Chapter 7: The Kiai in the Context of Socio-Political Change

This chapter discusses the influence of the kiai in politics. It highlights the emerging changes in Muslim political perspective at the grassroots level in Jombang. Such changes constitute their response to the existing and continuous changes in the socio-political realm at the national level. This change in perspective on the part of both kiai and Muslims in general actually marks the failure of their politics.

The failure of Islamic politics has pushed the kiai, through NU, to free Muslim society from the necessity of adhering to a certain political orientation, so that the religious affiliations which formerly directed the political steps of society has become blurred. The moral (religious) obligations which were often attached to politics have been loosened. The kiai's views of the government, for example, have changed significantly. This has resulted in a general reformulation of the Islamic ideals that they must pursue.

The chapter also highlights the political influence of the kiai after they deormalised Islam in the Indonesian politics. It is argued that the kiai's political influence in present day Jombang is less strong compared to that when Islam characterised a political party. Many followers of the kiai did not follow their kiai political lead. This means that in general the kiai are less charismatic.

7.1 Changing Kiai’s Islamic Politics

The debate about Islamic politics has not yet given the final picture of the form of such politics. This is so since there is no explicit text either from the Qur’an or the hadith which mentions a certain format of politics. Nevertheless, from the experience of some countries claiming to be Islamic and of Indonesia itself, the concept and the form of an idealised Islamic state has been promoted by Muslim thinkers and leaders several times. Nasir of the Masjumi and Wahab Chasbullah of NU clearly conceptualised the ideal form of an ‘Islamic’ state. The former once suggested that:

Islam is a philosophy of life, an ideology, a system of living for the victory of man now and in the hereafter ….. Because of this, we as Muslims, cannot detach ourselves from our ideology, namely Islam. For us, to construct Islam cannot be separated from constructing society, constructing the state, constructing freedom ….. Concerning the relationship of man with his fellow man, the function of religion is to defend that connection in all aspects of life. Here we should notice the function of politics in defending the relationship. Does politics cover one aspect of life or all aspects? Politics only includes one aspect of the
relationship between man with his fellow man, while the function of religion is to defend this relationship in all aspects of life. So how is it possible that religion, which is inclusive of all aspects, can be separated from politics, which only includes one aspect?\(^1\)

How such a conceptualisation was applied can be seen through the struggle of Islamic political parties on the Indonesian political scene and by the way Islamic leaders pursued what they idealised\(^2\). The formation of Islamic political parties was indeed aimed at articulating the political interests of the umma. Islamic objectives were hence stated clearly, either by Masjumi or NU\(^3\), as their primary ends which sustained their political struggles. It is important to note that what was done by Islamic political parties after Indonesian independence was a continuation of what Indonesian Muslims had done during Dutch colonialisation. The difference between Dutch colonialism and Indonesia independence in relation to the situation of Indonesian Muslims changed only the method of their struggle. The essence of their objective remained the same, that is ‘izzu al-Islam wa’l-Muslimin (for the sake of Islam and Muslim society). During the exploitative Dutch colonialism, the political struggle of Indonesian Muslims was aimed at confronting the Dutch\(^4\) who distorted Islam and its culture, while after Indonesian independence, Islamic politics was focused on realising Islamic ideals as they were conceptualised.

However, the long struggle of Muslims against the Dutch was not resolved by the application of Islamic politics during the time of Indonesian Independence, since the political situation was not conducive to the realisation of such ideals. It was rather marked by the decline of Islamic politics itself\(^5\). The political

---

\(^1\) See Samson (1978:214)  
\(^2\) In practice, the ideal form of politics which the Islamic leaders conceptualised depended on their interpretation of Islam generally. Differences between Nasir and Wahab Chasbullah, for example, were apparently differences in applying or pursuing what they idealised. Nasir, with his Masjumi was more strict and unwilling to compromise, while Wahab Chasbullah, with his NU was more accommodating to the existing situation. For a description of NU’s political aspirations and how they applied what they understood from Islam in regard to politics, see Fealy, G (forthcoming), *Entrenching Traditional Islam: A Political History of Nahdlatul Ulama, 1952–1968* (thesis, Monash University). See also Haidar, M Ali (1994), *Nahdatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia: Pendekatan Fikih dalam Politik*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.  
\(^3\) As I mentioned, NU was a political party from 1952 to 1973. It was formed in 1926 as a socio-religious organisation. Masjumi was another Islamic political party which was banned by the Soekarno government in 1960. Masjumi was a coalition of various Islamic organisations and, until 1951, NU was one of its components. In 1973, NU was one of the PPP components; and in 1984 it became a socio-religious organisation again, formally leaving politics.  
\(^4\) The Muslims’ efforts to oppose the Dutch have been widely discussed by scholars. See, for example, Kartodirdjo, S (1973), *Protest Movement in Rural Java: a Study of Agrarian Unrest in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. Also his *Ratu Adil*, published by Sinar Harapan in 1984.  
\(^5\) The emergence of the nationalists, preceding Indonesia’s independence, contributed to this. The emergence of a nationalistic independent Indonesia was a decisive point which positioned Islamic politics. The nationalists, like Soekarno, seemed to have a more strategic position because their politics
situation during the Soekarno government gave the impression that Islam had not received a reasonable share of Indonesian politics. The same held true during the New Order government in which Islam was even further weakened. This was so not only because the New Order government claimed to be non-ideologically oriented and tried to prevent any ideological conflict, but also because of the recurrent internal conflicts among Muslim groups in PPP. The Islamic political party, PPP, was therefore pushed into a very weak position. The government's efforts to weaken Islamic politics culminated in the introduction of the ‘Asas Tunggal’ (sole ideology) in 1985, which ordered all socio-political organisations to use Pancasila as their ideological base.

Following the decrease of Islamic politics, the early 1990s was marked by a change in the government's standpoint on Islam in general. The government tended to be more accommodating towards Indonesian Muslims and its strict policy changed dramatically. The government, for example, promoted or gave full support to the formation of Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia (ICMI, All Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals). It is interesting to note that a few Ministers of the Suharto government are also ICMI members; and the top leader of ICMI is the Minister for Research and Technology, Prof. B.J. Habibi.

On the Muslim side, the change has been more significant. Muslim society, which up to the early 1980s had been marked by an attitude of what was called by Western observers, opposition, gave increasing support to the government in the third decade of its reign. Islam, which was political, is now more cultural (Ali, 1994). This change is not only shown by ICMI, which received full support from the government, but also by various other Islamic organisations, like NU and Muhammadiyah. The change in Muslims' politics has hence been quite obvious. The participants in the change are drawn from two levels, that is the level of the Muslim intellectuals or middle class and the grassroot Muslims in general. The change at the intellectual or middle class level actually occurred in the early period of the New Order government. It was marked by the slogan “Islam Yes, Politics No” echoed by Nurkholis Madjid. The change at the grassroots level clearly occurred after the government's promotion of de-Islamisation of politics had prevailed. Since the kiai is the socio-political were more acceptable to various groups of Indonesian society. Their idea of a nationalistic state, therefore, prevailed.

6 The impression was indicated by the reaction of some Muslims who established separatist movements. The first reaction was expressed by the establishment of the Darul Islam movement led by Kartosuwirjo. Another reaction was a PRRI movement which involved some members of an Islamic political party, Masjumi.

7 See Aly, F (1994b), Keharusan Demokratisasi dalam Islam di Indonesia, a paper presented at a seminar held in LIPI by Majelis Sinergi Kalam, ICMI.

8 Some Muslim intellectuals see the introduction of the 'sole ideology' (Azas Tunggal) by the government, urging all socio-political organisations to use Pancasila as their base, as de-Islamisation of politics. A few of them use the term ‘deformalisation of Islam’. To understand their reaction to this government’s policy of de-Islamisation of politics, see Panji Masyarakat (21 January 1995).
intermediary whose informal leadership is deeply embedded in Muslim society, the change at the grassroots level was attributed to a change in the kiai's standpoint on politics9. The change really occurred after the kiai introduced the concept of free political affiliation for Muslims and accepted the Pancasila, in place of Islam, as their organisation's ideological base.

As Indonesian kiai have secularised politics, the political ethos of Indonesian Muslims, which used to be 'Islamic'10, has been undermined. The significance of the change in kiai politics is the concomitant change in the ethos of Indonesian Muslim society. This change of ethos is marked by the breaking of the formal link between Islam and politics. As politics in this sense is no longer intertwined with Islam, there is no longer any moral obligation for a Muslim to affiliate with a certain political party. As a result, there is an increasing number of Muslims in Indonesia who now do not hesitate to support or affiliate with Golkar or PDI, actions which some years ago would have been deemed as having religious consequences. Some kiai have now even become supporters of the government and its political party11.

Since the change in the Muslims' perspective on politics is marked by a change at the grassroots level, it is socially significant. The adoption of the Pancasila by NU's kiai for their ideological base, replacing Islam, and their encouragement of free political affiliation for Muslims have replaced the traditionalist Muslim perspective on politics. The Muslim efforts to promote the politics of Islam, which have long been pursued, have been replaced by a wider perspective which is more nationalistic in character. I mean by this that most Muslim leaders are now inclined to consider politics in a wider context12.

---

9 Geertz (1959a) mentions the kiai as a cultural broker. See also Horikoshi (1976), A Traditional Leader in a Time of Change: the Kyai and Ulama in West Java. Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Illinois.

10 If an ethos is conceptually formed through a set of historical events which force society to interpret the existing order in a certain way, the historical evidence of the long established Islam in Indonesia are factors which have contributed to the formation of the Indonesian political ethos. The kiai's acceptance of Pancasila as their ideological base has not just distorted the existing ethos but it has also secularised politics itself.

11 In the past, almost all kiai in Jombang and other regions of East Java were affiliated with PPP. Those who joined Golkar were humiliated by their colleagues (see my discussion in the last section of this chapter. See also my discussion in Chapter V). The change in Muslim politics, nevertheless, is advantageous for the development of Islam for the near future in Indonesia. Not only does Islam get support from the government but also its da 'wa (preaching) can reach all segments of Indonesian society. In other words, the political change in Indonesia, which is especially marked by the accommodating attitude of the government towards Islam, has given Muslims a chance to pursue their former political goals in another way.

12 The actor behind this change was Kiai Ahmad Shiddiq. Long before the 'back to khittah' policy was launched, Kiai Ahmad Shiddiq had conceptualised the idealised politics which must be pursued by NU (see Bruinessen, Martin “Tradition for the Future: the Reconstruction of Traditionalist Discourse within NU”. In Greg Barton and Greg Fealy [1996, forthcoming]. Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia. Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University).
According to this framework, the *kiai* no longer see politics as the only avenue through which Islamic messages can be conveyed or its ideals pursued. The Islamic leaders, therefore, do not necessarily involve themselves in the formal structure of Indonesian politics as they did according to the former perspective. So, rather than thinking of Islam as a source of political ideas, the Islamic leaders now tend to consider and focus their thinking more on the prosperity of Muslim society. They concentrate on creating a favourable situation for the benefit of society, rather than imposing ‘Islamic politics’ on the Indonesian political scene. The way to spread and develop Islam, in the opinion of an educated Muslim, should not be restricted to politics. Rather, it must be emphasised through what is theoretically called the institutionalisation of Islam into people's daily lives. The politics of Islam does not necessarily mean the politics by which Islam is strictly applied to all aspects of their life, as would be the situation in the formation of an Islamic state or the application of Islamic law to the society. The politics of Islam, instead, should be directed toward the creation of a favourable situation for Muslims in their everyday lives. Muslims at the grassroots level, in the view of a young Muslim intellectual interviewed, must be lifted from poverty. They should be provided with facilities that can help solve their economic problems. Also they have to be provided with a secure political situation, since politics in Indonesia has often disturbed their lives. Such a situation is needed for the development of Islam itself, since in such a situation Islamic preaching can take place smoothly.

The question is how could the *kiai* who formerly introduced the religious necessity for Muslims to affiliate with an Islamic political party now free themselves to affiliate with any political party? As I mentioned, Kiai Bisri Syansuri, preceding the 1977 general election, maintained that it was compulsory for Muslims (*wajb*) to support and vote for the Islamic party, PPP. Although this political message did not explicitly prohibit Muslims from voting for another party, it implied such a meaning. The concept of *wajb* in *fiqh* (lit. Islamic jurisprudence) means that those performing the *wajb* would receive a reward, while those not performing it would be sinful. Although the interpretation of the religious necessity (*wajb*) to support the Islamic party varied among NU's *kiai* \(^\text{13}\), this political message was formal in the sense that it was delivered by the *kiai* representing NU in PPP. The question is: how could the *kiai* have aspirations that at one time were different from those at a later time. How could a position previously prohibited now become encouraged? There is no single answer to this *kiai* ‘religious justification’. What is certain is that the *kiai*’s change in attitude was based on the Islamic norms or precepts which they

\(^\text{13}\) A younger *kiai* whom I interviewed questioned the meaning of *wajb* suggested by his senior colleague. If the *wajb* in giving support for PPP was like that conceptualised in *fiqh*, a large number of Indonesian Muslims were sinful since they were affiliated with and gave support to political parties other than PPP.
understood. At least we need to understand how the *kiai* see politics and what the general framework sustaining this perspective is. A good example of the change in the *kiai*’s politics was provided by a younger *kiai* whom I interviewed. This *kiai* asked his senior colleague about his political stand of supporting the government party especially in the 1987 general election. The senior *kiai* answered that he was ‘isis’, a Javanese term to express ‘feeling hot’. Because of so many stressful situations, this *kiai* felt as though he was in a very hot summer. So he needed to get a cooler and more comfortable situation by moving into another party. Such a statement of course related to the situation of the former Islamic political party, PPP, which was coloured by an internal conflict between its constituent groups so that such a situation was unfavourable. So it was better for this *kiai* to join another party since the spirit of Islam underlying PPP was discarded by the partial interests of its factions. The perception of this senior *kiai* on politics can be understood by recourse to his perception about life, the framework through which the *kiai* see worldly activities such as politics. Worldly life in the *kiai*’s perception is less important compared to religious life. It exists to strengthen religious life. He did not need to take it as serious as his spiritual life. As politics was a worldly matter, there was therefore no difficulty for him to shift from one political orientation or affiliation to another, as expressed by his joining the government party when he felt that the situation in PPP was not favourable.

In addition, the change in *kiai* politics was also contextual. Thus it did not occur without the influence of the political situation surrounding it. The most important factor was the lack of an Islamic political party. According to one *kiai*, the change in the *kiai* politics was possible because one of the important prerequisites was removed. The religious obligation to support PPP therefore ceased after the party ceased to be Islamic. In their opinion *al-hukmu yaduru ma’a ‘illatihi*, which means that from the Islamic perspective, the legitimacy of the law concerned with certain things or behaviour is dependent on its cause. If the cause has changed, the legitimacy of such law also changes. This perspective is basically a guidance for *kiai* in deciding things under the domain of *fiqh*. One example is that the prohibition of eating something in a normal situation is waived in an emergency. The change in anything from *fiqh* perspective is very possible, and very much dependent on the situation. In practice, this principle has become a perspective for the understanding of socio-political problems as well. The inconsistency in attitude, or, in more appropriate words, the fluctuation of the politics of the *kiai* should therefore be understood by reference to this principle. Especially in relation to politics, which is often seen to be filled with opportunistic situations, the change in the *kiai*’s attitude should therefore be understood as more

---

14 The senior *kiai* referred to a widely known verse of the Qur’an which states that “verily life in the world is just a play”.

---

154
paradigmatic, not merely opportunistic\textsuperscript{15}. From the fact that \textit{fiqh} provides the \textit{kiai} with a general framework by which they can move from one paradigm to another in politics, the world of \textit{kiai} must be dynamic.

This evidence indicates that despite being regarded opportunistically by some critics, the \textit{kiai}'s change in politics was based on certain norms conceptualised by Islam and on their understanding of these norms. Because the \textit{kiai} are the guardian of Islam, they always base their politics on an Islamic perspective. The \textit{kiai} often use Islamic concepts\textsuperscript{16} as the guide and the framework in their thinking. Therefore, the \textit{kiai} can be hard and uncompromising when they are faced with things contradictory to Islam. But they can be most accommodating when things are acceptable to the Islamic point of view. As the Muslims in Jombang are devout enough to use Islam in their politics, the political change brought about by the \textit{kiai} was acceptable since it was sustained by religious arguments.

\textbf{7.2 Kiai's Political Influence: Post-'Back to Khittah'}}

The political aspect of the \textit{kiai}'s leadership needs attention since it reveals the pattern of patronage in his relation with society, and how his power is clearly discernible. The centrality of the \textit{kiai}'s authority and power in society (discussed in Chapter IV) raises the assumption that his influence is not confined to social relations but is also applicable in the field of politics. This assumption is evidenced by the fact that during a general election, for example, the contesting parties tried to use the \textit{kiai} to increase their share of the vote. The influence of the \textit{kiai} was indeed obvious among devout Muslims who often follow their political lead. But Muslims' submission is not without reservation, since they also have basic principles which they use to examine whether or not the political steps of the \textit{kiai} are religiously legitimate.

Looking at the research findings of other researchers (Geertz, 1965 and 1959; Horikoshi, 1976 and Mansurnoor, 1990) it is evident that the \textit{kiai}'s role in moulding society and in inducing the socio-political action of its members is critical, since the \textit{kiai} is a leading figure in Islamic society in Java. Deference to the \textit{kiai} is actually reinforced by the culture of Indonesian society. There is an unequal relationship between the \textit{kiai}, as patron, and his followers as subordinates or clients. The patron is seen as a source who can fulfil the material and spiritual needs of his followers and, in turn, command their respect. In his research in West Java, Jackson (1973) understood this pattern of relationships


\textsuperscript{16} The practice of religious politics by Indonesian \textit{kiai} is transparent in the sense that anyone can easily recognise it. The \textit{kiai}'s political tradition of “seeking revelation” through \textit{istikhara} is easily known because the \textit{kiai} themselves often publicise such prayers. The \textit{istikhara} is a prayer undertaken by a Muslim to obtain a “divine hint” regarding important matters that become his concern. By praying the Muslim asks Allah to give a hint, for example whether a marriage will be good or bad. \textit{Istikhara} is usually conducted when the \textit{kiai} face crucial issues concerned with the life of the nation.
to be sustained by what he called ‘traditional authority’. This authority is the authority of the patron who influences and arouses emotion from his followers. They will do their utmost to retain the esteem of the patron. This pattern of relationships is loosely entrenched among some village people in Indonesia and is often utilised to serve political interests since society can easily be mobilised just by mobilising the higher echelon of the patrons. The political affiliation of the patron is commonly adopted by his client. In addition, any change in political attitude made by the former will result in a similar change in the political attitude of the latter. One would expect from this pattern that obedient followers would comply with any request for support from their kiai, even if this was for the government party. Some followers would do this without question because they believe that the kiai can foresee what ordinary Muslims cannot.

In Jombang, the case of Kiai Musta’in's joining Golkar preceding the 1977 general election showed how a kiai’s political example was followed by some followers, and at the same time it indicated how he was powerless in encouraging other followers to follow his lead. In most cases, the kiai who left the Islamic party and then joined another party (non-Islamic one) was not followed by his followers. Kiai Musta’in's case showed that a large number of his followers established another tarekat organisation and remained supporters of PPP rather than following his political example.

As the kiai is a charismatic leader, whose words have traditionally been followed by Muslim villagers, it should be recognised that the increase in the number of devout Muslims who did support Golkar could be attributed to the kiai’s support for this party. In Jombang, despite the increase in PDI's votes in the 1992 general election, the number of kiai supporting Golkar is actually increasing. This is a result of NU's policy of ‘back to khittah’. In the 1977 general election, only Kiai Musta’in and his close fellows voted for Golkar in Jombang. Even other kiai of the Pesantren Darul Ulum led by Kiai Musta’in persisted in supporting PPP until NU launched its ‘back to khittah’ policy in 1984. The kiai of the three major pesantren (Tebuireng, Darul Ulum and Denanyar) openly gave their support to Golkar in the 1987 general election. It should be acknowledged that this situation

\[\text{17} \] Jackson's findings, however, hold for a more general relationship between two different people. It is not restricted just to figures such as the kiai and his followers. The character of ‘traditional authority’, which can incur emotional response on the part of the client derives from the client's feeling of indebtedness. A client might borrow some money from someone else, who then becomes his patron. The client would feel morally obliged to do a favour (rather than give money) to guard his patron's integrity. This is only one way among many to repay his moral debt (berhutang budi).

\[\text{18} \] It is a truism that during a general election campaign, kiai who supported a certain political party tried to religiously justify the appropriateness of the party. Under the cloak of religion, moreover, they attacked their fellow kiai who supported another party. In so doing, some kiai used Islamic verses. The situation was commonly known as ‘perang ayat’ (lit. war of verses). Such a situation occurred especially during the 1971 and 1977 general elections. The government then encouraged the kiai not to use Qur’anic verses for political ends during political campaigns.
contributed to the change in the electoral pattern of Muslims in Jombang and to the decrease in PPP's votes in the 1987 general election. The increase in Muslim support for Golkar\(^1\) in present day Jombang was due to the influence of a number of *kiai* who increasingly supported this party. Ibu Hindun, for example, was a former *Muslimat* (NU's Woman organisation) leader in Ngoro district and a former fanatical supporter of PPP. She transferred her support from PPP to Golkar in the 1987 general election when a few leading *kiai* in Jombang encouraged Muslims to leave PPP and support Golkar\(^2\). Ibu Hindun has continued to be a Golkar supporter ever since. Although in previous elections it was impossible for her to vote for Golkar for religious reasons, she now feels comfortable with her decision to support Golkar in the last two general elections (1987 and 1992).

In brief, the application of the ‘back to khittah’ policy and the adoption of the Pancasila by PPP have resulted in a change in Muslim electoral behaviour in Jombang. This situation has made the pattern of Muslims electoral behaviour more complex in terms of *kiai* influence. As the *kiai* mainly reinforce the religious commitment of the electoral behaviour of Muslims, the 1987 general election marked the diminution of the *kiai*’s (as an institution) influence in general. Some Muslims were hesitant to accept the encouragement of certain *kiai* to support Golkar. This is so because there were some other *kiai* who continued to encourage Muslims in Jombang to persist in supporting PPP. A significant number of Muslims in Jombang therefore continued to support PPP in the 1987 elections, disregarding their *kiai* (penggembosan supporters) who asked them to support Golkar. But it should be noted that most of those who changed their support by voting for Golkar in the 1987 and 1992 general elections were following their *kiai*, while a few were affected by their disappointment with PPP leadership under Naro. The latter's decision was sustained by the encouragement of some *kiai* to support Golkar. This gave their decision legitimacy.

After the introduction of the ‘back to khittah’ policy, the political steps of a *kiai* would only be followed by those Muslims who are very close to him and shared his political perspective. But it should be noted that there are also followers who are very close to the *kiai* but have a different political standpoint. Therefore the *kiai* support for Golkar does not necessarily mean that all their followers will support this party. In the same way, when *kiai* support PPP, some of their followers may support Golkar or PDI. In the past there was a more direct correlation between the followers' intentions to vote for an Islamic party and their *kiai*’s encouragement to vote this party. In present day Jombang it is not rare for followers to have different political standpoints from their *kiai*. Some followers continued to support PPP in the 1987 general election although their *kiai* urged

---

\(^1\) See also my discussion on Muslim electoral behaviour in Chapter VI.

\(^2\) See also my discussion in Chapter VI.
them to leave the party. On the other hand, a few followers of a kiai supported Golkar in the 1987 general election leaving their kiai who persisted in supporting the former Islamic party, PPP. In the first case the followers based their persistent support for PPP on the assumption that this party still represented the politics of the umma. They kept to a religious commitment to support the former Islamic party. In the second case the followers based their preference on the fact that there was no Islamic political party which obliged them (morally) to support it. It can be said that, in general, a large number of Muslims in Jombang based their support for either PPP or Golkar in the 1987 and 1992 general elections on their own preference and not because they were following their kiai’s footsteps.

Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the kiai still played a role in Muslim electoral behaviour although its role was confined to ‘triggering’ a Muslim’s decision to vote for a particular political party. According to one respondent, “saya puas kalau pilihan saya cocok dengan apa yang dianjurkan kiai saya” (I am satisfied if my choice of a party is compatible with what is recommended by my kiai). The continued presence of charismatic kiai with widespread influence throughout the villages in Jombang is a contributing factor to the influence of the kiai as a group on Muslim electoral behaviour. There were a few cases in which both a Muslim’s preference which was based on both religious commitment and the kiai’s influence strongly affected political behaviour in present day Jombang. When some Muslims were asked by their local kiai to support a certain political party which did not fit with their choice, they tried to get guidance from more senior kiai. The kiai as an institution was still seen as important in deciding electoral behaviour. In this case, a senior kiai’s influence would be greater than that of a junior kiai in affecting and giving emotional satisfaction in regard to politics.

One example of this from my research was that of a devout Muslim respondent who went to another kiai in Magelang of Central Java, around 400 km from Jombang because he was dissatisfied with the local kiai’s encouragement to support the government party in the 1992 general election. The respondent greatly respected his local kiai because he had been one of his obedient followers. On this occasion, however, his kiai’s advice ‘tidak pas di hati’ (did not fit with his heart), since his moral intuition consistently urged him to support PPP. Because of this dilemma he tried to get advice from a more senior kiai who had higher religious authority than his local kiai. This senior kiai recommended that he support the party which had a symbol that would not break down until the ‘hari kiamat’ (the apocalypse day). The symbol alluded to by this kiai was the star, the symbol of PPP. Compared to the banyan tree (the symbol for the government party) and the head of the wild buffalo (the symbol of PDI), the star would continue to exist for much longer. The kiai’s metaphor was thus interpreted as recommending him to support PPP. The respondent was satisfied with the advice of this senior kiai. Not only did it follow his moral intuition (in
supporting PPP) but it was also religiously legitimised by the more senior kiai
21. For this respondent the legitimacy of the kiai was very important in regard
to difficult political matters, including his desire to support the former Islamic
party. What is evident from this case is that the kiai’s advice was needed by his
follower to sanction his political actions, since there was no difference between
political organisations after PPP adopted secular ideology, the Pancasila.

From my examination of the existing political situation in Jombang, I assume
that no kiai has a very wide influence there. This is because the political
standpoint of some kiai and the formal NU leadership are in opposition to devout
society at the grassroots level. A large number of devout Muslims still hoped
that their kiai would remain affiliated with PPP. Although the party is no longer
Islamic, they still have a psychological attachment to it, not only because it was
the party which they supported for a long time but also because it was very
close to their aspirations (almost all PPP leaders in Jombang were NU members).
Some followers thus felt the need to reformulate their relationship to their kiai,
since the latter were sometimes regarded as deviating from ‘Islamic politics’, as
conventionally conceptualised. Thus it is common for a follower to have a
different political orientation from his kiai, though in other ways their
relationship remains as before. The follower still gives his allegiance as he should.
The same situation holds true for the relationship between those kiai who were
inclined to support PPP and their followers who were NU members disappointed
with PPP leadership. This situation has resulted in the development of a degree
of political liberation or of maturation, since the political choice of the society
during the election, for example, was based more on individual choices than
their kiai’s influence. The political standpoint and attitude of society towards
certain political parties was not dominated by the politics of the kiai, since no
one kiai has overarching influence in Jombang.

Despite this fact, the existing political situation has led to uncertainty for a few
Muslims. They were hesitant about which party they should vote for since the
kiai gave different advice. One result of this is that a few members of the umma
became Golpis 22 (Golongan Pilih Semua, the group which voted for all political

21 As I have mentioned previously, the need to follow the kiai is absolute for some Muslims. An example
of this is provided by the fact that some followers of Kiai Musta’in supported the government party
because the kiai joined this party. This occurred despite the national fatwa at the time which maintained
the religious necessity of supporting PPP as the Islamic party. The respondent discussed above in the
text would have supported the government party if the senior kiai had asked him to do that. In Jombang
there are two main blocks of Muslim supporters, both of which are legitimised by the kiai. The first
comprises the supporters of the government party and is represented by the mainstream of NU in
Jombang. The second block supports PPP (I have discussed this matter at length in Chapter VI). My
respondent was hesitant to support PPP because his own kiai asked him to support Golkar. This situation
indicated the close relationship between Muslims in Jombang and their own kiai.

22 I had this term from a Muslimat activist who discussed with me the new tendency among a few NU
members in Ngoro to vote for no party in the 1992 general election. But I think this tendency also
occurred in the 1987 general election when the conflict between kiai, as I discussed in Chapter VI, was
more obvious.
parties). They chose all three contestant parties, which means that their votes were not valid. Another result was a variation among individual voters in regard to their support at the three different levels of election\textsuperscript{23}. In contrast to the first group, whose votes were not valid, the second group could vote for PPP at the national level, for Golkar at the provincial level and for PDI at the regency level. This tendency will be clearer when we relate it to the assumed reality that people in Indonesia commonly vote for the same party at these three levels of parliament.

Although the encouragement of some kiai to support the government party was not followed by a large number of members of society, since it contradicted their ideas about politics, one still needs to consider the kiai’s political role in regard to the tarekat followers. This is necessary since the kiai, the murshid and his khalifa\textsuperscript{24}, have a special place in the lives of tarekat followers. Obedience to the master, especially the murshid, in the tarekat is strongly stressed. Since the murshid is the person who can bestow baraka, a situation sought by every Muslim, one might assume that his political example would be copied by his followers. But I found that such obedience is not absolute. Some followers accept that it is not possible to follow all the murshid’s advice. “We just perform what we can in regard to the murshid steps or his encouragement”, a tarekat follower told me.

Some tarekat followers even tried not to relate their political behaviour to their obedience to the murshid. In their opinion, the question of obedience to the murshid is separate from following his politics. In addition, their murshid never asked them to support or affiliate with a certain political party. The murshid gave them free choice in regard to political action. Such statements, however, seem to contradict the facts, since the leader of the Tarekat Rejoso, in his speech in 1991, tried to guide his followers, and even asked them to support Golkar in the 1992 general election\textsuperscript{25}. The same held true with the leaders of the Tarekat Cukir in Jombang. Although they did not publicly ask members of this tarekat, they encouraged them strongly in all social encounters to vote for PPP in the 1987 and 1992 general elections. Nevertheless, not all members would be influenced by such a political message. Those who were reached by such a message might not act as they were asked because they maintained that there was no relation between obedience to the murshid and individual political choice.

In addition, the tarekat as an institution should be differentiated from those who lead it, on the one hand, and their followers, on the other. The tarekat as an institution is different from the elites who manage it; and both are different from the followers. The majority of its followers know little about politics and do not

\textsuperscript{23} In a general election, people in Indonesia choose representatives at three levels of parliament, that is national, province, and regency. People also vote for the party, not the personalities of the candidates.

\textsuperscript{24} Both the murshid and his khalifa are kiai. In the tarekat they are highly respected (see my discussion in Chapter III and IV).

\textsuperscript{25} Interview with Hafidh Ma’shum, 9 September 1993.
have much political interest, although they would be aware of their obligation as Muslims in politics. It is thus very likely that murshid encouragement to support a certain political party would not be accepted by his followers if the latter felt unprepared to give support. However, I am sure that if the particular murshid had asked his followers to support PPP as happened among followers of the Tarekat Cukir, such a request would have been accepted without question, since of the three contesting parties PPP was the only Islamic party and, although since 1985 it was no longer an Islamic party, all of its leaders were Muslims.

In Jombang, there are two streams of tarekat, which have a large number of followers, that is the Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqsyabandiyyah which is coordinated by Jam‘iyah Ahli Thoriqoh Al-Mu’tabaroh Indonesia and the Tarekat Qadiriyyah Wa Naqsyabandiyyah coordinated by the Jam‘iyah Ahli Thoriqoh Al-Mu’tabaroh An-Nahdliyah. The discussion above relates to the followers of the former who did not follow their murshid’s support for Golkar. They did not agree with the political views of their murshid, and it is very likely that they voted for PPP in the elections. Despite their political standpoint, they continued to give their allegiance to their murshid. In their opinion, there is no need for absolute obedience in matters relating to an individual’s basic rights, as in politics. This means that, although the murshid encouraged the followers to support the government party, the final decision lay with the followers. Since the sympathies of a large number of kiai in this tarekat were with the government party, those followers who supported Golkar in the 1977 and 1982 general elections (when PPP was the Islamic party) probably based their decision to do so on the perceived need to follow the kiai’s advice. In this case, their political attitudes were based on the notion that one’s political action did not have any relation with being a Muslim. In other words, voting for Golkar or PDI was not sinful as some other Muslims felt it to be. This tendency is similar to that among kiai followers outside the tarekat.

In brief, the recent change in the pattern of support for political organisations contributes to a decrease in the kiai’s influence in relation to politics. In addition, it also led to variations in voting pattern among Muslims in Jombang. Some followers did not need to follow their kiai who supported Golkar. Other followers could not help being in opposition to their kiai when they continued to support PPP. This tendency occurred especially during the last two general elections. It needs to be noted, however, that this deviation from the kiai’s political lead was

26 There is a third tarekat in Jombang called Shiddiqiyah, but this tarekat has fewer followers compared to those I mentioned above (see my discussion in Chapter III).

27 A younger member refused to answer my question when I asked him about his support for a political party in the general election. His explanation about the difference between obedience to the murshid and following the murshid’s political example, nevertheless, gave me enough understanding that he had a different political standpoint from his murshid. His unwillingness to answer my question, I think, was because of this different political standpoint. He did not want to show that he really had such difference from his murshid’s. It seemed that he felt uncomfortable with this situation.
greater among followers whose *kiai* supported Golkar. This was because devout Muslims commonly felt more comfortable to affiliate with PPP rather than Golkar. They continued to do so even after PPP ceased to be an Islamic party. On the other hand, followers who deviated from their *kiai* who continued to support PPP in the 1987 and 1992 general elections were mostly disappointed with PPP national leadership.

Based on these findings it seems that the changing influence of the *kiai* in politics must be attributable to other factors. The influence of the *kiai* relates to society’s ideological understanding which is formed by society’s interpretation of the necessity to pursue religious ideals. In the past, this understanding obligated a Muslim to behave politically in a certain way, that is to support the Islamic political party. Ideological understanding can constitute an interpretation, especially by the *kiai*, of the existing ideals conceptualised in the Qur’an. It is hence normative and actualised in a set of moral concepts which affect the behaviour of Muslim society. The moral impulse is stronger when an Islamic political party exists. It nonetheless needs to be noted that the unavailability of an Islamic party does not necessarily cause the moral impulse to cease. This is because it is the Muslims’ interpretation of Islam, rather than the Islamic party, which gives rise to the moral impulse. However, since an Islamic party is a means by which Muslims can pursue their ideals, its very establishment can be said to result from a moral impulse. The change in the *kiai’s* interpretation of politics has affected Muslims’ interpretation of the existing political understanding. This change provided an opportunity for individuals to interpret the existing order, rather than being influenced by structural factors, such as the *kiai’s* influence.

Muslims were given the freedom of political choice, and it is therefore understandable that they then decided which party to vote for by themselves, not by following their *kiai*.

If this change can lead to political maturation, variations in voting pattern of individual Muslims, especially among a few who voted different political parties at the three levels of election also led to situation that was not conducive to the development of politics itself. Looking at the political culture of Indonesia, which can largely be subsumed under the term ‘parochial’ (see Almond, 1978) this variation in voting seems unusual. In addition, the system of elections in Indonesia is based on party voting, rather than voting for a particular candidate, so that voting preference is based on loyalty to a party. Voting preference reflects the ideological orientation of the party. Since the pattern of voting is grounded on ideological preference (allegiance), it is therefore very probable that society would vote for the same party at all three levels of parliament. The fact that this sometimes does not occur indicates that there has been a revolt by a few people

---

28 Like a person who digs his own grave, the *kiai* changed their interpretation of politics which then resulted in a decrease in their political influence.
who were dissatisfied with the existing political situation of the Muslims in Indonesia. Such a revolt is also expressed by those followers who hold different political attitudes from their kiai.

7.3 The Charisma factor

The decrease in the kiai political influence is attributable to the general change in the socio-political situation among Jombang's population. Variation in kiai's politics, as expressed by their support of various political organisations and the disassociation of Islam from politics is the decisive factor which has contributed to the decrease in the kiai's political influence. This decrease was also the result of the lack of charismatic kiai in Jombang comparable to Kiai Hasyim Asy’ari, Kiai Wahab Chasbullah and Kiai Bisri Syansuri. The availability of a very charismatic kiai not only contributed to the unity of the kiai as a group but was also influential on the electoral behaviour of all Muslims in Jombang. Every Muslim in present day Jombang relies on his own local kiai. When his political standpoint is different from that of the kiai, he will follow his own common sense rather than following the kiai. He dares to be different from his kiai partly because the kiai does not have a very strong charismatic influence. Muslims in Jombang have no influential figures other than their local kiai nor is there a charismatic kiai with sufficient influence to make all Muslims respect and listen to him.

The survey I conducted in four districts of Jombang shows that no kiai is known well by all respondents. When I asked the respondents to mention five kiai well known to them, most named very local kiai. By local I mean that most respondents did not mention kiai living outside their own districts. In addition, not all respondents could name five kiai. Some mentioned only four, and a few respondents only mentioned three. The survey of 182 respondents revealed only eight kiai who were widely known, being mentioned by more than ten respondents across at least three villages where I conducted the survey. These kiai are Syamsuri Badawi, Rifai Romly, As’ad Umar, Yusuf Hasyim, Muchtar Mu’thi, Shohib Bisri, Mahfudz Anwar and Makki Ma’shum (see Table 7.1).

29 However, the present situation in regard to kiaiship in Jombang does not necessarily mean that no kiai has extensive Islamic knowledge comparable to the former three great kiai.
Table 7.1. Number of Respondents in the Four Villages of Three Districts of Jombang to whom Jombang Kiai are Known (The Kiai are Listed in Alphabetical Order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kiai</th>
<th>Rejo Agung</th>
<th>Peterongan</th>
<th>Cukir</th>
<th>Puton</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Latif</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Muhajir</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Rahman</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Rohim</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arwani</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As’ad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziz M</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimyati</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatih</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanan</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisyam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaluddin</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoerul</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khudori</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahfudz</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makki</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma’shum</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muchtar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhdlor</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasrullah</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridwan</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifai</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shohib</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sholihin</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sholeh</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulthon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syamsuri</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: questionnaire)

Table 7.1 shows that, in general, most kiai were best known by respondents from the same district. Kiai Syamsuri Badawi from Cukir, for example, was mentioned as a well known kiai by 41 respondents who in fact came from the same village as he did. The eight kiai named above, however, are different in that they are also known by some Muslims in other districts of Jombang. They are, with the exception to Kiai Mahfudz Anwar, the kiai who have supra village influence, Muslim figures with either provincial or national reputations. Syamsuri Badawi, for example, is a national member of parliament from PPP, while As’ad Umar is a member of parliament from Golkar at provincial level.

In addition to the fact that no kiai is mentioned by all Muslim respondents, there are some interesting points to note from the data I collected. First, there is an exception to the general tendency that a kiai is especially well known to Muslim society in his own village or district. This exception is Kiai Rifai, who was the only one of the eight kiai well known to more respondents in other villages than
in his own village. In Table 7.1 we can see that Kiai Rifai was mentioned by 52 respondents from Cukir, while in his own district (Peterongan) he was mentioned by only ten respondents. Secondly, some NU top figures were less mentioned in certain villages, and in many respects were even not mentioned at all. Kiai Sholeh is a senior \textit{kiai} among NU \textit{kiai} in Jombang, but he was only mentioned by one respondent. In addition, it is interesting that Kiai Sulthon, the President of NU in Jombang, for example, was only mentioned by six respondents from three villages. His position as the NU president might imply his familiarity to all Muslims in Jombang. The same holds true of local NU chairman, Kiai Abdurrahman Usman. This \textit{kiai}, who assumed local NU leadership in 1993, around four months before my survey was conducted, was not even mentioned by one respondent, although he had been teaching at \textit{Pesantren Tebuireng}, and before assuming local NU leadership had been a young active \textit{kiai}.

It seems that there is another factor which contributes to a \textit{kiai}'s familiarity to Muslims in Jombang. Holding a formal position in NU therefore does not guarantee that a \textit{kiai} will be known to all Muslims. The same happens in the \textit{tarekat}. Kiai Makki, for example, was only mentioned by six respondents from Cukir, yet as a \textit{murshid} of the \textit{Jam'iyah Ahli Thoriqoh Al-Mu'tabaroh An-Nahdliyah} centred in Cukir village (District of Diwek) he should at least be well known to most respondents from Cukir, although he himself comes from another district. Two other \textit{murshid} of this \textit{tarekat}, Kiai Hisyam and Kiai Sholihin, were each mentioned by only one respondent.

Despite the popularity of the eight \textit{kiai} mentioned above compared to other \textit{kiai} in Jombang, no one \textit{kiai} is really well known by all Muslims in Jombang. The majority of the \textit{kiai} are only well known to Muslims in their own district. Although the lack of a very charismatic \textit{kiai} has contributed to the decline in the \textit{kiai}'s political influence on inducing Muslims' political action, the \textit{kiai} as an institution is still generally regarded as important. The pattern of the \textit{kiai}'s relationship with his society remains strong. The process of modernisation, which has introduced secular values and produced anxiety in regard to Muslim religious lives, has raised the hope of the Muslim population that the \textit{kiai} will become more active in their religious lives. In addition, as Muslims still base their actions on the Qur'anic norms, their attachment to the \textit{kiai} persists, since the \textit{kiai} is the person who best understands the Qur'an. \textit{Kiai} leadership hence continues to be expected by Indonesian Muslims.

The data in Table 7.2 indicates that the Muslim population's continued trust in the \textit{kiai}, despite the decrease in his political influence. Of the 182 respondents whom I interviewed, for example, 71.4 percent suggested that the \textit{kiai} is the most suitable person to lead an Islamic organisation. Only 3.8 percent of respondents recommended that an Islamic organisation be led by an intellectual. The remaining respondents, accounting for about 13.2 percent, said that anybody
was acceptable to lead an Islamic organisation as long as he was a capable Muslim. Nevertheless, these findings do not mean that kiai and ‘ulama in general are not vulnerable to the development of society. In an increasingly modernising society, their leadership needs continually to adjust to the current situation to remain relevant.

Table 7.2. The Respondents’ Views on the Idealised Person to Lead an Islamic Organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NU</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(78.1)</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
<td>(11.0)</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
<td>(4.1)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(44.4)</td>
<td>(5.6)</td>
<td>(22.2)</td>
<td>(8.3)</td>
<td>(19.4)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>182</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71.4)</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
<td>(13.2)</td>
<td>(4.4)</td>
<td>(7.2)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 182
(Source: questionnaire)

Explanation of Symbols:
I. Organisational Affiliation
II. Ulama
III. Intellectual
IV. Anybody
V. A Person who Follow the Prophet
VI. Do not Know
VII. Total

29a There are 4 organisations through which the respondents affiliate with. These are NU, Muhammadiyah, LDII and Pangestu. ‘Others’ means other than those organisations mentioned in the Table. This meaning holds for the same “Others” in Table 8.1, 8.3 and 8.5.

7.4 The Kiai’s New Relationship with Authority

Despite being less significant in their role in Muslim electoral behaviour, the kiai generally have an important role in Indonesian politics. This role has been performed since the period of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. The importance of their role lies in their being the religious leaders of Indonesian Muslims, so that their influence is embedded in society. The Indonesian kiai used to be grouped into an Islamic political party, which on some occasions challenged government authority since their basic concern was “…to preserve a comprehensive Islamic community in contrast to the secular outside world of the national system” (Horikoshi, 1976:375).

The kiai and the government both have power in relation to society, and they use this to bargain and profit from each other. From the government perspective, the kiai's power is strong enough to influence society's socio-political actions.
This is because they occupy the position of religious legitimator; and a Muslim society, such as in Indonesia, needs the legitimacy of the kiai to conduct their worldly affairs. The different perspectives of the kiai and the government in looking at various problems of society often provoke a situation where their relationship is marked by disharmony or even tension. In Indonesia, this tension commonly occurred because the government needed the kiai, and ‘ulama in general, to obtain political support from the Muslim society. It also sought the legitimacy of the kiai for its worldly policies that impinged on the religious domain.

The Indonesian kiai have held a leading position in the society since the coming of Islam to Indonesia. Since the formation of the Islamic kingdom in early Indonesia, some prominent kiai have been involved in governmental matters. However, the relationship between the kiai and the Indonesian government has fluctuated. In essence, the existing views of this relationship derive mostly from the salaf ‘ulama (lit. earlier ‘ulama). For most of the time, association with the government has been viewed pessimistically. There exists a common perception that becoming part of the government is not good, since once it occurs one will be exposed to things less religiously acceptable. The line between ‘acceptable’ and ‘not acceptable’ is nonetheless clearly defined. Any kiai who actually approached the government would become a target of gossip and be humiliated as kiai keceng.\(^{30}\)

The closeness of the kiai to the government can be identified through certain actions, such as involvement in the GUPPI (Joint Effort for the Development of Islamic Education), or membership in Golkar. The reaction of kiai and Muslim society in general against those kiai who are regarded as a part of the “government's machine” remains negative. This can be seen from the reaction of Jombang society and Muslims in East Java in general to Kiai Musta’in\(^{31}\), former

---

\(^{30}\) I had this term from an informant who described Muslim reaction in Jombang against the kiai joining Golkar. “Keceng” is a Javanese word, which means unprincipled or opportunistic. This word was also used for those kiai who were more accommodating to the government because of the NU’s ‘back to khittah’ policy.

\(^{31}\) An informant told me that Kiai Muafi Zain, the leader of Pesantren Najja Al-Tullab in Madura, was also abandoned by his santri soon after he announced that he had joined Golkar. He was a loyal santri of Kiai Musta’in. Of the approximately 800 santri studying in his pesantren, only eight remained. A religious teacher whom I know well in a village in West Java was a very famous and respected kiai before he gave support to the government political party. Not only was he a wealthy Muslim, but he was also a good orator, whose speeches were pleasant to hear (He did not have any students or a traditional Islamic school; he was a stage kiai). His popularity declined drastically soon after he gave tacit support for the government political party of Golkar in 1977. This kiai felt obliged to give such support since his son was a village head who campaigned for Golkar. The kiai thus showed behaviour contradictory to that of his other colleagues. Although he himself did not campaign for Golkar or visibly support the party, his son's political action gave the surrounding community and many of his followers sufficient reason to leave him. The popularity which he had established simultaneously faded. The community stopped asking him to give religious speeches and no longer invited him to even lead a religious ceremony. He was unlucky as a religious leader, since even when NU allowed its member to
leader of the *Pesantren Darul Ulum*. When he supported the government, he was not only left by a large part of his followers, but also by his fellow kiai. Kiai Musta‘in was accused of being *kafir*[^32] (an infidel) because of his cooperation with the government. He was hence judged unsuitable, for example, to lead (be an *imam* in) prayer. Even Kiai As’ad, the current head of the *Pesantren Darul Ulum*, and a colleague and member of Kiai Musta‘in’s close family, was humiliated by his *santri* when he led the prayer, since the students were disappointed with As’ad’s joining Golkar. In an evening prayer, the *santri* said ‘Golkaaaaar’ loudly, instead of ‘Amiiin’ when As’ad finished reciting *al-fatiha*[^33]. The same experience held true for other kiai who joined Golkar.

As the relationship between the *kiai* and society has long been institutionalised through patron–client norms, the Indonesian government is aware of the decisive position of the *kiai* in influencing people’s socio-political actions, and in guiding them to adopt certain ways. The government has been trying to incorporate the *kiai* into its machinery by establishing a formal institution called the *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* or MUI (Council for the Indonesian ‘Ulama) from the national level down to the district level. The original objective of this institution was to bridge the gap between the government on the one hand and Muslim society on the other. In a more practical way, however, the institution is often criticised for being a government tool to legitimise its programs. However, only a small number of *kiai* have accepted recruitment into this government corporate body. The majority of them remain independent.

It is the *kiai* in MUI who usually deliver national *fatwa* related to the dilemmas posed by a Muslim society. MUI, for example, was the first group of the ‘*ulama* to suggest that ‘family planning’ was religiously permitted, when most of the ‘*ulama* in Indonesia encouraged Muslims not to participate in the program. In spite of MUI closeness to government, however, the ‘religious advice’ delivered by them is not simply on behalf of the government. Their ‘religious advice’ is based on decisions made for the sake of the Muslim society itself. The ‘religious advice’ concerned with family planning, for example, was not only given because the program is a government program but also because Islamic rationale recommends that the Muslims participate in this important program for the prosperity of ‘Islamic society’. The fact that family planning is a government program is just a coincidence.

[^32]: The situation was terrible. According to a *kiai*, some *kiai* who opposed and supported Kiai Musta‘in called each other *kafir* (saling mengkafirkan).

[^33]: Reciting *al-fatiha* is one of necessities in a prayer. When an *imam* finishes reading it, Muslims who follow his prayer will say ‘amiiin’. In As’ad’s case, his *santri*, instead, said ‘Golkaaar’ just to show their disappointment with his political actions.
In addition, it is also important to note that MUI often produced ‘religions advice’
which is opposed to government programs. One example is ‘Porkas’, a fund
eraising program for sports in Indonesia administered by the Ministry of Social
Affairs. Under this program, donors received a ticket for a lucky number in
return for their donation. MUI declared this program as religiously prohibited,
even though their ‘religious advice’ was delivered after the ‘Porkas’ had been
in operation for a couple of months. MUI suggested that the government ban
‘Porkas’.

Nevertheless, many educated Muslims do not have a completely favourable
impression of MUI. MUI is still suspected of being a tool of the government to
legitimise its policies. Such suspicion is understandable, since the formation of
MUI at all levels was marked by the recruitment of kiai more favourably disposed
towards the government, and constitutes a part of the corporate structure of the
government. A large number of kiai who are not involved in MUI are cynical
about MUI; and some people looked down on those recruited as tools of the
government. Recent critics mocked MUI by called it as ‘Majlis Ular Indonesia’
(the Council for Indonesian Snake).

The relationship between the kiai and the government in Java has been marked
by tension. Since the government is the party with the most power, it keeps
trying to use various means not just to defeat the kiai but also to recruit them
onto its side in supporting its political policies. MUI is especially important for
establishing the legitimacy of government politics and the validity of its
administration. One way that it tried to counter the kiai’s politics was to impose
some restrictions on da’wa34 activities conducted by the kiai. The government
at the district level often delayed giving permission, and sometimes did not give
any permission for such activities. The government’s restrictions on these religious
activities seem to derive from the fact that in the past these religious sessions
(da’wa) were often used by anti-government kiai to give sharp criticism of and
to provoke an unpopular situation for the government. This provided the
government with a pretext not only to restrict preaching activities but also on
some occasions to ban them. A purely religious ritual that I observed in a village,
conducted by members of Sholawat Wahidiyah, was almost cancelled just because
permission had not been given by the provincial police office. This suf order
is actually included among those that support the government. Nevertheless, it
still needed to get formal permission from the government for its ritual.

In addition to such restrictions, other stricter steps taken by the government
are concerned with pressuring the kiai to give their support to the government

34 Da’wa is one of the most important religious activities held by Muslims in Indonesia. The kiai in his
da’wa gives religious advice. In addition, through the medium of da’wa he bridges the information gap,
so that people can get a variety of important information when they attend a da’wa session. The
importance of da’wa increased during critical situations, since it was used by some kiai as a medium to
criticise the government.
political party during general elections. Even though the pressure was imposed on the *kiai* at village or district level, it was done with the permission of the government at the regency level. In the 1971 and 1977 general elections, such pressure was evident. As reported by some mass media, the *kiai* living in less ‘devout-villages’ received serious physical threats. As the government officials had to win the election by any means at their disposal, despite the fact that the Muslim society did not generally support the government party, the support for Golkar from such an important figure as a *kiai* becomes a necessity since the *kiai*’s role in the general election would be critical. Some *camat* (district head) in Jombang therefore encouraged the village heads under their authority to recruit the local *kiai* into the village administration. A *camat* in the southern region of Jombang, Bareng, for example, proudly mentioned that he had no serious problems in terms of popular support for the government during the election because he had appointed some local *kiai* to the administration of critical villages.

It would be inappropriate, however, to analyse the relationship between the *kiai* and the government only through the difference in the institutions in which they play a part. The difference in their institutions or in the roles which they play are not the main factor that gives rise to the non-harmonious relations that often occur between them. The relationship, instead, can be seen in the context of the existing socio-political situation. We have seen, for example, the difference in the *kiai* attitude towards the government between the years when they were struggling through an Islamic political party and their attitude after the elimination of the Islamic political party. In the former, the relationship between the *kiai* and the government was marked by tension. The *kiai* not only had a different perspective from the government’s, but they were also grouped into a political party. This demonstrated their disagreement with the government and they were, therefore, accused of opposing the government. The persistence of the *kiai* in defending Islamic principles as far as they were articulated through PPP gave the impression that they were a radical group that could not easily be defeated by the government. For example, they had even staged a ‘walk out’ from the parliamentary assembly, an action uncharacteristic of Indonesian political culture.

Today, however, the *kiai*’s relationship with the government seems to be harmonious. Many *kiai* seem to show their sympathy for the government. They give full support to the leadership of Suharto. Several reasons sustain these

---

35 A younger *kiai* told me a story about an NU *kiai* in a district in Central Java during the 1971 general election, who was taken by the district security officers. He was forced to wear a necklace of fireworks, which were then burned.

36 Interview with the *Camat* of Bareng, 11 November 1992.

37 Such a view seemed to result from NU national congress in 1984. In this congress, however, there was actually no decision recommending that the *kiai* and their followers support the government. Rather
attitudes of the *kiai*. Firstly, the government is a leader just as are the *kiai*, and the former's legitimate authority needs to be supported as long as it does not represent a corrupt power. Secondly, the government in the most often stated view by the *kiai* has done a lot for Indonesian society. Since the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, the government has therefore actually benefited Muslim society.

This sympathetic attitude of the *kiai* has been balanced in return by the changed attitude of the government itself. The most salient change for the Indonesian Muslims resulting from the current government's attitude is a lack of strict monitoring of *da’wa* activities. Currently in Java, seeking government permission for a *da’wa* activity no longer involves a long process, especially if the project officers of the activity hold government party membership cards. This change in government attitude is felt by Muslims at the grassroots level, whose religious activities were often disturbed in the past by security officers.\(^{38}\)

In brief, what is interesting about this relationship is the major change in attitude on the part of the *kiai* with respect to the government. While in the past it very often happened that the government's offer of support was refused by the *kiai*, currently in Java such a situation would rarely occur.\(^{39}\) Some *kiai* might be ready to accept any government offer of particular non-bureaucratic formal positions. Looking at the two reasons underlying the change in attitude of the *kiai*, we are faced with further questions since the reasons seem to have been taken for granted. If the government is deemed to be doing a lot for Muslims in Indonesia, the question is: why have these reasons only lately come to the surface? Is it not the case that such responses are, from a more modern perspective, concerned with the function of the state and the government? To answer this, it is necessary to look at the socio-political context underlying the change in the *kiai*'s attitude. It should be noted that this change seems to have another dimension, indicating that the *kiai* are actually open to change and are responding to the current state of affairs. The change in attitude did not take place in a vacuum but rather was shaped by the socio-political situation.

---

\(^{38}\) It is interesting to note that a significant number of the respondents I interviewed suggested that the good relationship between the ‘ulama and the umara (government) should be maintained, since it advantages such religious activities as *da’wa*.

\(^{39}\) In 1990, a *kiai* from Jombang received a number of bottles of milk sent by the government. This *kiai* returned the milk. The main reason underlying his attitude was that the milk was sent by the government. Although this case was in fact a matter of incorrect delivery, since the government did not intend to send the milk to this *kiai* but to another *kiai*, this *kiai*’s attitude showed the persistent un-accommodating perspective among some *kiai* toward the government. This *kiai* also did not know that the government delivered the milk wrongly. This *kiai* steadfastly refused the government’s offer of funds for his pesantren and university.
The *kiai* have actually been pursuing certain strategies to reach their ideal for some time. The formation of the Islamic political party, PPP or NU (by the ‘*ulama*), were an indication that they had held ideas or plans which differed from the government’s. However, the on-going government mistrust or suspicion of the behaviour of Islamic leaders, including the *kiai*, led to the former discouraging any idea of an Islamic state. The *kiai*’s struggle through politics had thus come to a dead end. The government’s policy of ‘Azas Tunggal’ held a significant consequence for the pattern of the *kiai* struggle for Islam, since it provided the conditions for the de-institutionalisation of Islamic political parties. The *kiai* were aware of this consequence, but because there was no alternative, they could do nothing to prevent it. From this one might deduce that the change in attitude shown by the *kiai* stemmed from the fact that the avenue of Islamic politics was no longer open to them. The change was compensated by the fact that the government “has done a lot for Muslims in Indonesia”. The government in their opinion is no longer the other faction that needs to be suspected, but rather is a counterpart that must be supported. This helps explain why in the second half of the 1980s, there was no fissure marking the conflict between the *kiai* and the government. Hence, some *kiai* gave public support to the government. In 1992, a few months before the general election, a great number of the *kiai* in East Java publicly supported Suharto, proposing that he be elected for the next presidency. The same holds true in the current situation. Many *kiai* came to see Suharto in his palace just to give him implicit support. In June 1995, several *kiai* from Jombang and East Java, led by Kiai As’ad Umar from the *Pesantren Darul Ulum*, gave political support to President Suharto’s candidacy for another term in office (1998).

However, the current situation marks a change in position of the *kiai* in the eyes of the government. My informant gave me a cynical description. “In the past”, he said, “the government pursued the *kiai*. But in present day Jombang, the *kiai* pursue the government”. He suggested further, “If you go to a great *kiai* after you perform your *idul-fitr* prayer, I am sure you will not meet him, because the *kiai* must see the bupati (the regent) in his house. In the past, the bupati came to see the *kiai* after the former performed *idul-fitr prayer*”\(^{40}\).

Although only a few such cases have happened, it becomes clear that there is a change in the social structure in relation to the ‘*ulama*-government relationship. Some *santri* suggested, therefore, that although some cooperation with the

---

\(^{40}\) Another case was described by another informant. In commencing his term of office in Jombang, a bupati held a party. Kiai Shohib Bisri, a former local NU president and the head of the *Pesantren Denanyar*, and other *kiai* in Jombang were invited to the party. Without considering the *kiai*’s presence, the bupati provided entertainment in the form of local Javanese dance. As he was sitting in the front row, Kiai Shohib Bisri was asked by a lady dancer to dance together. Although Kiai Shohib refused, this accident disappointed some Muslim leaders. They viewed the government officers as ignorant of the *kiai* tradition and conceived the incident as humiliating.
government is valuable, it is too risky to be too close to it. The *kiai* had better to be more preoccupied with their *pesantren*, and leave the politics to other NU activists.