

BUYA, SPIRITUAL CHARISMA AND POLITICAL CONTENTION IN WEST SUMATRA

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Abstract

The article unravels the roles of *buyas* (charismatic scholar of the community) in coping with confidence issues amongst politicians who competed in the Limapuluh Kota Regency' 2015 Regional Election in West Sumatera. The study aims to answer the following questions: *first*, what are the politicians' motives to seek audience from the *buya*? *Second*, what are rituals and statements that the *buya* provide? As part of a qualitative research conducted within the Regency, the data were collected through in-depth interviews to four *buyas* and four candidates. The interview results were then analyzed through qualitative approaches. The result of the study indicates that politicians and their canvassers performed 'political safari' by visiting *buyas* upon becoming candidate hopefuls or being pronounced candidates by the Election Committee. It is worth noting that although *buyas* never rejected any politician or canvasser who wished to meet them, they were never involved in direct campaigns with the candidates or canvassers. In essence, *buyas* provide politicians a sense of legitimacy at a time when they are losing confidence in themselves. Eventually, as in all political competitions, there will always be victors and losers.

Keywords: *Buya, Politics, West Sumatran Regional Elections, Confidence, Charisma*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas peran Buya dalam mengatasi krisis kepercayaan yang dialami Politisi yang berkompetisi dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada) di Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota, Provinsi Sumatera Barat tahun 2015. Studi ini bermaksud untuk menjawab pertanyaan; pertama, apa motif politisi mendatangi buya? Kedua, apa bentuk ritual dan pernyataan yang diberikan buya kepada politisi? Sebagai bagian dari penelitian kualitatif yang dilaksanakan di Kabupaten Lima Puluh Kota, data dikumpulkan menggunakan teknik wawancara mendalam kepada empat orang buya dan empat pasang politisi yang maju pada Pilkada tersebut. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa politisi serta tim suksesnya melakukan safari politik dengan menemui buya saat menjadi bakal calon atau setelah ditetapkan sebagai calon oleh Komisi Pemilihan Umum. Perlu dicatat bahwa Buya tidak pernah menolak politisi atau tim sukses yang mendatangnya, namun mereka tidak pernah terlibat berkampanye secara langsung dengan politisi ataupun tim sukses. Pada intinya yang diberikan buya kepada politisi adalah dalam rangka mengatasi krisis kepercayaan diri yang dialami oleh para politisi. Pada akhirnya, sebagaimana lazimnya kontestasi politik, selalu akan ada yang menang dan kalah.

Kata Kunci: *Buya, Politik, Pilkada Sumbar, Kepercayaan, Kharismatik*

Background

Election processes, both in the national and regional level in Indonesia, are always intriguing to study. This is because election serve as the transfer of power as well as the determining factor in the

life of a state. For politicians, election serves as a moment to get into positions of power; for the people it determines their representatives in both the executive and the legislative branches. This makes the election as the fulfillment of the people's

sovereignty.¹ In the election, political parties are the vehicles used by politicians to nominate themselves, except for the Regional House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*, DPRD).² In terms of political infrastructure, there are many institutions and consultants involved, one of them are political survey institutions that politicians employ to measure their electability.³ However, political survey institutions are somehow inadequate for politicians despite the scientific approaches they use. Politicians need other instruments to fill the gaps that political survey institutions cannot, that is, the spiritual aspects.

Political spirituality in this context is different from political legitimacy. When *ulamas* offer political legitimacy, they are viewed as endorsing a certain candidate. This may trap them within the hegemonic political order, rather than maintaining or increasing their charisma⁴. Meanwhile, political spirituality in this context is meant only to provide confidence to politicians and canvassers without endorsements. As a result, seeking their audience would not be seen by the public as political hegemony at play. Hence, the charisma of the *ulamas* remains inviolable among the people.

Spirituality in politics is provided by *ulamas* since they are deemed to be people closely related to spirituality.⁵ Consequently, *ulamas* and politics are inseparable. History has proven that *ulamas* has played vital roles in the struggle for Indonesian independence⁶ as well as key actors in the political, social, and cultural life of the country.⁷ There were several political elites who, prior to presidential, regional, legislative, even village head elections, paid courtesy calls to various religious scholars, which are variably called *kyai*, *ustad*, *buya* or to other people of similar capacity.⁸ There were many politicians who made flyers and put up their banners on the roadsides that showed them arm in arm with *ulamas*, take *ulamas* on tours of religious sermons, even visit the graves of famed *ulamas*. Such phenomena are not surprising considering how the scholars are revered, and they possess great influence in the development of society. many people regard them as source of legitimacy in many activities.⁹

Many studies discuss the politicization of religion.¹⁰ However, very few focus on the roles of clerics. The study on the roles of scholars can be viewed from several perspectives, i.e. *kyai* and

¹ K. Fahmi, "Prinsip Kedaulatan Rakyat Dalam Penentuan Sistem Pemilihan Umum Anggota Legislatif," *Jurnal Konstitusi* 7, no. 3 (2010): pp. 119–160.

² Article 1 Sentence (27) of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 7 of 2017 on General Election. Besides the election of DPD, the election of Village Head is exercised without the involvement of political parties, but through selection process, and specifically for *desa adat* the mechanism will be surrendered to the local custom mechanism, and stipulated by Regional Ordinance (See Article 34 Sentence (5) and the Elucidation of Point 8 of Law No. 6 of 2014 on Village).

³ According to KPU record in 2019, there were 40 (forty) registered pollster agencies/institutes. See <https://video.tempo.co>, *Ini Daftar 40 Lembaga Survei Yang Diakui KPU*, 2019, <https://video.tempo.co/read/14316/ini-daftar-40-lembaga-survei-yang-diakui-kpu>. Accessed on 5 May 2022.

⁴ Shokhibul Mighfar, "Ambiguitas Politik Ulama-Kiai," *Lisan Al-Hal: Jurnal Pengembangan Pemikiran dan Kebudayaan* 13, no. 1 (2019): p. 37.

⁵ Mohamad Baihaqi, "Legitimasi Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) dalam Kontestasi Islam Politik Mutakhir," *Al Ma' Arief: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Dan Budaya* 1, no. 2 (2019): p. 55. Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin, "Female Ulama: Mediating Religious Authority in a Limited 'Islamic' Public

Sphere in Contemporary Indonesia," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic & Social Studies* 4, no. 2 (2018): p. 203.

⁶ Safradji, "Ulama Dan Politik di Indonesia Pasca Reformasi," *Al-Iman: Jurnal Keislaman dan Kemasyarakatan* 4, no. 1 (2020): p. 248.

⁷ Noorhaidi Hasan et al., *Ulama, Politik, dan Narasi Kebangsaan: Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan di Kota-kota Indonesia*, ed. Munirul Ikhwan Ibnu Burdah, Najib Kailani, I. (Yogyakarta: Pusat Pengkajian Islam Demokrasi dan Perdamaian (PusPIDeP), 2019), p. xix.

⁸ kumparanNEWS, *Prabowo Kunjungi Pesantren Di Sukabumi: Mohon Doa Kepada Kiai*, 2018, <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/prabowo-kunjungi-pesantren-di-sukabumi-mohon-doa-kepada-kiai-1538918125366315993/full>. Accessed on 1 May 2022.

⁹ Miftah Faridl, "Peran Sosial Politik Kyai di Indonesia," *Jurnal Sosioteknologi* 11 Tahun 6 (2007): p. 109.

¹⁰ Akh. Muzakki, "Islamisme dan Politisasi Agama Model PKS dalam Pilpres 2009," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (2014); Ahmad Fajar, "Politisasi Isu Agama di Media Massa: Strategi Politik Hos Kokroaminoto dalam Surat Kabar Djawi Hisworo (1918)," *Journal of Islamic History* 1, no. 1 (2021); Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Agama Dan Politik: Teologi Pembebasan Sebagai Arena Profetisasi Agama," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 22, no. 1 (2014); Budi Kurniawan, "Politisasi Agama di tahun Politik : Politik



ulamas in practical politics,¹¹ *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning), *ijtimak* (consensus among the scholars), and *ulamas' fatwa* (advice) in politics,¹² the views of *kiai* towards the politicization of *ulamas*,¹³ *ulamas* and identity politics,¹⁴ *dakwa* (religious propagation) and politics.¹⁵ In existing studies the roles of *ulama* were viewed from their involvements in practical politics which harmed their position as role models for the *ummah* (the whole community of Islamic believers) or in other words, the polarization of *ummah*.¹⁶ Many others also viewed *ulamas* as part of the elites who served as the tool to garner more votes for certain candidates in an election.¹⁷ This study is aimed to serve as a supplement to the existing studies. It will be focused on the roles of *ulamas*, in this case *buyas*, in the regional election in Limapuluh Kota Regency of West Sumatra.

This study argues that *ulamas* were capable of coping with the crisis of confidence on the part of politicians and canvassers both prior to the pronouncement as official candidates and the days leading to the polling day. Consequently, this study shall answer two questions: *first*, why do politicians pay courtesy calls to *ulamas*? The answer to this question will allow us to explain the position of *ulamas* in society. *Second*, what are the forms of

rituals and statements provided by the *ulama* to politicians? The answer to the second question shall explain the rituals performed by *ulamas* to politicians as well as statements that boost politicians and canvassers' confidence. The answers shall not be distinguished into two distinct sections, since they shall complete each other like the two sides of a coin.

This article is the result of a research in 2015 during the regional election in Limapuluh Kota Regency of West Sumatra. It is a qualitative, field research. The data were collected within the territory of Limapuluh Kota Regency and the location serves as the setting of the article's research. Data collection was conducted by means of in-depth interviews with four *buyas* in the Regency and four candidates who ran in the Regional Election for Limapuluh Kota Regency in 2015. The informants were selected through purposive sampling technique. The data was then analyzed in several stages. First, data reduction, conducted by making a transcript of interviews and selecting the data; *second*, data display, conducted by presentation of data in the result part of the article; and *third*, data interpretation and drawing conclusions, conducted by interpreting the

Pasca-Kebenaran di Indonesia dan Ancaman bagi demokrasi," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 12, no. 1 (2018); Miftahul Husna Siregar, Muhammad Arif Nasution, dan Warjio Warjio, "Politisasi Agama pada Kampanye Pemenangan Eramas dalam Pilkada Sumatera Utara Tahun 2018," *Perspektif* 11, no. 1 (2021).

¹¹ Faridl, "Peran Sosial Politik Kyai Di Indonesia." Mohammad Adi, "Fenomenologi Konstruksi Sosial Pada Kiai Yang Berpolitik Praktis," *Ulumuna: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 7, no. 1 (2021); Safradji, "Ulama Dan Politik di Indonesia Pasca Reformasi. Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Ulama Dan Pesantren Dalam Dinamika Politik Dan Kultur Nahdlatul Ulama," *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi Islam* 13, no. 1 (2013). Rizky Amalia Aziz, "Kiai Dan Politik Elektoral: Peran Kiai Yusuf Chudlori Dalam Pemenangan Kandidat Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin Pada Pilpres 2019 Di Kecamatan Tegalgrejo," *Jurnal PolGov* 2, no. 2 (2020): 223–276. Ahmad Adi Suradi dan Buyung Surahman, "Kiai's Role As Ulama and Umara: Implications to the Pesantren Education," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 33, no. 2 (2020): p. 202.

¹² Riki Ronaldo dan Darmaiza Darmaiza, "Politisasi Agama dan Politik Kebencian pada Pemilu Presiden Indonesia 2019," *Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society* 3, no. 1 (2021); Abdillah Halim, "Fatwa Dan Politisasi Agama

(Analisis Wacana Penggunaan Fatwa Pada Pilkada DKI Jakarta)," *An-Nuba: Jurnal Kajian Islam, Pendidikan, Budaya & Sosial* 5, no. 2 (2018): pp. 231–259, <http://ejournal.staimadiun.ac.id/index.php/annuha/article/view/272/108>.

¹³ Miftahul Huda dan M. Dayat, "Politisasi Ulama Pada Pilpres 2019 Perspektif Kiai Silo di Kabupaten Pasuruan," *Kabilab: Journal of Social Community* 4, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁴ Nafilah Sulfa, "Ulama dalam Penguatan Politik Identitas Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *Revelatia: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁵ Siti Asiyah dan Arif Chasanudin, "Pondok Pesantren dan Dakwah Politik: Kajian Histori Pondok Pesantren Hasyim Asy'ari Bangsri Jepara," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 40, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁶ Eko Setiawan, "Keterlibatan Kiai Dalam Politik Praktis Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Masyarakat," *Ar-Risalah* 13, no. 1 (2014): p. 15. Suradi and Surahman, "Kiai's Role As Ulama and Umara: Implications to the Pesantren Education."

¹⁷ Iswandi Iswandi dan Gibran Abdullah, "Religious Issues in the 2019 Indonesia-Presidential Election," *Al-Dutsur* 3, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1–21.



findings based on the applied approach, presented in the discussion section of this article.

Ulama in Public Perception

Ulama is defined as an expert in the field of Islamic religious studies.¹⁸ Sheikh Nawadwi Al-Bantani has argued that *ulama* is the group of people who master all legal (*sharia*) matters that stipulate *itikad* (belief) as well as other *sharia* deeds. Wahbah az-Zuhaili has argued that *ulama* as the persons capable of analyzing worldly phenomenon for the sake of life in both this world and the Hereafter, and who fear the warnings of God.¹⁹ Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyah wrote that *ulama* is at the center of the relation between Islam and the believers (Muslims). The sustainability of Muslim societies is inseparable from the roles of *ulama*, and simultaneously the formation of *ulama* is inseparable from Muslim societies.²⁰ *Ulama* often presented as a determining figure in the various stages of Muslim history, in matters of governance, politics, culture, society, and education. *Ulama* are teachers, the sustainers of the teachings of the Prophets, the enforcers of *amar makruf nahi munkar* (upholding the good and preventing wrongdoing).²¹ *Ulama* do not only master religious

matters, but their words and actions serve as a motivation, driving force, example, and role model to society.²²

Based on the aforementioned perspective, the label for *ulama* varies within the Indonesian community based on the local culture. Some are called *kiai* (Java), *tengku* (Aceh), *ajengan* (Sunda), *buya* (Minangkabau), *syekh* (North Sumatra), *tuan guru* (Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara and Kalimantan).²³ Among the *Nabdhyyin* (followers of *Nabdatul Ulama*, NU) *ulama* is called *kyai*. The title is given to someone knowledgeable (*alim*) and an expert in Islamic studies and owns or leads a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). *Kyai* is usually a founder of a *pesantren* and teaches classical Islamic works to disciples.²⁴ Opinions of *kyais* serve as main references in decision-making processes, not only in religious matters but also in social and political matters. They bring together individual as well as collective interests. This gives the *kyai* a privileged status.²⁵ Nahdatul Ulama places *kyai* at the highest position of the organization, such as *Dewan/Majelis Syuro* (the highest deliberative council). At this point, *kyai* play strategic roles in

¹⁸ Muhtarom, *Reproduksi Ulama di Era Globalisasi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2005), p. 12.

¹⁹ Badaruddin Sukby, *Dilema Ulama Dalam Perubahan Zaman* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995), pp. 45–46.

²⁰ M. Hamdar Haqiri, Muhammad Syatibi Al-Arraiyyah et al., *Ulama dalam Penyebaran Pendidikan dan Khazanah Keagamaan* (Jakarta: Puslitbang lektur keagamaan, 2003), p. 13.

²¹ Anuri Furqon Hadi, "Ulama dalam Pandangan Masyarakat Jakarta: Sebuah Pemaknaan Berdasarkan Ruang," *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 20, no. 1 (2012): pp. 115–116,

<http://www.ejournal.stainpamekasan.ac.id/index.php/karsa/article/view/56>. D.I. Ansusa Putra, "New Concept of Ignorance: An Islamic Epistemological Approach to The Story of Moses As Relevant Reference for Contemporary Ulama," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic & Social Studies* 5, no. 2 (2019): p. 121.

²² MS Abu Bakar dan Imam Hanafi, "Berebut Paling Shaleh: Penguatan Identitas Ulama di Era Milenial," *Jurnal Penelitian Sosial dan Keagamaan* 34, no. 2 (2017): p. 72, <http://ejournal.lp2m.uinjambi.ac.id/ojp/index.php/Kontekstualita/article/view/39>.

²³ The title Tuan Guru is an address and title of the community for the ulama in the Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara. See Musthofa Asrori, *Tuan Guru, Sebutan Ulama*

Khas Lombok, 2015, <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/tuan-guru-sebutan-ulama-khas-lombok-6Vd0k>. Accessed on 27 April 2022.

Furthermore, from the angle of origin, the term Tuan Guru derived from bahasa Melayu, 'Tuan' means the venerated, or 'tuan' as master, or 'tuan' that means 'the noble'. Meanwhile 'guru' is understood as a person who provides teachings and knowledge, or someone to look up to. See Muhyidin Azmi, *Haji Dan Seputar Gelar Tuan Guru*, 2021, <https://alif.id/read/maz/haji-dan-seputar-gelar-tuan-guru-b240936p/>. Accessed on 27 April 2022. Choirul Mahfud, "Imagined Islamic Societies And The Role Of Ulema In Contemporary Indonesia," *AKADEMIKA: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 2 (2019): p. 269, <http://dx.doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v24i2.1567>.

²⁴ Zamakhasyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011), hlm. 93. Jasa Ungguh Muliawan, *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam: Studi Kasus terhadap Struktur Ilmu, Kurikulum, Metodologi dan Kelembagaan Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: PT. Rajagrafindo Persada, 2015), hlm. 301. Ahmad Patoni, *Peran Kiai Pesantren dalam Partai Politik* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Belajar, 2007), p. 20.

²⁵ Muthmainnah, *Jemabatan Suramadu Respon Ulama Terhadap Industrialisasi* (Yogyakarta: LKPSM, 1998), p. 37.

the social life of Indonesians.²⁶ They are especially close to the fabric of Javanese and NU society and culture.

The *kyai* in the island of Madura is distinguished into three categories: *first*, the teacher of Quran recitation; *second*, the teacher who teaches several books on religion; and *third*, the teacher or leader of Sufi groups or *tarekat*.²⁷ Despite all the definitions, the position of *kyai* remains similar, i.e., someone who plays strategic roles in society. He is a village elite who specializes in dealing with religious rites. With such competence, *kyais* are capable of mobilizing the masses in rural areas. They are recognized as informal leaders.²⁸ Apart from delivering their expertise on religious matters, some *kyais* can also prophesy and cure the sick.²⁹ This means that *kyais* serve as the beacon of hope for rural people on issues ranging from religious matters and other issues encountered by society.

In the perspective of the Minangkabau society who now live in the administrative territory of West Sumatra Province, *ulama* is called *buya* and occasionally *ustad*. However, there is a slight distinction between the two; the *buya* is more identical to *ulama*, as they own a mosque (*surau*) and teach Sufi teachings of the *tarekat*, while *ustad* is not the owner of *surau* yet they preach in mosques or *mushalas*. They are both considered as people who deeply understand religious teachings.

Historically, in the post-Islam era, *surau* is the place to sleep for unmarried men when they reach the age of moral responsibility (*baligh*). *Surau* serves as the place for worship besides studying local

custom (*adat*), religion, a place of deliberation, as well as a place for spiritual practice (*suluk*). Mosques, on the other hand, serves as a place of worship in a narrower sense i.e., for the congregational five daily prayers (*salah*), Friday sermons, and the Eid prayers.³⁰ Students of knowledge in a *surau* are called *orang siak*.³¹

Unlike past practices, *surau* no longer serves as the place to sleep for unmarried *baligh* males. Many *suraus* have now transformed into *madrasah* or *pesantren*.³² In several places, the existence of *suraus* remains the same and they still have *buyas* as the teachers of *tarekat*. In this context, *buyas* do not only serve the status for teachers of *tarekat*, but also for figures people consult on issues pertaining spirituality. This is in line with the purpose of performing *tarekat*, i.e., to find a way or method to worship as the Sufis do in order to be closer to God.³³ The phenomenon of politics entering *surau tarekat* can be understood as a phenomenon that has breached the barrier of spirituality which, in essence, is aimed to get closer to God and touches worldly issues or *muamalah*.

Political “Safari”

The practice of seeking audience from the *buya* can be categorized as part of political “safari” performed by West Sumatran politicians in the regional election of *Limapuluh Kota* Regency. In fact, in a broader sense, it is a common practice performed by Indonesian politicians. During the period leading up to political contests, politicians commonly conduct political safari to various places and regions in Indonesia. This is performed to

²⁶ Muhibbin, *Politik Kiai Vs Politik Rakyat: Pembacaan Masyarakat terhadap Perilaku Politik Kiai* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2012), pp. 45–46.

²⁷ Kuntowijoyo, *Perubahan Sosial dalam Masyarakat Agraris* (Yogyakarta: Matabangsa, 2002), p. 333.

²⁸ Nur Syam, *Bukan Dunia Berbeda: Sosiologi Komunitas Islam* (Surabaya: Pustaka Eureka, 2005), p. 134.

²⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Perubahan Sosial dalam Masyarakat Agraris*, p. 333.

³⁰ Azra, Azyumardi, *Surau: Pendidikan Islam Tradisional dalam Transisi dan Modernisasi*, Jakarta: PT. Logos Wacana Ilmu, 2003, pp. 8–9. Buya Hamka criticized the *surau* pattern where a male was positioned as a pitiful person. Unmarried and elder males lived in the *surau*, meanwhile their senior years ought to be spent by being surrounded by

grandchildren as they spent their youth by searching for livelihood. For complete argument, see; Hamka, *Islam dan Adat Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1984), p. 40.

³¹ Azra, *Surau: Pendidikan Islam Tradisional dalam Transisi dan Modernisasi*, p. 13.

³² Muhammad Kosim, “Tradisi Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah di Sumatera Barat,” *At-Tarbiyah* 4, no. 1 (2013): p. 21. Zainal Efendi Hasibuan, “The Portrait of Surau as a Forerunner of Madrasah: The Dynamics of Islamic Institutions in Minangkabau Toward Modernization,” *Ajis* 1, no. 1 (2016): p. 1,

<http://journal.staincurup.ac.id/index.php/AJIS/article/view/90/39>.

³³ Risan Rusli, *Tasawuf Dan Tarekat Studi Pemikiran Dan Pengalaman Sufi* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2013), p. 187.

boost party image as well as electability.³⁴ Consequently, political safari is in line with practical purposes certain politicians and parties wish to attain.

In the 2015 regional election of Limapuluh Kota Regency, besides the competition among candidates, there are people who barely stood under spotlight, i.e., the *buyas*. Many politicians and canvassers sought audience from them due to the popular assumption that they are people with capabilities above the average people in that they can foresee the victory of the candidates. Not only did such an assumption affect regional election, but it also affected the presidential and legislative elections.

The description on the roles of the *buya* above is consistent with the Weberian concept of charismatic authority. The term charisma, according to Weber, refers to the quality of certain individuals.³⁵ Charismatic authority is an authority of an individual who is considered to have excellent qualities and unique and outstanding capacities. This authority may occur in social and varying historical contexts.³⁶ Consequently, in this research context, the *buya* for politicians and canvassers – in the Minangkabau cultural setting – are considered as excellent individuals, bearers of sanctity, and those closest to God.

The practice of politicians and canvassers seeking audience from *buya* differs between regions. In other places, the visit to *ulama* is covered by the press. During the research, it was evident that the *buya* were visited individually and in secret to their houses, mosques, or *surau*. Such practice simultaneously secured the image of the *buya* as being partial towards certain candidate. Moreover, the *buya* will grant audience to anyone wishing to meet them.

I am confident about the spiritual realm than about myself. I visited teachers of tasawuf or tarekat in many surau. There are several surau that I visited along with canvassers (Interview, Politician X, 2019). Nearly in all political competitions, be it the presidential, legislative, or regional elections, politicians, canvassers or both came to visit (*silaturahmi*) and requested assistance in winning political competitions they were running in. They sometimes come to the house, mosque, or surau (Interview, Buya X, 2019)

Many *buyas* regard political practice as pertaining not only the visible world, but also the invisible. Both are simultaneously intertwined. Politics is both *berlabir dan berbatin* (the physical and spiritual) process. In the view of *buyas*, some unpredicted incident might transpire when practicing politics. For instance, when someone is in the polling booth and suddenly fails to determine what he/she had previously decided before entering. Hence, for the *buya*, spiritual issues should be resolved at the earliest possible moment as they could not be tackled physically.

The activity of politics should be held in both physical and spiritual realms. The political process is not something physical in nature, but also spiritual. In political contention, things beyond the capability of the senses are often influential. Something that ought to be visible might become invisible during the polling, for example, when voters wish to cast their votes on a certain ticket number. Hence, things of spiritual nature must be performed by politicians to anticipate the political problems that wouldn't be solvable by *zahiriyah* (external) power (Interview, Buya X, 2019).

Audience before a *buya* is performed by politicians and canvassers under a common understanding. Political processes are not only a matter of rationality. This is because politics is

³⁴ Yolanda Agne, "Safari Politik, Cara Meningkatkan Citra Tokoh Maupun Partai," *Tempo.Co*, last modified 2022, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1631172/safari-politik-cara-meningkatkan-citra-tokoh-maupun-partai>. accessed on 28 November 2022; Mohamad Hatta Muarabagja, "Tujuan Safari Politik, Apakah Hanya Mengerek Elektabilitas?," *Tempo.Co*, last modified 2022, [https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1631955/tujuan-safari-](https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1631955/tujuan-safari-politik-apakah-hanya-mengerek-elektabilitas)

[politik-apakah-hanya-mengerek-elektabilitas](https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1631955/tujuan-safari-politik-apakah-hanya-mengerek-elektabilitas). Accessed on 28 November 2022.

³⁵ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Falcon's Wings Press, 1947), p. 358.

³⁶ George Ritzer and Douglas J. Goodman, *Teori Sosiologi Modern* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2005), p. 145.



something that has yet to happen and there are many possibilities that may occur. Consequently, with all their prowess, *buyas* are positioned as people who could see the victory of the candidates before the polling day, even the percentage of the votes garnered could be seen after performing some rites.

The spiritual/psychic approach is one of the ways to see and determine a politician's electability in a political contention. Through inner vision, one can see who has the potential and chance to win. Even the numbers or percentage can be seen after rites are performed by politicians (Interview, Buya X, 2019).

There were two points during which politicians would pay a visit to the *buya*, i.e., when they were still candidate hopefuls and after being declared as official candidates by KPU. Certain rites would follow when the hopefuls wished to be declared candidates. As the process of becoming a candidate is deemed a *hajjat* or intent, several rites are required, such as the night prayer, preceded by *hajjat* prayer, *tabajud* (late night prayer), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and supplications.

Prior to candidacy, there is a bathing ceremony. The purpose is to gain the chance to be declared as the official candidate out of the selection process by KPU. As candidacy is deemed a *hajjat* or something one intends to gain, the bathing serves as a medium for delivering a person into candidacy process. Then the person should perform night salah preceded by *hajjat* prayer, *tabajud*, *dhikr* and supplications. (Interview, Buya X, 2019)

Upon becoming candidates, politicians would then be asked by the *buya* to recite Quranic verses, perform *dhikr*, and fast to achieve charisma. The fast, interestingly, can be performed by someone else in the politicians' stead. When politicians have been declared candidates, the *buya* could see or prognosticate the victory of the politicians through mystical rituals. When the *buya* sees that a candidate would win, the politicians would be taken to pay a visit to sacred graves.

To achieve charisma, one needs to recite verses pertaining the Prophets Joseph and Abraham, improve their *dhikr*, and fast for either 40 or three days. The fasting could be performed by the candidate, or someone else on his stead. The purpose is to remove one's arrogance and to shape the candidate's character. The rite would be continued by other practices such as the *dhikr*, and for those whose victory is visible through the inner vision, they would be taken to visit the graves of sacred individuals, such as the one in Batu Hampa etc. (Interview, Buya X, 2019)

Overcoming Politicians' Confidence Crisis

Based on the data above, the *buya* play substantial roles in the political processes in the Limapuluh Kota Regency. Politicians and canvassers visit *buyas* because they are viewed as being capable of prognosticating politicians' victory despite the fact that such claims are not yet scientifically proven. Various politicians and canvassers had come to seek audience from *buyas*, including those who compete in the same elections. This means that future winner and losers would all seek audience from them, who would never reject those who visit them.

Politicians and canvassers would not include *buyas* in their campaign that include public meetings with the community. However, they would visit *buyas* individually and sometimes in secret. The secret visit is to maintain the impartiality of *buyas*. Similar practice yet in different manner is also performed by politicians and canvassers in other regions of Indonesia. The visit from politicians and canvassers to religious figures would sometimes be covered by the media. Hence the public could see the political favoritism practiced by religious figures towards certain political candidates. When a *buya* is personally visited, he would provide reassurance to the politicians and canvassers. Days prior to the declaration as candidate and polling day, politicians and canvassers are undeniably restless and uncertain. Under the circumstances, the confidence of politicians and canvassers is at its lowest level.



The tranquility provided by the *buya* is part of his role to overcome the crisis of confidence encountered by politicians before and after being declared as official candidate by KPU. On the surface politicians would look confident before the public, yet underneath there is a crisis of confidence. Politicians and canvassers' confidence is a key indicator for the public to determine which candidate to vote for.

In psychology, confidence is a determining factor, and it may affect individuals differently. Confidence is based on the feeling of certainty, and it reduces anxiety.³⁷ When anxiety lingers in politicians or canvassers and no action is taken to overcome the issues, it may lead to serious problems, risking electability and may result in loss.

Self-sufficiency may provide belief for politicians so they could perform better in political process in order to prevail. It may also boost the morale of canvassers so they would be much more active in promoting their candidate to the public as the feeling of self-sufficiency could also overcome stress factors.³⁸

The confidence and self-sufficiency provided by the *buya* for politicians and canvassers comes from a spiritual approach. Such approach is known by *sufi* psychological approach. The approach places the heart as the source of inner illumination, inspiration, creativity, and mercy.³⁹ The spiritual side of religious teachings is the way to God. When one's wish is in line with God's, one will experience spiritual awakening making one capable of seeing things beyond common senses and reasoning.⁴⁰ In this context, according to al-Ghazali, there are three groups of men: *first*, the *basyaniyah*, those who

do not receive spiritual meanings; *second*, the *Batiniyah*, those who merely acknowledge things of spiritual nature; *third*, the *kamil* (perfect) group who combine both.⁴¹ Based on the explanation it is conclusive that the *buya* fall into the group of *kamil* as they consider practical politics as involving realities that are beyond the physical-material, but also the spiritual. This is in line with the activities of those who owns *surau tarekat* and perform *suluk* activities. *Suluk* is an activity performed by secluding oneself from social life and to stay in a *surau* for certain period. Members of *suluk* perform several rites such as *dhikr*, *salah*, fasting, *istighfar* (repentance), *mahasabah* (self-rebuke), etc. The rites are performed under the guidance of the *buya*, who are called *mursyid*.⁴²

The importance for politicians and canvassers to have self-sufficiency is inseparable from the culture of Minangkabau society who sees political candidates as needing to have "*takab, tageh, tokoh*" (good-looking, decisive, personality). This standard is in line with the expectation in Minangkabau society that a politician must have charisma. The service rendered by the *buya* is meant to help politicians achieve the three standards. In practice, the *buya* perform several rites that politicians must perform. The rites may be of mystical nature, which are immeasurable by standards of empirical science. The mystical way is chosen by politicians and canvassers as supplement to hiring survey agencies. This helps them face critical situations

³⁷ Emrah Oney dan Gizem Oksuzoglu-Guven, "Confidence: A critical review of the literature and an alternative perspective for general and specific self-confidence," *Psychological Reports* 116, no. 1 (2015): pp. 149–150.

³⁸ Rohmad Efendi, "Self Efficacy: Studi Indigenus pada Guru Bersuku Jawa," *Journal of Social and Industrial Psychology* Vol. 2, no. No. 2 (2013): p. 62, <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/sip/article/view/2595>.

³⁹ Robbi Hidayat, Nurma Yuwita, dan Gatut Setiadi, "Komunikasi Transedental Jamaah Gerak Batin Di Desa Glagahsari Dengan Pendekatan Symbolic Interaction

Theory," *Al-Ittibol: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): p. 36.

⁴⁰ Abdul Kadir, "Apresiasi Keimanan Kepada Tuhan Melalui Pengalaman Spiritual," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 1 (2015): p. 33.

⁴¹ Salahuddin, "Menembus Batas Lahiriiah Perspektif aL-Ghazali: Refleksi bagi Dunia Pendidikan," *Lentera Pendidikan* 18, no. 2 (2015): p. 176.

⁴² Toni Hartono, "The Surau Suluk and Tradition of Ratik Togak: the Expression of Piety Among the Followers of the Tarekat Naqsabandiyah in Rokan Hulu, Riau," *Sosiobumaniora* 22, no. 2 (2020): p. 234.

that may give way to emotional stress.⁴³ The implementation of mysticism is quite common considering the culture of Minangkabau and Indonesian society.⁴⁴

The politicians performing rites under the command of the *buya* is a sign that mystical practices are still rooted in the political life of the people of Limapuluh Kota Regency. This is in line with the opinion of Bahaudin (2015) that the political elites in Indonesia are inseparable from the mystical or spiritual power. Many politicians have spiritual gurus as advisors or support for their political power.⁴⁵ Politicians, canvassers, and *buya* do not only believe in pollsters and political consultants, but they also share the same view of the 'berlahir dan berbatin' politics. They need latent spiritual powers to manifest. This could add positive values in the political contentions in Limapuluh Kota and Indonesia in general. *Buyas* are also figures capable of delivering religious advice to candidates so they do not commit illicit acts in politics and this would create leaders who are more open to the needs of the people. This also implies that political contention in Indonesian elections is still far from true spiritual values, since politicians would do anything for the sake of garnering votes.

Conclusion

The regional election in Limapuluh Kota Regency is nuanced with spiritual politics. Politicians seeking audience from the *buya* believe that they are people with capabilities beyond that of the common people. *Buyas* are considered to be closer to God through *119uluk* activities in the *surau tarekat*. *Buyas* are also believed to be able to predict the victory of politicians or obstacles that may hinder their political undertakings. This is achieved through spiritual approaches despite how irrational it may look. This is an imperative for

politicians and canvassers as they need to boost confidence during the period of political contention. Spiritual politics involves practices that are designed to get politicians closer to God, such as bathing, performing *dhiker*, *salah*, and visit to sacred graves. The practices are believed by the *buya* as the best way to see what the Creator had intended for one of His creations. In conclusion, all the rites performed leads to the boosting of politicians' confidence. This research only studied the roles of the *buya* in spiritual politics. As a result, further research may study the economic benefits obtained by the *buya* for their involvement in political contentions.

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⁴³ Jurnal Agus Trihartono, "Dukun dan Politik di Indonesia", Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia Issue 12: The living and the dead, (October 2012).

⁴⁴ CNN Indonesia, *Muasal Mistik "Bertaban" Di Tengah Masyarakat Indonesia*, 2019, [https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20191027174605-](https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20191027174605-241-443282/muasal-mistik-bertaban-di-tengah-masyarakat-indonesia)

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Interviews

Interviews with Buya and Politicians in Limapuluh Kota Regency in 2019 (1-30 July 2019). Names are hidden.