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Nyai and Politics: The Role of Nyai Muhimmah in the Winning of the Candidate Pair Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto in the 2015 Rembang Regency Election

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the role of the pesantren elite in winning the Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto candidate pair in the 2015 Rembang District Election. Islamic boarding schools specifically have not been carried out by many researchers. This is because most studies on Islamic boarding schools so far have focused on the kiai as the strongest figure who dominates various cultural, social, economic and political capitals of pesantren. The theory used to look at the practice of the 2015 Rembang local elections where Nyai Muhimmah was staged was James C. Scott's patron-client. He explained that the patron-client relationship can be seen through the pattern of relations that exist between the elite as patrons and the community as clients. By using a qualitative method, namely data collection through in-depth interviews and literature studies, the authors found that Nyai as a female pesantren leader was able to increase the electability of the couple Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto with absolute victory in all sub-districts even though she ran as a candidate from an independent path. Through her network, namely Islamic boarding schools, organizations and individuals, she succeeded in winning the pair Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto. Based on this, James Scott's theory has proven to be applicable and relevant to analyzing the patron-client relationship between Nyai and the people in Rembang Regency in the 2015 district election

INTRODUCTION

General elections are often only interpreted as a legal means to change power. In fact, elections can also be interpreted as momentum to provide an evaluation of leaders in the last five years. As in its practical meaning, elections are a process of selecting figures to fill certain political positions. This is not much different according to Harris G Warren in Ramlan Subakti, explaining that elections are an opportunity for the community to choose the leaders they want. In the process of determining this, people have the opportunity to determine what and who exactly they need (Subakti: 1992).

Elections are also one of the important pillars of democracy. As Joseph Schumpeter explains, elections are a major criterion in the political system so that a country can be called democratic (Gustina Komdo: 2016). As in its ideal concept, the holding of elections aims to form a healthy democratic climate and bring up popular sovereignty as a political entity in a country. With the electoral process, it can provide legitimacy and credibility to the government elected by the people.

However, the facts on the ground show that in electoral politics politicians often cannot reach the community directly. They often need a figure or public figure whose purpose is to bridge communication with constituents. One of the reasons this happens is because many people are skeptical of politicians. As Russel J Dalton in his work entitled *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (2014) explains that not a few parties deliberately get closer and maintain relationships with certain groups or individuals with the aim of maintaining a support base to get to the electoral level.

This is also the case in Rembang, an area with a strong dominance of pesantren culture. In fact, people listen to or respect the words of kiai or pesantren families more than politicians or public officials. There are at least 127 Islamic boarding schools with 17,955 students. Many kiai from Rembang have become national figures, such as KH Mustofa Bisri, KH Maimoen Zubair, KH Ahmad Thoifoer, and the extended family of KH Ma'soem Ahmad as the founder of NU. This shows that as a regency with a pesantren culture, Rembang requires the role of kiai as leaders, kiai also have a strategic role in the momentum of Pilkada.

One of the reasons for approaching pesantren families is the charisma of the gus and the culture of *sam'an wa tho'atan* in the pesantren environment. The charisma and culture make people trust him and make him a role model (Thoriquttya: 2018). This condition is evident in Kediri and Jombang, where Gus is able to influence political conditions in the community. This means that religious elites have an important role in politics in the local sphere, especially Pilkada.

The 2015 Rembang regional election was won by an independent candidate with a significant margin. The independent candidate pair received 237,963 votes. The Abdul Hafidz – Bayu

Andrianto pair was able to win against other candidates who were recommended and had the support of political parties. In general, the pairs carried by political parties are considered to have more certain cadres and votes, but the facts in Rembang Regency state otherwise.

Candidate pair number one, Hamzah Fathoni and Ridwan, supported by PKB, Gerindra, and PDIP, received 35,270 votes. Meanwhile, candidate number two, Sunarto and Kuntum, supported by the Democratic Party and PKS, received 74,133 votes. For more details, please refer to the table below:

Table 1. Candidate Supporting Party and Vote Acquisition

Candidates Pair	Proponents	Vote Acquisition	Percentage
Hamzah Fathoni – Ridwan	PKB, Gerindra, dan PDIP	35.270	10,15%
Sunarto – Kuntum	Demokrat dan PKS	74.133	21,34%
Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto	Independen	237.963	68,50%

Source: Processed by the Author from the Report of KPU Kab. Rembang 2015

Pesantren, which is thick with religious and patriarchal values, is often only synonymous with the figure of kiai. However, in addition to kiai as a respected community figure, Nyai is also a figure who has an important role. Nyai is the wife of kiai who also has an important role both within the pesantren and outside the pesantren, in community life.

Nyai as a figure who has a depth of religious knowledge is considered to be able to guide the community in their daily lives according to religious teachings and values. In addition, in the social sphere, Nyai is often the representative of the pesantren kiai to attend and assist with community affairs, because the kiai is busy with internal affairs, namely the management and teaching of the pesantren. So that as a figure who has personal qualities plus great influence, Nyai is considered by regional head candidates (cakada) to be able to influence the community both in terms of infiltration of religious values, social life, and political preferences.

It is known that the Rembang Pilkada was followed by three pairs of candidates. The first pair is Hamzah Fathoni - Ridwan, which was carried by PKB, Gerindra, and PDIP with 35,270 votes. The second pair, Sunarto - Kuntum, was carried by the Democratic Party and PKS with 74,133 votes. The third pair was Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto from an independent candidate with 237,963 votes. As a candidate pair carried by political parties with a more definite mass base, the Hamzah Fathoni - Ridwan and Sunarto - Kuntum pairs should have greater potential for victory than Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto, who departed from the independent

path and was only supported by pesantren. However, the facts show that pair number three won with a very significant difference in votes. The assumption is that the boarding school has an important role in the winning process of the candidate pair Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto.

The distribution of pesantren in Rembang district is evenly distributed in each sub-district. There are at least 148 pesantren and 14,466 students (BPS: 2020). As 148 pesantren are spread across 14 sub-districts in Rembang district, there are 5 sub-districts that have more pesantren than other sub-districts, such as Sarang, Sedan, Rembang, Kragan, and Lasem. Sarang has 25 pesantren, Sedan has 37, Rembang has 21, Kragan has 12, and Lasem has 18 (Rembangkab.bps.go.id: 2020).

Among the several pesantren scattered in Rembang district, there are several pesantren that have a more respected position than other pesantren. These pesantren become a reference for other pesantren. Such as Pesantren Al-Anwar in Sarang Subdistrict led by KH. Maimoen Zubair and Pesantren Al-Wahdah in Lasem Subdistrict. These two pesantren have alumni who have spread in various regions both in Rembang Regency and throughout Indonesia.

As in pesantren culture, even though they have become alumni and have their own pesantren when making decisions or holding activities, alumni often ask for opinions and blessings from kiai in the pesantren where they previously studied. This is also still often the case in the pesantren environment in Rembang Regency. The assumption is that Pesantren Al-Anwar and Al-Wahdah often become references

for other pesantren both in religious and non-religious matters.

In addition to kiai, pesantren cannot be separated from Nyai. In the social sphere, Nyai often represents kiai pesantren to attend and assist with community affairs, because kiai are busy with internal affairs, namely teaching and pesantren management. Because of Nyai's closeness to the community, this makes cakada will approach Nyai to get voters. The logical consequence is that the Nyai have quite a lot of followers and are scattered in remote villages in all sub-districts within the administrative scope of Rembang Regency. The followers have loyalty to Nyai, because they believe that there is a blessing if they follow what the kiai or nyai wants, especially since the people in Rembang Regency have the view that the prayers of kiai or nyai are full of blessings.

Among the Nyai in Rembang Regency, there is the figure of Nyai Muhimmah as the caretaker of the Al-Hamidiyah pesantren who has a great influence on other pesantren, especially at the momentum of the 2015 Rembang Pilkada. She is the caretaker of Al-Hamidiyah pesantren, one of the elder pesantren in Rembang Regency. In addition, Nyai Muhimmah has a general education that is considered better than other Nyai. She is also seen as a figure who has a lot of experience in various matters because of her education. So that she is able to have a big influence on the nyai and other pesantren. Moreover, Al-Hamidiyah and Al-Anwar pesantren still have a close relationship. This condition made many Nyai and pesantren in the Rembang area give more respect to Nyai Muhimmah. This also makes the figure of Nyai Muhimmah in the 2015 Rembang regional election have a dominant role.

Based on the above situation, she is also able to direct Nyai to support one of the Cakada. When Nyai Muhimmah has succeeded in convincing and influencing other Nyai, there can be a domino effect. Nyai in other pesantren can ask their alumni to support the Cakada as desired by Nyai Muhimmah and other Nyai.

The author of this study examines the role of female pesantren figures in the scope of electoral politics in Rembang Regency. The author will explain how the role of Nyai Muhimmah and other Nyai figures in winning the Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto candidate in the 2015 Rembang Pilkada. In addition, the author will also discuss the pattern of relations between female pesantren figures and the strategies used in winning the Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto pair. This is interesting because this year the Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto pair advanced independently, but thanks to the political work of female figures, they were able to win electoral contestation with victories in all sub-districts. Moreover, environments or areas that hold strong religious values such as pesantren and their surrounding environments have a tendency to place women in an inferior position.

There are several significations of the research that has been made by the author, first, this research can contribute to the development of women's elite discourse and its relationship with Pilkada, especially in the context of Rembang Regency. Second, this research can provide information to political practitioners that in Rembang Regency it is not only kiai as a religious figure that must be embraced. But there is also the figure of Nyai as a female religious figure who can be utilized to increase the popularity and electability of regional head candidates.

METHODS

The approach used in this research is a qualitative approach. According to Creswell, a qualitative approach is a process of research and understanding based on a methodology that investigates a social phenomenon and human problems (Creswell, 2008). The qualitative approach was chosen in this study because it is able to explore in depth and detail a certain phenomenon, especially in this case an explanation of the role of Nyai in the Pilkada in Rembang Regency in 2015.

In line with the research questions to be answered, the type of research used for this research is a case study. Case study research examines a particular case in the context of contemporary life

using various sources of information including interviews, various reports and documents. Stakes (1995) explains that cases are limited by time and activity, and researchers collect complete information using various data collection procedures based on a predetermined time. Therefore, this research is a study that aims to look at the role of the pesantren elite figure, in this case Nyai, in the 2015 Rembang Regency Pilkada.

The reason this approach is more specialized in 2015, is that this year the role of pesantren and nyai is very visible in the Cakada winning process. The Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto pair as independent candidates were able to defeat other Cakada who were in fact carried by a coalition of political parties that had a more definite voter base. As for 2020, Abdul Hafidz again ran to win the Pilkada but was carried by a party.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The social conditions of society in Indonesia greatly influence the style of behavior towards pesantren entities. In terms of adherence to religious values and practices, rural communities, especially coastal communities, are more submissive than urban communities. Rembang as an area is classified as a rural-style district, because it still relies on conventional livelihood sectors, such as agriculture and fisheries. Historically, the northern coastal area of Rembang has been the center of economic, social and political development that has influenced the way of life in the southern region, where the majority of villagers make a living from agriculture. For this reason, the typology of Rembang society with regard to religious adherence can be seen from the behavior of the people in the coastal areas.

As Musyrifah Sunanto (2012) explains, the spread of Islam was still relatively in the port area, before Islam entered other coastal areas and extended to rural areas. Areas such as Rembang, where Islam developed through the coast and continued to the inland areas, brought logical consequences to the process of cultural contact in the form of the practice of Islamic teachings that still carry various local beliefs. Including in terms of leadership, coastal people not only respect figures based on faith and piety alone, but also based on social structures such

as in the royal hierarchy. Only pesantrens that have figures with heroic stories, lineage to the blue bloods, and strange behavior will get the recognition of followers, because they are considered to carry special qualities (Weber: 1965).

In such a doctrine, special qualities often do not stop at the figure of the kiai as the leader of the pesantren, but can be passed down to his wife, children and grandchildren and anyone else related to the figure. Such respect is also not limited to religious aspects, but also societal and individual (Dhofier: 1994). The pesantren praxis locks the obedience of the community, which is dominated by santri. The obedience is not temporal, but absolute, so it is rare to find conflict between the community and kiai in areas dominated by the culture of obedience. By James Scott (1972), religious-based obedience is what gives birth to patron-client relations in traditional societies. So when a politician wants to approach the community, it is mandatory for him to approach the pesantren in order to get the blessing and value of obedience from his followers. This condition is the same as what happened in Rembang. Rembang residents, who are affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), still leave all matters and socio-political choices to certain actors, in this case kiai and nyai pesantren. Therefore, the coastal residents of Rembang deserve to be included in the category of people who are still dominated by subject political culture, which is a political culture indicated by the condition of the relevant community that is relatively more advanced in terms of responding to the political system, but still passive (Almond and Verba, 2004: 20-22).

The strong influence of pesantren figures in politics can be seen through electoral results and their affiliation with political institutions. Some pesantren with great influence have close ties with parties based on Islamic society. For example, Al-Anwar, which was raised by the late KH Maimoen Zubair, has a close relationship with PPP. Likewise, the Ma'had Ulum Asyar'iyah (MUS) pesantren and the Lp3ia pesantren, which is raised by KH. Bahauddin Nursalim or Gus Baha. In addition, there are also Al-Hamidyah, Al-Wahdah, and Kauman pesantren in

Lasem sub-district that are closer to the PPP. Al-Hamidyah has a close relationship with PPP because of KH. Ahmad Toyfoer was once the Chairman of DPW PPP and Nyai Muhimmah became the chairwoman of Wanita Persatuan Pembangunan (WPP) Central Java, PPP's women's organization. As for Al-Wahdah as a pesantren, it chooses to be closer to the NU Islamic organization. However, in Rembang Regency NU also has more closeness to PPP than other parties.

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Table 2. Legislative Seat Acquisition in Rembang Regional Election 2010 -2015

Political Party	Number of Seats in Period	
	2009-2014	2014-2019
PKB	6	6
Gerindra	0 ^(New)	5
PDI-P	5	5
Golkar	8	3
Nasdem		3 ^(New)
PKS	3	1
PPP	6	10
PAN	4	2
Hanura	0	2
Demokrat	8	8
PBB	2	0
Pelopor	1	
RepublikaN	1	
PKNU	1	
Jumlah Anggota	45	45
Jumlah Partai	11	10

Source Processed from: World Encyclopedia. Universitas Stekom

The above described by the researcher is a description of the Rembang Pilkada event in 2015. An interesting phenomenon that needs to be highlighted, namely when Hafidz-Bayu becomes the prototype of the failure of political parties to build

their institutions, it means that Hafidz-Bayu indirectly prefers to channel campaign costs to the pesantren network that they control with the pesantren elite. The existence of this phenomenon further strengthens patron-client practices, even

stronger, so that pesantren elites in clientelistic relations are often referred to as vote brokers par excellence or unrivaled in Indonesia, as explained by Aspinall and Berenschot below (2019: 200-203).

The Role of Nyai Muhimmah in Winning Candidates for the 2015 Rembang Regional Election

Conducting a study on the political behavior of Nyai Pesantren in relation to their relationship with the candidates and voters requires a complex approach. There are at least three approaches that can explain the source of motivation for the relationship between cakada Hafidz-Bayu and Nyai Muhimmah and her followers. First, the sociological approach, which assumes that sociological characteristics and social groupings such as age, gender, religion, class or social status, and family background have a significant influence on a person's political behavior. Second, the psychological approach, which assumes that there are three factors that influence a person's political behavior, namely (1) political information obtained related to public interests and political activities, such as political campaigns or news, (2) interest in political issues and activities, and (3) party identity or Party ID which is linked to a person's feeling of closeness or self-identification with a particular political party which has implications for supportive attitudes. Third, the rational choice approach, which explains that people's political attitudes are more driven by real interests, therefore they can change, especially those concerning material interests and welfare will be seen based on profit and loss calculations (JPP and Asia Foundation: 2014).

As with the three approaches, Nyai Muhimmah has followers whose preferences follow her political choices. So that the sociological character is dominant in determining their political choices. This is also supported by the facts in the field, that the pesantren community in the Rembang area, which is dominated by cultural-traditional ties, is often involved in relational relationships between pesantren and the community based on patron-client mechanisms, just like the relationship built by landlords with farmers-cultivators. This kind of

culturalist understanding departs from James Scott's research (1972) which states that "mutual expectations between the parties are supported by the values and rituals in the community concerned". Thus, in rural communities - as researched by Aspinall and Berenschot (2019), such as in Rembang Regency, the political choices of pesantren are decisive.

Hafidz-Bayu's approach to Nyai Muhimmah is due to her high charisma, so her advice and political choices often become the final reference for the nahdliyin congregation, especially from Fatayat and Muslimat. As research conducted by Van Bruinessen (1994:152), political competition in pesantren life always carries an element of hierarchical charisma. Thus, followers will often follow or not follow the advice and political choices of pesantren actors based on the actor's hierarchical charisma and gildedness. In this case, of course, Nyai Muhimmah is one of the figures who has the highest charisma.

Hafidz-Bayu's choice to rely on Nyai Muhimmah's network was also caused by the voter phenomenon in the 2015 Rembang regional election. Many voters base their choices on personal and social networks rather than affiliation or closeness to political parties. The popularity of the candidate was more important than the party platform. Nyai Muhimmah emerged as one of the central figures behind which social and religious organizations and communities were established. Although not endorsed by the PPP, with Nyai Muhimmah's support, voters and cultural PPP loyalists gave their support to Hafidz-Bayu. So, after Nyai Muhimmah's support was obtained, Hafidz-Bayu was freer to form a team of processors based on personal networks built with pesantren elites. This indicates that her figure is enough to give her blessing to Hafidz-Bayu and this has a positive impact on the increase in popularity and electability. The blessing was able to make the public perceive that the congregation must provide support to Hafidz-Bayu. When analyzed using the opinion of Aspinall and Berenschot (2019), the 'politics of giving blessings' to Hafidz as an

incumbent official is sufficient to bind voter loyalty to be willing to enter and form a structural team.

The guaranteed 'political blessing' of Nyai Muhimmah who mobilized her congregation to provide support to Hafidz-Bayu certainly came from the culture of 'absolute obedience' in the tradition of the pesantren community in Rembang. According to Karel A. Steenbrink, this absolute obedience is obtained by pesantren families because pesantren figures are considered sacred figures who are credited with entering the community into the highest knowledge area in life, namely 'Divine' knowledge (1986). Such a culture strengthens the patron-client effect in pesantren related to electoral politics, where pesantren elites receive legitimacy in the form of power and authority and obedience from the congregation.

Nyai Muhimmah's Strategy in Winning Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto in the 2015 Pilkada

The complex pattern of relations between Nyai and the community was not formed in a short period of time. Often this pattern of relations has been established since the pesantren was first established by the previous grandfather or great-grandfather. Like Pesantren Al Hamidyah Lasem, historically this pesantren was founded in 1980 by KH Ahmad Toyfoer and his wife. KH Ahmad Toyfoer is a descendant of one of the founders of the Al Hidayat pesantren as well as Nahdlatul Ulama, KH Ma'sum. Through this lineage he was able to have a strong influence on the environment of other pesantren and the surrounding community in Rembang Regency.

The strong influence possessed by Nyai Muhimmah in the pesantren environment in Rembang Regency, was able to have a positive impact on Hafidz - Bayu. They, as Cakada who have received the blessing, are able to get support from other pesantren leaders. This support can be used to gain the legitimacy that the figure of Hafidz - Bayu is a representation of the pesantren community. This also makes the figure of Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto acceptable to the wider Rembang community.

As the culture of the Rembang community is characterized by a santri culture, the pesantren family, namely Nyai, has a strong influence on the community. Kiai and their families are seen as figures who have a deep understanding or knowledge related to religious knowledge who have the duty to spread the noble values of Islam both to the santri who go to boarding school and to the community at large. This is also what makes kiai and their families get greater respect than other ordinary people. So that it raises the attitude of taqlid or the attitude of sam'an wa to'atan - an attitude of assent without questioning the intentions and objectives - of the community to the kiai and his family. Moreover, Nyai Muhimmah and other pesantren involve the community in their business sector as one of managers. This is the principle of Scott's scope of exchange which explains that the exchange between patron and client is not limited to economic exchange, but is more complex. This relationship pattern makes the community consider the pesantren family not only a figure who is obeyed because of the depth of religious knowledge, but more than that. Nyai and pesantren are also considered as figures who help in domestic issues, namely the family economy. The complexity of this relationship makes the relationship that occurs not because of profit and loss factors or economic calculations, but rather personal relations. So it is not uncommon for the Rembang community to help the success of the wishes or desires of the Nyai and the pesantren family. This is as described by James Scott in the affective instrumental balance pattern which emphasizes maintaining personal relationships.

The personal closeness that exists between the community and Nyai and the pesantren family is not only related to general issues. But more than that, the community is not reluctant to help Nyai and the pesantren family in political matters. Although many Nyai from pesantren are involved in politics, they build the same perception, namely winning one of the candidates. As when Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto in the 2015 Pilkada, the pair won in all districts in Rembang Regency. This happened because the community knew that many Nyai from various pesantren gave their blessing and even

directly introduced their figures at events attended by Nyai and pesantren. This relationship pattern makes the community consider the pesantren family not only a figure who is obeyed because of the depth of religious knowledge, but more than that. Nyai and pesantren are also considered as figures who help in domestic issues, namely the family economy. The complexity of this relationship makes the relationship that occurs not because of profit and loss factors or economic calculations, but rather personal relations. So it is not uncommon for the Rembang community to help the success of the wishes or desires of the Nyai and the pesantren family. This is as described by James Scott in the affective instrumental balance pattern which emphasizes maintaining personal relationships.⁶

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Table 3. Vote Acquisition in the 2015 Rembang Regional Election

District	Hamzah Fatoni - Ridwan	Sunarto – Kuntum	Hafidz – Bayu
Bulu	1.285	4.067	10.528
	8,09%	25,61%	66,30%
Gunem	589	5.589	8.827
	3,93%	37,25%	58,83%
Kaliori	1.940	4.627	17.162
	8,18%	19,50%	72,33%
Kragan	4.855	6.747	22.618
	14,19%	19,72%	66,10%
Lasem	2.768	4.892	17.243
	11,12%	19,64%	69,24%
Pamotan	1.917	2.964	22.114
	7,10%	10,98%	81,92%
Pancur	1.559	3.541	11.355
	9,47%	21,52%	69,01%
Rembang	7.550	10.254	30.430
	15,65%	21,26%	63,09%
Sale	1.632	4.437	14.154
	8,07%	21,94%	69,99%
Sarang	2.109	7.872	22.941
	6,41%	23,91%	69,68%

Sedan	4.405	4.253	20.854
	14,93%	14,41%	70,66%
Sluke	1.212	3.850	10.384
	7,85%	24,93%	67,23%
Sulang	1.808	5.916	14.702
	8,06%	26,38%	65,56%
Sumber	1.641	5.124	14.687
	7,65%	23,89%	68,46%
Total	35.270	74.133	237.963
Total	10,15%	21,34%	68,50%

Source: Processed from KPU Data Rembang Pilkada 2015

The success of the Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto pair in the 2015 regional elections was due to the similar character of the Rembang community. Historically, the northern coastal region of Rembang has been the center of economic, social and political development that has influenced the life of the southern region, where the majority of villagers work in the agricultural sector. Therefore, the typology of Rembang society in relation to religious adherence can be seen from the behavior of the people in the coastal area.

This is in accordance with research conducted by academics. Musyrifah Sunanto (2012) explains that the spread of Islam was still relatively in port cities before Islam entered other coastal areas and extended to rural areas. Areas such as Rembang, where Islam developed through the coast and continued to the inland areas, brought logical consequences to the process of cultural contact in the form of Islamic teaching practices that still carry various local beliefs. Including in terms of leadership, coastal people not only respect figures based on faith and piety alone, but also based on social structures such as in the royal hierarchy. Moreover, only pesantren that have figures with heroic stories, lineage to the blue bloods, and strange behavior will get the recognition of followers, because they are considered to carry special qualities (Weber: 1965).

CONCLUSION

In electoral politics, politicians are often unable to reach potential constituents directly. They need figures or public figures who have more influence so that people sympathize and become close to them. Among the causes is the skepticism that people have towards politicians.

Rembang is an area with a strong dominance of pesantren culture. People listen to or respect the words of kiai or pesantren families more than politicians or public officials. Among the causes are the charisma of kiai and their families and the culture of sam'an wa tho'atan in the pesantren environment. The charisma and culture make people trust him and make him a role model.

As an area based on pesantren culture that is thick with religious values, Rembang Regency is characterized by a patriarchal culture. This cultural value is often only synonymous with kiai as a male figure. However, besides kiai as a respected community figure, nyai is also a figure who has an important role. As a kiai's wife, she also has an important role both within the pesantren and outside the pesantren, in community life.

This is evidenced by the role of Nyai Muhimmah and other Nyai in the process of winning the Cakada pair Abdul Hafidz - Bayu Andrianto in the 2015 Rembang Pilkada. Armed with his influence, Abdul Hafidz as a candidate who has personal closeness to him was able to win the Rembang Pilkada even though it was from an independent route. Even the Abdul Hafidz - Bayu

Andianto pair was able to get optimal votes and win votes in all sub-districts in Rembang Regency.

Thanks to Nyai Muhimmah's blessing, not a few pesantren leaders and community organizations helped in the winning process. Such as the Lasem Branch PCNU, Rembang Branch PCNU, Fatayat and Muslimat in the Rembang Branch, to pesantren in the Rembang Regency area. Among them were Pesantren Al Anwar, Ma'had Ulum Asyyar'iyah (MUS), Nurul Aziz, Pesantren Lp3ia Kragan, Pesantren Kauman, and Pesantren Al Wahdah. This condition also indicates that not only kiai, but nyai as a female figure also has a great influence that can be accumulated for electoral competition in a strong pesantren culture society.

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