Navigating the Political Terrain: How Political Contestation among National Sufi Ulama Shaping Political Preferences of Muslim Society in Indonesia

The involvement of Sufi Ulama of Tarekat Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah (TQN) Jagaraya in political contestation provides a distinct approach to introduce the presidential candidates they supported in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. In contrast to the conventional guru-disciple attachment, the Sufi ulama adopt various strategies to modify the standpoint of their Tarekat member and align it with particular political tendencies. The intent of this study is to identify the strategies implemented by the Sufi ulama to collect support for their preferred political candidates within the Tarekat community. By utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study revealed various strategies used by those ulama in introducing political leaders, yet additionally taking the congregation’s view regarding its process into consideration. Kiai Raga, with his traditional religious intellectual background, adopts traditional methods of gathering tarekat members who are interested in traditional tarekat rituals. Kiai Alam, on the other hand, embraces digital media to promote his political stance. These two varied methods by the two nationals Sufi Ulama display a dynamic combination of invention and adaptation, reflecting their diverse efforts to accommodate the political preferences of their respective tarekat members.

Keywords: Sufi Ulama, Political Identity, Tarekat


Kata kunci: Ulama Sufi, Identitas Politik, Tarekat
Introduction

Sufi order (i.e. Tarekat) is traditionally known as religious teaching that focuses on the spiritual development of Muslims. Sufism’s fundamental doctrine emphasizes the simplicity of life by distancing themselves from worldly concerns. It has been emphasized that a Muslim’s heart must be cleansed of worldly impurities in order for him to remain connected to God. Individuals are required to practice the Islamic Syariat along with Tarekat as religious path for cultivating Islamic spiritual devotion and recognizing God’s presence through the hearts. Scholars consider sufi order as a traditional scripturalist Islam since most of Muslims lived in rural area whose submit to this practice and retrieve from modernity. Because of this Sufi ideal, the Tarekat community is generally known to abstain from socio-political matters.

However, the existence of Tarekat Qodiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah in Pesantren Jagaraya (TQN Jagaraya), a prominent Tarekat in Indonesia, suggests that Sufi orders have a substantial influence on Indonesian socio-political dynamics. Previous studies pointed out how the growth of Sufi orders has been adapting to modernity and politics. In fact, many Muslims believe that Tarekat practice is essential in the religious life of modern Muslim cultures. One significant example is the renowned TQN Jagaraya, which has a long history of changing socio-religious landscape in Indonesia. Notably, it is its teachings commitment to strengthen the understanding of moderate and tolerant religious traditions, and against radicalism and religious-based violence which has always been a national issue. The Fundamental doctrine by the Murshid of this order (called Wasiat) and social acts of the Sufi Ulama among the community reflect the link between the Sufi order and national politics. However, prior studies on TQN Jagaraya have primarily concentrated on the content of the Wasiat. Meanwhile, the direct involvement of the Sufi ulama in the political arena, which is centered of this article, has rarely been considered.

TQN Jagaraya is a nation-wide organization and even has some overseas members in Southeast Asia. This Sufi order was instituted at Pesantren Jagaraya near, West Java in 1905 by Kiai Nur (Nur, hold a title as Murshid). He was succeeded by his son, Kiai Salamah who hold a title as Talqin. Since the death of the two Sufi gurus, the spiritual practice of TQN Jagaraya has been led by Ulama in various regions entitled Wakil Talqin. Therefore, the Sufi Ulama entitled Wakil Talkin play essential role in guiding the spirituality of the congregation, including shaping their socio-political belief. For practical purposes, they shall be referred to as Sufi Ulama throughout this study.

This research is based on the political intervention of the Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya Naqsyabandiyyah, Pesantren Suryalaya, in the 1990s, “RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs 35, no. 2 (December 2001): 33–59.

1 Harun Nasution, Filsafat Dan Mistisisme (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1978).
7 Howell, Peter L. Nelson, and M. A. Subandi, “New Faces of Indonesian Sufism: A Demographic Profile of Tarekat Qodiriyyah-Naqsyabandiyyah, Pesantren Suryalaya, in the 1990s.”
towards Tarekat members during the 2019 Indonesian presidential election. This situation exemplifies the patron-client nature of political connections between Sufi Ulama, Tarekat members, and national political figures. In particular, this study address at the political contestation between Kiai Raga (known as Wakil Talkin), who supports the presidential candidate Jokowi-Ma’ruf, and Kiai Alam, who supports the opposition, Prabowo, in shaping the political preferences of TQN Jagaraya members. These two Sufi Ulama are the two notable Wakil Talqin of TQN Jagaraya, having enormous social influence and religious authority across the whole community.

Pertaining to this issue, there are two common perspectives among scholars to understanding the relationship between Sufi Ulama in the political situation in Indonesia. First, it is focused on the political motivation for direct engagement of Sufi Ulama is founded on the objectives of constructing an ideal social order based on Islamic values. This earlier study suggested that such religious-political engagement as a type of struggle in establishing society through political practices based on the idea of nationalism. Second, it is noticed how the contestation of Sufi Ulama in political activity through religious symbols affects the internal conflict among Tarekat members. However, academics are still puzzled as to how the process of action formation that underpins Sufi Ulama’s efforts to foster the same preference among the community to select one of the political candidates works.

Therefore, employing Bourdieu’s Action Scheme theory this article attempts to elaborate the construction of the religious-political acts of the two Sufi Ulama above for shaping the same political preferences among Tarekat members, as reflected on social religious activities and the Tarekat narratives among TQN Jagaraya. The following discussion on this article focuses on the process of identification with the cognitive structure of the two Sufi Ulama that mediates their political aspiration with social reality, as well as the constructed acts carried out by those two figures that captivate the attention of the Tarekat community.

Mapping the Arena Structure: Tarekat Doctrine on Politics.

Sufi Ulama engagement in political activity takes Islamic teachings as the foundation for the action. Through their deeds, the Sufi ulama work as agents who facilitate the Tarekat community understanding the holy scriptures. Their political acts therefore have to be in tune with the two primary concepts conveyed by the Koran and hadith, namely the principle of equality (al-musawwah) and the principle of justice (al-adalah). Referring to these two fundamental principles considers the development of piety, as an essential element of diverse religious acts that serve generating social prosperity for Muslims as the primary objective of political engagement. Islamic Sufism traditionally conceptualize political authority among Muslim has to be synergized with the fundamental values of khalq and khuluq. Khalq is the spiritual side of power, whereas Khuluq represents force in its outward manifestation. Tarekat place communal prosperity as the ultimate goal, both internally and outside. The Sufi Ulama, thus, are required to embody this doctrine in all of their political endeavours.

The realization of a civil society as the primary objective of Sufi engagement in politics also alludes to common tarekat ideologies. Evans Pitchard states that the Sanusiyah Order in Cyrenaica views tarekat principles as the foundation of its activity while fighting for societal rights. Azwar and Muliono adopt the same argument defining the political practice foundation of Sattariyah and Naqsabandiyah tarekat devotees in West Sumatra whose political decision determined on the murshid fatwa. In this context, TQN members are relying on the testament (Wasiyat) of Abah Nur. The fundamental beliefs maintained in numerous foundations derived from tarekat doctrines and fatwas issued by tarekat leaders are connected to power management, which relates to the advantages of religion and the state.

It is considered that the underlying doctrine of power management depends on the actors who govern it. The personal interest of each actor has implication on practices relating to managing authority that contribute to achieving common goals. Meanwhile, in the context of Indonesia’s 2019 presidential election, actors ability in managing authority subjectively shaped Muslim voters engagement in the political process. They tend to view the political values of each presidential candidates based on their religious identity. Similar to that, TQN Jagaraya members indicate their political preference for candidates whose identified from the same tarekat. Herlambang and Kurniawan regard to this as a political identity that is perpetually embedded in the process of contestation involving religious symbols. This involvement derives from the conviction that their political credibility is dependent on their adherence to religion moral norms.

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14 Ibid.
16 Azwar and Muliono, “The Multifaced Politics: A Study on Polarization of Political Behavior of Tarekat Community in West Sumatera, Indonesia.”
The Political Stance of TQN Jagaraya Sufi Ulama

In this particular context, the Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya state their positions through social conducts, which indicates their assessment of certain aspects multiplied by the adequacy of social, economic, and cultural capitals. It reflects their experiences-shaped recognition that includes diverse sorts of capitals to reconstruct a new social space as a distinct mechanism. Furthermore, this constructed experience would determine their social behavior in responding and perceiving the reality. Such encounters establish a value system that impacts the way individuals think and behave, which is utilized to differentiate themselves from others through cultural competition.

Those capital is accumulated throughout the competitive process as a means of preserving authority in a certain social environment. Thus, the Sufi Ulama control over such capital, which has advanced as a function of their experience, impacts their decisions towards becoming further involved in political events.

Kiai Raga and Kiai Alam, are the two prominent Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya who has been actively engage in political debates. Their political standing constituted by their position as wakil talqin of Kiai Salamah, the Murshid, who was renowned for his political activities. Considering such a fundamental social capital, each of them has the capacity to develop new positions based on the structure of their individual experiences and other forms of acquired capital.

Kiai Raga grew up in the traditional religious environment of Pesantren Mulki, West Java, with a strong traditional Islamic education system that nurtured him into a religious figure with qualified religious knowledge expertise, particularly in the fields of ilm al-Balaghah (eloquence science) and ilm al-Mantiq (logic science). His thorough understanding of Islamic knowledge led to the community recognizing him as the 38th head of Tarekat Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah, succeeding Kiai Salamah. This symbolic capital is reinforced further by social and economic wealth. He is respected as the leader of a Pesantren covering 3 hectares area and owning 4 hectares of plantation land. The institution he manages not only contains a pesantren, but also formal educational facilities spanning from kindergarten (TK) to university level.

Kiai Alam is inversely related to such social habitus and capital of Kiai Raga. He grew up in urban environment and was exposed to modern technology advancement. This social setting led to educational preference that is more structured and updated. He went to a modern pesantren as a basis for expanding religious knowledge, which he continued overseas for his high education level. His intellectual background led to his recognition as an Islamic figure who mastered both religious knowledge and technology, resulting in building more modern management system of educational institutions. He founded a Quran Tahfidz Pesantren specifically for university students. In terms of institutional administration, his utilizing technology as a medium of dissemination and information has been displayed by the existence of the TQN Media Center for the Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah Jagaraya congregation. Additionally, he owns oil palm farms and private enterprises engaged in providing Spiritual Training and Healing. The community widely recognizes him to be an Islamic preacher whose followers dispersed over several cities. He is regarded as a moderate national preacher who is capable of

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21 Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, An Invitation to Reflective Sociology, 68.
integrating religion and technology.

Political Contestation of the Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya

The political contest between the two Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya takes place in the social setting that has been transformed into a resource battleground. The activities that occur within the arena are attempts to differentiate oneself from others. As a result, each actor develops new dispositions. They negotiate their capital as crucial actors by developing actions that attempt to modify the political views of the Tarekat members. Those political activities conducted by each of the Sufi Ulama, are separated by a classification system based on subjective evaluations and elements referring to their cultural conventions. In this scenario, the Sufi Ulama’s social experience and capital impose how the social acts created leads the decision-making process of the Tarekat members to the same option as the Sufi Ulama.

The primary component to developing a cohesive political voice is the existence of opposition or opposing differences. This is a significant fundamental indication of identity a commonality. The identity resemblance between the presidential candidate and the Tarekat is a crucial factor that strengthens the Sufi Ulama’s authority and position in political provisions within the congregation. This is accomplished by acts designed for introducing the persona and setting of the spiritual background of the political candidate he supports.

The TQN Sufi Ulama staged different kinds of encounters between presidential candidates in the Republic of Indonesia for the 2019-2024 term and Tarekat members. Kiai Raga adopted a negotiating strategy modeled after Kiai Salamah’s historical performs on the 1992 presidential election. Kiai Salamah is reported to have legitimized his support for President Soeharto by releasing the decree (maklumat) to the TQN Jagaraya congregation to vote for the Golkar party. AB followed suit by publishing a decree on October 18, 2018 in support of the pair candidate of Joko Widodo-Ma’ruf Amin in the 2019 presidential election. Furthermore, the stipulation of this decree was considered a representation of Kiai Nur teachings (Wasiat) regarding the absolute necessity of a balance between religion and the state, which is reflected in the pair of Joko Widodo as a political leader and Ma’ruf Amin as a religiousist.

Additionally, such an encounter was accomplished by personally presenting Ma’ruf Amin at the manaqib recitation forum conducted at the Jagad Rahmat Jakarta Islamic Boarding School on October 13, 2018 and at the Bandung Grand Mosque on July 6, 2018. More than a thousand Tarekat Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah Jagaraya members attended each of the two significant traditional religious ceremonies. That resembled the political branding process conducted by Kiai Raga. He presented Ma’ruf Amin to the congregation by highlighting his ancestry as the grandson of Syaikh Nawawi Banten and a descendant of the Banten Sultanate.

A bond was intentionally formed between the prospective presidential pair Joko Widodo-Ma’ruf Amin and the congregation of Tarekat Naqsabandiyah-Qadariyah Jagaraya. The pair, who were accompanied by the National Coalition Team (TKN), paid an

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23 Ibid., 6.
official visit to Jagaraya Islamic Boarding School. At its peak, TKN requested representatives from Tarekat Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah to the Presidential Palace to pledge Jokowi’s allegiance (talkin) as a member of the Tarekat congregation. Joko Widodo has thus formally become a member of the TQN Jagaraya.

Meanwhile, on the opposition side, Kiai Alam developed cultural alliance with presidential contender Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno. Prabowo made a visit to Jagaraya Islamic Boarding School which was openly received by the kiai. He was regarded as an experienced leader, despite the fact that his visit on February 4, 2019 was a mere pilgrimage and request for blessings. Kiai Alam underlined Prabowo’s affiliation with the congregation of TQN Jagaraya by paying a visit to Prabowo’s private residence in Jakarta. When such a visit was publicly portrayed as a national meeting of ustadz and kiai, the association he established was legitimized.

In addition, the chance encounter allowed him to converse with Prabowo regarding global challenges and their potential impact on the national economy and politics. Kiai Alam, therefore, utilized the same strategy as Kiai Raga, which conducted talqin zikir as an act of announcement that Prabowo had become a member of the prominent Tarekat member of TQN Jagaraya. The allegiance process received considerable media attention on social media. His political support for Prabowo was further cemented by his critical remarks against the former president in national policy implementation.

As previously stated, the action tendency of those Sufi Ulama, Kiai Raga and Kiai Alam, in the political negotiation process indicates the consideration of the Tarekat community preferences as a distinguishing mechanism from other candidates. There are two emerging trends in any endeavor to legitimate the presidential candidate in front of the TQN Jagaraya congregation. The first is the personal image element. Personal kinship and intellectual background were used to identify candidate capacity. The Tarekat congregation shares a religious identity, which is the second feature. By performing baiat talkin to both candidate pairings through separate actors, the legitimacy of the two presidential candidates as member of the extended family Tarekat Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah Jagaraya was established. Baiat talqin performed by Kiai Raga and Kiai Alam indicate equal capital ownership in the same arena. In this sense, baiat talqin constitutes a deciding factor in distinguishing one candidate pair from another as a political mechanism of the Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya in the 2019-2024 presidential election.

The fulfillment of acts by Kiai Raga and Kiai Alam through diverse trends reinforces the distinctiveness of the viewpoints created by their experiences. The constructed experiences as a habitus do not drive towards mechanical action, but rather toward measured action with an appraisal of the adequacy of the intended purpose. Personal statement by Kiai Raga regarding Ma’ruf Amin lineage confirms his genealogical closeness to Kiai Salamah and Kiai Nur, both of whom were prominent spiritual figures in the Tarekat of Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah Pesantren Jagaraya. Meanwhile, Kiai Alam crafted an image of an ideal leader who dominated the world discourse towards Prabowo by emphasizing the flaws of the former president in national policy implementation. The formation of such

28 SP, Interview, Jagaraya, 22 June 2019
29 HD, Interview, Jagaraya 23 March 2022
discourse demonstrates the function of the regulatory system (disposition) in structuring the society such that the individual preference of the Sufi Ulama incorporates in them (bodily hexis), forming the same consciousness and behavior.\(^{31}\) Regulating the structure of public awareness to select the promoted presidential candidate is a strategy of dominance through social and cultural capital.

The Sufi Ulama utilize their diverse social capital as a means to subjugate congregational views to moral imperatives. A predisposition toward universal moral ideals serves as the foundation for evaluating subsequent behaviors that are responded to in the same manner.\(^{32}\) Political support statements in the form of decrees by the Sufi Ulama, *baiat talqin* as a symbol of allegiance, and affirmation in the form of participation at different *manaqib* recitations became the norm for Jemaah Tarekat to approve and legitimate the presidential candidate. The objectification of knowledge and capital in certain arena through acts perceived by the community is an instance of actor political interests being situated.\(^{33}\) The situating process influence the congregation political preferences without taking into account theological and social concerns carried out by the Sufi Ulama.

The political inclinations of the Sufi Ulama of TQN Jagaraya, as manifested in different activities, serve to construct the condition of the Tarekat congregation in accordance with their proclivity for leader representation. Their modalities and experiences become prominent in efforts to lure the public as a strategy for forming specialized groupings of voters (classes). The identification of religious leaders, which has been identified by different studies as an approach for politicians to secure votes,\(^{34}\) is no longer the primary determinant. Instead of providing an instrument to impose decisions, the Sufi ulama’s religious identity constitutes a component of the paradigm owned to establish a new class structure in politics.\(^{35}\) The search to build a class based on capital and knowledge gained through experience is precisely the method by which the Sufi ulama tarekat binds the adherents.

Such certain community associations imply a unique form of relation between Sufi Ulama and socio-political decisions. This association is founded on the notion that religion is an essential instrument for political negotiation.\(^{36}\) Those fragmented Sufi ulama symbolized religious Islam incorporating social and cultural resources legitimized by religious experiences to shape new structures for their congregations by binding acts and decisions. Such of political inclinations, therefore, are regarded as noble and pious actions due to the act of joining a particular group through spiritual endeavors.\(^{37}\)

However, in this study, the presence of symbolic capital combined with the habitus to form the same perception with reference to the standard understanding of the congregation as a dominated class is the key factor that is significant in influencing the political choices.

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32 Michael Halewood, “‘Class Is Always a Matter of Morals’: Bourdieu and Dewey on Social Class, Morality, and Habit(Us),” *Cultural Sociology* 17, no. 3 (September 18, 2023): 373–389.
Conclusion
In this study, the engagement of Sufi ulama in politics, which has traditionally been considered to be utilizing religious symbols by manipulating the spiritual guru-disciple connection, is discovered to be different. The findings of this study revealed that leveraging process of religious symbols adapted to the demands of class construction, which adapted to the congregation's perspective as an authority figure. The experience of the Sufi ulama of TQN Jagaraya generated through the combination of religious education and socioeconomic capital owned subordinates the political appraisal of the Tarekat members as the lower social class. Through differentiated efforts toward the development of the image of presidential candidates supported by each Sufi Ulama TQN Jagaraya, this process promotes a new structure in society with distinct social classes. The difference in strategies for obtaining congregational support used by Kiai Raga and Kiai Alam is the result of distinct patterns of innovation and improvisation that emerge as a result of different assessment methods. Experience and capital become the fundamental components in forming the number of classes that serve as the primary foundation for voting.

The discovery of the main elements in the political action of Sufi Ulama to influence the political decision-making of his Tarekat members as part of Indonesian citizens whose right to vote in the presidential election, is produced through the conception of social action introduced by Bourdieu. This concept effectively identifies the link between habitus and the area in which the forces that generate individual capital in operation function. However, this study restricts the interaction between the Sufi Ulama and the social space of Tarekat in general by neglecting to address the contestation of Sufi ulama in politics, resulting in the potential impact toward internal relationship within the Tarekat Qadariyah-Naqsabandiyah of Jagaraya. Thus, neglected aspects in this study could serve as the foundation for future research to provide new perspectives that might confirm or evaluate this research conclusions.

Acknowledgments
The authors are grateful to all informants and participants who shared their experiences and contributed to the research.

Competing Interests
This research is self-funded or does not receive any funding from religious organisations or interest groups that could have an impact on the findings.

Author’s Contributions
This study was written in collaboration by the authors which All of them contributed to this paper. Santoso compiled the information and composed the article. Abdullah developed the theoretical framework as well as the study objectives. The final results of this research were evaluated by Yusuf, Zakariaz and Rahayu.

Ethical Considerations
This article adheres to the publication norm of not contacting any human or animal subjects.

Funding Information
This paper did not receive financial support from individuals, religious social institutions, and interest groups.

Data Availability
Data exchange has been demonstrated in writing.

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Halewood, Michael. “‘Class Is Always a Matter of Morals’: Bourdieu and Dewey on Social Class, Morality, and Habit(Us).” Cultural Sociology 17, no. 3 (September 18, 2023): 373–389.


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