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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Personification of Religious Elite, Political Behavior and Identity Politics: A Profile of Regional Elections in Indonesia

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| ABSTRACT

The religious elite's role is significant in Indonesia's regional head elections. The political behavior of the religious elite; The role of the religious elite has legitimacy as a symbolic representation of the highest religious authority in society. The politicization of Identity at the local level has strengthened along with the presence of elite groups that participate in proclaiming the superiority of Identity, the spirit of communalism, feudalism, and regional issues in political events. This paper aims to analyze the relationship between the role and behavior of religious elites and identity politics in regional elections in the realm of politics at the local level. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and analysis of qualitative research data revealed: First, the dynamics of direct regional elections in Situbondo, Banyuwangi, Bondowoso, and Jember; second, the legitimacy of power and the political behavior of religious elites in regional elections; third, the current role of the elite mobilizes the masses and political campaigns and forth, the use of Identity Politics in regional elections. This paper suggests that the government and election organizers increase consistency in keeping the public sphere from being dominated by specific identity political forces by commodifying the politicization of religion; whatever form of identity politics in the name of religion does not cause a commotion that has the potential to undermine the disintegration of nation and state.

| KEYWORDS

Religious elite, political behavior, identity politics, elections, regional heads

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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### 1. Introduction

The fundamental relationship between political behavior and the personification of religious elites and identity politics became a new phenomenon in local elections. The role of the religious elite becomes a solid magnet to gain votes so that it becomes a surefire strategy for regional head candidates who compete to win and are elected as Regents or regional heads. The role of the religious elite is not only persuasive but directly into the successful team of candidates, who become political campaigners, and even his photos spread on banners and posters of regional candidates posted on the side of the highway. Indonesia's religious elites, who have become successful teams, have begun to increase since the enactment of the direct regional election system. More most areas in Indonesia are composed of Muslims. According to data, there are several identity politics that candidates use to win, such as the case of the DKI Jakarta Governorship election, where there were findings of blasphemy committed by regional head candidates, known as blasphemy against the holy verses of the Quran letter Al-Maidah 54(Djumadin, 2022) It is from this association that religious Identity becomes a political commodification to strengthen the politics of Identity on a national scale and local spaces.(Chen & Urminsky, 2019; J. Jung & Mittal, 2020; Rekker et al., 2017)

The current literature examines the following three points: First, religious elites' strong influence and role in regional elections. (Arvate et al., 2021; Aspinnall, 2005; Baker, 2018; Carroll, 2018; Lassébie, 2020; Mbah et al., 2019; Mechkova & Wilson, 2021; Meitzner, 2009; Prihatini, 2020; Warshaw, 2019). Second, literature that examines political behavior and religious hegemony in regional

elections. (Gray, 2013; Mas'oed, 2019; Simone, 2018; Sobhy, 2021). Third, studies that examine the use of identity politics as a political campaign issue (Buschman, 2018; Choe, 2019; Kaufman, 2019; Lind, 2018; Litchfield, 2018; Marshall & Read, 2003; Meznaric, 2019; Nordholt, 2018; Wuest, 2019) From current literature studies, there is a scarcity of studies that specifically examine how the role and behavior of religious elites become a successful team to win regional elections by utilizing identity politics to achieve victory and strengthen power.

This study specifically aims to analyze the contradictory behavior of the Indonesian people during the pandemic. In line with this, three questions are answered in this research: a) What is the role of religious elites in direct regional elections in Situbondo, Bondowoso, and Jember? B) What factors were behind the religious elite becoming a successful team during the election of regents? As well as looking at the political behavior of religious elites in the dynamics of local political democracy. C) What are the implications of the involvement of religious elites in successful teams of local elections and strengthening identity politics at the local level? What is the solution?

This study is compiled based on arguments that rely on the influence of the signification of Religious elites, political behavior, and identity politics in regional head elections in local politics. In addition to reviewing the negative side of identity politics, the analysis also reviews the positive side. First, that identity politics is not always dangerous. On the one hand, it can positively impact the development of democracy in Indonesia. This is based on the fact that the social situation of society in Indonesia is plural and multicultural, making identity politics impossible to disappear, especially in political events both at the local and national levels.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Religious elites and political behavior**

The general notion that religious elites can influence political behavior and how that influence occurs is fundamentally unknown (Djupe & Calfano, 2009). Among the many possible mechanisms, the effect of information on the decision-making process is included in the elite's statements (Tajali, 2017). All this shows that belief in religious elites is firm. The arguments given by religious elites vary widely in interpretation, cues the process of political behavior do influence beliefs and ambivalence of attitudes, but in a way that challenges some broad assumptions about the integrity and importance of religious groups in politics (Calfano, 2010; Collins et al., 2011; Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000; E. Jung, 2014).

The power imbalance between participants is a central aspect of elite interviews. As feminist social scientists have argued, the imbalance of power can affect not only the practical structure of the interview but also the experiential and normative dimensions of the relationship that arises between the parties to the interview. Currently, there are limited means to analyze the differentials of power in elite interviews concretely. This article addresses this gap by leveraging feminist sociolinguistics to develop an original "strength index" for measuring power in the context of elite interviews in the social sciences. This index is applied to interview texts to explore their usefulness and develop methods that can be usefully expanded in future studies.

This article explores the Chinese Party-State's 'anxiety' about spirituality from a domestic religious, and geopolitical perspective. It analyzes its effectiveness in using sovereignty and government to rule, regulate, control, promote and suppress religious activities after the Reformation Era in 1978. After introducing how the People's Republic of China (PRC) regulates religious affairs, this paper examines how the PRC uses spatial and discursive strategies to suppress unwanted religious practices. The article then examines case studies of the PRC's repression of religious movements. The study not only incorporates spatial and spiritual dimensions into theoretical discussions about governance and sovereignty but also illustrates how these two dynamic forms of state power are intertwined to influence and shape the lives and thoughts of individuals in the modern state of the PRC.

### **2.2 Identity Politics, In Regional Head Elections**

In terms of identity politics, according to Mark Lillia and colleagues, it discusses an interesting issue in the language of identity politics. This presents many problems: 1) confusion between identity politics and its close allies such as diversity or professional Identity; 2) confusion in identity politics; 3) reactions to the identity politics represented; and 4) the controversy over the concept in his allies personified by Mark Lilla. This paper seeks to chart a path between these ideas to formulate a practical political response to these developments.

This study was conducted on 1302 Dutch youth. Examines the dynamics of political identity and issues attitudes. Some theories propose that voters form an identity early in life that determines attitudes. Other conflicting theories argue that attitudes are the cause of Identity. However, research on this controversy has never focused on the crucial phases of adolescence. The results revealed that youth form an identity that is more consistent with previous attitudes than vice versa. Furthermore, highly educated youth often adapt their attitudes to their identities, which explains the educational gaps in the consistency of those attitudes. Finally, the findings suggest that early cultural attitudes build identities that can further determine economic attitudes.

The importance of consumer political identity in the consumer journey has grown in recent years. This article describes and discusses four main issues relevant to consumer and political Identity: (1) the definition and conceptual structure of political Identity as a construction; (2) practical guidelines for measuring political Identity; (3) the role of political Identity in consumer decisions; and (4) an examination of how political Identity can affect the consumer journey in retail. Overall, insights from this article can help retailers better utilize consumers' political identities for their tactical implementation strategies and processes.

### **3. Methodology**

The power of influence of religious elites as a successful team in regional elections by utilizing identity politics in the political dynamics of local space was chosen as the subject of this paper with three considerations. First, how religious elites' role in Direct Regional Head Elections in Situbondo, Bondowoso, and Jember. Second, What factors were behind the religious elite becoming a successful team during the election of regents, as well as looking at the political behavior of religious elites in the dynamics of local political democracy. Third, how do the implications of the involvement of religious elites be a successful team for regional elections and strengthen identity politics at the local level? Understanding this does require mapping to formulate actions. The above considerations are expected to provide a thorough reading and insight into problem-solving, especially regarding religious elites' behavior and identity politics in regional elections.

This qualitative research rests on primary and secondary data. Primary data were taken from field studies to observe directly and from the mapping research aspect. The data needed consists of data on the shape, factors, and implications of the study of *TAPAL KUDA*, East Java, namely, districts of Situbondo, Banyuwangi, Bondowoso, and Jember. First, the dynamics of direct regional elections in Situbondo, Banyuwangi, Bondowoso, and Jember. Second, the legitimacy of power and the political behavior of religious elites in regional elections. Third, the current role of the elite mobilizes the masses and political campaigns. Fourth, the use of Identity Politics in regional elections.

This study involved three parties in the data collection. They are (a) informants consisting of the Chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the United Development Party (PPP), (b) The successful team of regional head candidates, (c) the general election commissioner (KPU) of Situbondo, Banyuwangi, Bondowoso and Jember districts respectively.

The research process lasted two months, starting with desk reviews, field observations, and interviews. Before field research was conducted, various secondary materials, including online news, were collected to map religious elites' behavior and identity politics' use to achieve victory in regional elections. Furthermore, observations were made in several regional head candidates' political campaigns, utilizing the elite's religious identity politics. Finally, the interview was conducted with the three informants mentioned above for mapping purposes.

Then, the data analysis is carried out in two stages. First, it is carried out before the research work; Second, it begins when data collection begins and after accumulating data for a specific duration. First, determine the method of data collection, analytical data, research type, and study time and place.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

#### ***4.1 Dynamics of Direct Regional Head Elections in Situbondo, Bondowoso, and Jember***

Situbondo Regency is a regency in East Java located in the Horseshoe area on the north coast of Java Island. Situbondo has the slogan of the city of *Santri* because there are many *pesantren*, namely, PP Salafiyah Syafi'iyah (KHR. Azaim Ibrahimy, S.Sy), PP Walisongo (KHR. Muhammad Khalil As'ad), PP Source of Flowers (KH. Syainuri Sufyan), PP Nurul Huda, Peleyan (Habib Musthofa), PP Nurul Huda, Paowan (KH. Mursyid Romli). The characteristic of Situbondo society is very high in its religiosity, a paternalistic society where the power and power of a kyai or religious elite determine policies and decisions. Two big kyai are role models known as Kyai, the western stronghold of Pondok Pesantren Wali Songo, KHR. Cholil As'ad is his caretaker and kyai of the eastern stronghold of Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo, KHR. Azam Ibrahimy, as the fourth caregiver, replaced KHR. Ach. Fawaid As'ad Samsul Arifin.

In direct local elections, these two influences of the forces of the religious elite determine the victory of the candidate's spouse, whether supported by the kyai of the western camp or the kyai of the eastern camp. This is unique in Situbondo; no matter how professional it is, it will never be a winner if it is not supported by one of the kyai. As stated by DPC PPP chairman Situbondo Muhyidin Khotib:

..."Situbondo is a unique area, all that kyai says, if white kyai all participate white, if red kyai all follow red, the majority of people obey kyai; Until there is a slogan in *Madura* language, "Mate Odhik Norok Kyai," which means life and death joining kyai. Related to the Regent is also like that if it is not approved by kyai, yes. So don't register as a candidate because you will never win.

The interview results show that the level of obedience and participation of the people of Situbondo is very high to Kyai's orders. So, the elite and religious hegemony in specific segments of traditional society is very much in control of the surrounding society. In the next development, the religious elites or kyai not only teach or engage in devotion in pesantren. As a result, few became political figures, regional leaders, ministers, and even presidents.

Related to the Situbondo Regional Election on December 9, 2015, of the three candidate pairs, there were three people from the Kyai circle, namely KH. Abdullah Faqih Gufron is the caretaker of Tanjung Glugur Islamic boarding school, Mangaran Situbondo District, KH. Abd Hamid Wahid from Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo and KH. Fadil Muzakky Shah from Pondok Pesantren Al Qodiri Jember. This picture can be seen from the three successions of direct regional elections for 2005-2010, 2010-2015, and the third period 2015-2020. The candidates selected are from a group supported by one of the most prominent Islamic boarding school camps between the Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Islamic boarding school and the Wali Songo Islamic boarding school. Here's a table showing the elections;

Table 1.1 Situbondo Regional Election Votes Wednesday, December 9, 2015

No	Name	Proposing Party	Votes	Percentage	Information Political Identity
1	R. Abdullah Faqih Gufron. H. Untung	PDIP Demokrat	18961	5,10%	- Leadership of Pondok Pesantren Tanjung Glugur Mangaran - exs Kepala desa Tanjung Pecinan
2	KH. Abdul Hamid Wahid KH. Ach. Fadil Muzakki Syah, S.Pd.I	PPP Gerindra	158636	42,66%	-Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo -Pondok Pesantren Al Qodiri Jember
3	H. Dadang Wigiarto, SH H. Yoyok Mulyadi, MSi.	PKB	194280	52,24%	- Lawyer dan simpatisan Ponpes Wali Songo Situbondo - Leadearship of Dinas PU dan Bina Marga Situbondo

Source: KPU Situbondo, data processed 2017

Direct local elections in Situbondo Regency are visible in the significant influence of religious elites and identity politics of candidates' spouses. For example, the winners of the Regent and Deputy Regent of Situbondo Dadang Wigiarto and Yoyok Mulyadi are not from the Kyai circle but are candidates supported and approved by KH. Cholil As'ad Pondok Pesaantren Wali Songo.

#### **4.2 The legitimacy of power and Political Behavior of Religious elites in Regional Head Elections in Bondowoso**

The regional head election (*PILKADA*) of Bondowoso Regency is suspected that there is a significant scenario from the Regent of Pertahana Amin Said Husni and almost a large number of parties in parliament and all *gurem* parties totaling 19 Political Parties, trying to keep the regional head elections carried out by bringing up "puppet" regional head candidates from PKNU, this is what makes ripples in the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia. The Bondowoso Regional Election Dagelan was also increasingly evident when the DPC PKNU Bondowoso finally withdrew its support for the Muna couple. Muna was previously carried by PKNU when Achmad Dhofir still chaired it. Two weeks after registration to KPU, KH. Dhofir, who is also the Speaker of the Bondowoso DPRD, changed parties and even became the Chairman of the DPC PKB Bondowoso

Related to the protests by non-governmental organizations and sympathizers from the PDIP who accused the dirty play in the regional elections. So the Chairman of the DPC PKB Bondowoso, who also serves as the Speaker of the Bondowoso DPRD, said:

....."it is unlikely that Muna's candidate will withdraw from the election nomination that the KPUD has set. "If you withdraw from the candidacy, you can get a fine of IDR 20 billion, and I estimate that Muna can't pay for it. What is clear is that the Bondowoso regional elections are very democratic and by the will of the majority of Bondowoso citizens.

Local elections in Bondowoso also confirmed the power of religious hegemony and the thick of identity politics. After the reform period, those who occupied the position of Regent or deputy Regent came from among the Kyai Pesantren or nahdhatul ulama (NU) figures. The victory of the pair of regional head candidates must get the support and blessing of Kyai from the Islamic Boarding School;

Table. 2. Kyai's support for elected regents Amin Said and Salwa Arifin:

No	Elite Name	Religious Identity	Information
1	Kh.Idris Marzuki	Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo Kediri	Pengasuh
2	KH. Mutawakkil Alallah	Pondok Pesantren Genggong Probolonggo	Pengasuh
3	KH. Zaini	Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo	Pengasuh
4	KH. A. Nawawi Abd. Dalil	Pondok Pesantren Sidogiri	Pengasuh
5	KH. Cholil As'ad	Pondok Pesantren Wali Songo Situbondo	Pengasuh
6	KHR. Ach. Azaim Ibrahimy	Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Situbondo	Pengasuh

Source: In an interview with Aswaja success team leader H. Tohari, the data was processed.

The candidate for the Regent of Pertahana was also supported and approved by many significant clerics in East Java, marked when the declaration, which was accompanied by the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's Maulid, was attended by clerics and senior officials of the supporting party. Many scholars who attended included KH Idris Marzuki from Lirboyo, Kediri, Kiai from Pesantren Zainul Hasan Genggong, Kiai from Pesantren Nurul Jadid Paiton, Kiai from Pesantren Sidogiri and Kiai from Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo, Asembagus. The support, blessing, and hegemony of religion by the kyai or local elite largely determines the victory of the regional head in Bondowoso. It isn't very easy for the candidate's spouse, who does not have the social capital support of Kyai charismatic. Since the enactment of Law No. 32 of 2004 concerning direct regional head elections. No pair of independent candidates or pairs of nationalist-backed candidates came out victorious. As shown in the election table below;

Table.3 Bondowoso District Elections, 6 May 2013

No	Name	Proposing Party	Votes	Prosentase	Information
1	<b>"MUNA"</b> Drs. Mustawiyanto, MS.i & Abdul Manan	PKNU	77.275	19.33%	
2	<b>"ASWAJA"</b> Drs. H. Amin Said Husni & Drs. KH. Salwa Arifin	PKB, PPP, PKS, Gerindra, Golkar, Demokrat, Partai gurem	279.734	69,98%	Incumbent Ketua Syuriah PCNU

Source: KPU Bondowoso Regency, data processed

Judging from the victory of the ASWAJA Incumbent pair, with a significant vote gain of 69.98%, shows that the power of kyai hegemony through religious ritual activities can gain votes, in addition to the defense factor being one of the evidence of the strong influence of power in regional politics. Some other factors that are also supportive are the network of power, funding, and the help of the local elite through its religious hegemony in mobilizing the masses. Besides, the candidate for deputy regent is KH. Salwa Arifin is a religious figure who owns Pesantren, a Syuriah in the Nahdhatul Ulama Branch Leader of Bondowoso regency. Utilizing the *Ikatan Alumni Santri Salafiyah Syafi'iyah* (IKSASS) is an ex-students network (Santri Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Situbondo Alumni Association) because he is also a student alumnus and became Ustadz in Sukorejo Situbondo. The majority of political parties supported the incumbent, so it was difficult to find a challenger, even if there was a competitor suspected to be the pair of candidates or shadows that were deliberately created by the incumbent because, at that time, there was no rule that a

single candidate could be chosen as it is today. So the names Mustawiyanto and Abdul Manan appeared as potential puppets because other candidates are unlikely to speculate on fighting against the incumbent.

#### 4.3 Profile of the support of the religious elite in Banyuwangi Regency.

The regional head election in Banyuwangi on December 9, 2015, was also a party of the incumbent. It's the same with Bondowoso county, which has only two candidates fighting. The signal about the pair of puppet candidates is also rife, as most of the major parties in parliament support the incumbent pair; PDIP, PAN, PKS, Gerindra, Demokrat, Nasdem, PKB, and PPP, while the competitors are only supported by Golkar and Hanura parties. The 2015 Banyuwangi Regent general election was held on December 9, 2015, to elect the Regent and Deputy Regent of Banyuwangi for the 2016-2021 period. Direct regional elections in Banyuwangi since 2005 were won by Ratna, the wife of Winasa Regent of Jembrana Bali, the winner of the 2010-2015 Regent duet of Anas and Yusuf, both of whom were carried out by the PKB, the third time in 2015. The -2020 incumbent managed to maintain its power, but there is something different: the party that carries it is PDIP.

Table 5. Banyuwangi District Election December 9, 2015

No	Candidate Name	Proposing Party	Votes	Percentage
1	Abdullah Azwar Anas & Yusuf Widyatmoko	PDIP, PAN, PKS, Gerindra, Demokrat, Nasdem, PKB, PPP	680.365	88%
2	Ir. Sumantri Soedomo, MP & Sigit Wahyu Widodo, SH	Golkar dan Hanura	85.431	11%

Source: SK. KPU No. 52/kpts/KPU/kab.014.329662/XII/2015, December 22, 2015, data processed in 2017

Of the two pairs of regent candidates who came from among the kyai and santri, only Abdullah Azwar Anas benefited not only from being supported by a large number of political parties but also supported by social capital from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) because he had also served as the administrator of the central Anshor and until now still serves as the Chairman of the central Nahdatul Ulama Scholars Association (ISNU). As Thoriqul Haq says about Anas below;

....."Anas is still the best in Banyuwangi, so PKB provides recommendations; we want togetherness with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) to be maintained in the face of the upcoming regional elections and stated that they follow the directions of the kyai in Banyuwangi. "PKB is a party born by NU. In the Banyuwangi regional elections, several NU cadres have come forward, so we don't want this inter-election to break out. For solidity and fulfilling the directives of the kyai, the PKB finally decided to support the incumbent. We have consulted with the scholars in Banyuwangi before deciding to support Anas and see quite successfully executing the *jamiyah* contract with NU. The PKB wants to keep nu's extended family intact in the face of political competition. We also communicate with NU Banyuwangi so that all cohesion is maintained. Moreover, Anas is a pure NU cadre...."

Based on NU Banyuwangi's aspiration record, Anas also received majority support, which was supported by 1,014 votes or about 93 percent of the total 1,088 votes from Islamic boarding school caregivers, sub-district level MWC administrators, branch administrators, and NU autonomous bodies. Moreover, in the 2010 regional elections, the Anas-Yusuf couple also signed a *Jamiyah* contract with NU which contains mandates related to solving community problems, such as improving the quality of education, economy, health, maintaining religious harmony, and so on.

#### 4.4 The Existence of the Role of Elites to mobilize the masses and political campaigns in Jember Regency

The role of Kiai in the political stage of regional elections in Jember is significant, considering his role as a community leader who can move the masses efficiently, especially people who are passionate about their shoplifting. His power in mobilizing the masses is easily used as a mount by potential regional leaders to get as many votes as possible. Kiai Yusuf is one of the Kyai that is quite influential in the southern part of Jember; his shop is widely used as a reference for the public to choose a candidate for leader, so one month before the election took place Kiai Yusuf had declared himself as a supporter of candidate no. 2. In addition, Ustadz Tohari, one of the students from Kiai Muzaki Syah, the caretaker of PP Al-Qodiri Gebang Jember, stated that he fully supports candidate No. 2 as the regional leader of the Jember regency.

On the other hand, Kiai Haromain, one of the most influential kyai in the NU body, supports the no. 1 candidate because it is backgrounded by the PKB and NU, which have previously been declared as the no. 1 supporting party. In addition, there is a young Kiai Muchlisin in Curah Lele village who, according to sources from those closest to him, fully supports candidate No. 1, namely from the couple Sugiarto and dr. Dwi. Participating in Kiai in the political stage has created divisions in the middle of society, between one kyai and another Kiai with different choices, in fact about the role of Kiai has been alluded to by a national figure, Gus Dur, in his book *Wisdom Of Gusdur* so that a Kiai does not participate in the electoral process, because this can cause divisions

in the middle of society. Kiai's role on the political stage has also lowered people's confidence in the Kiai shop because some think that Kiai, who participates in the political stage, is materialistic. Although this view without concrete evidence is limited to perceptions born in the middle of society. The fight can be seen from the two figures of NU Gugiarto and KH Muqit, who fought in the 2015 Jember regional election, as shown in the following table:

**Table.6** Jember Regency Regional Election December 9, 2015

No	Name	Proposing Party	Votes	Percentage	Information
1	Ir. Sugiarto & dr Dwi Karyanto, Sp. Bs	Gerindra, PKB, PKS, Golkar, PPP, Demokrat	452.519	45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District Secretary</li> <li>• Director of Rsud Jember</li> </ul>
2	Dr. Hj. Faidah, MMR & KH. Abdul Muqid Arief	PDIP, Nasdem, Hanura, PAN	525.519	55%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of Bina Sehat Hospital</li> <li>• Leadership of Pesantren Al Fatah-Silo Jember</li> </ul>

The regional elections in Jember on December 9, 2015, became the historical recorder of a woman of Arab blood named dr Faidah, who could penetrate the power of patriarchal culture very thick in the horseshoe area. The results of this election show that there is a significant transformation of rationality in society from traditional to rationalistic. Although it is undeniable that the pair of deputy regents from among the religious elite or Kiai caretakers of Al Fatah Islamic boarding school, Silo Jember district, who also serves as the administrator of the Nahdatul Ulama (PCNU) Jember Branch Leader, contributed significantly to the victory of the regional head election. A very fierce battle between Nahdlatul Ulama cadres, Sugiarto, known as Pak Giek and KH. Muqid Abd Arief.

**4.5 Utilization of Identity Politics in Regional Head Elections**

The use of religious identity politics in the contestation of direct regional head elections is significantly dominating used by the pair of candidates for the head, and deputy regional head carried out through religious activities, starting from mass gatherings in Islamic boarding schools, mosques, and Musholla. Taking advantage of various events commemorating Islamic holidays, the implementation of the safari of recitation of Nariyah sholawat. Follow Friday prayers in turn. There is a change in the meaning of the rituals of religious traditions. To perpetuate the power of a regional head under the hegemony of the religious elite, issued a circular to the Regent to all government agencies and all educational institutions at all levels to read sholawat nariyah before entering school, entering offices, and all government events. Like the opening of the meeting and the beginning of the ceremony.

Implementing congregational dhuhr prayers at the Jamik Mosque in Situbondo is an obligation for the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in the Situbondo regency government by filling in attendances that are directly supervised by the Regional Civil Service Agency (BKD). So practically, from 11 to 2 pm, the service at the office of the entire Situbondo regency is closed because it requires congregational prayers. But there is also a lot of cuteness done by civil servants because researchers see firsthand that the civil servants come to the mosque for absentee signatures but do not participate in congregational prayers and even sit around in the room to eat rojak as a result of an interview with Ach. Yani as secretary of the Public Works and Clan Development Office of Situbondo, as follows;

....." prayer is a human right. why should it be required. The important thing is that every day I am absent so that I am not transferred to the same as the Regent."

Before being elected as Regent, there was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Kiai, who supported it. The regional budget and revenue facilitate allowances for salaried teachers in surau or mushola (APBD). Utilization in power structures, for example, in determining and appointing echelon one to four officials, the Regent and Deputy Regent will wait for orders and directions from Kyai, who have supported him. Religious elites also carry out the Friday tradition of sweets to change the meaning of showing the strength of the mass base of students, *alumnus*, and sympathizers of Islamic boarding schools. It is the use of religious hegemony for the formation of identity politics so that it can be used as a tool to manipulate, as a tool to rally political power to achieve economic power and power politics. The Regent's Pavilion, which is usually used as an official venue for official events, receiving state guests, and the inauguration place of local government officials, began to change its value to become a place for religious events such as Qur'an *khataman*, sholawatan venues, Qosidah competitions, yellow book recitations, and various religious events in commemorating Islamic holidays.

## 5. Conclusion

From all the descriptions above, the hegemony of the religious elite in the dynamics of local politics in direct regional elections is dominant in forming identity politics. So it is used as a manipulation tool by utilizing his charisma and social capital. These religious elites can also rally political power to gain economic power and seek power in politics. The use of identity politics in achieving victory in sorting Regional Heads cannot be separated from the support of the elite, especially the patron-client relationship between kyai and santri. Using network power, funding, and mutually beneficial cooperation are reasons elites support the incumbent. And some of the other incumbents and cadets also came from among the kyai and students. This makes it easier to access to penetrate political power structures to the grass root level (mass base). That is why the incumbent and candidate forces from among the kyai and santri are more dominant in the contestation of regional elections in the Horseshoe area of East Java Province.

In the context of hegemony, religion gives legitimacy to power to the ruling group and the people it controls. Religion gives a spiritual dimension to existing institutions and meaning to changing demands. The spirit of religion that can provide power for the existence of power makes religion often used as a tool to perpetuate power. Political power now adorns various corners of society, especially in Indonesia. This phenomenon gets worse when political education is not running well and the functioning of local wisdom institutions of the community, both in the form of traditions and social norms that can functionally strengthen family ties and social cohesion, and prevent social conflicts, both in the name of religion, ethnicity and culture. So it is not surprising that every political event at the local level is always vulnerable to discrimination and violence by politicizing religious symbols.

The study's recommendations suggest that governments and election organizers increase consistency in keeping public spaces from being dominated by specific identity political forces by commodifying the politicization of religion; whatever form of identity politics in the name of religion does not cause a commotion that has the potential to undermine the disintegration of nation and state.

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