion of various forms of capital. Consequently, the electoral success of the united development party during that period is best viewed as an empirical context that illustrates the interconnectedness between religious authority, *pesantren* social networks, and the formal political arena. This perspective is significant because it allows for a distinction between the social power of *pesantren* and their electoral power. Social power refers to the legitimacy, networks, trust, and standing of *pesantren* within society, whereas electoral power refers to the capacity to convert these resources into relatively consolidated political support. This distinction serves as a foundation for understanding the shifts in the relationship between *pesantren* and politics in subsequent periods.

3.1. From Cultural and Symbolic Relations toward More Strategic Political Relations

One of the key findings that serves as the foundation for this research is the indication of a shift in the nature of the relationship between *pesantren* and politics. A connection that was previously more cultural and symbolic in character has evolved toward a more pragmatic and strategic orientation. Cultural relations can be understood as political ties built upon social proximity, religious identity, respect for the *kiai* of *pesantren*, and the bonds between the *pesantren* and the broader community. In this pattern, political support is not necessarily forged through direct political transactions; rather, the legitimacy of the *kiai* and shared religious identity can shape the political orientation of the community. Various studies on the political role of *kiai* in Indonesia indicate that their standing in political life does not stem solely from formal involvement in political parties, but is instead rooted in their social status, charisma, networks, and the community's recognition of their religious authority [20], [21]. Thus, the cultural relationship between *pesantren* and politics is grounded in a socio-religious authority that is established well before any electoral contest takes place.

This pattern contrasts with a more strategic form of political engagement. In increasingly competitive electoral politics, political actors do not rely solely on identity or symbolic legitimacy; they also weigh factors such as winning strategies, political networks, the distribution of resources, political communication, and electoral calculations. Consequently, *pesantren* are positioned not merely as religious institutions, but as actors possessing social resources that can be negotiated within the political arena. This aligns with Bourdieu's [18] concepts of social capital and symbolic capital. Social capital—forged through networks of relationships and trust—can serve as a valuable resource within a specific field, while symbolic capital provides legitimacy and recognition for an actor's position. In the context of local politics, these resources acquire political value when they intersect with candidates, political parties, or networks of power. Research on the political arena involving *kiai* reveals a tug-of-war of interests between candidates and *kiai*, demonstrating that their relationship is not merely based on cultural affinity but can also evolve into a strategic partnership within electoral contests [22].

This shift indicates that the relationship between *pesantren* and political parties is not static; rather, it is continuously negotiated in response to changes in the political landscape. Political parties seek legitimacy and access to the social networks of *pesantren*, while *pesantren* may engage with political parties to advance specific interests. Consequently, the relationship is not one-way, but a reciprocal one involving a process of negotiation. Research by Azizah [20], for instance, shows that the power of a *kiai* within political relations is not absolute; *kiai* may act as independent agents, supporters, or participants, and they do not all hold the same standing in political decision-making. This finding is significant as it demonstrates that religious authority is not necessarily synonymous with political power concentrated in a single actor.

From a Foucaultian perspective [23], [24], power should not be understood as something possessed exclusively by one party, but rather as something that operates through social relations, practices, knowledge, and various forms of interaction between different forces. Power is, therefore, relational and subject to change based on the configuration of relationships among actors. This perspective helps explain that the evolution in the relationship between *pesantren* and politics is not merely a change in the degree of influence held by *pesantren*, but a transformation in the mechanisms through which power is produced, negotiated, and distributed. Studies on local political contestation also show that the religious symbols associated with *kiai* can be utilized for political mobilization—though such use occurs within an arena where various other social and political forces converge [25]. As the political arena shifts, the strategies of the actors involved also change, meaning that forms of power relations which were previously effective may undergo adjustments.

These changes also explain why a strong *pesantren* base does not necessarily translate into electoral support concentrated within a single party. While a socio-religious base constitutes a resource, its conversion into electoral support depends on how political actors cultivate relationships with those who control that resource. Within Bourdieu's [18] framework, the possession of capital does not automatically guarantee its successful conversion into other forms of capital. Such conversion depends on the specific arena, the relationships between actors, and the form of recognition granted by the social environment. Consequently, the relationship between *pesantren* and politics cannot be understood merely by asking whether or not a *pesantren* supports a particular party. A more relevant inquiry concerns how such support is constructed, through which networks it emerges, who holds the authority to articulate it, and how the community responds to that authority.

The finding that political stances among *pesantren* actors are not uniform is further supported by Wafa's [21] research, which demonstrates that the political roles of *kiai* are diverse rather than monolithic. A *kiai* may function as a political actor, a participant, or a community figure who influences political preferences. Similarly, Mutiullah's [26] study on religious authority in the lead-up to the 2024 General Election indicates that the authority of *kiai* remains significant in politics—notably when political parties seek to leverage their ties with *ulama* (Islamic scholars) to secure public support. These findings point to the persistence of religious authority within the political arena, while also revealing how this authority interacts with the strategies of political organizations. Thus, the evolution of the relationship between *pesantren* and politics should not be interpreted as the disappearance of the *kiai*'s role, but rather as a shift in how that authority is utilized and negotiated within an increasingly competitive political landscape.

The dynamics of the 2004–2024 general elections provide an essential empirical context for analyzing the shifting power relations involving *pesantren*. The united development party secured consecutive victories in Tasikmalaya City during the 2004, 2009, and 2014 general elections. However, in the 2019 and 2024 elections, the party experienced a decline in both its vote share and legislative seats, while simultaneously facing a shift in the political landscape marked by the rising influence of the Gerindra party. This shift is particularly noteworthy given that it occurred within a society that retains a strong foundation in *pesantren* culture. Consequently, the change in the united development party electoral strength cannot be adequately explained by the simple assumption that the influence of *pesantren* has vanished. Instead, this shift may indicate that the mechanisms linking *pesantren* authorities to the electoral choices of the public have evolved. In this context, research on the politics of *kiai* suggests that while religious authority may remain robust, the nature of its political engagement can vary depending on the political environment and the relationships between different actors [21], [26].

While religious authority could previously be converted more readily into relatively concentrated political support, subsequent developments show that this conversion process has become increasingly complex. Individuals connected to *pesantren* do not necessarily share the same political orientation; they may maintain a religious affinity with a *pesantren* while basing their electoral decisions on entirely different considerations. This situation can be understood by distinguishing between social power and electoral power. Social power encompasses the legitimacy, networks, trust, and social ties possessed by a *pesantren*, whereas electoral power refers to the capacity to translate these resources into support for specific candidates or parties. Bourdieu [18] provides insight here, noting that the conversion between different forms of capital is not an automatic process. Therefore, the existence of a strong *pesantren* network does not, in itself, guarantee uniformity in political choices.

This phenomenon serves as the basis for the concept of "fragmentation of authority" proposed in this study. Fragmentation does not imply the disappearance of the authority of *pesantren*; rather, it signifies a shift from a relatively concentrated form of authority toward one that is more dispersed and negotiated among various actors. In this context, the *kiai* retain their authority, yet this authority cannot always be translated into collective political decisions. *Santri*, alumni, the *pesantren* community, local figures, political candidates, and political parties all possess the space to engage in their own interpretations and negotiations. Political authority becomes more pluralistic because the sources of political legitimacy are no longer derived solely from the *pesantren*. Foucault's perspective on power as a set of relations helps explain this condition, as power is not situated exclusively at a single center but instead operates through a network of relationships that allow for acceptance, negotiation, and even resistance [24].

This concept offers an alternative explanation for the shifts in electoral politics in Tasikmalaya City. A decline in support for the united development party does not automatically equate to a decline in the social standing of *pesantren*. What has changed is the capacity of a specific political network to consolidate the authority of *pesantren* into uniform electoral support. In other words, the change is not merely a shift from strength to weakness, but rather a transition from a concentration of influence to a more diverse distribution of its sources. These findings align with research on the politics of *kiai*, which indicates that not all *kiai* share the same political positions or orientations, and that the relationships between *kiai* and political parties can take various forms—ranging from direct involvement to more limited expressions of support [20], [21].

The findings of this study expand the discourse on the relationship between *pesantren* and politics in Indonesia by demonstrating that the political influence of *kiai* can no longer be understood solely through the lens of charisma, religious legitimacy, and patronage networks. Previous research has established that *kiai* hold a significant position in shaping the political orientations of the public and the activities of political parties. Azizah [20], for instance, demonstrates that the power of *kiai* within the National Awakening Party in the Special Region of Yogyakarta remains significant, yet it is not absolute. *Kiai* may function as actors, supporters, or participants, while the party's decision-making process also entails coordination with other organizational structures. These findings indicate that the authority of *kiai* has always been subject to limitations and has consistently interacted with institutional political actors.

In a similar vein, Wafa [21] identifies the diverse political roles played by *kiai* during elections in Rembang Regency. *Kiai* do not merely act as direct participants in political activities; they also serve as figures who provide support or shape the political preferences of the public. This study is significant as it reveals that the involvement of *kiai* in politics is not monolithic. However, while Wafa's research emphasizes the specific forms and roles of *kiai* within the electoral process, the present study focuses on shifts in the structure of power relations—a dynamic that has led to the political influence of *kiai* becoming increasingly subject to negotiation, rather than consistently resulting in uniform political choices.

Meanwhile, Mutiullah [26] explains how the religious authority of *kiai* is leveraged by the National Awakening Party as part of its political strategy leading up to the 2024 General Election, notably through the *Ijtima Ulama Nusantara* (a gathering of *ulama* or Islamic scholars). This study illustrates that religious legitimacy remains a vital political resource for the party in building electability and securing public support. The present research does not dispute this argument; rather, findings from Tasikmalaya City suggest that utilizing religious authority as a political resource does not automatically guarantee the consolidation of electoral support. The social

and religious legitimacy of *pesantren* may endure, even as the political preferences of *santri*, alumni, their families, and the surrounding community evolve in increasingly diverse directions.

Thus, shifts in election outcomes can be understood as a symptom of changing power relations [27]. While the relationship between *pesantren* and politics was previously concentrated—centered on the ties between *kiai*, the *pesantren* themselves, and specific political parties—subsequent developments reveal a more dispersed pattern of engagement. Political actors must now contend with various sources of influence that do not fall under a single, unified command structure [28], [29]. Although *pesantren* retain their significance as sources of social and religious legitimacy, the ability to translate this authority into concentrated electoral support now hinges on processes of negotiation with other actors. In this context, the fragmentation of authority refers to a situation where, while the social and religious legitimacy of *pesantren* remains intact, their capacity to generate a uniform electoral orientation has become increasingly dispersed, subject to negotiation, and influenced by a diverse array of power sources within the local political arena.

3.2. The Fragmentation of Kiai Authority in the Electoral Political Arena

The fragmentation of authority is a key aspect that distinguishes this study from research that views *pesantren* solely as bases for political mobilization. In a pattern of concentrated authority, the *kiai* holds a relatively dominant position in determining the political orientation of the community [30]. However, social and political changes can lead to the differentiation of such authority. From a Weberian perspective, charismatic authority relies on the recognition of an individual perceived to possess specific qualities. In the context of a *pesantren*, this recognition can form the basis of the relationship between the *kiai* and the community. Yet, charismatic authority is not immune to social change; as a society gains access to a wider array of information sources, social networks, and political choices, the relationship between the *kiai's* authority and the community's political behavior can become increasingly complex.

Consequently, this fragmentation should not necessarily be interpreted as a rejection of the *kiai*. A *santri* or a member of the community may continue to hold the *kiai* in high regard in religious matters, while not necessarily following the political choices the *kiai* advocates. This decoupling of religious obedience from electoral political choices is a significant possibility that warrants examination through field data. Drawing on Bourdieu [18], this situation suggests that symbolic capital cannot always be automatically converted into political capital. A *kiai* may possess substantial symbolic capital within the *pesantren* environment, but its conversion into electoral votes depends on the structure of the political arena and the strategies employed by the actors involved.

Meanwhile, a Foucauldian perspective [24] helps explain that power is inherently linked to the possibility of resistance and negotiation. If the authority of a *kiai* is a form of power, then members of the community retain the space to interpret, accept, negotiate, or even decline to follow the *kiai's* directives. Power relations are, therefore, dynamic. Taken together, these three perspectives support the argument that the fragmentation of authority emerges when the sources of political legitimacy become increasingly diverse. Religious authority has not disappeared; rather, it interacts with other forms of social, economic, political, and electoral authority.

The politics of *pesantren* in Tasikmalaya City can be understood as an arena where various forms of capital and authority converge. *Kiai* possess symbolic capital, *pesantren* maintain social networks, political parties offer organizational structures, candidates bring political resources, and voters hold the capacity to make electoral choices. The interplay among these sources of power creates a political configuration that is more complex than in previous periods.

Shifts in the power dynamics of *pesantren* also have implications for the strategies of political parties [31]. During periods when *pesantren* possess a relatively strong capacity for political consolidation, political parties have an incentive to cultivate relationships with *kiai* and *pesantren* networks. Such ties provide access to communities that are already socially organized. However, when the authority of *pesantren* becomes fragmented, political strategies that rely solely on the support of a single figure or institution prove insufficient. Consequently, parties and candidates must build connections with broader and more diverse networks—a shift that renders political relationships increasingly strategic and negotiable in nature.

In this context, *pesantren* are no longer positioned merely as objects of political mobilization. Both the *pesantren* themselves and the actors within them possess the capacity to negotiate political interests. The relationships that emerge may be transactional in a political sense, yet such transactions are not necessarily limited to material exchanges; they can involve the exchange of support, access, representation, policy, political communication, or the recognition of the community's interests.

This shift demonstrates that power relations operate across multiple levels. At the elite level, there are connections between *pesantren* leaders and party leaders. At the organizational level, there are links between *pesantren* networks and party structures. Meanwhile, at the societal level, there are relationships involving the *pesantren*, *santri*, alumni, and voters. This multi-layered structure explains why the influence of *pesantren* can no longer be viewed as a homogeneous entity. *Pesantren* encompass a variety of actors and networks, each of which may pursue distinct political interests and strategies.

A significant implication of these research findings is the necessity of distinguishing between the social power and the electoral power of *pesantren*. Social power refers to a *pesantren*'s capacity to build legitimacy, networks, trust, and social ties within the community. Electoral power, by contrast, relates to the ability to translate these resources into support for specific candidates or political parties during elections. These two forms of power do not always move in parallel; a *pesantren* may retain strong social legitimacy, even as its previously concentrated electoral support becomes fragmented. This can occur because the political choices of the community are influenced by an increasingly diverse range of factors.

The findings regarding the shifting position of the united development party during the 2019 and 2024 elections provide an essential context for understanding this issue. This shift followed a period of electoral success for the united development party between 2004 and 2014. Applying a Bourdieusian framework, this situation can be understood as a matter of capital conversion: the symbolic and social capital held by *pesantren* does not automatically translate into electoral political capital. Such conversion requires specific mechanisms; if these mechanisms change, electoral outcomes may also shift, even when the underlying social resources remain intact. A decline in the vote share of a particular party does not necessarily mean a decline in the influence of *pesantren*. Instead, such a shift may indicate that the influence of *pesantren* has been redistributed across various political channels. Thus, the fragmentation of authority serves as a concept that bridges two seemingly contradictory phenomena: the enduring strength of the social position of *pesantren* and the changing patterns of political support. *Pesantren* continue to possess authority, but that authority no longer operates through a single, dominant political channel.

3.3. A Model of Shifting Power Relations between *Pesantren* and Politics in Tasikmalaya City

Based on the preceding discussion, this study proposes a conceptual model regarding the shifting power relations between *pesantren* and politics in the city of Tasikmalaya. This model can be delineated into three stages. The first stage is the concentration of authority. In this phase, the legitimacy of *kiai* and *pesantren* serves as a crucial factor in shaping the political orientation of the community. The relationship between *pesantren* and political parties can generate relatively concentrated support; the dynamics of the united development party during the 2004–2014 elections provide an important empirical context for understanding this phase. The second stage is the negotiation of authority. Changes in the political arena mean that the relationship between *pesantren* and political parties no longer follows a consistent pattern. Actors begin to negotiate their interests, strategies, and political choices. At this stage, the authority of the *kiai* remains significant, yet it does not necessarily result in uniform political compliance. The third stage is the fragmentation of authority. In this phase, the sources of political influence are dispersed among various actors and networks. While *kiai* remain a source of legitimacy, political parties, individual candidates, social networks, alumni, *santri*, families, and voters also possess the capacity to shape political choices. The shifts in the electoral configuration observed during the 2019 and 2024 elections serve as key empirical indicators for this stage.

Table 1. Model of the Transformation of *Pesantren* Power Relations in the Electoral Politics of Tasikmalaya City

Dimensions of Analysis	Phase I: Concentration of Authority	Phase II: Authority Negotiation	Phase III: Fragmentation of Authority
Authority structure	Relatively centered on the figure of the *kiai* and the *pesantren* institution	It begins to involve interaction and negotiation among *kiai*, *pesantren*, political parties, and candidates.	Distributed across various actors and socio-political networks
Source of legitimacy	The charisma of the *kiai*, religious identity, and public trust	Religious legitimacy interacts with political interests and strategies.	A plurality of sources of legitimacy, including religious, social, and political authority, as well as individual considerations
The relationship between *pesantren* and political parties	A relatively consolidated relationship with certain political forces	A relationship that is more strategic, reciprocal, and negotiable	Relationships are more diverse and not concentrated on a single political power
The position of *santri* and the community	Political orientation is relatively influenced by the authority of the kiai	Differences in interpretation and political orientation have begun to emerge	Having more room to make political choices independently

Mechanisms of power	Consolidation of social capital and symbolic capital	Negotiation, capital conversion, and the contestation of interests	Redistribution of influence, differentiation of preferences, and pluralization of authority
Empirical context of Tasikmalaya City	United development party Dominance in the 2004, 2009, and 2014 General Elections	Shifting relationships among *pesantren*, *kiai*, and political actors in the electoral arena	Shifts in political configuration and the electoral decline of the united development party in the 2019 and 2024 general elections

This model demonstrates that shifts in power relations are not a linear progression from strength to weakness; rather, they occur through a process of redistributing sources of influence. Authority that was previously relatively centralized can become more dispersed without necessarily forfeiting its social legitimacy. This argument contributes to the study of the politics of *pesantren*. *Pesantren* should not be understood merely as institutions that either possess or lose political influence, but rather as arenas where various forms of authority and capital are negotiated.

The novelty of this research lies in shifting the unit of analysis from "the influence of *pesantren* on politics" to "changes in how *pesantren* authority functions within politics." Existing literature has largely examined *pesantren* through the role of the *kiai* as a political communicator, an agent of mobilization, and a foundation for religious-based politics. This study goes further by questioning how such authority evolves when confronted with an increasingly competitive electoral political arena. The concept of "fragmentation of authority" allows for an explanation that changes in the politics of *pesantren* are not synonymous with a loss of influence. Instead, authority may persist in social and symbolic terms, even as the capacity to consolidate that authority into collective political choices undergoes transformation.

The study employs three complementary theoretical perspectives: Foucault's framework, which elucidates the relational and dynamic nature of power; Bourdieu's, which explains how social and symbolic capital operate within the political arena; and Weber's, which helps in understanding the sources of a *kiai*'s personal legitimacy. This combination enables an analysis of the evolving relationship between *pesantren* and politics across the dimensions of power, resources, and legitimacy.

Set within the local context of Tasikmalaya City, this research moves beyond viewing *pesantren* solely as a national-level phenomenon, situating them instead within local political dynamics—a context characterized by a historically strong relationship between *pesantren* and political parties. The transition from the dominance of the united development party during the 2004–2014 elections to a different political configuration in 2019 and 2024 provides an empirical basis for examining how *pesantren* authority has transformed. Thus, the primary contribution of this research is not to suggest that *pesantren* have lost their political power, but rather to highlight the potential for a transformation in the nature of that power. The authority of *pesantren* has shifted from a more centralized, cultural, and symbolic model toward one that is more dispersed, negotiable, and strategic. In this process, the fragmentation of authority serves as a crucial mechanism for explaining why the social influence of *pesantren* does not consistently yield the same patterns of electoral support from one election to the next.

These conceptual findings carry broader implications for the study of religion and politics in Indonesia. *Pesantren* should not be viewed as static actors, but rather as institutions that continuously adapt to shifts in democracy, party competition, voter behavior, and local political developments. Consequently, the relationship between *pesantren* and politics is an ongoing process of negotiation, in which religious authority, social capital, symbolic capital, and political interests constantly interact.

Ultimately, the fragmentation of authority demonstrates that political shifts involving *pesantren* cannot be measured solely by the success or failure of a political party in securing votes. More fundamental changes lie within the mechanisms through which power is produced, distributed, and negotiated. From this perspective, the dynamics of post-Reformasi elections in Tasikmalaya City reveal that *pesantren* remain a significant part of the political arena; however, the connection between *pesantren* authority and the public's electoral choices has become increasingly complex, no longer concentrated entirely within a single actor or political force.

4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that *pesantren* continue to hold a significant position in the electoral politics of Tasikmalaya City, though the manner in which their authority operates within the political arena has evolved. The authority of a *pesantren* is derived not only from its status as an institution for religious education but also from social capital, symbolic capital, community networks, and the religious legitimacy inherent in the figure of the *kiai*. These elements establish the *pesantren* as a key actor in shaping the relationships between the public, political parties, candidates, and voters.

The dynamics of the 2004–2024 elections reveal that a strong social base for *pesantren* does not always translate directly into a concentrated bloc of electoral support. The dominance of the united development party in

the 2004, 2009, and 2014 elections, followed by shifts in the political configuration during the 2019 and 2024 elections, points to a change in the mechanisms by which socio-religious authority is converted into political support. This shift does not signify a loss of *pesantren* influence, but rather a change in the channels and mechanisms through which that influence is exerted.

A primary finding of this research is the fragmentation of *pesantren* authority. This fragmentation indicates that while the authority of the *kiai* and the *pesantren* retains its social and religious legitimacy, it no longer automatically results in uniform political choices. *Santri*, alumni, *pesantren*-affiliated families, community leaders, candidates, political parties, and voters now possess the space to interpret, accept, negotiate, or even decline the political preferences that emerge within the *pesantren* environment. Thus, fragmentation does not imply the disappearance of authority, but rather the dispersal of the sources of political influence across various actors and networks.

This transformation has unfolded through three stages of power relations: the concentration, negotiation, and fragmentation of authority. In the concentration stage, the legitimacy of the *kiai* and the *pesantren* network could be relatively easily converted into specific political support. In the negotiation stage, the relationship between the *pesantren* and political parties or candidates became increasingly influenced by specific interests, strategies, and electoral calculations. During the fragmentation phase, political authority becomes more pluralistic; consequently, while *pesantren* remain influential, they are no longer fully capable of collectively consolidating the political choices of their communities.

Theoretically, the research findings demonstrate that the perspectives of Weber, Bourdieu, and Foucault can be employed in a complementary manner to explain this transformation. Weber's framework elucidates the legitimacy of the *kiai's* authority; Bourdieu's approach clarifies the role of social and symbolic capital within the political arena; and Foucault's perspective frames power as a dynamic set of relations that consistently leaves room for negotiation. Thus, this study shifts the focus of inquiry from *pesantren* as a base of political power to *pesantren* as an arena for the production, distribution, and negotiation of political authority. Ultimately, the political shifts observed within *pesantren* in Tasikmalaya City do not primarily signify a weakening of these institutions, but rather a transformation in the forms and mechanisms of their power. Authority, once relatively centralized, has evolved into something more dispersed, negotiable, and pluralistic. This condition explains how the social influence of *pesantren* has managed to endure, even as patterns of electoral support have shifted from one election to the next.

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