
Tuan Guru Batak: A Phenomenon of Religion, Culture and Practical Politics

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Abstract

The democratic party not only provides a stage for political maneuvering by the political elite, but also the role of cultural clerics. The cultural cleric is Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk who is the leader of the Naqsyabandiyah Order in Simalungun. The purpose of this research is to find out the involvement of Tuan Guru Batak in the practical politics of the 2020 Medan City Election. Using qualitative research methods with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and literature studies. The results of this study show that Mr. Batak's involvement in politics is practically based on the desire to spread networks and gain legitimacy from power. Conclusion in this study, Tuan Guru Batak built political relations to become a ruling partner in strengthening the position of the Naqshbandiyah Order in society in the context of religion and nationality.

Keywords: Tuan Guru, Kiai, Power Relations, Electoral politics

Introduction

The 2020 agenda is a five-year plan by the Democratic Party to organize regional head elections in Indonesia. The simultaneous regional election took place in 270 regions across Indonesia, comprising 9 provinces, 224 regencies, and 37 cities, including the election of Medan's mayoral and deputy mayoral candidates (Kompas, 2020). During the Medan City election, many individuals play significant roles in society. One category includes religious leaders, known by various titles such as kiai, ulama, or tuan guru. They are a significant entity with a strong influence in the socio-political sphere of Indonesia as documented in history.

Fealy (2011) states that the ulama depend on educational institutions known as pesantren or persulukan as supporters of their religious knowledge. Ulama are believed to have the ability to impact public backing in electoral politics through direct and indirect means. Ulama are regarded as the successors of the Prophet in their religious role. Kiswanto (2008) suggests that kiai and ulama can serve as a source of legitimacy in religious and socio-political contexts.

Kiai is a type of religious sanctity that can effortlessly command obedience and reverence across all societal strata. Not only in religious affairs, but also in other areas beyond it. Even within the sphere of politics. Kiai plays a significant strategic role and function in the electoral leadership circulation in Madura. The role and function of kiai originate from two sources. Initially, his skill in self-promotion and adjusting to the community. Kiai aims to enhance themselves with positive, virtuous, and spiritual behaviors and characteristics. Secondly, the breed's element acquired from previous strong kiai. The genealogy of a kyai connecting to the preceding kyai is a crucial factor in this context. The greater the renown of the lineage associated with him, the more charisma and influence he possesses. The kyai's profound religious knowledge, holiness, and close relationship with God result in strong obedience and compliance. The source is Hannan's work from 2018.

Kiai holds influence in society through its established customs and practices. Kiai's authority is established through the accumulation of habitus shaped by descent, education, societal traditions, and respect. This authority is supported by cultural capital inherited through family lineage, institutionalized through pesantren institutions, and legitimized through institutional recognition. This process created social norms where the kiai is regarded with respect, second only to parents, within the culture. Next There is a tradition of using acabis for various purposes. Third, inherent community connection, Fourth, mystical significance of the kiai, Fifth, congregation or santri loyalty. Kiai's authority eventually becomes a commodity that is traded in political competition. This value exchange takes place between voters and political candidates during general elections. Commodification happens when kiai support is traded for material rewards such as aid funds, goods, cars, etc., and non-material rewards like positions in political parties (Lubis & Rohmatillah).

Kiai, through their natural charm, become leaders not only in spiritual matters but also in political affairs. Before political events like legislative and regional elections, numerous candidates seek the endorsement of influential kiai to validate their candidacy and increase their chances of being elected.

Located in Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra, there is a Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah-Khalidiyah Serambi Babussalam (TNKSB) persulukan house overseen by a spiritual leader known as Tuan Guru Batak (TGB). Tarekat is a spiritual movement that emphasizes the importance of divinity. This is demonstrated by the dedication and concentration on God through the rituals performed. Tarekat is engaged in various aspects of life, such as political, social, and cultural matters. Tarekat is viewed as an essential component of a cohesive community structure that is intertwined with the social fabric of the community.

Tarekat leaders are revered as holy individuals with the power to intercede spiritually on behalf of their followers, enabling their desires to be fulfilled by the Divine. There will be various interests from the followers, such as power

patronage, ritual routines, or other factors (Asmawi, 2006). Tuan Guru Batak can be understood as the intersection of Batak culture and Islam. He can also symbolize harmonious relationships between different faiths, particularly for the Batak community, who are predominantly Christian (Aritonang, 2001). The title Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) has been bestowed upon religious leaders and prominent individuals, starting with the first Tuan Guru, Sheikh Abdurrahman Rajagukguk, who passed away in 2010.

The Batak Sufi Order contributes to shaping the interaction between Muslims and Christians in Batak land through a cultural dialectic approach. Furthermore, both religions frequently engage in the social sphere as a fundamental aspect of Batak society. Tuan Guru Batak does not have a direct affiliation with Islamic organizations like Nahdatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah, but he maintains positive relationships with both. This differs slightly from the kiai in Java who originated from NU and were raised there, forming two interconnected parts that are challenging to distinguish (Ummatin, 2002).

NU, established by scholars in 1926, has had a significant impact on the development of Indonesian politics and society. In this context, both Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) in North Sumatra and the Javanese Kiai of NU share similarities by actively engaging in practical politics. Furthermore, the NU leader's position as kiai also influences the pesantren (Turmudi, 2004). The kiai has become recognized and holds a significant position in Javanese society, especially within the community (Patoni, 2007). The Batak Tuan Guru in North Sumatra also fulfills this role while preaching culturally (Astuti, 2006).

The phenomenon of Tuan Guru Batak in practical politics is closely intertwined. As a religious leader of Tarekat Naqshbandiyah, his identity and religious symbols make him a sought-after advisor and supporter for aspiring leaders in various regions during political events. Disciples, scholars, alim ulama, and the congregations they lead are targeted for political support (Hidayat, 2016). Greetz suggested that religious leaders like kiai or Tuan Guru now serve as cultural, political brokers, and even political figures (Hidayat, 2014).

The neighboring province of Aceh also developed the Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Tarekat, where the Tarekat adapted to the times with three important patterns, among others, *First*, building a non-tarekat derivative organization but having a direct affiliation with the Naqsyabandiyah Tarekat itself. *Second*, building political affiliations with local political actors in building their existence. Unlike what generally happens in Indonesia, the affiliation with politics that occurs in tarekat in Aceh is represented by its derivative organization, not by the tarekat organization directly. *Third*, building a "new" structure in the Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah tarekat in Aceh. The three patterns of adaptation carried out by the Naqshbandiyah tarekat above cannot be separated from the context of the internal dynamics of the tarekat and external Acehese society in general (Shadiqin, 2021).

Muhammad Zainul Majdi, also known as Tuan Guru Bajang in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), became governor in 2008 while holding the same position. The clergy's significant influence in the socio-political realm of post-reform Indonesia is well-established (Oktara, 2015). This study examines the power dynamics of Tuan Guru Batak, the leader of Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah-Khalidiyah Serambi Babussalam (TNKSB) in Simalungun, North Sumatra, during the 2020 Medan City Pilkada electoral politics.

Literature Review

Religion & Power Relations

Peter Berger, as defined in Muttaqin (2012), characterizes religion as a system of beliefs that direct an individual in their actions. From a sociological viewpoint, religion is seen as a belief system that influences the social behavior of a society, with all behaviors being connected to the religious teachings followed. Individual behavior and social values are influenced by internal forces rooted in religious teachings that have been internalized and subjectified as part of one's belief system (Kahmad, 2009).

Religious symbols are recognized in religion. Symbols are crucial in religious practices as they are intricately connected to the divine, and religious rituals rely heavily on their presence. A symbol is anything with a specific meaning that is recognized and understood by members of a community. Without community support, this symbol holds no significance for an individual. Religious beliefs can serve as a societal framework to enhance cohesion among followers (Nottingham, 1985).

In this context, kiai is a religious symbol that plays a crucial role in the belief system and organization of Muslim society. In Muslim communities in Indonesia, particularly Java, the term Kiai refers to a cleric with profound expertise in religious affairs. Kiai are typically charismatic leaders of Islamic boarding schools who also teach classical Islamic texts. Kiai typically have a connection to conventional Muslim organizations (Dhofier, 1986). The term kiai is specific to Javanese society but is synonymous with terms like *ajengan*, *buya*, and *Tuan Guru* in terminology and culture. These are all regional monikers for scholars of Islamic theology (Suprayogo, 2007).

Indonesian society places kiai in the upper echelon of the social structure in a sociological context. The kiai holds a prominent position due to his vast religious knowledge and wisdom. Many individuals intentionally seek out kiai for guidance. Dhofier (1982) suggests that a person is typically considered a kiai if they have a boarding school, although there are exceptions where individuals without a boarding school may still be referred to as kiai, based on their individual characteristics and circumstances.

Kiai serve as a reference for the community in making decisions related to economics and politics, in addition to their role in the socio-religious sphere (Sirodj, 2008). Kiai are thought to possess supernatural abilities that imbue them with a unique charisma, as described by Weber in 2006. Charisma is acquired through two dimensions. Initially, it is provided, like genealogical connections to past charismatic kiai. Secondly, via an engineering process.

In another sense, the figure of the kiai has the ability in religious knowledge which contributes to the morality of a pious personality and always shares with others. This charisma that is owned, makes the figure of kiai not only lead in *ubudiyah* affairs but also political affairs. It can easily be witnessed in political momentum such as legislative elections

and regional head elections (Pemilukada), many candidates visit to get recognition from kiai as candidates who deserve to be elected. The relationship between kiai and power is inseparable, Foucault (1980) calls power a productive entity, meaning it has the ability to penetrate all spaces and social structures. Power has no place to form and grow where it appears, but power spreads widely in many lines that are in direct contact with many activities of community life. Be it in the dimensions of culture, tradition, politics, education, economic activities, even religious activities.

Foucault's concept of power is best comprehended as an interplay among various powers that are interconnected with the components and elements of an organization. Foucault posits that power is not omnipresent but rather emanates from various sources. Power cannot be obtained, claimed, distributed, seized, or surrendered. Power is not solely coercive or oppressive, but also inherently effective. The source is Foucault's work from 1980.

Power is not just a tool for elite groups to suppress others, but rather a complex network of relations that permeates society as a whole. Various societies are engaged in it (Adian, 2005). Power functions independently of possession and is a product of societal evolution, not a tool of authority. Foucault discusses 'micro pouvoirs' as power structures that are dispersed locally, such as families, factories, schools, hospitals, and prisons. Power is regenerated by these individuals who function across all strata of society.

Kusmayadi, Agung, & Ali (2016) elucidate how Kiai play a role in political leadership by illustrating their practical approach to gaining power. Various Kiai concepts are interpreted differently due to their nature as social constructions. Diverse interpretations arise due to different societies with varying cultures. In Banten, particularly in Pandeglang, the concept of Kiai differs significantly from other community norms. The concept of Kiai in Pandeglang significantly impacts the community's way of life. Kiai plays a significant role in both religious and public matters within the government. The influence and symbolism of a Kiai are evident in their ability to mobilize the masses on various issues during regional and national elections (Hikmawan, Indriyany & Mayrudin, 2019). Kiai holds greater respect than officials in the nearby area. Many people believe that the advice given by kiai is very appealing, making it easier for them to gather support from different groups (Misyuniarto, 2020).

Kiai's participation in politics can potentially disrupt his life. Kiai's political engagement obscures his independent identity as a distinct figure. As a result, the policies created are not populist and often show bias. Due to their biased policies, they are no longer considered as role models by the people. The practical political implications pose a threat to the survival of kiai and pesantren, presenting a challenge for the future. The source is Setiawan's work from 2014.

Oktara's (2015) research indicates that ulama play a crucial political role in the success of Tuan Guru Bajang (TGB) in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). Ulama continue to play a significant role in the political landscape of NTB. Socio-cultural factors have influenced the ulama who successfully won Tuan Guru Bajang in the 2008 gubernatorial election. Hannan (2018) discovered a strong correlation between the political leadership of Madurese leaders and the influence of kiai figures. Kiai's authoritative role significantly influences the subjectivity and collective consciousness of the community. The functions of Kiai in political communication strategies include serving as an Opinion Leader, Political Mediator, and Vote Getter (Assiddiq, 2020).

As happened in Pandeglang, the form of power structuration on Kiai becomes a new political subject where the birth of a new center or agency in determining the direction of policy and power in the area. This difference is very striking if we look at the activities of Kiai who have been affiliated with political parties or the like from the beginning (Himawan, et al, 2021). In the Sumenep community, the position of Kiai is a central position in society. Kiai's political views, which often lead to the justification of religious culture and social culture, are nothing but a kind of 'propaganda' tool in breaking down votes in the local elections yesterday. The hegemony attached to the position of kiai makes people's awareness of democracy no longer their realistic belief (Nurfaizin, 2017).

In Madura, a kiai who teaches religion by preaching from village to village to provide fatwas to the broader community is known by a specific term. This kiai type is commonly known as the Teko kiai. These preaching kiai are compared to a teapot that is always ready to pour water for those in need. Kiai who own pesantren are referred to as "kiai well." The source is Kamilah & Jatningsih (2017). Kiai can play a significant role in garnering mass support in rural and traditional communities. The source is Assiddiq (2019).

Kiai is closely linked to practical politics, as the charisma of a Kiai can effectively rally the masses to garner votes. Kiai is regarded as a sacred figure whose blessing is crucial for regional head candidates to garner mass support in their area. Kiai's structure enables him to generate and replicate power within his community's social framework. This ability allows Kiai to be perceived as capable of upholding and managing power, while also being able to shape a dialogue on the sustainability of the power structure (Giddens, 1979).

The social influence of a kiai is based on his humble, populist, and charismatic character. The effectiveness of kiai in establishing personal branding relies heavily on the ability to interpret the atmosphere and social circumstances. In this context, kiai demonstrate strong proficiency and sensitivity in performing self-regulation. Adjusting the kiai involves connecting oneself to the practical life of the community. Kiai presents himself as a problem solver for all community issues, particularly those concerning religion. The Kiai figure's role as a religious leader in traditional society has gradually evolved to establish a new form of leadership alongside government leadership. This emerging style of leadership is known as non-formal leadership, which holds more sway than formal leadership in traditional societies (Nasution, 2017).

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methods utilizing data collection techniques such as observation, in-depth interviews, and literature reviews. The primary source in this study is Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk, the leader of Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah, and literary data that corroborate this research.

Results And Discussion

Tuan Guru Batak: The Fusion of Culture and Religion

The Islam's existence in the archipelago has led to the development of different theories. During the 14th century, the Walisongo initiated the dissemination of Islam in Java, leading to a distinctive cultural blending between Islam and the traditional magical practices of Java, acknowledged by the followers. Terms like kiai, bindereh, nun, ajengan, and guru were initially used exclusively for traditional scholars who resided on the island of Java. However, nowadays, the term kiai is commonly used to refer to all scholars, both within and outside of Java.

Kiai was born and raised in Javanese culture, while Tuan Guru Batak was born from Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah-Khalidiyah Serambi Babussalam (TNKSB) under the leadership of master teacher Abdurrahman Rajagukguk. Under Abdurrahman's leadership, TNKSB is prominent in Tanah Batak, particularly in Simalungun Regency due to its location in a non-Muslim community, making it distinct from the Christian-dominated customs. This persulukan's uniqueness sets it apart from the predominantly non-Muslim community.

Within the local Batak community, the TNKSB location is commonly known as "Kampung Melayu". Referencing Kampung Melayu signifies the fusion of Islam and Malay culture. According to the Batak ethnic community, Muslims are always associated with the ethnic Malay community, making the term "Kampung Melayu" a way to confirm the Muslim village (King 1993). Kampung Melayu is still preserved as a marker for the TNKSB's location. After Abdurrahman's death, Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk succeeded him and followed Abdurrahman's will to prioritize his descendants, known as zuriat, who are considered capable and deserving of taking over as murshid in the TNKB tradition.

Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) is the 13th generation of the Aritonang lineage. Tuan Aritonang, Tuan Rajagukguk, Tuan Pingganpasu, Tuan Naihapatian, Tuan Gurutinoloan, Tuan Oppusohutoron, Tuan Apparbimbin, Tuan Oppumonang, Tuan Oppunijaji, Musa, Binjamin, Sheikh Abdurrahman Rajagukguk, and the 13th generation of Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Sheikh Ahmad Sabban el Rahmani Rajagukguk. Under Sabban's leadership, TNKSB underwent substantial changes, including improvements to the lodge's facilities and infrastructure, as well as an expansion of the worshiper network. Sabban, a young murshid, is supported by other zuriats and elder caliphs.

Sabban, a young individual, requires help from descendants and senior caliphs. Their assistance and support are crucial for the sustainability of various TNKSB activities. They collaborate with all parties to promote TNKSB. Sabban, as a young murshid, has the authority to establish and implement policies regarding persulukan issues that are deemed significant for the advancement of TNKSB without the need to consult with zuriat and senior caliphs (Hidayat, 2016).

Having Mursyid as the leader of the tariqah is essential. The role of mursyid is significant for fostering interfaith unity in the Hatonduan region of Tanah Batak. The Batak Sufi's role involves enhancing interfaith unity among individuals of diverse religious beliefs (Pawenang, 2013). The Batak ethnic group's perception of spirituality is reinforced by the enduring kinship system, particularly in relation to clans or lineages.

The significant impact of Batak tradition on this clan matter is evident through the social bonds that develop between clans, despite variations in factors like religion and economic status. Clans can unify various differences within Batak ethnic communities due to their strong cohesive force. The TNKSB murshid belongs to a clan that holds a higher status than other clans in the Batak ethnic community, contributing to the promotion of interfaith unity in a diverse religious society.

This Batak Sufi shares a genetic connection with ethnic Batak Christians, which strengthens interfaith brotherhood beyond clan affiliations. This genetic bond is more powerful in fostering harmony than religious affiliations among the ethnic Batak community (Hidayat, 2016). Tuan Guru Batak's congregation has expanded beyond the Simalungun region to include the capital city. He also assisted the congregation in the city of Medan and its environs. An assembly was founded primarily for the purpose of dhikr (tawajjuh). As the assembly grew rapidly and attracted more worshipers and community leaders, it changed its name to Bait Al-shufi wa Al-hadharah (Sufi house and civilization), signifying its role as a place for spiritual enlightenment and wisdom. The assembly is situated at Jl. Suluh No. 51 in Medan.

The use of the majelis remains widespread for the application of rituals of remembrance (tawajjuh) and as a center for study, thought, spiritual development, and the birth of wisdom and civilization. The Sufi house and civilization serve as a recitation center, conducting recitations for Islamic holidays, monthly routine recitations, life recitations attended by congregants or non-jam members, and Tawajjuh accompanied by congregants knowledgeable in Thoriqoh Naqsyabandiyah. Tawajjuh means presenting oneself to Allah through increased dhikr. Another aspect to investigate is the Thoriqoh known as suluk, which involves practicing riyadhoh in a bermujahadah under the guidance of a murshid teacher (Lesnida, 2019).

Tuan Guru Batak is regarded as possessing unique knowledge and other exceptional qualities uncommon among the general population. Tuan Guru Batak's high status within the community is reinforced by his residence in North Sumatra, where the Batak ethnicity is predominant, thus solidifying his influence in community dynamics. Tuan Guru Batak embodies both the local Batak culture and religious cultural implications.

Hidayat's (2016) research identifies three Batak Sufi strategies for fostering interfaith brotherhood. Tuan Guru Batak is perceived as a spiritual and traditional leader who engages in cultural preaching and establishes connections with governmental authorities. This strategy is based on the Batak Sufi's role within the Batak ethnic group, where he upholds all the traditions and customs of the community, facilitating his supervision of the establishment of interfaith unity. Tuan Guru Batak considers harmony to be crucial in fostering the integrity of Indonesia's diverse society with varying belief systems.

Tuan Guru Batak's actions within Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah as a social institution align with Giddens' (2009) view that a religious institution can serve as a standardized set of attitudes that significantly influence the development of social systems in terms of space and time. Standardizing behavior across different situations involves consistently reevaluating the possible environment of everyday social interactions.

Tuan Guru Batak and Practical Politics

Freedom to make political choices is intrinsic to human nature, including being inherent in a Kai or Tuan Guru Batak. From a sociological perspective, Tuan Guru Batak is linked to his decision to engage in politics. Whether a Batak Tuan Guru decides to engage in politics is a personal decision influenced by his internalization of religious values and the social context of his community. Patoni (2007) identified various factors that influence a kiai or master teacher in practical politics.

1. Theological justifications. The Sunni tradition views the relationship between belief (din) and politics (siyasah) as inseparable. Politics and religion are interconnected and thus should not be kept apart.
2. Da'wah is the endeavor to promote Islamic values within the community. Various approaches can be employed to promote the values found in religious teachings. One way is through political channels. Many proponents believe that taking this political approach will expand the scope of da'wah, making it more accessible and efficient.
3. Political solidarity is a challenging aspect that pesantren kiai inevitably must engage with.

Ummatin (2002) identified power factors and interest factors as reasons for kiai to engage in practical politics. Power factors involve utilizing group resources to achieve goals, while interest factors refer to the objectives pursued by political actors or groups. In order to pursue these interests, humans require power, health, skills, compassion, justice, and honesty, which are influenced by policy factors resulting from the interplay of power and interests, often manifested through legislation. In addition to the political culture factor, which refers to individuals' subjective orientation towards the political system. Political culture, which consists of political values and beliefs held by individuals, can be examined through cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations that influence political behavior.

In the 2020 Medan City Election, two pairs of candidates ran for Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Medan. Bobby Afif Nasution - Aulia Rahman, supported by multiple parties, won with 53.5% of the valid votes, totaling 393,533 votes. The incumbent candidate, Akhyar Nasution paired with Salman Alfarisi, supported by two parties, lost with 46.5% of the votes, totaling 342,480 votes (KPU Medan 2020).

Tuan Guru Batak, a member of the Mulia Medan Center (MMC), endorsed the Bobby and Aulia Rahman duo, stating that they can collaborate with religious scholars to promote a moderate and inclusive form of Islam, rejecting all types of radicalism (Indomeidia, 2020).

The 2020 Medan City Pilkada is particularly intriguing due to Bobby Nasution's relation as the son-in-law of President Jokowi. There were concerns about him being part of a political dynasty and accusations that Jokowi was anti-Islamic and targeted religious leaders.

The political dynamics in Medan City are a unique phenomenon. Medan City's population distribution pattern, along with its religious and ethnic diversity, plays a significant role in shaping its political decisions. The political dynamics in Medan City involve a strong primordial approach that often involves illicit relationships between businessmen, rulers, and thugs in political contests



Figure 1. Tuan Guru Batak gives political support to Bobby Nasution in regional head election of Medan city (Medan Bisnis Daily.com, 2020)

During the Pilkada momentum, identity politics discourse emerged, as seen in the 2018 election for Governor and Deputy Governor of North Sumatra with two pairs of candidates: Edy Rahmayadi - Musa Rajekshah and Djarot Syaiful Hidayat - Sihar Sitorus. Putra (2019) stated that followers of Edi Rahmayadi and Musa Rajekshah urged Muslims to elect Muslim leaders who can advocate for Islam. Supporters of Djarot and Sihar Sitorus emphasized that voters should not prioritize ethnic or religious similarities when selecting leaders. Supporters of Djarot and Sihar leverage their backgrounds to attract the support of Javanese and Batak ethnic voters, who are predominantly non-Muslims. The presence of identity politics in the public sphere appears to frame the 2018 North Sumatra Governor election as a conflict between Islamic and non-Muslim factions.

The North Sumatra governor election involved religious issues raised by the two winning teams. Religious organizations did not make any declarations during the campaign period regarding the two candidate pairs. However, each candidate pair subtly addressed the issue by demonstrating care for specific religious groups (Daulay, et al, 2019).

Kobayashi (2020) claims that identity politics persists in a multicultural society. Medan Mayor candidates utilize cultural attributes to connect with voters during the regional head election.

Tuan Guru Batak is presenting himself as a contrasting viewpoint to negative allegations and enhancing Islamic identity politics in the 2020 Medan City Pilkada by collaborating with charismatic and influential scholars to Bobby Nasution. Tuan Guru Batak stated that Bobby Nasution was the mayoral candidate selected by the ulama. Mr. Guru Batak provided Bobby Nasution with a turban and robe, as reported by Tagar.id in 2020. This support gained widespread attention due to concerns about Tuan Guru Batak's involvement in practical politics and his Islamic identity potentially causing division within the ummah in participatory politics (Ernas, 2005).

Tuan Guru Batak stated that in the Sufistic tradition, it is customary to give or show appreciation by presenting Sufistic symbols to visiting guests, such as turbans and ulos. This method involves spiritualizing an individual to develop them into a leader. Pinning the turban and robe on Bobby Nasution is a Sufistic tradition that aims to strengthen his soul. Bobby received this support based on the political consultation he conducted with his congregation. In 2020, Tuan Guru Batak stated:

"Before he (Bobby Nasution) came to stay in touch, we had held discussions and dialogues among the congregation and we contemplated or political *istiqhoroh* what our attitude was, then we got instructions to accept and give that symbolization (robe and turban) as well as support."

This support is rooted in the political landscape of Indonesia, characterized by identity politics leading to division. Tuan Guru Batak, a religious figure, aims to safeguard the nation from groups seeking to divide Indonesia during political events like the Regional Head election. Support for Bobby Nasution is driven by his reputation as a devout individual from a respectable family. It is deemed fitting to show support and offer prayers by presenting him with a turban and robe, symbolizing his role as a potential leader of Medan City among religious scholars. Tuan Guru Batak offers spiritual guidance to Bobby to ensure his future path aligns with the community's and ulama's expectations. Tuan Guru Batak expresses his political position through circulars, edicts, and short videos on social media to rally other religious leaders to support a specific candidate and urge followers to vote for a particular pair (Haris & Dardum, 2021).

Tuan Guru Batak is not concerned that engaging in practical politics will diminish his influence and presence, as seen in Pamekasan Madura where the political involvement of religious leaders led to a decline in their influence within the community. The kyai who became involved in politics departed from the pesantren. Consequently, their personal connection with the santri and the local community gradually started to deteriorate. Their influence waned and was gradually forsaken and supplanted by young intellectuals with pesantren backgrounds (Madani, 2015).

Political backing for the Bobby and Aulia Rahman duo is unprecedented, occurring for the first time during the 2020 Siantar Pilkada. Tuan Guru Batak offered his prayers and backing to Asner Silalahi and Susanti Dewayani as Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Siantar. Asner Silalahi was present at the Babussalam Simalungun Tuan Guru Batak persulukan house. During the meeting, Tuan Guru Batak prayed for the success of this couple in serving the community due to their qualities as humble leaders who value diversity and have strong connections with scholars and religious leaders. This duo won the 2020 Siantar City Pilkada by defeating an empty box.

During the 2018 North Sumatra elections, there was a wider geographical support. Tuan Guru Batak endorsed Musa Rajekshah as Deputy Governor of North Sumatra alongside Edy Rahmayadi as Governor of North Sumatra. Tuan Guru Batak stated that Musa Rajekshah, also known as Ijek, is a person who greatly respects religious scholars and has made significant contributions to North Sumatra, including the construction of mosques and churches (Jawa Pos, 2018). Tuan Guru Batak was frequently asked by the North Sumatra provincial government to represent ulama and religious leaders at different events, as the vote was in favor of this pair (Jawa Pos, 2018).

Kiai plays a crucial role in fostering participation by acting as a community political patron. Kiai in the community serve as role models and are greatly esteemed, especially in the realm of politics. Kiai is a factor that students and the community consider during elections. Information technology is utilized to communicate the kiai's political position through WhatsApp videos, Facebook, and YouTube. Kiai, as political elites and religious leaders, play a crucial role in increasing voter participation (Nurhadi, 2018). New media, like television and the internet, with their diverse features, impact the behavior of contemporary individuals (Wahyuni, 2017).

Most candidates use a specific kiai as a tool, even influential kiai from large pesantren are used in print and electronic media ads to show support for candidate X. In societies where kiai still act as patrons, their leadership holds more influence than formal leaders such as lurah, camat, bupati, governor, and even the president, resulting in kiai opinions being prioritized. This fact demonstrates that the informal leadership of kiai exerts a significant influence on societal dynamics. This factor motivates candidates running for mayor, regent, governor, and even president to prioritize gaining the support of influential figures known as kiai (Subakir, 2018).

Tuan Guru Batak endorsed the Bobby Nasution and Aulia Rahman pairs, along with other Regional Head Candidate pairs, for theological and da'wah purposes. Theology, for him, refers to the connection between religion (*din*) and politics (*siyasah*), which in the Sunni tradition are fundamentally intertwined and inseparable. Politics and religion are viewed as essential components of society. Da'wah aims to disseminate Islamic values to the broader community through various methods. To change the negative perception of ulama involved in practical politics, they need to possess a transformative and emancipatory essence. Ulama should be resolute in their engagement as a response to societal changes aiming for a fairer, more democratic social structure that meets the fundamental needs of the people. One way is through politics. Tuan Guru Batak is confident that the da'wah of Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah will gain widespread recognition through this political approach.

Conclusions

Based on discussing ulama, such as Tuan Guru Batak, in different literary works always involves the topics of change and the movement he established. Tuan Guru Batak is recognized as the successor of the Prophet and a scholar who disseminates Islamic teachings through Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah. Tuan Guru Batak engages in intriguing political activities and practical politics. Tuan Guru Batak, a cleric revered for his sanctity and recognized as a saint, is inevitably involved in practical political activities within the scope of his national da'wah efforts.

The reasons for the involvement of the Batak Tuan Guru in supporting regional head candidates can be summarized in several points. Initially, cultural or national preaching. Tuan Guru thinks that by engaging in practical politics and endorsing candidate pairs, he can connect his teachings that are rich in national values. Secondly, solidifying his position as a Batak Tuan Guru affiliated with the Naqsyabandiyah Order, which encompasses both Sufism and practical politics.

Tuan Guru Batak assumes an influential leadership position in communicating and conveying ideas to the community. Acting as a cultural mediator within the Batak community, maintaining existing social connections while leveraging them to facilitate the desired social transformation.

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