

## THE ROLE OF ULAMA IN THE 2024 ELECTION IN PANTE BIDARI DISTRICT, EAST ACEH REGENCY IN PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION (SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS)

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### ABSTRACT

This study reviews the socio-cultural of the Pante Bidari community towards the role of ulama in the 2024 elections. The importance of this study is because it touches on the dominant role of ulama in the life of the Acehnese people as well as the presence of a new ulama-based political party, namely, the Prosperous Adil Party (PAS). The method used is a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, field observations, and document studies. The results showed that the community generally assessed the role of ulama in politics to be positively welcomed, by expecting the moral values and integrity of the community to influence positive politics in Aceh. However, there are also views of some people who prefer a critical attitude by prioritizing candidates' track records and work programs rather than just religious identity. Some informants believe that ulama can 'clean up' politics, while others are concerned that the image of ulama can be tainted by power. In conclusion, ulama are still respected as leaders of the people and enforcers of community morality. However, the people of Pante Bidari prefer ulama's political role to be complemented by program legitimacy and transparency, not just religious symbols.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural society; ulama; politics; Pante Bidari; Adil Sejahtera Party.

### INTRODUCTION

Aceh is known as a province with the implementation of Islamic sharia and the role of ulama that influence the socio-cultural and political order. Based on the Aceh Special Autonomy Act (Law No. 44 of 1999), the role of ulama in the establishment of regional policies is recognized socio-historically, Acehnese ulama receive legitimacy from the community, their position is called "heirs of the Prophets" which is highly respected by the community as the Prophet's hadith. Acehnese ulama are not only religious teachers, but also moral advisors to references in various social and political issues (Chabibi, 2016) [e-journal.uac.ac.id](http://e-journal.uac.ac.id).

After the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (2005) that ended the Aceh conflict, political freedom was born, allowing the formation of local parties. Many new parties were established, including those associated with the ulama, Partai Aceh and Daulat Aceh Party [ojs3.unpatti.ac.id](http://ojs3.unpatti.ac.id). The involvement of ulama in politics is increasingly evident, Novriansyah et al (2024) noted the existence of a new party explicitly dominated by dayah

ulama, as well as the active role of ulama in modern Aceh political contestation [ojs3.unpatti.ac.id](https://ojs3.unpatti.ac.id). This development has generated pros and cons among Muslims: some see the presence of ulama as sowing integrity in politics, while others worry that this will lead to pragmatism and damage their religious image.

In Pante Bidari Sub-district, East Aceh District, the community is characterized by a strong religious tradition. The area has many large pesantren (e.g. Nurul Huda, Darul Huda, Malikusaleh, Nurul Sa'adah), so the social ties between ulama and residents are very close. Ideally, the voter base in Pante Bidari is very potential to support ulama-based parties because of the image of ulama who are fair, honest and have integrity. However, the 2024 election results recorded that the Prosperous Adil Party (PAS) actually won very low votes. This is a phenomenon that goes against the socio-cultural expectations of the community. This certainly raises the question: how do the people of Pante Bidari actually view the involvement of ulama in politics? This research aims to answer this question by analyzing the views and attitudes of local residents towards ulama actors or candidates and party ideas who enter politics. By understanding the views of the community, it is hoped that a picture can be obtained of the dynamics of the relationship between religion and politics at the local level, especially in East Aceh district.

Acehnese clerics have long played an important role in Indonesian political history such as Abu Hasan Krueng Kalee and Abuya Muda Waly Alkhalidi. The involvement of ulama is also very important as they are religious figures who have great influence in society, education and politics. In the Indonesian context, ulama have a strategic role because of their influence in society, which is rooted in their ability to make significant contributions to the state, both politically and intellectually.

In the Indonesian context, ulama have a strategic role because of their influence in society, which is rooted in their ability to make a significant contribution to the state, both politically and intellectually. Based on the above problems, researchers feel that this issue is very important to be raised as a research. Therefore, the title of this research was determined with the Role of Ulama in the 2024 Election in Pante Bidari District, East Aceh Regency in Community Perception (Socio-Cultural Analysis).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study in Pante Bidari Sub-district, East Aceh. Informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to obtain a rich picture of public perceptions. A total of 14 informants were involved, consisting of novice voters (aged 17-21 years, 7 people) and experienced voters (aged 22-60 years, 7 people). Data collection techniques included in-depth semistructured interviews with an open-ended guide, participatory observation in the field (observing local religious and political activities), and documentation study (local news and campaign materials). Data analysis followed the stages

of collection, reduction (selection and summary of findings), descriptive presentation, and verification through source triangulation. Data validity was supported by re-examination of informants (member check) and comparison with related literature sources.

Research informants are people who are sources of data in qualitative research to obtain the information needed in this study, which can provide information related to the data needed. The research objectives in this study are to find out the views of the people of Pante Bidari District on the involvement of Ulama in politics by carrying out the Adil Sejahtera Party (PAS). The benefits of this research are theoretically, this research is a study of political sociology which is expected to contribute to readers regarding the involvement of ulama in politics. And the formation of local political parties in Aceh has been regulated in (MoU).

Institutionally, this research is expected to add to the reference treasury. This research also aims to prove that the role of ulama is not only limited as experts in the field of religion but more than that it is also a mentor in regulating politics and providing wiser solutions in political decision making.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several relevant previous studies discuss the role of ulama and the political perceptions of the people. Acehnese clerics have historically been the "enforcing pillars" of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam and continue to have a major influence in the socio-political life of the community [journal.iainlangsa.ac.id](http://journal.iainlangsa.ac.id). Ulama are respected for their religious knowledge, often used as a place to ask, consult, and find solutions [journal.iainlangsa.ac.id](http://journal.iainlangsa.ac.id). In a modern context, Chabibi (2016) emphasized that the establishment of the Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU) in Aceh confirmed the position of ulama as agents of socio-political development unique to Aceh [e-journal.uac.ac.id](http://e-journal.uac.ac.id). The establishment of the MPU is part of Aceh's privileges under the Special Autonomy Law, which explicitly states the role of ulama in regional policy-making. In other words, sociologically and legally, Aceh's ulama hold an honorable position and are recognized by the community as the main figure in the governance of state life [ejournal.uac.ac.id](http://ejournal.uac.ac.id).

In the realm of practical politics, an increasing number of studies document the involvement of ulama. Novriansyah et al. (2024) noted that after the MoU, the birth of local parties influenced by dayah ulama in Aceh shows the trend of the existence of ulama in contemporary politics [ojs3.unpatti.ac.id](http://ojs3.unpatti.ac.id). The research shows that ulama play a direct role in politics both actively and passively, in line with their historical role as educators. On the other hand, Irfan (2021) examined the case of the Aceh Party and Daulat Party in Southwest Aceh, and found that the involvement of clerics gave rise to conflicting views in society. The pro group argued that ulama could 'clean up' the political atmosphere and improve integrity, while the counter group was worried that ulama would only pursue power and tarnish their religious image. Irfan's findings indicate that public perceptions of clerics in politics are not monolithic, but depend on social context and experience.

Another study, Wahyudi (2021), also found the dominance of positive views among rural communities in West Java; they viewed the presence of clerics in politics as a source of moral inspiration and hope for "clean" politics as well as an opportunity for broader da'wah [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net). This positive view is reinforced by the historical story of the Prophet Muhammad who actively united the community or ummat. By seeing the ulama can become agents of socio-political change, based on a commitment to da'wah that is maintained [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net). However, other literature emphasizes that the historical-cultural dimension must be seen alongside pragmatic factors. For example, Noer (2009) writes that ulama and modern Islamic movements are always at the intersection of religious idealism and the dynamics of political power, public trust in political ulama depends heavily on their track record and assertiveness in separating political interests from religious duties (the concept of *Fardhu Kifayah* regarding political involvement).

Theoretically, political perceptions are formed through psychological processes and the influence of political system legitimacy (Easton, 1965; as cited by Sugiharto et al., 2020). Public perceptions of political policies or actors are influenced by people's sense of trust in the system. In this context, ulama as religious figures hold high *credibility*, so their involvement can positively affect the image of the party or candidate (moral legitimacy). However, if the public feels that the ulama are not consistent with their teachings, trust may decline. This approach helps to understand why in Pante Bidari the community assesses the involvement of ulama not only from the element of religiosity, but also from the aspect of credibility and consistency (performance legitimacy) of ulama in the local political context.

Based on the literature review above, it can be concluded that previous studies highlighted the historical role of Aceh's ulama as moral leaders (Dar, 2018), the structural recognition of their role in government (Abidin, 2021; Chabibi, 2016), and the trend of dayah ulama participation in new political parties (Novriansyah et al., 2024). Several field studies state that the public views ulama's work in politics positively (Wahyudi, 2021; Irfan, 2021 with the pro side), but also note concerns about image pollution (Irfan, 2021). There is still a lack of in-depth research on public perceptions at the village/settlement level towards this phenomenon in the 2024 elections, especially in East Aceh. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the literature with a contemporary focus on the political views of the people of East Aceh towards the involvement and role of ulama in politics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the elections held simultaneously in 2024 in electoral district 4 Simpang Ulim, Madat and Pante Bidari. So it can be seen the number of voters participating from these three sub-districts with the respective number of each sub-district, namely Simpang Ulim the number of voters 15,155 voters, Madat 18,463 voters and Pante Bidari 17,634 voters. So the total number of voters in electoral district-4 is 51,252 voters. In another context, it is also seen from the number of voters of the Adil Sejahtera Party (PAS) specifically as a comparison

of each of the sub-districts. Simpang Ulim 1,103 votes, Madat 1,001 votes and Pante Bidari 818 votes for a total of 2,922 votes.

No	Sub-districts of electoral district-4	Number of votes Voters	Total number of votes cast PAS
1	Simpang ulim	15.155	1.103
2	Madat	18.463	1.001
3	Pante Bidari	17.634	818
4	Total	51252	2.922

Table; number of voters in electoral district-4

From the data above, it can be concluded that the Pante Bidari sub-district is the least sub-district that chooses the Adil Sejahtera Party (PAS). This is very ironic when viewed from the socio-cultural community that is religious and close to the ulama, this can be seen from the many large pesantren / dayahs such as Nurul Huda, Darul Huda, Malikusaleh and many other pesantren, so it is impossible with the role of the ulama in Pantee Bidari PAS lost even though their contribution to society in the area is so great. Analysis of the findings revealed several main themes in the Pante Bidari community's view of the role of ulama in politics.

First, *positive expectations* of the role of ulama. Most informants stated that the involvement of ulama in politics can provide a "new color" and moral value to leadership. For example, a number of respondents considered that with ulama as political leaders, the community is more receptive to the policies taken because of the trust in the integrity and honesty of the ulama. This view is in line with the findings of Wahyudi (2021) that the village public hopes that the presence of kyai will be able to clean politics from dirty interests [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net). Supporters of ulama in politics believe that the figure of the ulama convinces the people that the political process is based on a commitment to da'wah and justice, not merely power. This finding indicates that ulama are still considered potential agents of social change in East Aceh.

Second, the *pragmatic orientation of voters* is increasingly dominant. The main finding is that Pante Bidari voters now tend to vote based on objective considerations such as track records and work programs of legislative candidates. Many informants (especially the more critical and experienced ones) emphasized that they are "more rational" and demand concrete evidence of performance, rather than relying solely on religious promises. This result is in line with the researcher's previous conclusion that East Aceh voters now prioritize the credibility of candidates and do not solely consider candidates from religious-based parties or historical figures. For example, the interviews noted that some informants considered the involvement of religious scholars important, but still checked their political track records. Experienced voters talk more about issues of personal integrity and candidates' track records, in line with literature findings that state that public support is inseparable from aspects of legitimacy (Easton, 1965).

Third, there is a *lack of familiarity with ulama-based candidates*. Some informants, especially young voters, mentioned that they were unfamiliar with the candidates promoted by ulama-based parties (such as PAS) in their area. Several people stated that the campaigns of these candidates were "less visible" in Pante Bidari, so pragmatic support instead went to other parties that were more active in campaigning. This finding was reflected in interviews where "most did not recognize PAS candidates". This indicates that religious social capital alone is not enough without an effective political machine and campaign strategy.

Fourth, there is a *contrarian view of political clerics*. Although the majority of informants tended to be optimistic, there were also skeptical voices. Some informants recalled incidents where parties that raised religious issues failed to fulfill campaign promises. Skeptical voters are worried that if ulama enter practical politics, they could be trapped in power politics and lose the focus of da'wah (similar concerns in Irfan, 2021). For example, there is an assumption that some faith-based parties "always fail to fulfill their promises", resulting in less trust from the community. This concern suggests that the people of Pante Bidari have high hopes for ulama figures, but are also ready to punish them politically if these ideals are not proven.

Overall, the combination of findings suggests a *two-fold* attitude towards ulama in politics. On the one hand, ulama are still respected and expected to bring honesty in leadership. On the other hand, the public shows a new political maturity by demanding concrete performance. This result is consistent with Irfan (2021) who found a pro-con view; in Pante Bidari, the majority seemed to be in a conditionally neutral-positive position. The underlying issue of religion was not made the sole factor for the election, but rather the historical background of Aceh's struggle was also taken into account in the selection of candidates. Thus, although East Aceh legalized ulama in public policy, local people assessed the involvement of ulama politicians based on their real contributions to welfare, not just religious symbols.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that the people of Pante Bidari Sub-district generally view the involvement and role of ulama in politics with high optimism and caution so that ulama do not fall into practical politics. Ulama are still seen as figures of integrity who can improve the quality of politics, but the majority of voters prioritize evidence of performance and track records of candidates over mere religious identity. This view is reflected in the fact that voters in Pante Bidari are more rational and critical, considering candidates' work programs and backgrounds in elections. Some residents believe ulama are able to "clean up" the nuances of politics (an idealistic expectation in line with Wahyudi, 2021), while others are concerned that the image of ulama is tainted by political practices (a conclusion similar to Irfan, 2021). These characteristics suggest that while the social legitimacy of ulama in East Aceh remains strong, they are not immune to modern political judgment, and their success in politics in this area depends on their ability to meet public expectations of performance and fairness.



Based on these results, several suggestions are made. Local political parties (e.g. Adil Sejahtera Party), are advised to select legislative candidates who are active ulama and have a good reputation in the community. As found, voters value ulama who are known for their active preaching and social contributions. For example, PAS's success in Bireuen District is attributed to a charismatic cleric (Teungku Nurdin Judo) who is active in pesantren and the community. The public is urged to remain critical, assessing candidates based on vision, track record and real commitment. Focus on candidates who are transparent and maintain public trust (in line with this research's advice on sharpening the image of candidates).

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