



Integration Of Pesantren Values In The Construction Of A Religious Society: A Study Of Local Government Policy In Bondowoso Regency

Rifa'i¹✉, Rusydi²

^{1,2}Taqwa Institute of Islamic Studies, Bondowoso, East Java, Indonesia

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✉ Correspondence

rifaibachtiar42@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study analyzes the institutionalization of pesantren (Islamic boarding school) values within regional governance to construct a religious society. Using a qualitative ethnographic case study, the research explores how local government policies transform traditional religious ethics into formal legal frameworks. Data were gathered through participant observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with cross-sectoral stakeholders, including legislative leaders, executive bureaucrats, and spiritual authorities. Findings reveal that the integration of pesantren values transcends symbolic programming, manifesting as a hybrid governance model that synergizes bureaucratic rationality with transcendental authority. The formalization of these values into local legislation has reconfigured public compliance, where civic duty now intersects with spiritual loyalty. This process facilitates a "collective habitus" that projects pesantren ethics into the public sphere (from pesantren to polis). Theoretically, this research proposes the "Triangle of Authority" paradigm—a conceptual framework connecting legal-rational governance, charismatic-religious leadership, and socio-cultural identity. This study argues that the sustainability of religious-based public policy depends on the state's ability to synchronize formal instruments with the ethical gatekeeping of religious elites. These insights offer a significant contribution to the discourse on state-religion synergy and character education policy in contemporary Muslim-majority societies.

INTRODUCTION

The growing phenomenon of social disruption, shifting value orientations, and the weakening of society's moral cohesion indicates that the formation of a religious society is facing increasingly complex challenges (Barlian, Wardana, & Murniati, 2024). Rapid modernization has brought progress in material dimensions; however, at the same time, it has generated a paradox manifested in the rise of individualism, pragmatism, social intolerance, the degradation of public ethics, and the reduction of religiosity into ritualistic forms often detached from social praxis (Chairuddin, 2025). Contemporary realities further reveal a sociocultural disconnection between massive digital expansion and the stability of public morality, in which society is increasingly trapped in currents of ethical decadence and the shallowing of spiritual meaning. Amid the accelerating forces of

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modernization, pesantren values—such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), exemplary conduct (*uswah*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*)—are often confined within institutional boundaries, remaining largely embedded within pesantren environments without being systematically distributed into broader social structures (Ristianah & Munir, 2025). This condition has strengthened the phenomenon of “surface religiosity,” in which religious symbols increase quantitatively, yet fail to transform into substantive social piety. Such a situation creates a normative vacuum within an increasingly pragmatic social order, a vacuum that should, in principle, be filled through the internalization of pesantren values as an ethical foundation for civilizational development (Indrafudin, 2024).

In this context, the fundamental problem is not merely the decline of religious expression, but rather the growing disconnection between religious values and social life as the foundation for building a civilized society (Muntoha, 2024). Amid this condition, pesantren as a traditional Islamic educational institution presents a contrasting phenomenon, namely its capacity to sustain a living value system through tradition, exemplary leadership, habituation, and morally grounded social relations (Jayadi, Thohri, Maujud, & Safinah, 2024). This problem becomes increasingly complex when pesantren values are often understood narrowly as an internal cultural identity of the institution, rather than as a resource for social transformation that can be contextualized within broader community life (Amri, 2025). As a consequence, a tendency toward dualism emerges between the educational sphere of the pesantren and the social realities beyond it, resulting in the incomplete transformation of values such as *ukhuwah* (social solidarity), *tawassuth* (moderation), self-reliance, moral discipline, and social welfare into collective social practices.

Furthermore, the challenges posed by globalization, the penetration of digital culture, shifts in socio-religious authority, and the weakness of integrative models linking educational institutions, religious leadership, and community participation further intensify the problem of sustaining a religious society. From this perspective, the central issue lies not in the absence of values, but in how pesantren values are negotiated, institutionalized, and operationalized as a transformative social force.

The socio-religious phenomenon in Bondowoso Regency reflects a distinctive typology widely recognized as the “Santri City,” where Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) function not merely as educational institutions, but as the cultural epicenter that shapes and regulates the rhythm of social life. Empirically, there exists an organic integration between core pesantren values—such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), service (*khidmah*), and humility (*tawadhu'*)—and the social structures of both agrarian and urban communities in the region. These values are embedded not only in religious practices but also in collective social behavior, community ethics, and local patterns of interaction. However, an intriguing dynamic has emerged alongside the acceleration of digitalization and modernity, which has increasingly penetrated even peripheral areas. In this context, pesantren in Bondowoso face significant challenges in maintaining the relevance of these traditional values amid the expansion of consumerism and shifting social orientations.

This tension between the growing penetration of external cultural influences and the persistence of the pesantren’s *manhaj al-fikr* (intellectual and normative tradition) creates a critical dialectical space worthy of scholarly inquiry. It raises an important question regarding how pesantren values are not only preserved but also transformed into forms of social capital capable of mitigating the crisis of public morality. From this perspective, the integration of pesantren values can be understood not as a static cultural inheritance, but as a dynamic process of value reproduction, adaptation, and social transformation in response to contemporary challenges. This phenomenon positions pesantren as a strategic moral institution whose values continue to serve as a normative foundation for strengthening religious society and sustaining social cohesion in the midst of socio-cultural change.

Furthermore, the dynamics in Bondowoso indicate that the integration of pesantren values no longer operates in a linear-traditional manner, but rather

through a mechanism of strategic adaptation involving the role of the Kyai as a central opinion leader. There emerges a phenomenon of hybrid religiosity, in which society increasingly adopts modern standards of living while continuing to position the pesantren as an ethical compass in social and economic decision-making. The primary challenge lies in the fluctuation of value internalization among younger generations, who are becoming increasingly alienated from the cultural roots of the pesantren due to exposure to destructive global content. This study captures such a phenomenon as an urgent concern, requiring a critical examination of how the management of value integration is systematically enacted so that it does not remain confined to symbolic-ritualistic expressions, but is capable of constructing a resilient, moderate, and adaptive religious social order in response to contemporary change at both the local and national levels.

In this context, the integration of pesantren values constitutes a strategic issue, as pesantren function not merely as religious educational institutions, but also as cultural systems that reproduce ethical, spiritual, social, and civilizational values oriented toward the formation of a religiously grounded society. Values such as *tafaqquh fi al-din* (deep understanding of religion), exemplary leadership (*uswah*), self-governance, *ukhuwah* (social solidarity), *tawazun* (balance), and social welfare (*maslahah*) represent normative capital that is highly relevant for addressing contemporary crises of dehumanization, individualism, and social fragmentation.

Within the context of governance, the role of pesantren in fostering a religious society has been articulated in several regulations and policy frameworks. The 1999 Reformation brought positive expectations for local governments with the enactment of the Regional Autonomy Law, which granted regions the authority to manage their administration and finances in a competitive, innovative, and independent manner in accordance with their respective potentials (Law No. 22/1999 and Law No. 25/1999). The reform era also brought significant changes to the world of education with the amendment of Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution on Education and the enactment of the 2003 National Education System Law. These fundamental changes became the spirit for local governments in advancing the quality of human resources. This law regulates the standardization, characteristics, and direction of national education policy. These changes reflect the government's attention and commitment to accelerating the development of human resources. Four years later, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction was issued. This regulation accommodates religious educational institutions organized by the community, such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasahs, Quranic education centers, and other similar institutions. Religious education will produce a religious society with a character based on the noble values of the nation. To realize this commitment, Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 13 of 2014 concerning Islamic religious education and Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 18 of 2014 concerning Muadalah education in Islamic boarding schools were issued. Several regulations.

The integration of pesantren values in realizing a religious society is grounded in the theoretical assumption that pesantren is not merely an institution for the transmission of religious knowledge, but rather an ecosystem of value formation (value system), cultural reproduction, and religious social engineering (Rahmah & Hamdan, 2025). From the perspective of Zamakhsyari Dhofier, pesantren is built upon core elements consisting of the kyai, santri, mosque, kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), and boarding system (pondok), which structurally function not only to shape an educational system, but also to construct a collective worldview through the internalization of values such as humility (*tawadhu'*), solidarity (*ukhuwah*), self-reliance, discipline, and moral obedience (Yanto, 2024). Within this framework, the integration of pesantren values can be understood as a process of value transformation from the educational sphere into the social sphere, in which normative pesantren values are externalized into the social ethics of a religious society. This perspective intersects with the thought of Abdurrahman Wahid, who viewed pesantren as a subculture possessing adaptive capacity to respond to social change without

losing its normative identity (Febriyanti & Giantara, 2025), and aligns with the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid, who positioned pesantren as a foundation for the formation of civil society through a synthesis of Islamic tradition, social rationality, and civilizational renewal (Zaman, Nawir, Islamy, & Aninnas, 2022). Thus, conceptually, the integration of pesantren values does not end with the transmission of tradition; rather, it constitutes a mechanism of social construction that generates public religiosity grounded in ethics, social solidarity, and an orientation toward the common good.

Theoretically, the integration of pesantren values is grounded in the epistemology of *akhlāq al-karimah* (noble character), which is positioned as a form of spiritual capital for social transformation (Triana, Yahya, Nashihin, Sugito, & Musthan, 2023). Referring to the thought of Hasyim Asy'ari in *Adab al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, pesantren values are not merely behavioral norms, but manifestations of tawhidic integrity that should transcend institutional boundaries in order to shape a civilized social order (Asy'ari, 1415 H). In this framework, integration is understood as a process of internalizing the values of *at-tawāzun* (balance) and *al-i'tidāl* (justice) into the social habitus of the community. From the perspective of Abdurrahman Wahid, the pesantren functions as a subculture endowed with cultural resilience, enabling it to sustain a dialectical engagement between religious orthodoxy and socio-political realities. Through this dynamic, values such as self-reliance (*kemandirian*) and simplicity (*zuhd*) become critical instruments for resisting the expansion of modern materialism (Wahid, 2001). Accordingly, the integration of pesantren values should be understood not merely as a normative transmission of religious ethics, but as a transformative process through which spiritual capital is converted into social practices that nurture moral order, communal solidarity, and the formation of a religious society.

The construction of a religious society from the pesantren perspective is grounded in the principle of *maslahah ammah* (public benefit), which is managed through transformative moral leadership. Kyai Sahal Mahfudh, in *Nuansa Fiqh Sosial*, emphasizes that pesantren values should serve as an ethical foundation for community development (Qadarin & Nazhatut, 2025). This is aligned with the principle of *al-muhafadzah 'ala al-qadimi al-salih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadidi al-ashlah* (preserving worthy traditions while adopting better innovations), in which the integration of pesantren values operates as a cultural filtering mechanism that enables society to embrace modernity without losing its spiritual identity (Munjiat, Umihani, & Nuryadien, 2024). From a managerial perspective, this theoretical orientation positions pesantren as an "agent of change" that transforms society from a mere aggregation of individuals into a religious community bound by the values of collectivism (*ukhuwah*) and divine responsibility (Bulhayat, 2025).

Recent literature reviews indicate that the discourse on pesantren values has largely focused on the internal domain of institutional life and the character formation of *santri*. Research by (S. Hidayat, Cahyanita, & Mustafidin, 2025) explores the internalization of character values through the pesantren curriculum, while (Mustaan, 2020) highlights the role of kyai leadership in transforming organizational culture. Furthermore, (Maslahah, 2022) analyzes pesantren adaptation strategies in response to digitalization, whereas (S. Hidayat et al., 2025) and (Fatahillah, 2023) discuss the relationship between religious values and social cohesion. However, these studies tend to isolate pesantren values within the microsystem of educational settings, thereby leaving a theoretical gap regarding how such values migrate and become integrated into public policy structures as well as the broader sociocultural identity of society, particularly in regions characterized by a very high density of pesantren.

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms through which pesantren values are integrated into the construction of a religious society in Bondowoso Regency through a multi-stakeholder perspective involving legislative actors, executive authorities, and authoritative pesantren leaders. The novelty of this study resides in its research locus and analytical focus, which examine the interface between the sacred moral values of pesantren and the rationality of formal local governance, while bridging the spiritual authority of pesantren leadership with political actors, including regional legislative leaders

(DPRD) and the governmental bureaucracy of Bondowoso.

Departing from this gap, this study aims to analyze how the integration of pesantren values is constructed, operationalized, and transformed in shaping a religious society in Bondowoso Regency through social, cultural, and institutional mechanisms embedded within and surrounding pesantren communities. The study focuses not only on examining the transmission of values such as ta'awun (mutual assistance), ukhuwah (social solidarity), ta'dzim (respect), ikhlas (sincerity), and masalahah (public benefit), but also on how these values are institutionalized into collective social practices that shape the religious order of community life.

The novelty of this research lies in its proposed Pesantren Value Integration Framework, a conceptual model that positions the integration of pesantren values as a synthesis of three interrelated dimensions: value transmission, social institutionalization, and religious community transformation. A further contribution of this study is its departure from viewing pesantren merely as educational institutions; instead, it conceptualizes pesantren as moral-governance actors that construct social religiosity through cultural leadership, socio-religious networks, and value-based transformation. In this regard, the study contributes to expanding global discourse on faith-based community transformation and offers an alternative perspective from the Indonesian pesantren tradition to theories of religion, education, and community development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design to investigate the institutionalization of pesantren values within the social and bureaucratic structures of a religious society. This design allows for a deep exploration of cultural patterns and shared beliefs through the researcher's role as the primary instrument for holistic interpretation (Creswell, 2018; Moleong, 2017). The research was conducted through an intensive field study, utilizing purposive sampling to engage cross-sectoral stakeholders. Participants included legislative leaders, executive bureaucrats from the Social and Education Offices, and spiritual authorities from prominent pesantren institutions. This strategic selection of informants ensures robust source triangulation, capturing the intersection between political-rational interests and transcendental-religious values in the policy-making process.

Data collection was executed through a tripartite synergy of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation focused on the communal dynamics and formal institutional interactions, while semi-structured interviews explored the philosophical orientations and strategic commitments of key actors toward pesantren-based ethics. Complementary document analysis was performed on regional regulations and educational curricula to provide empirical evidence of value formalization. This comprehensive data gathering aligns with the principles of analytical depth and credibility, ensuring that the interplay between indigenous traditions and public policy is captured with empirical precision (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The analytical phase followed Bogdan's framework, involving systematic data organization, unitization, and pattern identification to generate central themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This study specifically applies "analysis for policy" by evaluating policy contents, processes, and outputs to map the transformation of religious values into public ethics. To ensure scientific rigor, the researcher established trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Technical and source triangulation were complemented by prolonged field engagement and member checking, ensuring that the emerging theoretical propositions regarding the "Triangle of Authority" are consistently validated by the participants' lived realities and the institutional context.

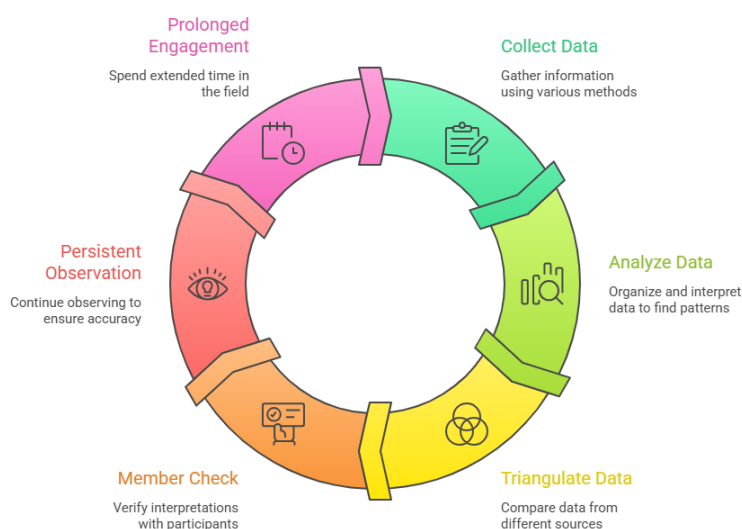


Image 1. Research Trustworthiness Cycle

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The Formalization of Pesantren Values into Local Government Policy Instruments

Based on in-depth exploration, the findings indicate that the integration of pesantren values in Bondowoso Regency has reached a legal-formal stage through the codification of these values into various local legal instruments, such as Regional Regulations (Peraturan Daerah/Perda) and Regent Instructions related to character education and religious literacy. Based on document analysis of the academic drafts underlying these regulations, it was found that distinctive pesantren concepts—such as *akhlakul karimah* (noble character), *tawadhu'* (humility), and *kemaslahatan* (public welfare)—no longer function merely as cultural jargon, but have been transformed into legally binding norms operating within the local governance framework. Researcher observations on the implementation of these policies further reveal a synchronization between local legal instruments and the non-formal curriculum of pesantren, indicating that the local government is undertaking a structural moral institutionalization to ensure the sustainability of the community's religious identity amid the disruptive pressures of global value transformations.

The formalization of pesantren values into local legal products constitutes a strategic mechanism for transforming cultural-religious values into regulatory norms that shape the construction of a religious society in Bondowoso Regency. Based on interview data with *kiai* (Islamic boarding school leaders), local government officials, community leaders, and policy-making actors, the study reveals that pesantren values such as *maslahah* (public welfare), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ukhuwah* (social solidarity), *tawassuth* (moderation), and collective moral responsibility do not remain merely as social ethics embedded in community traditions, but are incorporated into policy formulation, regional regulations, and normative instruments of development. Field observations indicate that this process does not operate as a symbolic formalization that reduces religion to a mere ornament of policy; rather, it represents an effort of value institutionalization in which local law functions as a medium for translating the moral principles of pesantren into public governance. This finding is further reinforced by document analysis demonstrating a clear interconnection between the substance of local legal products and policy orientations aimed at protecting religious values, fostering socio-religious life, and strengthening the moral order of society. These findings confirm that, in this context, local law does not function merely as an administrative instrument, but transforms into a normative vehicle through which the epistemology of pesantren is embedded within the structure of state regulation.

Interpretively, in-depth interviews with policymakers and pesantren elites revealed that this formalization constitutes a form of “theo-political contract” between the state and pesantren institutions. Key informants from the bureaucratic apparatus emphasized that the incorporation of pesantren values into local legal instruments is not merely intended to ensure administrative order, but also represents an effort to secure spiritual legitimacy in order to enhance regulatory effectiveness at the grassroots level. Field data indicate that when a regulation—such as compulsory diniyah education or the zoning of santri areas—possesses both a strong legal foundation and a deeply rooted religious value base, sociological resistance within society tends to diminish. In this context, local legal products function as a bridge connecting the rationality of modern law with the traditional authority of the pesantren, thereby creating a legal order that is spiritually authoritative while remaining constitutionally legitimate.

The Reproduction of Religious-Social Habitus: From Pesantren to the Polis

This research finding reveals a phenomenon of systemic habitus transplantation, in which the internal values of the pesantren—such as *istiqamah* (steadfastness), *tawadhu'* (humility), and *khidmah* (service)—are extracted from the domestic sphere of the educational institution and injected into the ecosystem of the polis (urban public sphere) through local government policy instruments. Document analysis of strategic policy texts issued by the Bondowoso Regency Government indicates a deliberate effort to replicate the mental structure of the santri within the character formation of citizens. Through intensive field observation, the researcher found that the religious behavior of society no longer emerges as a reactive response to occasional religious instruction; rather, it has become an enduring “scheme of dispositions”—a collective habitus that operates almost automatically within social interactions, bureaucratic conduct, and even economic activities in the public sphere. In this context, local government policy functions as a structuring structure, transforming urban space into an “open pesantren” that continuously reproduces practices of social piety.

The integration of pesantren values in realizing a religious society in Bondowoso Regency operates through the reproduction of social habitus, namely a process through which value dispositions originally rooted in pesantren culture are transformed into a collective ethical structure functioning within a broader social sphere (from pesantren to polis). Based on interview data with *kiai*, local government officials, community leaders, and members of the community, the findings reveal that pesantren values such as *ta'dzim* (reverence), *ukhuwah* (social solidarity), *amanah* (trustworthiness), moral discipline, and communal responsibility do not remain confined to the internal practices of pesantren education; rather, they are reproduced through social interaction, public policy, and collective habituation in community life. Field observations indicate that this reproduction is manifested in deliberative culture (*musyawarah*), social solidarity, religious participation, ethical compliance, and patterns of social relations characterized by religious-communal orientations. Meanwhile, document analysis demonstrates that local government policies also function as an institutional medium that reinforces this reproductive process through community development programs and the strengthening of religious culture. This finding confirms that the integration of pesantren values does not operate through a linear transfer of norms, but through a mechanism of social habitus reproduction—that is, the sedimentation of values that continuously shapes orientations of action and the behavioral structures of society.

Interpretively, the findings from in-depth interviews with pesantren elites and policy stakeholders confirm that this process of habitus reproduction is mediated by the symbolic authority of the *kiai*, which has become institutionalized within the governmental system. Key informants emphasized that this value integration is not merely an effort of moralization, but rather a strategy of social engineering aimed at creating public order grounded in transcendental ethics. Data triangulation further indicates that the pesantren habitus, which was initially particularistic in nature, has transformed into a universal social identity of the Bondowoso community. The researcher interprets this phenomenon as evidence

of the local government's success in deconstructing the dichotomy between sacred and secular spheres, wherein pesantren values are no longer confined within the walls of the boarding school but have become embedded in the pulse of urban social life. Consequently, Bondowoso emerges as a distinctive sociological entity in which the rationality of public governance and the spirituality of the pesantren converge in a unified rhythm of communal life.

The Institutionalization of Kiai–Bureaucratic Synergy

This study reveals that the realization of a religious society in Bondowoso Regency is not merely an implication of cultural da'wah activities, but rather the result of a highly structured institutionalization of kiai–bureaucratic synergy. Documentary analysis of Regional Regulations and Regent Instructions concerning Qur'anic literacy and the strengthening of character education indicates that the local government no longer positions itself as a secular entity detached from religious values, but instead operates as an administrative extension of pesantren values. This synergy generates a hybrid governance pattern in which the government bureaucracy provides legal-formal legitimacy, while the kiai contributes theological-spiritual legitimacy. Researcher observations across various government institutions further demonstrate that the internalization of pesantren values has moved beyond religious symbolism and has permeated the bureaucratic work ethos, integrating principles of professionalism with the normative logic of santri discipline and obedience.

The institutionalization of kiai–bureaucratic synergy has emerged as a key mechanism in integrating pesantren values into the governance of religious development in Bondowoso Regency. Based on interview data, informants—including kiai, local government officials, community leaders, and managers of socio-religious programs—affirmed that the relationship between pesantren and government does not operate through an incidental consultative pattern, but has evolved into a structured model of institutional partnership. In this configuration, kiai function not merely as actors of moral legitimacy, but as strategic partners in articulating policy agendas oriented toward social welfare (*maslahah*). Meanwhile, the local bureaucracy serves as an instrument for the formalization and operationalization of pesantren values within development programs. This configuration gives rise to what this study conceptualizes as institutionalized kiai–bureaucratic synergy, namely a system of interaction that combines moral-religious authority and administrative authority in the production of a value-based social order. This finding demonstrates that the integration of pesantren values does not occur through state penetration into the religious sphere, but rather through normative co-production between cultural authority and policy structures.

A deeper interpretation indicates that this institutionalization has stimulated the emergence of a collective religious habitus driven by dual authority structures. The researcher observed that this synergy does not remain confined to the level of elite policymaking, but extends to the grassroots through networks of pesantren alumni who occupy strategic positions at the village level. Document analysis of regional program achievement reports confirms that the integration of pesantren values, mediated through kiai–bureaucratic collaboration, has been effective in reducing social pathologies and strengthening social cohesion among community members. Accordingly, Bondowoso has developed a model of Theocratic-Rational Governance, a system in which the rationality of modern bureaucracy is enriched by the ethical depth of the pesantren tradition, ultimately transforming the regency's identity into a “large pesantren,” with the kiai serving as the moral conductor and the government functioning as its technical operator.

The Role of Kiai as Ethical Gatekeepers in Mediating Policy and Transcendental Authority

In-depth research exploration reveals that Kiai in Bondowoso Regency play a central role as ethical gatekeepers, validating every dimension of local government policy before it is implemented in the public sphere. Based on in-depth interview data with bureaucratic elites, it was found that the integration of pesantren values into regional regulations is not a unilateral administrative

process, but rather the result of a prolonged dialectical process in which Kiai function as theological filters, ensuring that policies remain aligned with the normative principles of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. Research observations further indicate that the involvement of Kiai has generated a distinctive mechanism of social control; policies that have passed through this “ethical gate” of the pesantren demonstrate significantly higher sociological acceptance. This occurs because the community no longer perceives regional legal products as instruments of state coercion, but rather as manifestations of pesantren’s noble values that have acquired moral legitimacy

Kiai function as ethical gatekeepers who bridge the rationality of local government policy with the transcendental authority embedded within pesantren traditions, such that the integration of pesantren values in the development of a religious society does not operate merely through administrative logic, but through ethical mediation that provides moral legitimacy to public policy. Based on interview data with kiai, local government officials, community leaders, and policy implementation actors, the findings reveal that the position of kiai is not confined to providing symbolic support for policy; rather, they serve as guardians of moral boundaries who filter, direct, and critically correct policy orientations to ensure their alignment with the principles of *maslahah* (public good), *amanah* (trustworthiness), justice, and socio-religious responsibility. In this respect, kiai operate not only as religious authorities but also as normative actors who shape the ethical substance of governance.

Field observations further indicate that the authority of kiai operates through exemplary influence, normative guidance, social mediation, and active engagement in consultative forums that shape the direction of regional socio-religious policy. These observations suggest that the role of kiai extends beyond cultural influence into the domain of policy mediation, where moral authority becomes a strategic mechanism for strengthening public trust and policy effectiveness. Document analysis also demonstrates that various policy agendas related to the development of a religious society gain stronger implementation and broader social acceptance when supported by the moral authority of kiai. This finding confirms that the integration of pesantren values is reinforced not solely through formal regulatory instruments, but through the ethical authority of kiai, which functions as a legitimizing force that sustains the moral orientation of public governance.

Furthermore, analysis of the field data indicates that Kiai exercise a form of transcendental authority that extends beyond the boundaries of formal political power. Documentary analysis of various regional coordination meeting records reveals that the influence of Kiai is not merely decorative or symbolic, but substantively directive in shaping the orientation of policies aimed at fostering public religiosity. This study interprets this phenomenon as a form of Theo-Managerial Leadership, in which Kiai utilize symbolic capital and charismatic authority to reframe bureaucratic rationality into collective spiritual action. Data triangulation confirms that Bondowoso’s success in realizing a religious society is significantly contingent upon the position of Kiai as the gravitational axis of authority; they are able to connect the government’s technocratic vision with the community’s eschatological aspirations, thereby transforming public policy into a vehicle for achieving citizens’ spiritual well-being within the polis.

The Formation of Religious Public Identity

This study finds that the integration of pesantren values in Bondowoso Regency has reached a stage of identity crystallization referred to as Religious Public Identity. This identity is not merely an individual attribute of citizens, but a collective identity embedded within the spatial and social image of the regency. Documentary analysis of regional branding and public spatial regulations reveals a systematic effort to manifest religious symbolism within both the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of urban governance. Through participatory observation, the researcher found that this religious identity is reflected in relatively uniform public behaviors, such as the wearing of Muslim attire on designated days and the suspension of economic activities during prayer times, both of which have come

to be regarded as a form of “unwritten law.” This phenomenon indicates that pesantren values have been successfully negotiated into a dominant civic identity, in which the boundary between religious observance and civic compliance becomes increasingly fluid within the public sphere..

Interpretively, descriptions drawn from interview data across diverse social groups and key informants reveal that this Religious Public Identity functions as a mechanism of sociological distinction that differentiates Bondowoso from other urban regions. Informants emphasized that this religious identity did not emerge from coercive structural pressures, but rather from a long process of value internalization that has generated a shared collective consciousness. Data triangulation further indicates that this public identity operates as a cultural filter against the penetration of global influences perceived as discordant with local ethical norms. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence of the local government’s success in legitimizing identity formation, wherein “being a citizen of Bondowoso” is symbolically and socially understood as “being part of the living breath of pesantren religiosity.” Ultimately, this identity produces social stability grounded in transcendental values, transforming the regency from a mere administrative unit into a cohesive moral community.

DISCUSSION

The integration of pesantren values in Bondowoso Regency represents a “Triangle of Authority” model that converges three principal pillars: the Government with its legal-rational logic, the Kiai with charismatic-transcendental authority, and the Community with a religious-cultural identity. This phenomenon validates Michel Foucault’s Power/Knowledge theory, in which the pesantren operates as a dominant discourse that produces moral knowledge, which is subsequently adopted by the state as an instrument of regulation (T. Hidayat, Tinggi, Arab, & Raayah, 2024). In this context, local government policy is not merely an administrative intervention, but rather a strategy of governmentality that draws upon the “truth” of the pesantren tradition to shape and discipline society into compliant religious subjects. Within this framework, the kiai occupies a central axis that connects theological aspirations with bureaucratic formality, ensuring that state power retains a moral and spiritual legitimacy—its “soul”—in the eyes of society.

Sociologically, this synergy reinforces social capital as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu and Robert D. Putnam (Febriyanti & Giantara, 2025). Pesantren values such as khidmah (service) and barakah (blessing) are transformed into symbolic capital that strengthens social cohesion in Bondowoso. Through the role of the kiai as an ethical gatekeeper, local government policies undergo a process of “sacralization” that enhances public trust in state institutions. This finding resonates with the perspective of Hasyim Asy’ari in *Adabul ‘Alim wal Muta’allim*, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge and praxis within the structure of leadership. In this context, local government no longer operates within an empty secular sphere; rather, it strategically engages the patronage networks of the kiai as a form of social infrastructure to mobilize public participation in fostering a religious social order.(Anam, Padil, & Yahya, 2021).

The phenomenon of formalizing pesantren values into regional legal products constitutes a concrete manifestation of Eugen Ehrlich’s concept of Living Law-law that derives its vitality from norms actively embedded within society(Hamayotsu, 2002). This finding indicates that state law (statutory law) in Bondowoso tends to lose its binding force when it is not aligned with the living norms operating within the community, particularly those rooted in pesantren traditions. By incorporating values such as akhlaqul karimah into regional regulations, a harmonious form of legal pluralism emerges, in which the boundaries between religious norms and legal norms become increasingly fluid and mutually reinforcing. This integration generates a dual legitimacy for regional regulations: they are valid within the framework of positive law while simultaneously regarded as religiously legitimate within the moral consciousness of the community. Such a transformation demonstrates that law functions effectively when it represents the collective habitus deeply internalized within the

structure of local social consciousness.

Furthermore, the successful reproduction of habitus from the pesantren into the civic sphere (polis) signifies the expansion of the traditional boundaries of the pesantren into a broader urban social ecosystem. This process generates what the researcher conceptualizes as “Civic Santrization,” in which pesantren values are no longer particularistic and confined to the santri community, but are transformed into a universal public identity. From the perspective of Islamic educational management, this policy represents a form of visionary strategic leadership, whereby the local government acts as a facilitator for the values of Wasathiyah (moderation) cultivated within the pesantren tradition to counter radicalization and moral disruption (Arifin, Jazilurrahman, Nordin, & Rahman, 2025). This finding resonates with the thought of Nusantara Muslim scholars, who emphasize the principle of Himayatul Ummah (the protection of the community), wherein state and religion are understood as mutually interdependent (al-din wa al-dawlah tau’amani) in fostering a just and socially ordered society.(Ridwan, 2024).

As a synthesis, the Authority Triangle model in Bondowoso offers a new paradigm in the study of public management in the Muslim world. The emergence of a Religious Public Identity is not the product of theocratic coercion, but rather the outcome of an intelligent negotiation between the charismatic authority of the kiai and the legal-rational authority of government. Theoretically, this finding challenges the classical secularization thesis, which predicts the decline of religion’s influence in the modern public sphere. On the contrary, Bondowoso demonstrates that under the transcendental leadership of the kiai, traditional pesantren values are capable of shaping and directing the course of modernity. This integration ultimately generates a social order that is not only administratively stable, but also grounded in profound spiritual depth, making it a reference model for local governance based on indigenous religious values at the international level.

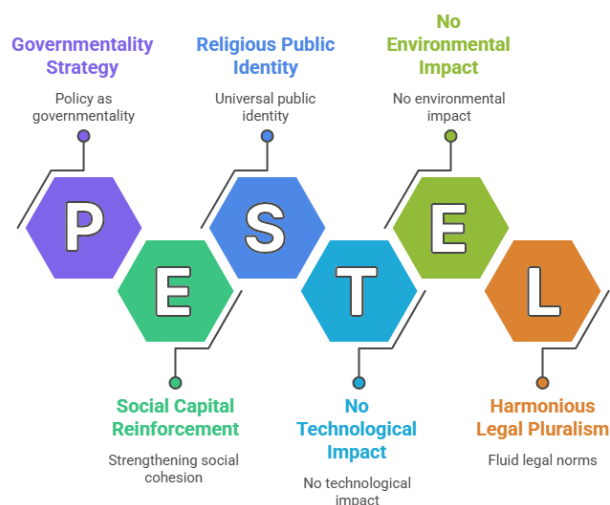


Figure 2. Pesantren Values Integration in Bondowoso

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, analysis, interpretation, and discussion, this study reveals that the integration of pesantren values in realizing a religious society in Bondowoso Regency is not merely an artificial policy program, but rather a manifestation of a hybrid governance model that synergizes bureaucratic rationality with the transcendental authority of the pesantren. Through the mechanism of formalizing values into local legal products and through the role of the kiai as an ethical gatekeeper, a fundamental shift has occurred in the pattern of public compliance; obedience to the state now intersects with spiritual loyalty. This phenomenon has generated a solid Religious Public Identity, in which pesantren values are no longer isolated as a boarding-school tradition, but have

metamorphosed into a collective habitus that shapes and determines social behavior in the public sphere (from pesantren to polis). Thus, this integration demonstrates that traditional values can be transformed into an effective normative vehicle for sustaining a religious society and preserving moral cohesion amid the pressures of modernity.

Theoretically, this study offers a new paradigm referred to as the “Triangle of Authority,” which interconnects the government’s legal-rational reasoning, the kiai’s charismatic-transcendental authority, and the community’s religious-cultural identity. This finding challenges the classical secularization thesis by demonstrating that in regions endowed with strong pesantren-based cultural capital, religion does not retreat from the public sphere; rather, it undergoes institutionalization in ways that reinforce local governance structures. The study further indicates that religion, in this context, operates not merely as a symbolic-cultural force but as a substantive normative framework that shapes public order and policy legitimacy.

The implications of this study affirm that the success of Islamic education at the regional level depends substantially on the capacity of policy actors to undertake epistemic negotiation between positive law and living law. Such negotiation enables the integration of formal regulatory systems with socially embedded moral norms, thereby strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance. In this regard, the institutionalization of pesantren values emerges not only as a cultural strategy but also as a governance mechanism for sustaining religiously grounded social transformation. Ultimately, the Bondowoso model contributes to international public management studies by offering a reference for how collaboration between religious authority and bureaucratic structures can generate social governance that is just, stable, and sustained by enduring spiritual depth. This model broadens contemporary governance discourse by demonstrating that the synergy between moral authority and administrative institutions can serve as an alternative paradigm for inclusive and value-based public governance.

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