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## **Islamism Denounced: Madura Kiais' Perspective of Nationalism**

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### **Abstract**

The transmission of Islamism among the kiais and their students in Madura has become more critical to examine in the last decade. However, some kiais of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Bangkalan Madura



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see that Islamism or political Islam will gradually erode their national commitment. This article intends to reinterpret the nationalism vision of several kiais of NU and measure the extent of their views on the ideology of Islamism discoursed by the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). By interviewing several kiais, this study finds that the propagation of Islamism in Bangkalan has not been as massive as occurred in Pamekasan, another sub-districts in Madura. The FPI-style Islamism in Bangkalan has been propagated only by a small group though they are vigorously active on social media. The majority of the NU community remains devoted to nationalism, committing that the NKRI is the final state. Islamic moderation promulgated by the kiais has been widely accepted and deeply rooted among the NU community. They believe nationalism and religion should not be separated from the spirit of their struggle (*khittah*). These two elements have united within their fighting spirit and become the primary trigger in devoting themselves to the nation and state to preserve national sovereignty and the integrity of Indonesia.

[Transmisi Islamisme di kalangan kiai dan santrinya di Madura semakin urgen untuk dikaji dalam satu dekade terakhir. Sebagian kiai Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) di Bangkalan Madura melihat Islamisme atau Islam politik lambat laun akan mengikis komitmen kebangsaan mereka. Artikel ini bermaksud untuk menginterpretasikan kembali visi nasionalisme beberapa kiai NU dan mengukur sejauh mana pandangan mereka terhadap ideologi Islamisme yang diwacanakan oleh Front Pembela Islam (FPI). Dengan mewawancarai beberapa kiai, artikel ini menemukan bahwa penyebaran Islamisme di Bangkalan tidak sebesar yang terjadi di Pamekasan, kecamatan lain di Madura. Islamisme ala FPI di Bangkalan hanya dipropagandakan oleh kelompok kecil meskipun mereka giat aktif di media sosial. Mayoritas masyarakat NU tetap setia pada nasionalisme dengan komitmen bahwa NKRI adalah negara final. Hal ini karena moderasi Islam yang disosialisasikan oleh para kiai telah diterima secara luas dan mengakar kuat di kalangan masyarakat NU. Mereka percaya bahwa nasionalisme dan agama tidak boleh dipisahkan dari semangat perjuangan (*khittah*) mereka. Kedua unsur tersebut telah menyatu dalam semangat juangnya dan menjadi pemicu utama dalam mengabdikan diri untuk berbangsa dan bernegara guna menjaga kedaulatan dan keutuhan NKRI.]

**Keywords:** Islamism; Madura; Nahlatul Ulama; Front Pembela Islam; nationalism



## Introduction

Generally, there are two perspectives on the trajectory of Islam in the Indonesian political arena. The first view believes that a formal institution is necessary to achieve the actualization of Islam, either by declaring itself Islam or embodying an Islamic political system. The second view argues that the fulfillment of Islam does not need any institutional formalities. Those who stand for this argument consider Islamic commitment more important to realize. They would rather make Islam a complementary force in national politics instead of political aspiration, let alone any alternative ideologies that tend to be problematic in a pluralistic country like Indonesia.<sup>1</sup>

These two perspectives are in many ways considered to be derivatives of the general debate about the political dimension of Islamic teachings. Islamic scholars have various thoughts on whether Islamic teachings also contain political concepts. Some scholars argue that Islamic teachings are universal and relevant in any time and place and every corner of human thought and action, including politics. For this group, Islam already has definitive political rules. Thus, Islam can administrate and run a legal state on its values and ideological basis. On the other hand, other scholars agree on the universality of Islam but deny that it regulates all aspects of human life in detail, including the political concept.

The persistence of several political-Islamic groups to reclaim the relationship between Islam and the Indonesian state is related to the three-axis of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East. The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, the al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn movement in Egypt, and the Wahhabi-Salafi movement of Saudi Arabia inspired the emergence of these groups.<sup>2</sup> There are five prominent groups in

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul Gaffar Karim, "Islam di Panggung Politik Indonesia: Latar Belakang, Dinamika, dan Pergeserannya", *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* 1, no.2 (1997): 47-48.

<sup>2</sup> About the transmission of the Islamic movement, read M. Imdadun Rahmat, *Arus Baru Islam Radikal: Transmisi Revivalisme Islam Timur Tengah ke Indonesia* (Jakarta: Erlangga Press, 2006); Abd. Rachman Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional



Indonesia: Tarbiyah organizations, Hizbut Tahrir, Salafi dawah, the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). These groups have been developing in Indonesia and act as the proponents of Islamism. Tarbiyah Islamists established the Justice Party, Hizbut Tahrir became Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (Disbanded in 2017), Salafism has developed into dawah faction and had ever created Jihad troops.<sup>3</sup>

These emerging actors are different from the old Islamic movement such as NU, Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam, al-Irsyad, al-Washliyah, Jamaat Khair. Their movements are mainly outside the mainstream framework of the political process and discourse in the dominant Islamic movement. The emergence of this phenomenon is often called the “New Islamic movement”. The movement represents a new generation of Islamic movements in Indonesia before and after the political reformation.

After the Indonesian *Reformasi* in 1998, the question about religion-state relations in Indonesia had become a discussion among *kiais* (religious leaders) in several regions, including Madura. The debate on religion-state relations continues to the present day. Under Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization, the Alim Ulama National Conference in Situbondo in 1983 had agreed on its commitment to Pancasila<sup>4</sup> which was proven in NU's Articles of Association. However, the Islamism of the Islamic Defenders Front in Indonesia influenced the discussion among the religious leaders, who are the NU intellectuals and FPI sympathizers at the same time. They politically have tried to “challenge” the commitments made by the National Conference of the organization, which agrees that Pancasila is the basis of the state and

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Islam dan Globalisasi Salafi di *Islamic Center bin Baz* Yogyakarta,” *Millah* 16, no. 2 (2017): 151, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol16.iss2.art1>.

<sup>3</sup> Rubaidi, “Variasi Gerakan Radikal Islam di Indonesia,” *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2011): 33-52, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v11i1.607>.

<sup>4</sup> In Chapter II of the Articles of Association, Guidelines, Aqidah, and Principles are stated: “Dalam kehidupan berbangsa dan bernegara di Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama berbasas pada Pancasila dan Undang-undang Dasar 1945,” Tim PBNU, *Pokok-pokok Pikiran tentang Pemulihan Khittah NU 1926* (Jakarta: Lajnah Ta'lif wa al-Nasyr PBNU, 1983).



Islam is the faith. Moreover, the position of Islam is a part of Pancasila as it includes “belief in God” in the first article, which to some extent is a form of practicing Islamic law.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the school of thought and ritual practices, FPI and NU have similar religious preferences. They follow Ashariyah theology and Shafiiyah school of fiqh. They read *qunūt* at dawn prayers and perform tarawih prayer in 20 cycles. They are keen on reciting *shalawat* and reading the pronunciation of “*sayyidunā*” in their prayers. The religious figures such as KH Saiful Qohhar Thobroni, KH Khon Thobroni, KH. Kholid Makhsus Ridwan are the *kiais* whose cultural and religious practices belong to NU, but are politically different from NU because they follow the ideology and the FPI mission. Because of the similarities, some circles in NU accused them of allowing the infiltration of FPI-style Islamism into NU’s body.

In his research “Radicalizing Indonesian Moderate Islam from Within: The NU-FPI Relationship in Bangkalan Madura” Ahmad Zainul Hamdi reported the intense infiltration of FPI’s Islamism in the region. According to Hamdi, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) ideology, which offers the idea of “NKRI Bersyariah” has been massively accepted by the Nahdliyyin audience in Bangkalan, Madura. Many NU religious leaders adopt FPI’s ideology.<sup>6</sup> In addition, our previous research on the movement and growth of Islamism in Pamekasan found out the role of *kiais* in propagating Islamism. They voiced the need for an “Islamic State”, and strongly suggested other religious figures “comprehensively” apply Islamic law in all socio-political institutions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *NU: Tradisi, Relasi-relasi Kuasa, Pencarian Wacana Baru* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1994), 76; Ngatawi al-Zastrouw, *Gerakan Islam Simbolik: Politik Kepentingan FPI* (Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2006), 15-24.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, “Radicalizing Indonesian Moderate Islam from Within: The NU-FPI Relationship in Bangkalan, Madura,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2013.7.1.71-95>.

<sup>7</sup> Read: Abd A’la, Mukhammad Zamzami, Nur Hidayat Wakhid Udin, and Ahmad Fathan Aniq, “Islamism in Madura: From Religious Symbolism to Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 2 (2018): 159-194, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2018.12.2.159-194>; Abd A’la, Ahwan Mukarrom, Mukhammad Zamzami,



They also made the mission namely “Gerakan Pembangunan Masyarakat Islami” (abbrev. Gerbang Salam). However, their *Shariatization* has not worked well at the practical level.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the dynamic influence of Islamism in the last decade makes the further study on the Islamic understanding of the Muslim leaders and their followers more critical. The reconstruction of the *kiais'* insights is vital because several studies, such as the one researched by Ahmad Zainul Hamdi above, claim that the FPI's Islamism is the leading ideology in the Bangkalan Muslim community. Therefore, this article aims to measure the *kiais'* nationalism and their insight into FPI's Islamism and determine to what extent the *kiais* are committed to guarding the nationalism.

## Methods

This article is qualitative research using case studies. This type of research is field research based on social facts in society. In addition to interviewing several informants, this article also uses the literature to strengthen the analysis.<sup>9</sup> The research approach in this article is phenomenology which is used to understand the variety of events and their relation to certain people in certain situations.<sup>10</sup> The research location is in the Bangkalan area, Madura, where the researcher

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“Kontribusi Aliansi Ulama Madura (AUMA) dalam Merespons Isu Keislaman dan Keumatan di Pamekasan Madura,” *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 8, no. 2 (2018): 227-255, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v8i2.793>; Abd A'la, Ahwan Mukarrom, Mukhammad Zamzami, “Islam dan Agamaisasi Politik: Studi Analisis terhadap Peran dan Pergerakan Forum Kiai Muda (FKM) Pamekasan Madura,” *Jurnal Review Politik* 8, no. 1 (2018); Abd A'la and Ahwan Mukarrom, “Power-knowledge Relations of the Elder and the Younger Madurese Muslim Scholars in Propagating Islamism in Madura: A Counter-narrative,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 10, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2020.10.1.81-109>.

<sup>8</sup> Erie Hariyanto, “Gerbang Salam: Telaah atas Pelaksanaanya di Kabupaten Pamekasan,” *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 15, no. 1 (2012): 73-81. <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v15i1.116>.

<sup>9</sup> Suharsimi Arikunto, *Prosedur Penelitian: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1998), 29.

<sup>10</sup> H. Russell Bernard, *Metodologi Penelitian: Pendekatan Kuantitatif dan Kualitatif* (Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia, 1994), 26.



interviewed several Kiais as crucial informants in understanding their moderate vision in their national perspective in dealing with the currents of Islamism that developed in some Madurese people.

## Results

### Nahdlatul Ulama and an Overview of Islamism in Madura

There is a common assumption that Madura is identical to Islam, although not all Madurese are Muslim. The image of Madura island as a “*santri* community” is powerful. Almost every Madurese house has a small mosque (*langgar* or *surau*) for the families to pray.<sup>11</sup> From the eastern part of the island to the east end, we see rows of mosques, Islamic boarding schools, and prayer rooms. Islam and the Madurese are inseparable entities. Islamic identity of a person determines one’s membership in the Madurese ethnic group. A Madurese who no longer embraces Islam is never be called a Madurese.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, many historians have written specifically on the relationship between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization and the Madurese, especially Bangkalan Regency. Historically, the establishment of NU was ordered and spiritually supported by Syaikhona Kholil to his student, KH. Hasyim Asy’ari, the founder of the NU organization. As Kiai Hasyim stated, “God has enabled us to create an organization.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the strong relationship between Syaikhona Kholil and Kiai Hasyim impacted the close relationship between NU and the Muslim community in Bangkalan. Therefore, we can see obvious development of NU in Madura, such as the increasing number of Islamic boarding schools in the regency.

The western and eastern Madura has their distinctive cultures. As this research mainly focuses on Islamism, the western Madura—

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<sup>11</sup> Andang Subaharianto, *Tantangan Industrialisasi Madura: Membentur Kultur, Menjunjung Leluhur* (Malang: Bayumedia, 2004), 51-52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>13</sup> RKH. Fuad Amin Imron, *Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan: Penentu Berdirinya Nahdlatul Ulama* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2012); Choirul Anam, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan NU* (Surabaya: Duta Aksara Mulia, 2010).



Bangkalan, and Sampang—is the crucial part because most of the *kiais* in this region are the descendants of Shaykhona Kholil.<sup>14</sup> They are highly respected and become role models for Muslims in Bangkalan. Moreover, his descendants are considered representatives of Islam in Madura. They also occupy the main level in the Islamic movement in Bangkalan. His boarding school, affiliated with NU, has become the central axis of the Islamic movement in Bangkalan. All religious and political activities in Bangkalan must obtain legitimacy from the *kiais* of the Syaikhona Kholil family to be accepted by the Muslim community.

Similarly, the dissemination of Islamism among the Muslim community in Madura should get a positive response from Syaikhona Kholil's family. The broader acceptance of FPI's ideology—political-Islamic ideas brought by Muhammad Rizieq Shihab—in Bangkalan has been legitimized by religious leaders such as KH Saiful Qohhar Thobroni and KH Khon Thobroni.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the support toward *Habib*—the Prophet's descendants—leadership of FPI by the Madurese *kiais* is a form of respect to Syaikhona Kholil, who came from a Yemen Basyaiban family.<sup>16</sup>

The early formation and establishment of the Islamic Defenders Front in Bangkalan was also strongly supported by the extended family of the Syaikhona Kholil Islamic boarding school. Several *kiais* have occupied strategic positions in the FPI branch organization in Bangkalan. The Kademangan family—another name for the descendants of kiai Kholil—was the controller of the FPI in Bangkalan. The head of the *shūrā* is held by KH. Abdullah Schal and the Chairman

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<sup>14</sup> For more details about Syaikhona Kholil's kinship path in Bangkalan, read on Imron, *Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan*.

<sup>15</sup> Raynaldo Ghiffari Lubabah, "PKS dan FPI Madura Rapatkan Barisan Menangkan Prabowo-Sandiaga," February 27, 2019, *Liputan6.com*, <https://www.liputan6.com/pilpres/read/3905701>.

<sup>16</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Lessons from Madura: NU, Conservatism, and the 2019 Presidential Election," September 10, 2019, *ISEAS Perspective* (2019): 5, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/201972-lessons-from-madura-nu-conservatism-and-the-2019-presidential-election-by-ahmad-najib-burhani/>.





of *Tanfidziah* is RKH. Fahrilla Aschal. The headquarter of FPI Bangkalan is in the main city, located at the Syaikhona Kholil Islamic boarding school in Kademangan, Bangkalan.<sup>17</sup> As this research found out, the management of FPI in Bangkalan Madura is under the command of KH Saiful Qohhar Thobroni and KH Khon Thobroni. Both are the caregivers of the Raudlatul Muta'allimin al-Aziziyah Islamic Boarding School, Sabeneh, Bangkalan, Madura. Although culturally and traditionally, they are closer to the Nahdliyyin model, their political aspiration is closer to the political-Islamic model of the Prosperous Justice Party. The PKS frequently visit the pesantren. In the past presidential campaign, PKS and FPI Bangkalan collaborated to support Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno,<sup>18</sup> sharing similarities in the Islamic-political vision.

The close socio-historical relationship between NU and FPI in Bangkalan is a meeting point between traditional Islam, the foundation of Nahdlatul Ulama, and Islamism, which is the foundation of FPI. Although the conflict between the center structure of NU and FPI often occurred for different opinions on various issues, the attitude of NU Bangkalan is the antithesis of the central NU. One of the conflicting opinions between NU organizations and the FPI at the center is the relation between Islam and the State. In this case, NU adheres to the NKRI ideology, according to Pancasila. In contrast, the FPI adheres to the *Shariah*-based NKRI. This substantial difference has made the two organizations oppose one another at the central level.

In addition to the FPI-style Islamism, several *kiais'* organizations show the spirit of Islamism. The well-known regional organizations are Badan Silaturrahmi Ulama Madura (Bassra),<sup>19</sup> Aliansi Ulama Madura (AUMA),<sup>20</sup> and Forum Kiai Muda Madura (FKM).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hamdi, "Radicalizing Indonesian Moderate Islam From Within," 78.

<sup>18</sup> "FPI Bangkalan Deklarasikan Dukungan ke PKS dan Prabowo-Sandi," March 1, 2019, *Dewan Pengurus Pusat Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, <https://pks.id/foto/fpi-bangkalan-deklarasikan-dukungan-ke-pks-dan-prabowo-sandi?page=2>.

<sup>19</sup> A'la, et al., "Islamism in Madura,"

<sup>20</sup> A'la, et al., "Kontribusi Aliansi Ulama Madura (AUMA)," 227-255.

<sup>21</sup> A'la, et al., "Islam dan Agamaisasi Politik,"



These organizations are politically close to the FPI's Islamism. The relation of FPI and regional Islamism intensified as Rizieq Shihab, the general chairman of FPI, was invited by the regional organization to give a *tabligh akbar* (religious sermon) in Sampang with the theme "Achieving the glory of Islam within the framework of the Republic of Indonesia".<sup>22</sup> Thus, the regional organizations are the autonomous bodies of FPI which share cultural and political aspirations with FPI.

The influence of FPI and other Islamist organizations has intensified conservatism in Madura. We found some examples of the conservative events such as the declaration of the Gerbang Salam (Islamic Community Development Movement) in 2002, the rejection of the Shia community in Sampang 2012, the birth of the Sharia Regional Regulation (Prohibition of Alcoholic Drinks, Prohibition of Prostitution, and Monitoring of Activities during the month of Ramadan), and the overthrow of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) in Jakarta on December 2016.

In the 2019 presidential election, many conservative Muslims in Madura supported Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno, Najib Burhani concluded that the characteristics of Madurese NU are not similar to NU followers in Java. He argued that their characteristics are closer to Acehese Muslims in West Sumatra and Muslims in West Java, who are very Islamist-cum-conservative. Burhani also stated in his research, "The more Islamist or conservative a region is, the greater the tendency to vote Prabowo in the 2019 presidential election".<sup>23</sup>

The frequent disagreement between NU Madura and other NU regions caused the Madurese to claim themselves as the legitimate NU. Therefore; they ordained themselves "NU Garis Lurus" (The Straight NU). The most dominant group in NU Garis Lurus is the alumni of Hai'ah ash-Shofwah al-Malikiyyah from the Sidogiri Islamic Boarding School, Pasuruan. The *Hai'ah Ash-Shofwah*<sup>24</sup> the forum is an alumni

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<sup>22</sup> A'la et al., "Kontribusi Aliansi Ulama Madura," 228-229.

<sup>23</sup> Burhani, "Lessons from Madura," 5.

<sup>24</sup> The number of members of this container is very significant. At least 500 habaib and kiai are members of this forum. There are a lot of interconnected pesantren networks in this forum, and it covers many regions in Indonesia. This forum also plays an essential role in unifying alumni steps in developing educational, da'wah, economic,



network of the students of their central figure Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawi al-Maliki al-Hasani from Saudi Arabia. Most of the *Hai'ah ash-Shofwah* members confirmed the Islamic view and statehood of the FPI.

Amidst the wave of Islamism, we also found some NU *kiais* in Bangkalan who are worried about this phenomenon. They reaffirm the statehood and nationality built by NU elders in the past. They conveyed that Islamism has eroded Pancasila and pluralistic ideology by proposing the “shariat-ization” of the Indonesian Republic. Through this research, we realize the distinctive Islamism in Bangkalan. We argue that the commitment to nationalism (NKRI) is still dominant in this region, as taught by the elderly religious leaders of NU. Islamism, which has reached the majority Bangkalan Muslims, is widely accepted because the western Madurese have greater respect toward the descendants of the Prophet (*habīb* or *habāib*), including Habib Rizieq Shihab. However, we cannot conclude that most Madurese people affirm FPI’s ideology as their respect for the *habāib* is undoubtedly one of the acceptance factors.

### **Nationalism of the NU’s *Kiais* in Bangkalan**

As one of the major religious organizations in Indonesia, every NU’s response to political problems is a form of attitude and behavior that is embedded in their religious understanding according to the Ahlu al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah perspective. Zamakhsyari Dhofier stated that the essence of NU is a religious organization. Therefore, the various political goals of the organization fit its religious purposes.<sup>25</sup>

NU’s *kiais* in Bangkalan view that Muslims cannot separate Islam from the state. The absence of any specific explanation on the Muslims’ government does not mean that the Quran does not address

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and social potentials. Furthermore, Hai’ah Ash Shofwah is expected to become a professional organization and media for alumni actualization. See, “Haiah Ash-Shofwah al Malikiyyah,” *Shofwatuna.org*, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.shofwatuna.org/haiah-ash-shofwah-al-malikiyyah/>.

<sup>25</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1994), 9.



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the issue. KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal commented on a Quranic verse that discusses the importance of state existence:

“As a religion, Islam was revealed by Allah to regulate all aspects of life. When Islam encounters a very plural society or group, Islam should address through its jargon—the blessing for the entire universe. Therefore, the correlation between Islam and nationality or state is robust. Surah *al-Tīn* explains the condition of the Muslim community during the Prophet's life. One of the verses mentions *wa hādha al-balad al-amīn* (and [by] this secure city/state (i.e., Makkah). When we speak in the context of *balad* (state), we will talk about a country or region with a community component, which we call a national group. Therefore, there is a strong relationship between Islam and the concept of nation and state.”<sup>26</sup>

He further stated that the *kiais* in Bangkalan acknowledge the relation between Islam and the state, as found in Islamic theology. Most of the *kiais* in Bangkalan appreciate the history of Indonesian independence. They realize that Islam unifies various groups in Indonesia, and the *kiais* have contributed to establishing the Indonesian state.<sup>27</sup>

The ulama and *kiais* have played a significant role and contribution in the history of Indonesia. Some *kiais* in Bangkalan believe that one of the essential clerics in Indonesian history is Syaikhona Kholil. Although he was not at the forefront in proclaiming Indonesian independence because he had died before the Indonesian independence, his struggles and thoughts on Indonesian independence were long before.<sup>28</sup> Kiai Makki Nasir said:

“Our ancestors have instilled an order on religion, society, and state. The order was formed when Islam entered the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal, Bangkalan, September 15, 2020. Kiai Nasih is the caretaker of the Syaikhona Cholil Islamic Boarding School and the Chair of the STAI Syaikhona Mohammad Cholil, Bangkalan Madura.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal, Bangkalan, September 15, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Soeleiman Fadel and Moh. Subhan, *Antologi NU* (Khalista: Surabaya, 2008), 35-36.



archipelago. The order was finally mandated to Syaikhona Kholil in a concept. Then, he gave the mandate to Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama. Kiai Hasyim then implemented it in various forms, including the birth of Pancasila. Syaikhona Kholil wanted to unite different existing movements into a larger power in the archipelago by putting aside sectoral egos without forgetting spiritual values. A common historical story told that one-day Syaikhona Kholil gave a mandate in “sticks and beads” to Kiai Hasyim. The mandate was not only to form an NU organization but also to form an independent state. This concept was mandated to Kiai Hasyim and his friends. After the birth of NU, Kiai Hasyim then developed the idea into a state order. So the question is, why Kiai Hasyim and other founders did not want to form an Islamic state? Kiai Hasyim and others are very aware of the diversity of customs, cultures, ethnicities, and religions in this archipelago. Thus, Syaikhona Kholil’s concept is ‘unite all people’ into an Indonesian state.”<sup>29</sup>

The historical contribution of Syaikhona Kholil above shows the significant contributions of the ulama. Thus, the concept of a state by Syaikhona Kholil has made the Indonesian state independent today. The *kiais* in Bangkalan have the same insight as to the founding fathers of NU, including Syaikhona Kholil’s state concept, namely “to unite everything.” There is no movement of the ulama who wants a religious state (Islam), although most founders are Muslims who cooperate with the ulama. Concerning Islam-state relation, a verse in the Qur’ān surah

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with KH. Makki Nasir, Bangkalan, July 16, 2020. Kiai Makki is the chairman of the PCNU Bangkalan Madura and the caretaker of the Asshomadiyah Islamic boarding school, Bangkalan Madura. This can also be traced in Ahmad Zubaidi, “Kontribusi Hadratusy Syaikh Hasyim Asy’ari dalam Menegakkan NKRI”, dalam Tim Museum Kebangkitan Nasional (ed.), *KH. Hasyim Asy’ari: Pengabdian Seorang Kyai untuk Negeri* (Jakarta: Museum Kebangkitan Nasional Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2017), 107-108.



al-Nisā' verse 59 gives an insight of obedience as the duty of a good citizen:

“O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Then, if you quarrel about something, revert it back to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is good, and the best at the end.” (Q.S. al-Nisā' 59.)

Obedience to state authorities is a must in the religion. Rebellion or treason against state power is a despicable act prohibited in the religion. To NU's *kiais* in Bangkalan, the initial concept of the Indonesian state aimed to unit all elements and that Islam and state are interconnected and interdependent.

### **The Relationship Between Islam and Pancasila**

The *kiais* believe that Pancasila, which is the ideology of the Indonesian nation, is compatible with Islam. Pancasila has to unite Muslims and other religious people in the Indonesian state. Kiai Abu Dzarrin Al Hamidy stated in the interview:

“Pancasila is not a religion. It is the ideology of the nation and the principle of the state. When we analyze Allah's command in the Qur'ān, we will understand Muslims do not only perform rituals of worship to Allah alone (*ḥabl min Allah*), but also practice and behave well and right with other humans (*ḥabl min al-nās*). Pancasila is a structure and concept that overshadows all religious, cultural, cultural and ethnic entities in Indonesia.”<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the design of Pancasila shows the symbolism for the unity of all differences. The aim of uniting all elements of the nation is the true mission of Indonesia. Kiai Abu Dzarrin Al Hamidy emphasized:

“Pancasila was born from a broad spectrum of thought that fulfills all aspects, both religious, social, and humanitarian.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with KH Abu Dzarrin Al Hamidy, Bangkalan, August 21, 2020. Kiai Abu Dzarrin is a lecturer at UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and the caretaker of the Asshomadiyah Islamic boarding school, Bangkalan Madura.



The founding fathers designed these five points in Pancasila through a long, holistic, and universal process.”<sup>31</sup>

The implementation of the Pancasila values does not contradict Islamic teachings and *sharia*. From “Belief in One Supreme God” to “Social Justice for All Indonesian People”, is the general aims of the Islamic teachings and *sharia*. Therefore, I argue Islam and Pancasila are not in contradiction. They share similarities and value compatibility. The first precept is evidence that Indonesia is a country that has commonality with the state formed by the Prophet Muhammad namely a religious nation-state. The Prophet fought rebellious atheists (infidels), but he protected the obedient non-Muslims. Likewise, the NKRI prohibits anti-divine and anti-religious attitudes, but it guarantees the independence of each citizen to embrace their religion and to worship in their way.”<sup>32</sup>

NU’s *kiais* in Bangkalan fully recognize Pancasila as the sole basis of the principles without any need to change the text or other substance of Pancasila. Their agreement is based on the results of NU Alim Ulama National Conference in Situbondo in 1983. The national conference was the final answer to the debate on the position of religion and the state. It also strengthened the theological basis for NU’s acceptance of pluralistic and democratic nation-state. NU supports this fact as proper political *ijtihad*.<sup>33</sup> Regarding this matter, KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal stated:

“For Muslims, implementing the first and second precepts in Pancasila must also be based on a strong foundation of faith in Allah. Faith is related to the vertical relationship between the individual and his God and is also closely related to the horizontal relationship among human beings.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with KH Abu Dzarrin Al Hamidy, Bangkalan, August 21, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Pimpinan MPR-RI dan Tim Kerja Sosialisasi MPR Periode 2009-2014, *Empat Pilar Kehidupan Berbangsa dan Bernegara* (Jakarta: Sekretariat MPR-RI, 2012), 48.

<sup>33</sup> Feillard underlined the contents of this National Conference by stating that: “The state foundation (Pancasila) and Islam are two things that can support it. The two are not contradictory and should not be contradicted. Both do not have to be chosen by one at the same time discarding the other.” Andree Feillard, *NU vis-à-vis Negara: Pencarian Isi, Bentuk, dan Makna* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), 243.



We also follow the essence of the Prophet's preaching method, that is, not to force someone to convert to Islam. The dawah procedure of the Prophet Muhammad is a gradual invitation. One must first believe to be able to practice the deeper teachings. It is also the way the early Islamic preachers had spread Islam in Indonesia. That is by way of wisdom, not by coercion."<sup>34</sup>

Although not all *kiais* in Bangkalan might not agree to the conference result, many *kiais* are still confirming the spirit of Pancasila, which was born from the understanding of the founding fathers. The values and spirit of Islam radiate strongly in the first to fifth precept. Hence, the *kiais* at the Situbondo congress agreed that Islam and Pancasila were not counterproductive. NU accepts Pancasila as the sole principle of the state. Islam and Pancasila do not have to be a binary opposition because the essence of Pancasila is in harmony with the basic tenets of Islam.

## Discussion

As a response to FPI-style Islamism, which is quite symptomatic in Madura, several *kiais* have also tried to understand the problematic relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia. There are at least three issues related to the discussion on the implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia.

### A. Form of the Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI)

At the NU Alim Ulama National Conference in Situbondo in 1983, the *kiais* have agreed that The Indonesian Republic (NKRI) has implemented elements of Islamic law. The view that the NKRI is not guided by Islamic law is a wrong conclusion. Although Indonesia might have weaknesses in justice enforcement, we have to recognize that the nation has a good vision for its citizens. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of implementing the vision do not reduce the goodwill of implementing Islamic values. KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal commented:

“The NKRI, as the basis of the state, has fulfilled the elements of Islamic law. However, if some people do not

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal, Bangkalan, July 15, 2020.





get justice in several sectors in our country, it is not because this country does not implement Islamic law. The problem is how the community can manage their resources ideally and adequately for all Indonesian people.”<sup>35</sup>

Several NU *kiais* in Madura also deny the notion that the NKRI was anti-*sharia*. According to them, the national insight carries the substantial value of Islamic law informally. Indonesia has not been an Islamic state (*khilāfah*) because of the absence of an absolute Islamic caliphate scheme and concept inherited from the Prophet Muhammad. The era of *al-Khulafa' al-Rasyidun* also did not have an election scheme. Although NKRI has adopted the western form of democracy, Indonesian democracy is different. In this regard, Kiai Makki Nasir asserted:

“Neither the Qur’ān nor Hadith mention a specific form of state, be it democracy, kingdom, or other systems. They do talk about various substances on the subject, such as the term deliberation. The four caliphs also used the media of deliberation in determining state policy. Indonesia uses the word democracy instead of *musyārawah*, but the words have the same intention. Democracy is indeed a Western ideology. Yet, when practiced in Indonesia, it becomes “Pancasila-Democracy.” They are different in implementation. While western democracy is the exercise of unconditional freedom, Indonesian democracy is based on the Pancasila ideology, which strictly adheres to the first to the fifth precepts. Pancasila is the soul of democracy in Indonesia.”<sup>36</sup>

Many *kiais* in Bangkalan reject the *shariat-ization* in Indonesia and replace the state system. They insist that Indonesia does not need a formal platform for implementing Islamic law because the republic’s current system has fulfilled the values and substance of the law. Furthermore, when the law is run by force, it can disrupt Indonesia’s stability of national life. Several Islamic organizations’ attempts to

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal, Bangkalan, July 15, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with KH. Makki Nasir, Bangkalan, July 16, 2020.



change the nation's ideology are inappropriate, and their wishes mostly come from their egoism without any concern for other religious adherents. In this case, applying Islamic law is problematic because not all Indonesians are Muslims. If the change in state ideology is forced, it will cause social upheaval and destroy the peaceful life among religious people.

We can learn from the debate between the importance of formalizing Islamic law and the need for Islamic law as the formal basis of the state. The event on the making of the early precepts of Pancasila was called the Piagam Jakarta (Jakarta Charter). The first precept, about divinity, includes the words "with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents." The addition of the words showed that the Muslim nationalist group wishes to implement Islamic law in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the secular nationalists thought that the phrase could harm national stability. Therefore, Mohammad Hatta met four Islam representatives from the Preparatory Committee Members for Indonesian Independence (PPKI), namely KH. Wahid Hasyim, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, Kasman Singodimedjo, and Teuku Mohammad Hassan. They were asked for an opinion on the first precept in the Piagam Jakarta "Divinity with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents." KH. Wahid Hasyim from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) wisely proposed that the disputing phrase be deleted. Later, the phrase was changed and shortened into "Belief in the One Supreme God."<sup>37</sup>

This historical event illustrates the great souls of the four Islamic figures above. This attitude was taken to save the country from division. Thus, this compromise has made Indonesia not an Islamic state and not a secular state. Since then, Indonesia has outlined the separation of politics from religion and made Pancasila the state ideology.

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<sup>37</sup> Faisal Ismail, *Islam and Pancasila: Indonesian Politics 1945-1995* (Jakarta: Balitbang Agama dan Diklat Keagamaan, Depag RI, 2001), 51, 55 dan 60-65; Faisal Ismail, "Religion, State, and Ideology in Indonesia: A Historical Account of the Acceptance of Pancasila as the Basis of the Indonesian State," *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary of Islamic Studies (IJIS)* 1, no. 2 (2018): 28-29, <https://doi.org/10.20885/ijjis.vol1.iss2.art2>.



Some *kiais* in Bangkalan uphold the value of the story above. Kiai Mohammad Nasih Aschal rejected the old idea—the need for implementing Islamic law—narrated by FPI.

“Although the idea of NKRI Bersyariah is appropriate to be applied in Indonesia, assuming most of the population is Muslim, it still has to be connected in a global context. This nation is diverse. Hence, the implementation of the sharia unit in this state can damage national stability. Moreover, the *sharia* implementation in the Islamic jurisprudence level will generate debate to decide which school of thought (*madzhab*) should be applied and prioritized. Even when the Shafii school is chosen to be mainstream, Muslims from Muhammadiyah, Persis, LDII, or other organizations will reject it because they do not follow Imam Syafii’s. Indonesian state needs to protect the plurality of *fiqh* and the other religious adherents. For that reason, I do not think Indonesia needs to apply Islamic law, and it does not need to change its ideology.”<sup>38</sup>

Based on the observation, some *kiais* in Bangkalan Madura emulate the wise attitude carried out by KH Wahid Hasyim, who approved the abolition of the disputed words in the Piagam Jakarta. Kiai Wahid absorbed transcendental values as the basis for all religions and groups so that different religious views—which can trigger conflict—could coexist. The majority *kiais* in Bangkalan also believe that the NKRI, which is based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, has substantially fulfilled the values of Islamic law. Those *kiais* state that there are two reasons the ulama and the founders of the Indonesian nation did not establish an Islamic state (*khilāfah*): (1) there were no absolute religious arguments related to the order to establish a caliphate either in the Qur’ān or Hadith; and (2) the Indonesian plurality—various ethnic groups, religions, cultures existence—determines the stability of the country. Hence, to change the national system into a formal Islamic state is not rational and counterproductive with national unity.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal, Bangkalan, July 15, 2020.



## B. Legislation in Indonesia

As one of Indonesia's largest Islamic community organizations, NU participated in the debate over the ideal model of government for Muslims in Indonesia. Although not directly involved in politics, the *kiais* paid close attention to a system of the Indonesian state right after independence.<sup>39</sup> According to Ali Haidar (1994), political attitudes in Islam are closely related to the law that requires political institutions to apply. Therefore, the NU struggle with implementing Islamic law in Indonesia is inseparable from its political power orientation because it can function only through political institutions.<sup>40</sup>

The state's fundamental problems became an excellent discussion in the BPUPKI meeting (Investigating Agency for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence). There are two factions in this discussion. The first group supported nationalism, while the second group proposed Islam as the state ideology. Because the debate had not concluded, Soekarno formed a much smaller committee consisting of nine people to continue the debate between the two groups.<sup>41</sup> KH Wahid Hasyim, who represented NU became this small member. On June 22, this small committee succeeded in making an agreement called the "Piagam Jakarta."<sup>42</sup> However, the results of this agreement received criticism from several members of BPUPKI. They protested the specific phrase added to the divinity precept, which says "with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents." Soekarno's explanation that the Piagam Jakarta was a compromise between the two parties was accepted by all members.<sup>43</sup> However, after Independence Day, the deal was scrapped.

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<sup>39</sup> Feillard, *NU vis-à-vis Negara*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Ali Haidar, *Nahdatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia: Pendekatan Fikih dalam Politik* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1994), 96.

<sup>41</sup> Feillard, *NU vis-à-vis Negara*, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Faisal Ismail, "The Nahdlatul Ulama: Its Early History and Contribution to the Establishment of Indonesian State," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no.2 (2011): 272-273, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2011.5.2.247-282>.

<sup>43</sup> Feillard, *NU vis-à-vis Negara*, 34.



The debate went on between the Islamic group and the Pancasila group. The Islamic group insisted that Islam must be the ideological foundation of the state, while the Pancasila group persisted that the foundation must be Pancasila. All Islamic political parties were united, including NU, although they have different political attitudes regarding Islam as the basis of the state.<sup>44</sup> Due to the endless debate about the state constitution between Muslims and Nationalists, President Soekarno issued a presidential decree to dissolve the Constituent Assembly and reinstated the 1945 Constitution.

The debate between Islam and Pancasila occurred again when President Soeharto imposed Pancasila as the only basis for organizations in Indonesia. Many Islamic organizations protested President Soeharto's policies, including NU. To solve this problem, NU held a National Alim Ulama National Conference. The results of the National Conference of the Ulamas, NU stated its acceptance and commitment to Pancasila. This decision was later ratified at the NU Congress in Situbondo in 1984. With this decision, NU became the first Islamic organization to accept Pancasila.

NU *kiais* in Bangkalan recognized Kiai Wahid's wise decision regarding eliminating the phrase "the obligation to carry out Islamic law" in the first point of Pancasila. When it was debated again in the New Order era, the *kiais* responded it similarly at the NU Congress in Situbondo. The *kiais* in Bangkalan realize that Islamic law has inspired the Indonesian laws and regulations. Kiai Makki Nasir explained:

"We should be grateful to have a nation's founders who came from wise scholars. The moment of erasing the seven words, namely "divinity with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents," which has the potential to discriminate against non-Muslim Indonesians, is the greatest wisdom for the people. Why? Just imagine when the seven words were still in Pancasila. The obligation to

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<sup>44</sup> Adnan Buyung Nasution, *The Aspiration for Constitutional Government in Indonesia: a Socio-legal Study of the Indonesian Konstituante, 1956-1959*, trans. Sylvia Tiwon (Jakarta: Grafitti, 1995), 52.



carry out Islamic law for its followers, which perspective or school of Islamic law will be used? Are the rituals such as Reciting *tahlil* for those who have died and reciting *qunūt* during the morning prayers still being practiced, who possibly refuse it. In NU tradition, we are taught the four schools of *fiqh* and follow the theological schools of *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah*. However, in practice, there are varieties. All of them are taken from the most authoritative sources of Islam, namely the Qur'ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet.”<sup>45</sup>

Since the beginning of the Indonesian state, Islamic law has existed because excluding Islamic law in the discussion would be refuted. There are similarities between Pancasila, the constitution, laws, and Islamic sharia in contextual values. Thus, the values scattered in the Pancasila to local regulations reflect Islamic law. Moreover, Islam and the constitution acknowledge that Indonesian Islam has followed a substantive sharia approach, not a formal one.<sup>46</sup> In Sitompul's words, “Indonesia is not a secular state, nor is it a religious Islamic state; but a state that seeks to develop a religious life.”<sup>47</sup> Kiai Mohammad Nasih Aschal explained:

“The implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia has been going on for a very long time. If some individuals or groups say that Indonesia does not implement Islamic teachings today, their argument must be weak. We know Islamic law through the Pancasila can be enforced; how the interaction between humans with God and each other is also regulated in this country. Mosques and prayer rooms as places of worship for Muslims are countless, and Islamic activities are not prohibited. This situation is evidence that Pancasila is already sharia-based because it has provided flexibility

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with KH. Makki Nasir, Bangkalan, July 16, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Nadirsyah Hosen, “Religion and the Indonesian Constitution: A Recent Debate,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 419-40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20072669>; JM Muslimin, “Islamic Law in the Pancasila State,” *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 12, no. 1 (2012): 15-25, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v12i1.976>.

<sup>47</sup> Einar Martahan Sitompul, *NU dan Pancasila* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2010), 91.



to implement the principles and basics of Islamic law. The state also regulates marriage in Islam, Sharia-based financial transactions are not prohibited, the practice of worship in mosques and prayer rooms is also not prohibited, and so on. So what is not Islamic of Pancasila?.”<sup>48</sup>

The implementation of Islamic law should consider the condition of a nation; if it causes division, the implementation of Islamic law should incorporate the nation's traditions and culture. The early Muslim preachers such as Walisongo have realized that the incorporation has caused a successful *dawah*.

The *kiais* understand that the state regulations ranging from Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, UU, to several regional regulations are essentially aligned with Islamic sharia values. Although the content of these values is limited to implicit values, they have fulfilled the elements of state regulations recommended in Islam, providing justice and benefit for all people without exception. So that all religious people in Indonesia can unite and freely worship God according to their beliefs.

## Conclusion

The NU *kiais* in Bangkalan accepted NKRI and Pancasila as the state ideology. Their acceptance is a form of their commitment and obedience to the results of the National Alim Ulama National Conference in Situbondo 1984. The conference ended the debate on Islam-state relations in Indonesia. It also strengthened the theological basis for NU's decision to accept the pluralistic and democratic nation-state in the form of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

For NU, nationality and religion are inseparable from their spirit of struggle (*khittah*). These two elements are closely united in their fighting spirit and become the primary motivation to devote themselves to the nation and state. As one of the most prominent organizations, NU will always be committed to maintaining national sovereignty and maintaining the integrity of the NKRI. NU always promotes unity in

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with KH. Mohammad Nasih Aschal, Bangkalan, 15 July 2020.



diversity by instilling respect for differences and dialogues. To counter Islamism and transnational religious organizations, NU keeps reaffirming the spirit of Indonesian nationalism by declaring that the NKRI is the final form of the national system.

In conclusion, FPI-style Islamism in Bangkalan—not to mention other areas such as Pamekasan, which FPI is quite solid—has not gained approval from the majority of the Muslim leaders. FPI's ideology in Bangkalan has been loud in the social media but has not become the grassroots ideology: Muslim majority in Bangkalan. In addition, FPI's Islamist ideology—that wants to revive the phrase “with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents,” as stated in the Piagam Jakarta can not easily infiltrate the moderate Muslim majority. NU's moderate ideology and the strong nationalism in the organization are the factors that counter Islamism in Indonesia.

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