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Contested *Gus* Titles in Mediatized Public Culture: A Weberian Analysis of the *Gus* Through the *Gus* Miftah Controversy

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Abstract

In contemporary Javanese Muslim society, the title *Gus* functions as a marker of religious distinction rooted in *pesantren* tradition, yet it now circulates within a public sphere that is increasingly mediatized and politicized. This study aims to explain how the title *Gus* works as a source of symbolic legitimacy that is produced, recognized, contested, and translated into public authority through the case of *Gus* Miftah, with reference to Max Weber's typology of authority. This study employs a qualitative design based on document analysis by taking the issue of the title *Gus* in relation to *Gus* Miftah. Data were collected from secondary sources, such as scholarly works, books, journal articles, online news reports, and digital materials, which were selected purposively based on relevance, their connection to claims about authority and legitimacy, and public traceability. The analysis was conducted through repeated reading, thematic grouping, and Weberian interpretation, by comparing diverse types of sources to strengthen the credibility of the analysis. The findings show that the title *Gus* operates as inherited symbolic legitimacy that provides an initial basis for recognition, but its effectiveness depends on performance and circulation in public arenas. The issue of the title *Gus* in the case of *Gus* Miftah shows that when the title enters broader public spaces and political networks, legitimacy becomes open to dispute and forms a hybrid configuration of traditional prestige, charismatic visibility, and limited legal rational recognition. The implication of this study is the need to examine religious titles as mechanisms of legitimacy that are negotiated in digital and political public spheres.

Keywords: *Gus*; Legitimacy; Religious Authority; *Pesantren*

Gelar Gus dalam masyarakat Muslim Jawa kontemporer berfungsi sebagai penanda distingsi religius yang berakar pada tradisi pesantren, namun kini beredar dalam ruang publik yang semakin termediatisasi dan terpolitisasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan bagaimana gelar Gus bekerja sebagai sumber legitimasi simbolik yang diproduksi, diakui, diperdebatkan, dan diterjemahkan menjadi otoritas publik melalui kasus Gus Miftah dengan rujukan tipologi otoritas Max Weber. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif berbasis analisis dokumen dengan mengambil isu gelar Gus pada Gus Miftah. Data dikumpulkan dari sumber sekunder, seperti karya ilmiah, buku, artikel jurnal, laporan berita daring, dan materi digital yang dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan relevansi, keterkaitan dengan klaim otoritas/legitimasi, dan keterlacakan publik. Analisis dilakukan melalui pembacaan berulang, pengelompokan tematik, serta interpretasi Weberian, dengan membandingkan beragam jenis sumber untuk memperkuat kredibilitas analisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa gelar Gus beroperasi sebagai legitimasi simbolik yang diwariskan dan memberi basis awal pengakuan, tetapi efektivitasnya bergantung pada performa dan sirkulasi dalam arena publik. Isu gelar 'Gus' pada Gus Miftah memperlihatkan bahwa ketika gelar memasuki ruang publik luas dan jejaring politik, legitimasi menjadi terbuka untuk dipersoalkan dan membentuk konfigurasi hibrid antara prestise tradisional, visibilitas karismatik, dan pengakuan legal-rasional yang terbatas. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah perlunya mengkaji gelar religius sebagai mekanisme legitimasi yang dinegosiasikan di ruang publik digital dan politik.

A. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Javanese Muslim society, the title *Gus* occupies a socially significant position as a marker of religious distinction, *pesantren* lineage, and symbolic respect. Traditionally associated with the sons of *kiai* or figures linked to prominent religious households (Arifin 2015), the title carries more than a genealogical meaning. It also evokes expectations of moral refinement, religious competence, and eventual leadership within wider Muslim communities, especially within *pesantren*-centered religious life (Setiyani 2020). For that reason, the title is not merely a cultural label, but a socially meaningful sign through which religious status may be recognized and authority may be anticipated in broader communal settings (Karim 2009).

Yet the significance of the title *Gus* cannot be understood only within the framework of inherited tradition. In contemporary public culture, religious titles circulate across sermons, digital platforms, political endorsements, and media controversies, reflecting the broader expansion of public Islam into mediated arenas (Hasan 2009). As a result, the authority attached to such a title increasingly depends not only on lineage, but also on visibility, public recognition, and the capacity to sustain symbolic credibility in wider arenas, including digital religious spaces (Hidayatullah 2024). This shift makes the title *Gus* sociologically important because it reveals how inherited religious status may be reworked in a mediatized and politicized public sphere, where recognition is also shaped by performative visibility, charismatic signaling, and manufactured public presence (Cocker & James Cronin 2017; Golan & M. Martini 2020; Tur et al. 2021).

The controversy of Gus Miftah makes this dynamic especially visible. Public controversy surrounding his background, the appropriateness of the title attached to him, and his involvement in electoral politics turned the title *Gus* into an object of dispute rather than a taken-for-granted symbol of deference (Fauzi 2024). In this context, the problem is not

simply whether a title is used, but how its legitimacy is socially recognized, challenged, and translated into broader forms of authority. The case is analytically useful because it exposes the unstable boundary between inherited status, public performance, and political recognition, including in the context of organized political networks (Fatoni 2023).

Previous studies have approached related questions from several overlapping directions, but they have not yet been integrated into a clear sociological account of how a religious title works as a contested mechanism of legitimacy. One body of literature shows that religious authority in Indonesia is shaped by lineage, symbolic prestige, institutional location, and networked influence, while *pesantren*-based leadership may expand from charismatic-traditional forms into broader institutional and public authority (Karim 2009; Nu'man 2025; Ridwan 2020). This literature also points to internal differentiation among *kiai* and *pesantren* elites, including the emergence of new traditional elites whose authority is grounded in religious learning, symbolic distinction, and expanding roles in public life (Bashri 2021). In this perspective, authority is anchored not only in genealogy, but also in social trust and sustained recognition within religious communities (Faisal et al. 2022; Ja'far 2024; Setiyani 2020).

A second body of literature demonstrates that religious status may be translated into political relevance through patronage, endorsement, electoral brokerage, and the moral credibility attached to *pesantren*-linked figures (Pribadi 2013; Yahya & S. Sahidin 2022; Yani et al. 2022). It also shows that *kiai* authority in contemporary Indonesia has become more pragmatic, networked, and situational without losing its symbolic force (Fealy & Robin Bush 2014; Maram et al. 2023). Comparative and conceptual studies further suggest that symbolic religious status may travel into political consequence when publics and institutions continue to recognize it as a credible source of authority (Mehmood & A. Seror 2022; Tieleman & J. Uitermark 2018). A third body of literature is especially important because

it highlights negotiation, mediation, and contestation. Research on village *kiai*, fragmented religious leadership, and public religious authority in digital settings shows that legitimacy is neither static nor automatically secured by title, pedigree, or institutional position, but depends on how claims to authority are recognized, challenged, circulated, and reinterpreted by different publics (Hidayat et al. 2025; Patriotta et al. 2011; Rosidi et al. 2024).

Although these strands provide important insights, more limited attention has been given to the religious title itself as a sociological object. Existing studies help explain *pesantren* hierarchy, *kiai* leadership, charismatic visibility, and political mediation, yet they more often focus on figures, institutions, or networks than on the title as a mechanism through which legitimacy is produced, disputed, and translated across social fields. This matters theoretically because, without treating the title itself as an object of analysis, it becomes difficult to explain how inherited symbolic status remains powerful in contemporary public culture while also becoming vulnerable to contestation. Three issues therefore remain underdeveloped: how a religious title carries inherited symbolic status, how that status becomes publicly contested in a mediatized environment, and how it may be converted into public-political authority in a contemporary case.

This study addresses the gap in existing scholarship by examining the *Gus* title itself as a contested mechanism of legitimacy through the Gus Miftah controversy, rather than treating it merely as an attribute of religious figures or institutions. This is important because focusing on the title as an analytical object clarifies how inherited symbolic status can remain influential while also becoming vulnerable to dispute when it circulates in mediatized and politicized public arenas. The implication is that sociology needs to examine religious titles as negotiated mechanisms of legitimacy in

digital and political public spheres, where recognition, performance, and public scrutiny shape how authority is sustained or unsettled.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative design based on document analysis to examine the contested legitimacy of the *Gus* title in contemporary Javanese public culture through the controversy of Gus Miftah. The controversy was selected because it provides a contemporary and publicly visible instance in which a religious title is not only associated with inherited status, but also entangled in public controversy, symbolic recognition, and political mobilization. For this reason, the controversy is analytically useful for exploring how legitimacy is produced, negotiated, and challenged in relation to religious authority. The design also allows the analysis to focus on one socially visible case without forcing universal claims beyond the material under examination.

The study relies on secondary sources as its main empirical material. These include scholarly works, books, journal articles, online news reports, and other publicly accessible digital materials relevant to the meaning of the *Gus* title, *pesantren*-based authority, public representations of *Gus* Miftah, and his involvement in socio-political discourse. Sources were selected purposively based on three criteria: substantive relevance to the research focus, direct connection to claims about religious authority and legitimacy, and public traceability. Rather than treating all collected documents as equivalent, the study focuses on those materials that contain explicit descriptions, narratives, or claims concerning genealogical status, symbolic recognition, charismatic influence, controversy, networks, and political mobilization.

The units of analysis in this study are not documents as a whole, but specific meaning-bearing elements within them. These include statements, descriptions of public events, representations of religious status, narratives

of controversy, and reported accounts of influence, support, or mobilization. In this sense, the documents function as a source of publicly circulating meanings through which legitimacy is attributed, disputed, and rearticulated. This analytic choice is important because the study is concerned less with the formal classification of documents than with the meanings and claims through which authority is publicly assembled and contested.

The analysis was conducted through repeated reading, thematic grouping, and Weberian interpretation. First, the collected materials were read repeatedly to identify recurring themes related to inherited status, charismatic performance, public recognition, controversy, and political engagement. Second, these themes were grouped into broader analytical patterns. Third, the resulting patterns were interpreted using Weber's typology of authority, especially the categories of traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. These categories were not imposed as rigid labels from the outset, but used as interpretive tools to clarify how different forms of legitimacy intersected within the case.

To strengthen analytical credibility, the study compared different types of sources rather than relying on a single narrative account. Scholarly sources were used to frame the broader sociological meaning of religious authority and the *Gus* title, while public reports and digital materials were used to trace how legitimacy claims circulated and were contested in contemporary public discourse. Because the study is based on a single case and secondary public materials, its claims are interpretive rather than universal. The aim is not to verify every public claim in a forensic sense, but to explain how legitimacy is socially constructed, contested, and translated into public authority in this case.

Theoretical Framework

Domination is the possibility that certain orders (or all orders) will be obeyed by a particular group of people. So, it does not include every way to exercise power or influence over others. Domination (authority) in this sense may be based on the most diverse motives of obedience: from simple habituation to the most rational calculation of profit. Max Weber developed a model of the ideal type of bureaucracy, which explains that every bureaucracy or administration has a clear form in which all its functions are carried out in a rational way (Weber 1978). According to him, this ideal type can be used to compare bureaucracies from one organization to another.

According to Weber, there are three ideal types of bureaucracy. First, rational-based bureaucracy, this type of dominance is under the belief in the legality of the rules set and the right of those appointed to authority based on these rules to issue orders (legal authority). Second, traditional-based bureaucracy, where dominance is based on an established belief in the sanctity of long-standing traditions and the legitimacy of those who exercise authority based on these traditions (traditional authority). Finally, charismatic bureaucracy. This dominance is based on devotion to the extraordinary sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual, and the normative pattern or order revealed or established by him (charismatic authority) (Weber 2012).

Weber embedded his discussion of the bureaucratization process in a broader discussion of political institutions. Only in the modern Western world could a rational-legal authority system develop, and only in that system can one find the full development of modern bureaucracy. The rest of the world is still dominated by traditional or charismatic authority systems, which generally hinder the development of rational-legal authority systems and modern bureaucracy (Ritzer 2011). The following are the three forms of bureaucratic administrative staff.

1. Legal Authority

Legal authority rests on the acceptance that norms are established through agreement or coercion grounded in utility or rationality, and that compliance from organizational members and all within that power's scope. It operates through a consistent system of abstract rules applied to specific cases, in which authorized individuals act under an impersonal order, and members obey as part of the organization, not as individuals, with obligations deriving from the impersonal order within a defined jurisdiction.

The purest form is bureaucratic: leaders hold a dominant position through appropriation, election, or appointment, within legal competence. Officials are personally free but subject to impersonal duties, organized in a clear hierarchy with legally defined competence, selected via free contract and technical qualifications (exams or diplomas), receive fixed salaries and pensions, view the position as a career with promotion by seniority or merit, remain separate from ownership of administrative means, and face strict discipline. This model applies to business, charities, politics, and private companies, with proven historical use across all sectors.

2. Traditional Authority

In traditional authority, legitimacy rests on the sanctity of long-established rules and powers, with rulers appointed by tradition and obeyed for their traditional status rather than impersonal duty. Obedience is given to the individual in power, not to formal rules, and the ruler's orders are legitimized by tradition or personal discretion permitted by it. Action is divided into tradition-bound spheres and areas open to personal pleasure, regulated by ethical or utilitarian considerations rather than formal principles. Resistance targets the ruler personally, not the system, and new rules are legitimate only if claimed to have long existed. Unlike legal authority, traditional authority lacks clear competence, rational

hierarchy, free contracts, technical training requirements, and fixed monetary salaries for administrative staff (Weber 1978).

3. Charismatic Authority

The term charisma refers to extraordinary qualities in an individual's personality that make him or her appear to have supernatural powers or extraordinary qualities, thus being treated as a leader (Weber 1978). These qualities are often considered to come from God and are recognized by followers based on evidence such as miracles. The validity of charisma depends on the followers' recognition a form of personal devotion to the leader.

If the leader fails to provide benefits or demonstrate success, his or her charismatic authority can be lost. A community that follows a charismatic leader is called a charismatic community, and built on emotional relationships. The leader's staff does not consist of officials, but rather of individual chosen for their charismatic qualities, without a formal hierarchy (Weber 2012).

Pure charisma does not consider economic aspects; it is considered a spiritual calling. Although it does not always reject material goods, charisma rejects economic exploitation as a source of income. In a traditional context, charisma can be a revolutionary force that changes the attitudes and actions of individuals, resulting in radical changes in how they view various problems (Weber 1978).

Max Weber's typology of bureaucratic authority or legitimacy – legal-rational, traditional, charismatic – is relevant and quite often used in academic studies (Prianto 2023). Weber's theory has been applied to contemporary issues such as the legitimacy of government networks, the role of social media in labor movements, and the authority of senior civil servants (Friis Hau 2025; Mangset and Asdal 2019; Netelenbos 2020). Research that specifically draws on the theory of charismatic authority is used across various issues, such as leadership in podiatry, the influence of

YouTubers and vloggers, and populist leadership models in India and Myanmar (Bacon and Borthwick 2013; Cocker and Cronin 2017; Subedi and Scott 2021).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section brings together the collected materials to show how the title *Gus* works as a socially recognizable claim to religious authority in contemporary Javanese public life. Rather than treating the title as a fixed label, the discussion traces how it operates across three connected layers: first, as an inherited marker of religious status that gains force through public recognition and performance; second, as a legitimacy claim that can be disputed once it circulates in wider, more mediatized arenas; and third, as a phenomenon that can be further clarified through Weber's ideas on bureaucracy, especially when religious authority intersects with organized networks, institutional roles, and public coordination.

1. *The Gus Title as Inherited Religious Status: Public Recognition and Performance of Religious Authority*

Across the collected scholarly and public materials, the title *Gus* is consistently represented as an honorific marker associated with *pesantren* lineage, especially the sons of *kiai* and figures linked to respected religious households. Traditional *pesantren* leadership is inseparable from symbolic deference, while village religious authority is sustained through everyday recognition and moral proximity (Setiyani 2020). Taken together with accounts of *pesantren*-based ruling elites (Karim 2009), these materials indicate that the title does not merely denote kinship, but also carries expectations of religious competence, moral refinement, and future leadership. The recurring narrative linking *Gus* to *pesantren* culture therefore suggests that the title functions as a symbolic status marker rather than as a neutral label.

This pattern becomes more visible in materials referring to widely respected figures such as Gus Dur and Gus Mus. In those accounts, their authority was not described as deriving solely from family background, yet their genealogical connection to prominent *kiai* clearly functioned as an initial basis for recognition. Biographical accounts of Gus Dur repeatedly show how inherited *pesantren* prestige served as the starting point for broader public authority, even though that authority later expanded through intellectual reach, moral voice, and political intervention (Barton 2002). The evidence thus suggests that inherited status served as an entry point from which broader authority could later be extended through performance and recognition. The claim that follows is not that lineage automatically guarantees legitimacy, but that it establishes a socially meaningful starting position from which authority can be claimed and recognized.

From a Weberian perspective, this finding points first to traditional authority (Weber 1978 2012). The legitimacy attached to the title *Gus* is rooted in inherited religious prestige, *pesantren* tradition, and long-standing social beliefs about who is entitled to symbolic deference. Yet the evidence also suggests that inherited status should not be treated as self-sufficient. What the case materials show is not a static tradition, but a socially carried expectation that still has to be maintained and recognized in practice. Sociologically, inherited status is therefore better understood not as a completed form of authority, but as a structured claim awaiting confirmation in social life. Tradition supplies an initial grammar of legitimacy, but that grammar remains vulnerable unless it is continuously affirmed by communities that continue to treat the title as meaningful.

The qualitative significance of this pattern lies in the fact that the title appears in the materials as a pre-personal resource of legitimacy. Before a title holder speaks, preaches, or performs publicly, the title has already condensed a set of social assumptions about piety, refinement, and

eligibility for respect. This means that the title does not simply follow authority; it helps prefigure it. In document-based terms, one repeatedly encounters the title not as a descriptive ornament, but as an index of anticipated authority. The title therefore, works as a cultural shorthand through which genealogy is translated into a socially legible claim to recognition. That claim may later be enlarged, contested, or weakened, but it rarely begins from zero.

The movement from inherited distinction to public authority depends on recognition, circulation, and the capacity of the title holder to perform the expectations already attached to the name. The collected materials indicate that the title *Gus* acquires greater force when publicly performed and socially circulated beyond *pesantren* settings. In the dataset, religious authority is repeatedly associated not only with lineage, but with sermons, media visibility, public appearances, and symbolic association with moral leadership. This shift can be situated within the expansion of public Islam into commodified and mediatized arenas, while digital religious authority is increasingly formed through circulation, visibility, and new publics (Hasan 2009; Hidayatullah 2024). The evidence therefore, suggests that the title becomes effective not simply because it is inherited, but because it is repeated, displayed, and recognized across wider audiences.

In this regard, the materials on figures such as Gus Dur and Gus Mus are analytically useful because they show a recurrent combination of inherited status and public enactment. Their authority was not exhausted by descent; rather, it was expanded through intellectual consistency, moral voice, and public visibility. This dynamic is also illuminated by discussions of charismatic authority in contemporary mediated culture, where recognition is co-produced rather than passively received (Cocker & James Cronin 2017). The pattern suggests that the title *Gus* enters the public sphere as an inherited status, but is sustained through performative recognition.

The symbolic weight of the title therefore depends not only on genealogy but also on the figure's ability to inhabit the expectations attached to it and translate them into broader public credibility.

This pattern is sociologically important because legitimacy involves recognition, not merely possession of status. The title functions as symbolic capital only when audiences, followers, and broader publics read it as meaningful. In Weberian terms, the title remains anchored in traditional authority, but it intersects with charismatic authority when public influence, perceived personal qualities, and mediated presence become central to the extension of recognition (Weber 1978 2012). The case therefore shows that the authority associated with the title *Gus* is not purely inherited, but relationally reproduced in the public sphere. Once authority depends on wider recognition rather than immediate communal inheritance alone, it becomes more expansive but also more fragile, because the same public sphere that amplifies recognition can also unsettle it.

This shift also changes the social scene in which authority is validated. In more localized *pesantren* settings, recognition may be stabilized by kinship memory, repeated interaction, and durable communal reputation. In a mediatized public sphere, by contrast, recognition is dispersed across audiences who do not necessarily share the same intimate knowledge of lineage or institutional background. The authority of the title then extends further, but its continuity becomes increasingly dependent on performance, circulation, and symbolic coherence. What the materials suggest, therefore, is not the disappearance of inherited legitimacy, but its relocation into a wider and more unstable arena of public evaluation.

2. Contested Legitimacy and Public Dispute over the Gus Title

The legitimacy attached to the title becomes publicly disputed once recognition moves into a wider arena of scrutiny, controversy, and counter-claim. This is why the case of Gus Miftah is analytically important. The

collected materials do not merely describe a recognized religious figure; they also contain competing narratives about background, appropriateness, credibility, and entitlement to the symbolic status carried by the title *Gus*. Public reports on Gus Miftah's political role and crisis communication show, in different ways, that public visibility does not simply enlarge authority but can also intensify dispute (Kudrawi et al. 2025). As evidence, the materials reveal not a single unified narrative, but a pattern of disagreement over whether the title still aligns with accepted expectations of religious authority in contemporary public culture.

This kind of contestation becomes even more visible in digital spaces, where legitimacy is built, displayed, and challenged in real time through mediated performances. A study by Fahma and Darwis (2020) on the presence of *Gus* figures on Instagram found that social media has become a new space for the sons of religious leaders to express themselves while also spreading the message of Islam. The title "*Gus*" serves as "trust capital" inherited from their parents. This study demonstrates that the *Gus* use Instagram through subtle semiotic visual strategies – via clothing choices, gestures, settings, and captions – to build an image that aligns with the dignity of the *kiai* while remaining relevant to younger generations. This indicates that the title "*Gus*" is not merely an identity but also carries moral responsibilities and public expectations that must be carefully managed in the digital space. This study demonstrates how traditional authority transforms into a digital format without losing its charismatic essence.

Further developments reveal that the *Gus* are undergoing a transformation from religious authority to political authority. Rosana et al. (2025) examine how religious figures (including the *Gus*) utilize digital platforms such as YouTube and TikTok to garner public sympathy, which is then mobilized for political purposes. This study identifies three main strategies: (1) building digital networks to disseminate political messages, (2) leveraging the authority and moral integrity inherent in their personas,

and (3) skillfully using digital media to deliver content that blends religious and political messages. This approach is deemed effective for securing votes in political contests.

An example is Gus Miftah, whose real name is Ta'im and not the son of a *kiai* (Riyanto 2024). He is said to not be from a lineage of ulama but the son of a transmigrant from Lampung who works odd jobs. Ta'im is known to have served as a caretaker at the Mergangsan Mosque in Yogyakarta, and failed his studies at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Jogja (Putri and Utami 2024).

In this case, Ta'im allegedly used a fake identity as *Gus* to gain recognition and honor he did not deserve. He is said to have taken the title for personal purposes, such as gaining influence and power in society and in religious organizations. Several netizens expressed their disappointment and felt cheated because of all this, emphasizing that Ta'im should not have forced himself to use a title that did not match his capacity. This controversy has also sparked discussions about ethics and integrity in the use of religious titles and the importance of honesty in personal identity. In addition, Ta'im often displays inappropriate behavior, such as rude remarks, insults, and even sexism, during public lectures (Diva 2024). Various comments on social media show the shame of several groups who initially defended him without knowing Ta'im's true background.

The Ta'im case also shows that the title *Gus* not only has the power to idolize someone and make them a figure seen as knowledgeable and respected, but is also used as a political tool by those in power. In the 2024 Election, Gus Miftah used his identity as a religious leader to rally support for Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates Prabowo-Gibran. *Gus* Miftah succeeded in rallying support from village kyai throughout Java by forming a wide network in 25 zones, with each zone having 1,000 kyai (Fauzi 2024). This gave him the nickname "village kyai president" in a movement called GM-08. Thanks to his role in rallying support for Prabowo-Gibran, Gus Miftah or Ta'im also secured a strategic position in

the Prabowo-Gibran government structure, namely as the President's Special Envoy for Religious Harmony (Fauzi 2024).

It is not only Gus Miftah who takes advantage of his popularity by using the title *Gus* to gain political support. Several *Gus* caretakers of Islamic boarding schools who are members of the Nusantara Gawagis Network (Jaga Nusantara) also do the same thing. Jaga Nusantara was formed by the *Gus* network in East Java (Fatoni 2023). The general chairman is the Caretaker of the Queen Al Azhar Darul Ulum Jombang Islamic Boarding School, KH Zahrul Azhar As'ad alias Gus Hans. There are also Gus Toif (Al Falah Islamic Boarding School, Ploso, Kediri), Lora Humron (Syaiikhona Kholil Islamic Boarding School, Bangkalan, Madura), Gus Rudin (Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School, Jombang), Gus Toev (An Najah Islamic Boarding School, Magetan), Gus Hisyamudin (Darussa'adah Islamic Boarding School, Central Lampung), Gus Fauzi (Annur Azzahra Islamic Boarding School, Lumajang), and Gus Heri (Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, Jombang). In the 2024 Election, they went around Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia to win the presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair number 2, Prabowo-Gibran (Fatoni 2023).

The point at issue is therefore not only whether the title is used, but whether its use is socially accepted as legitimate. The controversy, as represented in the collected reports and narratives, indicates that symbolic recognition can be challenged when audiences perceive a mismatch between inherited expectations and embodied performance. traditional religious authority is continually negotiated rather than simply inherited, and mediated publics can reshape how local religious credibility is perceived (Hidayat et al. 2025; Rosidi et al. 2024). The interpretation supported by these materials is thus not reducible to biographical accuracy alone. More fundamentally, it concerns whether the title continues to signify an accepted moral and religious order, or whether it is publicly

framed as being strategically mobilized in ways that disrupt the social grammar of recognition attached to *pesantren* tradition.

The case thus illustrates that legitimacy is not an automatic consequence of symbolic naming. Rather, it is negotiated, granted, withheld, or challenged through public discourse. In Weberian terms, this means that traditional authority in the contemporary setting remains dependent on recognition, and that recognition itself is vulnerable to contestation (Cerfedda, 2024; Weber, 1978). The title *Gus* may carry inherited prestige, but the case of Gus Miftah shows that such prestige can become unstable when audiences publicly question the congruence between title, social background, conduct, and claims to authority. At a broader sociological level, this indicates that contestation should not be treated merely as a sign of legitimacy failure. It is also part of the process through which legitimacy is tested, redefined, and redistributed in contemporary public culture.

Rahmayanti (2020) specifically examines the political role of the sons of religious leaders (*Gus*) in East Java, using the case studies of Ahmad Athoillah (Jombang) and Syaikhul Islam Ali (Sidoarjo). This research shows that the background of *Gus*'s involvement in politics is driven by a combination of factors: knowledge acquired at the *pesantren*, parental support, encouragement from organizations such as ASPARAGUS, and the desire to empower the *pesantren* and its students. Interestingly, this study also identifies that although the title of *Gus* provides significant social capital, political success is not automatic. This is reinforced by the findings of Fauzi et al. (2025), who compared Gus Al-Barra's victory in Mojokerto with Bu Nyai Munjidah's defeat in Jombang in the 2024 local elections. This study reveals that *kiai* genealogy (hereditary factors) is not sufficient to guarantee electoral victory if it is not supported by a solid organization, a strong patronage network, and proven leadership credibility.

A recurring pattern in the case materials is the translation of symbolic religious status into political visibility and mobilization. Across the collected public reports, Gus Miftah is positioned not only as a preacher or public religious figure, but also as an actor whose religious standing became associated with electoral support, political endorsement, and eventual recognition within state structures. his religious visibility is explicitly connected to political recognition, while broader mobilizing networks describe religious honorifics and *pesantren* affiliations as electorally meaningful (Fatoni 2023; Fauzi 2024). In this sense, the title *Gus* did not operate only within a cultural or religious field; it also entered a political field in which symbolic credibility could be converted into influence, access, and formal proximity to power.

The materials referring to support networks, campaign activities, and the mobilization of kyai-based constituencies are significant here, even when some of the numerical details should be treated cautiously as reported claims rather than verified measurements. The evidence does not lie only in the numbers themselves, but in the repeated framing of religious title, *pesantren* networks, and symbolic recognition as politically consequential resources. This broader pattern is consistent with the literature on *kiai* brokerage and *pesantren*-linked political influence in Indonesia, which shows that religious prestige may be translated into electoral relevance through patronage, endorsement, and networked trust (Fealy & Robin Bush 2014; Yani et al. 2022). The interpretation that follows is that symbolic religious status may be translated into public-political authority through networks, endorsements, and the capacity to speak as a morally recognized figure.

This does not mean that religious legitimacy simply becomes political power in a linear manner. Rather, the case indicates a process of conversion in which traditional symbolic capital is expanded through charismatic presence and then linked to formal or semi-formal political

recognition. In Weberian terms, the case reveals not a pure type, but an intersection among traditional authority, charismatic authority, and limited legal-political recognition (Nikolakakis 2024; Weber 1978). The public significance of the title *Gus* in this case lies precisely in this capacity to move across social fields. What becomes visible here is not merely politicization in a narrow sense, but the sociological convertibility of symbolic religious status: a title rooted in moral prestige may become politically consequential when publics, networks, and institutions continue to treat it as a credible sign of authority.

3. *Analysis of the Gus Title Using Weber's Bureaucracy Theory*

Taken as a whole, the case does not support a simple conclusion that inherited religious authority has disappeared, nor that contemporary authority is now purely charismatic or media-driven. Instead, the materials point to a more layered configuration in which older forms of symbolic prestige persist, but only by passing through new arenas of recognition, controversy, and translation. Three recurring evidentiary patterns stand out: inherited symbolic status, public recognition through performance and visibility, and political translation through networks and endorsement. Together, these patterns suggest that the title *Gus* in the case of Gus Miftah operates as a hybrid form of legitimacy rather than a self-sufficient traditional marker.

A religious title can no longer be read only as a residue of *pesantren* tradition, but must also be understood as an active resource within contemporary contests over public authority. The evidence indicates that legitimacy in this context is neither fully secured by genealogy nor reducible to personal charisma. The title *Gus* acquires public force because it stands at the intersection of tradition, recognition, and contestation. Where recognition is stable, the title can operate as a taken-for-granted

marker of moral authority. Where recognition is disputed, however, the same title becomes an object of public negotiation.

This makes the case particularly relevant for a Weberian reading of authority in contemporary Indonesia, because it demonstrates that the empirical life of religious authority often exceeds the neat boundaries of Weber's ideal types. Rather than placing the case inside fixed classificatory boxes, Weber's ideal types are more useful here as relational coordinates that help explain how contemporary religious authority is assembled across overlapping social logics (Nikolakakis 2024). The case therefore, contributes to a broader sociological understanding of legitimacy as something historically inherited yet publicly renegotiated. It also clarifies why symbolic religious titles remain powerful even as the social conditions of their recognition become more unstable and publicly contested.

The conferral of the *Gus* title in the *pesantren* tradition of Javanese society when viewed through Max Weber's bureaucracy theory can be categorized as a bureaucracy traditional bureaucracy. This is because the legitimacy of power is based on an established belief in the sanctity of tradition which has a long existed in the traditions and history of Javanese society. Initially, this title was given to the son of a king and then spread to *kiai* and *pesantren* circles, reflecting high social status and the hope of becoming a spiritual leader. In this context, the *Gus* title is not just a name, but also a symbol of honor that contains moral responsibility. Title holders are expected to have in-depth religious knowledge and to serve as role models for society. When someone holds this title, they are expected to adhere to the norms and values that have existed for centuries.

Weber distinguishes between ascribed status and achieved status (Weber 2012). The *Gus* title is often an ascribed status, given based on descent (*Kiai's* child) or relationship with religious figures. However, in the case of Gus Miftah, there is an element of achieved status, in which individuals can claim the title even if they do not come from a lineage of

kiai, to gain recognition and influence. When Ta'im claimed the title of *Gus* without the appropriate background, he was seeking to bolster of his authority in the public's eyes. This created tension between the traditional authority that should be attached to the title and the practice of identity abuse.

In addition to traditional bureaucracy, the title of *Gus* also has charismatic elements. In Weber's view, charismatic leaders have power and authority that come from their personal charisma, not from their position or formal rules in a bureaucracy (Weber 2012). Gus Dur is an example of a charismatic leader who integrates traditional values and modernity. As President of Indonesia, Gus Dur was able to leverage the personal charisma he possessed, even though he had not held a formal position in the country's bureaucratic structure before. Gus Dur's charisma, which was rooted in his status as a descendant of *kiai*, made him respected, both in the *pesantren* world and in politics (Arifin 2015).

The use of the title *Gus* in a political context, as seen by Gus Miftah and the Jaga Nusantara network, illustrates how traditional elements (religious titles) can be rationalized and deployed for political puposes. Although this title was originally intended to describe descent and knowledge, it is now used in a political context to build support networks and mobilize the masses. In the case of Jaga Nusantara, where the title *Gus* was used by the caretakers of Islamic boarding schools to rally political support, we can see how informal bureaucracy developed into of a structured network. Although they do not operate within the formal state bureaucracy, they leverage the social structure and influence within the Islamic boarding school community to achieve certain political goals.

In *Gus* communities such as Jaga Nusantara, the struggle for legitimacy is inherently linked to existing power dynamics. The politics of legitimacy significantly influences the construction, maintenance, and dissolution of political order (Sligte, Greer, and de Dreu 2012). Legitimacy

must also be seen as a dynamic process and not as a static state. This is because legitimacy involves ongoing social networks and changing bases for claims and counter-claims of legitimacy (Zhu et al. 2019). This shows that in the *Gus* community, legitimacy is continuously negotiated and contested along with the development of social and power relations. More broadly related to the discourse of legitimacy which also functions as a gatekeeping mechanism, ensuring that social practices meet certain standards (Adams 2022). In the context of the *Gus* community, this means that legitimacy is used to regulate and validate the actions and authority of various members. Personally, legitimacy is a psychological property that causes individuals to believe in the fairness and justice of an authority or institution, resulting in voluntary compliance (Dickson, Gordon, and Huber 2022; Jackson 2015). This psychological aspect is important for understanding why members of the *Gus* community might accept or oppose a particular leader or practice.

The process of legitimacy is closely related to social stability and the conditions that can lead to social change. Justice and legitimacy are intertwined, with each influencing perceptions of the others (Van Hall 2022; Scheuerman 2024). This interaction is significant within the *Gus* community, where shifts in legitimacy can alter in social order and power structures. This has implications for the construction of legitimacy in a globally connected society, where local conflicts receive international attention, highlighting the complex interplay between local and global legitimacy (Binder 2025; Gippert 2016). For the *Gus* community, this means local power struggles are influenced by broader social and cultural context. According to Fischer et al. (2011) a legitimate local authority is essential for effective compliance and governance. Institutions of power, such as those in the *Gus* community, rely on legitimacy to ensure that their directives are followed.

The struggle for power and legitimacy in the *Gus* community is a multifaceted process involving dynamic social networks, psychological

acceptance, and the organization of social practices. Understanding these elements can provide insight into the ongoing power struggle and the mechanisms used to build and maintain legitimacy among the *Gus*. Today, the transformation of *Gus*'s role and image in the modern era is heavily influenced by the media, both in business and political contexts (Bulut 2020). Modern media not only shape images but also influence social and political narratives. Digital transformation demands innovation and effective leadership in the media industry (Draper 2021). In the context of the authority of the *Gus* title, the value-based social activism carried out by several individuals with the *Gus* title shows how traditional values can be used to address modern challenges and drive positive social change. However, on the other hand, the development of information technology has led other *Gus* to utilize the media to strengthen the legitimacy that produces religious authority in society (Bishop et al. 2023; R R Gazizov and Nagovitsyna 2017).

D. CONCLUSION

The findings show that the title *Gus* works as an inherited form of symbolic legitimacy, carrying expectations of piety and religious competence that give its holder an initial basis for recognition. That legitimacy is then sustained – or weakened – through public performance and circulation in mediated arenas, where recognition is actively produced rather than simply guaranteed by lineage. The Gus Miftah case shows how, once the title enters wider publics and political networks, its legitimacy becomes openly contested and takes on a hybrid Weberian form where traditional prestige intersects with charismatic visibility and limited legal-rational recognition.

These findings reflect that religious authority is not simply inherited or claimed, but continuously produced, tested, and renegotiated through public recognition. The sociological implication is that the *Gus* title remains

powerful as an inherited symbolic status, yet becomes increasingly fragile once it circulates in mediatized and politicized arenas where legitimacy depends on visibility, performance, and wider scrutiny. A limitation of this study is that it relies on secondary, publicly available documents and a single high-profile case, which restricts the ability to verify contested claims or generalize across different *Gus* figures and contexts. Further research should compare multiple *Gus* cases across regions and platforms and combine document analysis with interviews and digital ethnography to trace how legitimacy is stabilized, disputed, and translated into public-political authority over time.

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