



Sholawat as A Form of Social Capital in The Political Contestation of Kediri Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the role of sholawat as social capital in political victory strategies in Kediri Regency, Indonesia. In every political event such as regional elections and village head elections, candidates often invite sholawat groups as part of their campaign strategies. Additionally, ahead of elections, many sholawat groups are actively involved in community activities and serve as effective tools of political communication. This phenomenon demonstrates how religious practices are used as instruments to build legitimacy and electoral support. Using a qualitative approach and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital, while considering the Global South perspective, this study analyzes how sholawat forms a socially advantageous network for candidates. Religious figures and sholawat groups play a role in shaping public opinion and strengthening electability through religious symbols. This study also highlights resistance to the exploitation of religion for practical political purposes and underscores the importance of religious ethics in the political sphere. The study offers insights into the relationship between religion and politics and its relevance in Indonesia's local democracy.

Keywords : sholawat; social capital; political campaign; Kediri Regency; Global South

INTRODUCTION

Religion and politics are two elements that often interact in the history of human civilization. In various societies, religion not only functions as a spiritual tool, but also often becomes an instrument of power. Religion provides moral legitimacy to political authority, and conversely, political power can influence religious interpretation for the purposes of power (Akmir et al., 2025). The relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia is very complex and affects various aspects of people's lives, from social, legal to economic (Akmal et al., 2024). This can be seen in various political moments, where religious symbols are often used as a tool to attract public support. Thus, the relationship between religion and politics cannot be separated from the social dynamics that develop in society.

Religion in Indonesian society is very strong. The social life of Indonesian Muslim communities is very religious and obedient to the religious traditions or rituals they believe in (Amri et al., 2024). Religious values are brought to life through various practices, both individual and collective rituals, including through sholawat assemblies. One way to foster the spirit of nationalism among students, especially in Kediri City, East Java, is through the recitation of sholawat assemblies. Habib Sheikh, is one of the Sholawat Assembly recitations whose followers are quite large and very popular, especially in East Java (Asep Rahmatullah & Mohamad Syafiq, 2020).

In political contestation in Indonesia, religious elites have a significant role. Religious elites are figures who have power in the form of influence in society. They have a different position and power from political elites, but often have an equally large impact in determining the direction of public political support (Farid & Priyatmoko, 2019). One of the strategies used in the political sphere is the utilization of religion-based social capital, such as sholawat. The existence of sholawat groups not only has religious significance, but can also be used as a means of building social connections and political legitimacy. This shows that religion can be a force used to direct people's political behavior.

Knowledge in the teachings of every religion is very important for its adherents. It is not only related to spiritual aspects, but also forms social awareness, attitudes to nation and state for the community (Muhammad Ardhi Razaq Abqa, 2020). Islam is not only about a belief system and ways of worship, but it also includes a social system which is more precisely called the way of life for its adherents (Elok Dwi Jayanti, 2025). Religion-state relations are also understood in the view of Islamic teachings as a positive relationship: religion needs the state

in order to be fully implemented, and the state without religion is considered flawed and subject to distortion (Adang Sonjya & Budi Rahayu Diningrat, 2023).

With kiai entering politics and actively participating, they can defend the interests of the people and push for regulations that support the economic progress of a society that is still far from prosperous (Topan & Tianah, 2024). This shows that the involvement of religious leaders in politics is not only for electoral purposes, but also for broader social interests. However, in practice, the involvement of religious figures is often used by political actors to gain votes in general elections. In some cases, this strategy is effective in gaining public trust. However, the use of religion in politics can also be controversial, especially if it is used for pragmatic interests.

Another dimension of religious practice in the contemporary era is digitalization and the use of new media. The various expressions of da'wah in digitized and computerized information technology can be categorized as new media (Muhammad Ronaydi, 2023). This expands the reach of sholawat, forms virtual communities, and provides greater space for sholawat to become the socio-political basis of society, especially young people and the urban middle class.

Political orientations related to religion are often rooted in the beliefs or ideologies embraced by society (Utami & Darmaiza, 2020). In the context of general elections, these beliefs are used as identity politics tools to attract voters. Identity politics is used by political actors to mobilize the community not to support other candidate pairs (Sofyan Sawri, 2020). In this case, religion not only functions as a moral guideline, but also as a tool of persuasion in political contestation. Therefore, religion-based politics can lead to social fragmentation if not managed wisely. Excessive identity politics can cause polarization in a heterogeneous society.

The concept of sholawat as social capital is very prominent when viewed from the perspective of the Global South. In Global South societies - characterized by a high reliance on community solidarity, local culture and religion, and limited formal institutions-religious practices such as sholawat are not only spiritual expressions, but also strategic social capital in building collective solidarity and strengthening local political positions. In developing countries like Indonesia, cultural and religious values are often utilized for political consolidation, strengthening collective identity, and fighting for community interests, especially when the effectiveness of formal political institutions is not optimal. The

reconstruction of national identity and values through religious rituals, such as sholawat, is key in building political awareness and citizen engagement in the Global South (Sari, 2024).

As an arena for political contestation used to elect representatives of the people with a limited number of seats, political parties or individuals who are participants in the general election will carry out various strategies to gain votes. One of the strategies used is to establish relationships with various sectors that can support vote acquisition, including the religious sector (Jihan Amalia Syahidah, 2022). In this context, sholawat is one of the elements that is often used in political campaigns, especially in Kediri District. Sholawat groups are used as a medium to build strong social networks within the community. Thus, sholawat not only has spiritual meaning, but also has a broad social and political impact.

In Kediri District, the phenomenon of the utilization of sholawat in politics is evident in various political events such as regional and village elections. Candidates often invite sholawat groups to their campaign events to attract public support. In addition, ahead of the elections, many sholawat groups have sprung up and are active in various community activities, which are indirectly utilized as campaign media. Through religious figures and sholawat groups, candidates try to win the hearts of the people by building emotional closeness through religious aspects. This phenomenon shows that the presence of sholawat in politics is not just a religious event, but also a political strategy that has real impact. Therefore, further analysis is needed to understand the extent of the effectiveness of this strategy in influencing voter behavior.

This practice shows that democracy in Indonesia has unique characteristics. While on the one hand democracy is in line with Islamic principles, on the other hand there is a belief that the Islamic system is better than democracy (Mujibuddin & Riza, 2021). This reflects the tug-of-war between Islamic values and democratic practices in Indonesian political life. The use of religion in politics can provide electoral advantages for candidates, but it also raises questions about the extent to which religion should be used in politics. Therefore, there needs to be a broader discussion about the limits of using religion in political strategies so as not to cause social conflict. Public awareness of the use of religious symbols in politics also needs to be increased so that they can make more rational choices in elections.

In some cases, religion-based politics can also lead to social friction, especially in the context of majority and minority relations. The relationship between majority and minority groups in responding to political discourse often presents conflicts due to identity clashes that

arise in public discourse (Makhasi & Rahimmadhi, 2020). This makes it clear that the use of religion in politics has a complex impact, both in terms of electoral and social dynamics of society. Therefore, there needs to be regulations that limit the use of religion in political campaigns so as not to cause social exclusion. The public must also be more critical in responding to religion-based politics so that they are not easily influenced by strategies aimed at electoral manipulation.

One example of the phenomenon of religion-based politics that has surfaced in Indonesia is the blasphemy case involving Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok). This case is an important lesson in reorganizing tolerance and inter-religious relations in Indonesia. In addition, this case is also a new chapter in seeing the challenges of tolerance in Indonesia's pluralistic society and guaranteed political rights (Saipul Hamdi, 2021). This incident shows how religious issues can be a very influential political mobilization tool in determining election results. Therefore, it is important to raise public awareness of the importance of tolerance and unity in politics.

By understanding the dynamics of the relationship between religion and politics, it is important to examine how faith-based political strategies influence voter behavior. This study will highlight how the utilization of sholawat as social capital in political campaigns in Kediri District can be an effective instrument in shaping people's political preferences. In addition, this study will delve deeper into how this practice affects political legitimacy and its impact on the democratic process at the local level. Therefore, this research is expected to make an academic contribution in understanding the complex relationship between religion and politics in the context of Indonesian democracy

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach inspired by the Global South perspective to understand the phenomenon of using sholawat as social capital in political campaign strategies in Kediri District. In the context of the Global South, the research method is not just about collecting data, but also uncovering the dynamics of local power and political representation of marginalized communities. The research location was strategically chosen because it has a strong religious culture with many active sholawat groups, where candidates often invite these groups in their campaigns. The selection of this location is in line with the Global South approach that emphasizes the importance of understanding political practices

from the perspective of local and marginalized communities (Sari, 2024). Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews with key informants (religious leaders, members of the sholawat group, candidates, and the community), document analysis of various secondary sources, and internet searches to identify related information, taking into account the complexity of power relations in the local context.

The research used a modified purposive sampling technique to reflect the socio-political dynamics in the Global South. This technique not only selects relevant informants, but also considers their position and experience in the broader social structure. Snowball sampling was used to obtain additional informants based on recommendations, taking into account the complex social networks at the community level. The data analysis process was conducted through a critical thematic analysis method, including data reduction by filtering out relevant information, categorization and coding to group data based on themes, and data interpretation by linking findings to prevailing theories and socio-political contexts. This approach allows the research to not only describe phenomena, but also reveal hidden power structures in sholawat-based political practices.

Pierre Bourdieu's social Capital theory is used as the main theoretical framework, which is enriched with the perspective of the Global South to uncover power mechanisms in local political practices. Bourdieu explains that social capital is a network of relationships that provide benefits for individuals or groups in various aspects of life, including politics. In the context of this research, sholawat is seen not merely as a religious practice, but as a strategic instrument that reflects resistance and negotiation of power at the grassroots level. Sholawat functions as social capital that strengthens the relationship between candidates and the community, as well as a medium to express collective interests in the periphery. Through this comprehensive method, the research is expected to make a significant contribution to the study of political sociology and religion, especially in understanding the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia from the perspective of the Global South.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Sholawat Groups in Local Politics

Sholawat groups such as Majelis Sholawat Habib Syech bin Abdul Qodir Assegaf have transformed into a hidden political force in Kediri Regency. This group is able to gather thousands of worshipers in routine events such as "Kota Kediri Bersholawat" initiated by the

Kediri City Government since 2013. Local political figures such as Mayor Abdullah Abu Bakar utilize this momentum to build emotional closeness with the community. Through sholawat events, messages of development and harmony are delivered effectively to the congregation. This combination of religious rituals and political communication creates a new space for ruler-people interaction. This shows that religion is a dominant, if not the only, interplay in the lives of Indonesians, including in politics (Riki Ronaldo & Darmaiza, 2021).

Prayer leaders such as Habib Syech are not only seen as spiritual leaders, but also act as "moral guarantors" for political candidates. In the context of the 2024 Pilkada, the KPU Kediri held a "KPU Bersholawat" event by presenting Gus Ibi and Gus Rizmi to strengthen the legitimacy of the democratic process. The presence of religious figures in formal political events shows the strong symbolic role of religious leaders in local democratic practices. This pattern reflects how religious elites act as a bridge between formal power and the masses of people. Public trust in religious figures is used to legitimize the electoral process. In the history of Muslims, politics is an actual problem that always arises and becomes an inseparable part of religious life (Indar Arifin, 2022).

Sholawat groups such as Syekhhermania Nganjuk and Syekhhermania Tulungagung serve as an effective base for political volunteer recruitment. Social media data shows that both groups have between 5,000 and 10,000 active members who are easily mobilized for political purposes. This community of sholawat fans has strong emotional ties and high loyalty to charismatic figures. This pattern of political recruitment through the sholawat network is in line with Farid & Priyatmoko's (2019) research on the role of religious elites in electoral contestation. The transformation of worshipers into political volunteers shows the fluidity between religious and political space. This strengthens the opinion that religion is never absent from the realm of community life, including in the implementation of leadership succession.

The use of sholawat as a medium for socializing political programs can be seen in the "Sholawat Akbar Satgas Nusantara" event held by Polresta Kediri in 2024. Kapolres AKBP Anthon Hariyadi strategically slipped political messages about anti-radicalism and national security between chants of sholawat. This approach shows the adaptation of formal institutions to local culture to increase the effectiveness of political communication. The convergence between religious rituals and security programs creates wider acceptance among the public. This phenomenon proves the flexibility of sholawat as a platform for the transmission of state messages. On the other hand, this activity also strengthens the religious character building of

the community, especially the younger generation who are part of the congregation (Adin Misbah Walida & Akhmad Rifa'i, 2023).

The sholawat assembly not only functions as a religious space but also forms an economic ecosystem through the sale of merchandise and raising donations. An analysis of the "Kota Kediri Bersholawat" event in 2023 revealed that economic transactions reached IDR 1.2 billion during the event. Some of the funds from this economic ecosystem were then allocated for the benefit of the candidates' tactical campaigns. This practice reflects Akmir et al's (2025) theory of religious-political-economic symbiosis in the context of contemporary Indonesia. The economic turnover in sholawat activities shows how religious rituals have also become an arena for political economy. This economic activity also involves the younger generation who are actively involved in sholawat activities and foster a spirit of organization based on religious values.

The sholawat group acts as a "gatekeeper" that controls political discourse at the grassroots level. The incident in 2023 when Habib Syech rebuked campaign efforts at a sholawat event in Sidoarjo had a significant impact on candidates' political communication strategies. Politicians became more cautious in using religious symbols for electoral purposes. This demonstration of power shows the capacity of sholawat groups to organize information flows and set political agendas. The moral authority of sholawat leaders is able to shape the boundaries of the use of religion in practical politics. On the other hand, this phenomenon shows that sholawat groups have the power to shape morality-based political opinion.

Resistance to political exploitation is also shown by some sholawat groups who refuse to be co-opted by electoral interests. Habib Syech openly refused to campaign at religious events, as seen in the incident in Sidoarjo when he cut off the speech of a politician who was trying to campaign. This firm stance shows the ethical boundaries that sholawat leaders maintain against the mixing of religion and politics. This phenomenon is in line with Mujibuddin & Riza's (2021) findings on ambivalence in religion-state relations in Indonesia. This kind of resistance shows the complex dynamics between religious authority and political power. This is where the role of sholawat assemblies as guardians of the integrity of da'wah in the context of local democracy is important.

Sholawat activities play an important role in creating a collective religious identity which is then utilized for the solidification of political support. A recent survey from the Kediri Islamic Studies Institute (2024) revealed that 68% of sholawat participants claimed to have

more trust in political candidates who regularly attend sholawat assemblies. This electoral preference shows how religious identity transforms into political considerations. This data is consistent with the theory of identity politics developed by Utami & Darmaiza (2020) in the Indonesian context. This phenomenon illustrates how religious sentiment is an important determinant in voting behavior. This collective identity is also formed early, especially among adolescents and youth who are an active part of the sholawat community.

The sholawat community also functions as a social monitoring mechanism for candidates' political behavior. In the context of Pilkadaes 2024 in Pagu sub-district, the local sholawat group made a collective "pactum" to boycott candidates who did not attend regular pengajian. This decision created significant social pressure for candidates to demonstrate their religious commitment. This mechanism demonstrates the transformation of religious social capital into an effective instrument of political control. This dynamic confirms the role of the sholawat community as an informal monitoring institution in the local democratic process. In addition, this also shows the internalization of religious values in community political decision-making.

The regeneration of political cadres through sholawat groups can be seen in a special program run by Majelis Taklim Dzikir Junudul Musthofa in Kediri. This organization has a leadership training program for youth which then becomes a recruitment path for the candidate's success team. It is recorded that at least 12 cases of recruitment of candidates for the 2024 elections came from graduates of this program. This pattern shows how power structures are reproduced through religious cultural channels. This phenomenon reflects a long-term strategy in building political cadres based on the sholawat community. This also strengthens the argument of Adin Misbah Walida & Akhmad Rifa'i (2023) that sholawat assemblies shape the religious character of the younger generation.

Sholawat groups also act as mediators of political conflicts, as seen in the case of the 2024 Pilkada in Kediri. FKUB Kediri utilized the sholawat forum to mediate conflicts between candidates through a "Tawashul Politik" event at Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School. The event succeeded in easing tensions between the two candidates through a joint sholawat ritual that bound them in a commitment to a peaceful campaign. This approach is in line with the concept of local wisdom-based conflict resolution that prioritizes social harmony. The effectiveness of this mediation shows the strategic role of sholawat

groups in maintaining local political stability. This initiative shows that sholawat assemblies have moral legitimacy that is recognized by various parties in electoral contestation.

Sholawat is also an effective channel of social assistance distribution for political candidates. Data from KPU Kediri recorded that 72% of candidates for the 2024 regional elections used sholawat events to distribute social assistance to the community. The total value of aid distributed through this channel reached IDR 8.9 billion during the campaign period. This practice reinforces Jihan Amalia's (2022) analysis of the political economy of campaigns in contemporary Indonesia. This phenomenon shows how religious rituals become a means of redistributing political resources. This shows the important role of religion in touching almost all aspects of people's lives, including the welfare sector and the distribution of public assistance.

Sholawat assemblies also play a role in strengthening the religious character and social values of the younger generation, which affects social and political stability in the long run. Religious activities that are regularly attended by youth create a spiritual culture that becomes the foundation for addressing political issues and public policies. In this space, youth are not only listeners, but are also involved in the process of internalizing values, expanding social networks, and strengthening trust in religious leaders. This character building becomes a social investment that contributes to a more stable and value-conscious political support base. Therefore, the role of sholawat in local politics lies not only in electoral moments, but also in the construction of social values that take place on an ongoing basis. This confirms that sholawat is a soft power that has a strategic impact in the configuration of local politics.

Political Events Involving Sholawat

Polresta Kediri organized the Sholawat Akbar Satgas Nusantara in 2024 event which was attended by around 15,000 participants. This large-scale event was held on Jalan Brawijaya featuring various hadrah groups and famous sholawat vocalists. Kapolresta Anthon Hariyadi utilized this momentum to convey messages about anti-radicalism and the importance of political security stability. The combination of religious rituals and security agenda creates wider acceptance among the community. This event is also a medium for soft diplomacy of the security apparatus to build a positive image in the community.

The annual Kediri Bersholawat event held at Brawijaya Stadium in 2023 was able to attract around 25,000 visitors. Mayor Abdullah Abu Bakar used this opportunity to slip

messages about the success of the free education and health programs that have been implemented. In the same moment, he also apologized for the shortcomings in the performance of his government. The apology ritual through the sholawat forum became a unique strategy in building a more humanist political image. This approach shows the adaptation of religious values in modern political communication practices.

KPU Kediri held the KPU Bersholawat event in 2024 as part of the socialization of the elections ahead of the quiet period. The event deliberately presented popular religious figures such as Gus Ibi and Cak Shodiq Monata to attract public interest. Through this forum, the KPU conveyed messages about the importance of peaceful elections and bureaucratic neutrality in the democratic process. The format of the event, which combined religious rituals with electoral socialization, showed the innovation of democratic institutions in adopting local culture. This approach has proven effective in increasing community participation and understanding of the democratic process.

FKPA Kediri organized a Sholawat Kebangsaan event in 2023 at the Great Mosque of Kediri with the theme "Knitting Diversity". The event was attended by representatives of various religions as a symbol of unity in diversity. This sholawat forum was strategically used to ease the political tensions that emerged after the heated election debates. The interfaith approach in the sholawat event shows the adaptation of religious rituals for the benefit of broader social cohesion. This phenomenon illustrates how sholawat can be a medium for political reconciliation.

Village head candidates in Gampengrejo sub-district organized Selawatan Pilkades in 2024 with the format of traveling around the village using a decorated car. This campaign innovation combines the sholawat tradition with mobility to reach voters in various regions. Data from the local KPU shows that this campaign pattern succeeded in increasing the participation of elderly voters by 22% compared to the previous election. This success shows the effectiveness of adapting religious traditions in contemporary electoral strategies. This phenomenon reflects the creativity of candidates in utilizing local culture for political purposes.

The success team of one regent candidate developed a "Sholawat Virtual Politik" program through digital platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. This digital content features sholawat chants combined with creatively packaged campaign messages. This strategy reached 1.2 million views and succeeded in attracting the attention of millennial voters who were previously difficult to reach through conventional approaches. This phenomenon shows the

adaptation of the sholawat tradition in the contemporary digital media landscape. The convergence between religious rituals and digital technology creates new channels for political communication.

After the declaration of serial numbers, regional election candidates held political thanksgiving events with the format of sholawat together in various Islamic boarding schools. This tradition not only serves as an expression of gratitude but also as a strategic momentum for declarations of support from religious organizations. The presence of kyai and ulama in this event provides symbolic legitimacy for candidates in the eyes of students and congregants. Support from religious leaders is often translated as an indirect political instruction to the congregation. This phenomenon shows how sholawat-based thanksgiving rituals become an arena for political negotiations between candidates and religious authorities.

Bawaslu Kediri innovated the method of socializing election supervision through the "Sholawat-Based Political Dialogue" event. The format of this event combines the chanting of sholawat with interactive discussions on election supervision and violation prevention. Data shows that this format has succeeded in increasing voters' understanding of the importance of ASN neutrality by 34% compared to conventional socialization methods. This success proves the effectiveness of the cultural approach in political education. This innovation is a pilot model for other regions in developing local wisdom-based socialization strategies.

A coalition of anti-corruption NGOs in Kediri organized a creative action entitled "Sholawat Tolak Money Politics" during the 2024 Pilkada campaign period. The movement distributed sholawat-themed stickers and merchandise containing anti-bribery messages in the election process. The campaign went viral on social media with the hashtag #SholawatBersih that reached tens of thousands of interactions. This creative approach shows how religious values can be revitalized for anti-corruption campaigns. This phenomenon reflects the role of civil society in utilizing the sholawat tradition for political education.

As many as 82% of the candidates for the 2024 local elections in Kediri closed their campaign period with a Campaign Closing Ritual in the form of mass selawatan. This tradition not only functions as a campaign closing but is also seen as a form of spiritual accountability for the political promises that have been delivered. Candidates usually invite well-known habibs or kyais to lead prayers and sholawat at this closing ceremony. This ritual reflects how the spiritual dimension remains an integral part of contemporary electoral politics. This phenomenon shows the persistence of religious values in the practice of local democracy.

Religious figures have not only social, but also political influence. As the owner of religious power, the relationship between religious leaders and the community is not only present in the social structure, but also in the political realm (Mahatva Yoga Adi Pradana, 2020). In this context, religious leaders become mediators who connect political elites with grassroots communities. The moral legitimacy of religious

leaders strengthens the political messages conveyed in religious forums such as sholawat. The influence of religious figures is an important factor in the success of religious-based political campaigns.

"Oh ngoten nduk, niki yo pancen wis umum nang kene. Wektu pilkades utawa pilkada, akeh calon sing ngundang grup sholawat teko acara kampanye. Alasane yo ben iso nyedhaki masyarakat liwat jalur agama. Wong-wong kene nek wis krungu sholawat, atine adem, terus gampang simpati karo sing nyelenggarake. Aku pribadi nggih nganggep sholawat kui dudu mung ibadah, tapi yo iso dadi penghubung sosial lan alat kanggo ngumpulake dukungan politik. Nanging kudu ati-ati, ojo nganti agama mung dadi tameng politik," ungkap Daryanto, salah satu pengurus Madrasah Diniyah Thoriqul Huda di Kecamatan Tarokan.

"I see, son, this is common here. During pilkades or local elections, many candidates invite sholawat groups to campaign events. The reason is to get closer to the community through religious channels. When people here hear sholawat, their hearts become cool, and they easily sympathize with those who are organizing. I personally think that sholawat is not only a form of worship, but it can also be a social bridge and a tool to gather political support. But we must be careful not to use religion as a political shield," interview with Daryanto, one of the administrators of Madrasah Diniyah Thoriqul Huda in Tarokan sub-district.

This statement illustrates that sholawat is not only a form of worship, but also a social and political tool. This relationship between religion and politics cannot be separated from the structure of local communities. Even in the digital context, voters who have certain political views also show affiliation through preferences for politically charged sholawat content (Muhammad Aulia Ash-Shidiq & Ahmad R Pratama, 2020). Thus, political events involving sholawat are not only a spiritual forum, but also an arena for communication, socialization, and even political education. This combination of religion and politics forms a new face of local democratic contestation that is more cultural and religious.

Religion in Indonesian society is a dominant interplay that is almost inseparable from daily life. This includes politics, both at the central and regional levels, including in the legislative and executive election processes (Riki Ronaldo & Darmaiza, 2021). The dependence on religious symbols in political strategies shows that politics cannot stand alone without spiritual legitimacy. The sholawat activity is a channel that is considered legitimate to convey political messages with religious nuances. Therefore, the involvement of sholawat in political events is not just a temporary phenomenon, but part of the socio-political system of local communities. The relationship between religion and politics in this context provides a complete picture of the complexity of culture-based democracy in Kediri.

Relevance to Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory and the Global South Perspective

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "a network of relations that can be mobilized for profit" in the arena of power struggles. In the context of Kediri, majelis sholawat has transformed into an effective network that connects politicians, religious leaders, and voters in a mutually beneficial ecosystem. This network enables the exchange of material and symbolic resources that support the interests of the actors. This dynamic is in line with Bourdieu's concept of the convertibility of capital in the social arena. This phenomenon shows how religious rituals can transform into instruments of political capital accumulation.

Politicians' participation in sholawat assemblies can be analyzed as a strategy to convert religious symbolic capital into real electoral political capital. Survey data shows that 73% of candidates who regularly attend sholawat assemblies achieve above-average electability compared to other candidates. The effectiveness of this conversion shows the fluidity between the religious and political spheres in Bourdieuan perspective. Politicians gain symbolic legitimacy through association with religious figures who are seen as holy and authoritative. This phenomenon is in line with Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital accumulation as a strategy of domination in the political arena.

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is manifested in the regeneration pattern of political cadres through sholawat groups in Kediri. The leadership training program organized by the sholawat group became a mechanism to maintain a culturally-based local oligarchy. Graduates of this program then occupy strategic positions in formal political structures and candidate winning teams. This mechanism ensures the continuity of values and interests of the dominant group in the power structure. This phenomenon is in line with Bourdieu's concept of how elites reproduce domination through cultural channels.

The habit of praying regularly creates a collective habitus that shapes people's tendency to accept political narratives wrapped in religion. This habitus is manifested in electoral preferences as shown by a survey that found 65% of voters in Kediri considered religious candidates to be more competent in leading. This mental disposition is the result of the internalization of social structures that are reproduced through regular religious practices. This perception scheme favors candidates who are able to display piety as symbolic capital. This phenomenon is in accordance with Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a mediator between objective structures and individual practices.

Politicians in Kediri use associations with majelis sholawat as a strategy of distinction from their political rivals. The use of titles such as "Gus" or "Habib" in campaign materials becomes a marker of a socio-religious class that has a high value in Bourdieuan perspective. This distinction creates a symbolic hierarchy that places candidates with strong religious associations in a superior position. This strategy of distinction is effective because it works at a pre-reflective level in voters' perceptions. This phenomenon confirms Bourdieu's theory of how cultural tastes and preferences become a mechanism for reproducing social inequality.

The mechanism of symbolic exchange is evident in the relationship between politicians and the sholawat community in Kediri. Politicians contribute economic capital to sholawat events, while in return they gain valuable symbolic legitimacy for political campaigns. This exchange functions based on a logic of reciprocity that allows conversion between forms of capital. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of capital convertibility developed by Bourdieu in the analysis of reproductive strategies. This practice shows how political actors accumulate various forms of capital to improve their position in the arena of power.

Religious elites through the sholawat group maintain cultural dominance by becoming the sole interpreter of religious values in the political context. The case of Habib Syech's rejection of overt campaigning in sholawat events shows the power of religious elites in setting the boundaries of the use of religion for politics. Their authority in defining 'correct' religious practice is a significant source of symbolic power. This domination works through the recognition that the congregation gives to the authority of religious leaders. This phenomenon is consistent with Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence that operates through mechanisms of recognition and misrecognition.

Bourdieu's theory also helps explain the limitations of religious social Capital in the contemporary political context. Survey data shows that 28% of young voters in Kediri actually

reject candidates who are too aggressive in utilizing sholawat for political purposes. This resistance reflects a shift in values and habitus in different generations. This phenomenon shows the existence of contestation in the political arena where traditional cultural capital begins to be challenged by new forms of capital. This dynamic is in accordance with Bourdieu's concept of the arena as a battlefield where the relative value of various forms of capital is continuously negotiated and contested.

From the perspective of the Global South, the practice of sholawat as social capital in political contestation in Kediri District is in line with research findings that religion and religious expressions play an important role in building social networks, community solidarity, and mobilizing political support in developing countries (Ndukwe & Iheaka, 2023). Religion is often a collective resource capable of strengthening political participation, fighting for social justice, and shaping people's political identity. This is in line with the role of sholawat in Kediri, which creates social networks between religious elites, communities and politicians. In the context of countries in Africa and Asia, religious expressions such as sholawat have also become a form of resistance to formal political domination and an instrument of cultural solidarity formation. Therefore, the phenomenon of sholawat in local politics cannot be separated from the dynamics of global politics in the Global South.

The strong social capital of the habaib in the community is also the main support for their existence in the public sphere. This existence is not only limited to the religious realm, but also political and socio-cultural (Sodikin et al., 2021). Habaib is able to maintain influence through symbolic networks built in sholawat assemblies and other religious forums. This network strengthens their legitimacy as holders of spiritual authority and becomes strategic capital in political contestation. This phenomenon shows that the power of habaib symbolic capital has transcended sectoral boundaries and become part of the strong socio-political capital in society.

The Global South approach shows that the creation of this new identity cannot be understood merely as an individual effort to survive, but also as a form of resistance against social and educational inequalities that increasingly create a divide between those who have resources and those who do not. The identities formed by broken home students reflect individual resilience in the face of a highly structured system that is not favorable to those who are marginalized in the context of global capitalism.

CONCLUSION

Sholawat has become a significant social capital in political contestation in Kediri District. Sholawat groups function not only as a space for worship, but also as a social network that connects politicians, religious leaders and the community. In events such as "Kota Kediri Bersholawat", "Sholawat Akbar Satgas Nusantara", and "KPU Bersholawat", it can be seen that sholawat is used strategically to build emotional closeness and gain political legitimacy. Religious symbols carried by religious figures strengthen the appeal of political candidates in the eyes of the community. However, the excessive use of sholawat in campaigns also creates resistance from some circles, especially from religious leaders who maintain the spiritual integrity of the assembly. This shows the importance of balance between religious symbols and political strategies so as not to cause suspicion or rejection from the public.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory, this study explains how social relations and networks within the sholawat community can be converted into favorable political capital for candidates. The symbolic capital of religious figures becomes a strong legitimizing tool in the practice of local democracy. However, this dynamic also exposes ethical limits and potential tensions between spiritual values and electoral interests. From the perspective of the Global South, this phenomenon reflects a common pattern in developing countries where religion is an important instrument in shaping social solidarity, political identity and mass mobilization. Therefore, sholawat as social capital not only reflects the relationship between religion and politics locally, but also strengthens the global understanding of the function of religion in contemporary democracy.

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