



Who Speaks for Nahdlatul Ulama? Representation, Legitimacy, and the Politics of Claim-making in the 2024 Presidential Election

Jasmine Hasna Nafila Rahman¹

Received: September 30th 2024 | Accepted: June 19th 2025 | Published: July 17th 2025

Abstract

In Indonesia's presidential elections, the act of claiming to represent Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has emerged as a potent political strategy—one pursued not only by political parties but also by religious elites, polling institutions, and self-proclaimed "neutral" actors. This article investigates how such claims are constructed and contested within the digital public sphere in the lead-up to the 2024 presidential election. Drawing on Saward's theory of representative claims, it analyses 413 online news articles using a combination of Discourse Network Analysis and qualitative text analysis. Empirically, the study maps who is speaking, about what, and on whose behalf—offering analytical insight into how legitimacy is narrated and performed. Theoretically, it extends the application of representative claims theory by demonstrating how legitimacy is negotiated in contexts where the constituency is internally fragmented, pluralistic, and contested—rather than unified or binary. These findings highlight the fluid nature of representation, especially in socio-religious communities such as NU, where claims to representation are constantly produced, challenged, and reframed in public discourse.

Keywords: Claims; representation; legitimacy; construction of interests

1 Associate Researcher at Institute for Research, Education, and Information on Social and Economic Affairs (LP3ES) Email: jasmine.hasna@mail.ugm.ac.id

Introduction

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has consistently attracted political attention in the lead-up to Indonesian elections. Interest in NU is not limited to political parties and formal politicians, but extends to extra-parliamentary actors as well. Along with the development of post-reform democracy, representation is no longer confined to formal political actors, civil society groups and the private sector entities now also participate in representative claims. Consequently, competition to claim legitimate representation of NU in the public sphere has become—and will likely remain—inevitable.

This is particularly significant given the sheer number of Nahdliyyin.² Based on data from Saiful Mujani Research and

Consulting, 20% of Indonesia's total population identify as NU members. When compared to the Permanent Voter List (*daftar pemilih tetap*/DPT) released by the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU), which totals around 204 million, this translates to approximately 40 million NU voters (Triono, 2023b). However, this figure only captures formal membership. A separate survey conducted by the Alvara Research Centre indicates that as many as 59.2% of Indonesians claim to have close ties with NU (Triono, 2023a). Unsurprisingly, NU-affiliated voters have long been a highly contested electoral constituency.

The National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa/PKB) has historically maintained close ties with NU, having been founded with the support of the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul

2 A term referring to individuals culturally or structurally affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (*kiai* NU).



Ulama/PBNU) (Rohman, 2018). However, the 2024 elections showed different results. A pre-election survey in East Java, a traditional NU stronghold, showed that PKB trailed behind the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan/PDIP), which garnered 31% of the vote compared to PKB's 20.2% (Lembaga Survei Indonesia, 2023). Moreover, PKB Chairman Muhaimin Iskandar (commonly known as Cak Imin), who stood in the presidential race, was also defeated. In East Java, Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka (Prabowo-Gibran) won 65.1% of the vote, while Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar (Anies-Imin/AMIN) only received 17.5% (Irawan, 2024). PKB also lost to PDIP in the contest of parliamentary seats in the province (Azmi, 2024).

The representation of NU is notably dynamic. Previous studies have shown that

various actors, such as formal organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and political parties, attempt to claim representation of NU for their respective interests (Nasrudin, 2022; Chalik, 2010; Adryamarthanino, 2022). The evolving role of PKB in representing NU in successive elections has also attracted scholarly attention. For instance, research has demonstrated that NU's support for PKB has fluctuated: in Bandar Lampung, PKB received both symbolic and substantive legitimacy from NU (Abror, 2019), whereas in Madura, the 2019 presidential election revealed that NU's political preferences did not always align with those of PKB (Burhani, 2019).

The decline in PKB's electability among Nahdliyyin voters in the 2024 election is therefore neither now nor unexpected. According to Ignazi (2021), a party's difficulty to



gain public trust and secure a majority vote signals a legitimacy crisis. Saward (2010) further argues that representational legitimacy does not stem solely from electoral outcomes; rather, it emerges through an ongoing process of making and responding to representative claims. This legitimacy is actively contested through convincing claims (Leifeld & Haunss, 2012), and can only be achieved when constituents recognise and accept those claims of representation (Guasti & Geissel, 2019).

Given PKB's failure to secure dominant NU support in the 2024 election and the increasing contestation over NU representation, a new analytical approach is required. Much of the existing literature on the PKB–NU relationship focuses on binary electoral outcomes—whether or not NU supports PKB—without examining the processes through which representative

claims are produced and contested. Yet NU's support for PKB remains volatile and contested. This study adopts the framework of representative claims, moving beyond formalistic electoral procedures to explore how claims to represent NU are produced, contested, and legitimised within the broader sphere of public discourse.

This study seeks to address the following question: How do various actors contest and construct claims to represent NU in the lead-up to Indonesia's 2024 presidential election through online mass media discourse? To answer this, the research examines public responses to PKB's claims, the discursive construction of NU-related interests, and the types and variations of claims articulated by competing actors in the pursuit of representational legitimacy.



Methods

This research employs a mixed-method approach, combining Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) with descriptive qualitative methods. In this analysis, political discourse is conceptualised as a dynamic network that interacts and is interdependent (Leifeld, 2016). By identifying patterns in language use, such as recurring word and sentence, the claim map shows how various actors shape NU-related interests through their representational claims. This network of claims provides a comprehensive view of the dynamics of claim contestation, enabling the identification of both support and rejection of these claims.

To deepen the discourse network analysis, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. This method aims to understand, interpret and explore meaning within written texts. In this study,

content analysis enriches the findings of big data analysis by capturing important elements in each claim that are not easily identified through network analysis alone. These elements illuminate the patterns in the types of claims made by PKB and other actors in constructing representational legitimacy.

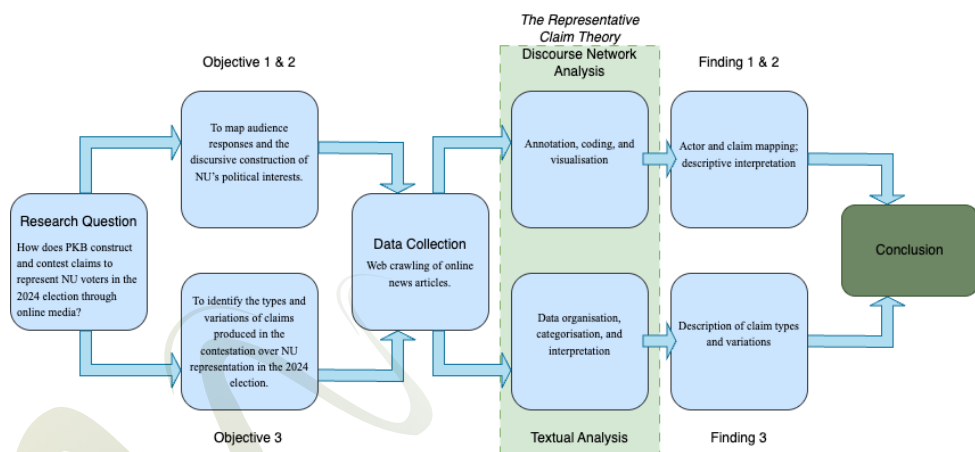
The integration of discourse network analysis and qualitative content analysis offer both breadth and depth in examining contested claims to represent NU in the mass media. While network analysis provides a macro-level landscape of discursive conflict, content analysis dissects the structure and meaning of each claim to better understand what, how, and why certain ideas are communicated and contested.

Data were collected from national and local online news media. Articles collected using the Event Registry tool with the keywords “(PKB or

National Awakening Party) and (Nahdlatul Ulama or NU)" over the period spanning from the official declaration of the AMIN candidate pair on 2 September 2023 to the end of the campaign on 10 February 2024. Media sources were limited to Kompas and Detik, the two most trusted and widely accessed news outlets between 2021 and 2023. Based on a Reuters survey

(Newman et al., 2023), Kompas is trusted by 69% of respondents, while Detik is accessed weekly by 61%. This study also includes articles from domains affiliated with Detik and Kompas. A total of 445 articles were initially identified, of which 413 were deemed suitable for further analysis after data cleaning and filtering.

Figure 1. Research Stages



Source: author's data



From the 413 articles, the author annotated statements identified as claims, resulting in a total of 470 claim statements. These statements were then coded using a discourse network analyser, producing 75 groups of distinct clusters of claims/discourses originating from 23 organisations. Upon further breakdown, these organisations encompassed 95 individual actors. The resulting discourses, organisations, and individuals were subsequently visualised as a network map using the Visone application.

Theoretical Framework

To analyse the data collected, this study draws upon Saward's (2010) theoretical framework of representative claims. Saward outlines five core elements that constitute a representative claim.

"A maker of representations (M) puts forward a subject (S) which stands for an object (O) that is related to a referent (R) and is offered to an audience (A)."

In this framework, the claim-maker (M) proposes a subject (S) to speak or act for an object (O), which is linked to a particular referent (R), and directs this claim to an audience (A). (M) makes a claim by describing (S) to represent (O) in a manner that aligns with their own interests. The audience (A) then judges the claim, accepting or rejecting it. It is crucial to distinguish between (M) and (S); as the claim-maker does not always position themselves as the subject, but may instead construct or appoint the subject to support their claim. Likewise, the object (O) is often framed through the attribution of specific characteristics (R) by (M) to strengthen the legitimacy or persuasiveness of the claim. These representative claims

are addressed to an audience, whether constituents, the media, or policymakers who may either accept the claim or respond with a counterclaim, thus generating a dynamic process.

To enrich the empirical analysis, the study also incorporates Guasti and Geissel's (2019, 102) typology of representative claims. They categorise claims based on the presence of identifiable

constituents and linkages. If both constituents and linkages are evident, the statement qualifies as a representation claim. If the linkage is rejected, it is considered a misrepresentation claim. Where a claim references a value or interest but lacks a linkage to a constituent, it is classified as an interest claim. If neither constituent nor linkage is clearly identified, the statement is categorised simply as a statement.

Table 1. Types of Claims Guasti and Geissel (2019)

Claim Type	Constituents	Linkage	Example
Representation Claim	called	called	"A is the party that represents B"
Misrepresentation Claim	called	rejected	"Party A does not represent B"
Claim of Interest/ Value	called	Not mentioned	"B supports party A"
Statement	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	"Party A has an impact on welfare"

Source: Guasti and Geissel (2019), processed by the author



These various types of claims can be used to reflect the dynamics, diversity, and emerging trends within PKB's representative claim strategy towards NU. Analysing the variation in these claims strengthens the earlier arguments regarding the heterogeneity of representation claim strategies and highlights the distinct elements embedded within each claim.

Results

Yahya Cholil Staquf's election as chairman of the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) presents a new challenge for PKB, which had previously enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the former chairman. This shift is particularly significant in the context of the 2024 elections, where Cak Imin, the chairman of PKB, is running as the vice-presidential candidate alongside Anies Baswedan—a figure

widely perceived as close to the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera/PKS), a party often considered ideologically opposed to NU. Yahya Cholil has strongly emphasised NU's institutional neutrality (Pangaribowo, 2024), making it more difficult for PKB to secure support from the Nahdliyyin constituency.

Although PBNU has officially declared a neutral stance, some statements from PBNU officials suggest otherwise. For example, PBNU's secretary general claimed that the majority of v supported Prabowo (Ernes, 2024). Similarly, Nadirsyah Hosen, a well-known NU intellectual, revealed a systematic and large-scale mobilisation by the chairman and the *Rais 'Aam* (supreme leader) of PBNU to rally institutional support for candidate 02 (Ni'am & Asril, 2024).



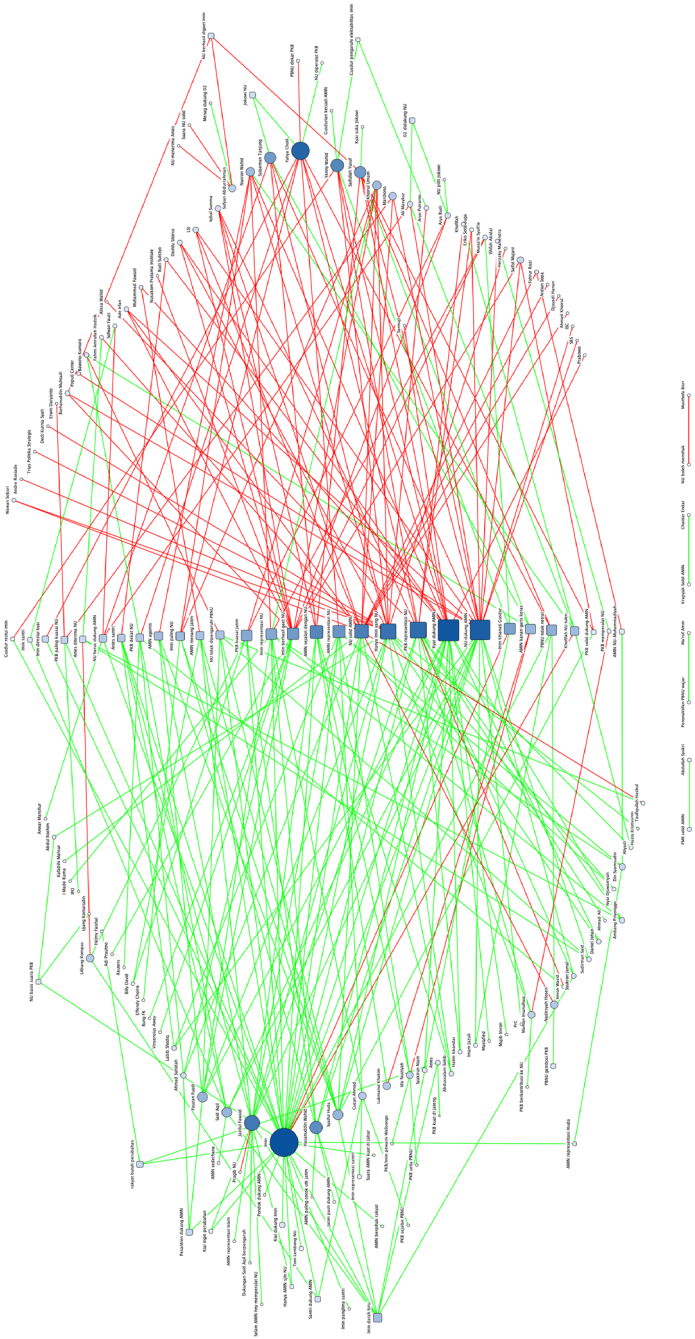
Tensions between PBNU and PKB were exacerbated by efforts to delegitimise support for PKB, including public calls from PBNU figures urging voters not to support candidates endorsed by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir—a radical Islamist leader who declared his support for the AMIN ticket—and not to back candidates who exploit religion for electoral gain, a veiled reference to Anies Baswedan's controversial campaign in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial race (Aditya & Setuningsih, 2023; Arifin, 2024). Nonetheless, political divisions between PBNU and some various regional board of NU (Pengurus Wilayah Nahdlatul Ulama/PWNU) reveal a fragmented political landscape within NU, where support cannot be centrally dictated or uniformly enforced.

The main finding in this study is the network of NU representative claims as reflected in two mass media sources. The network map of actors and

claims shows how audiences responded to the representative claims made by PKB. Mapping these responses is important to understand the dynamics of legitimacy surrounding PKB's claim to represent NU, as well as for revealing the interests and alignments of the many actors involved. In addition, this section discusses how the network map of claims can assist researchers in analysing how NU's interests are discursively constructed within these competing claims.

The network map also highlights the involvement of actors traditionally perceived as neutral—such as academics and polling institutions—in the production of claims, which are often shaped by underlying interests. Additionally, it identifies dominant actors who play major roles in the contestation of representation claims, both among political parties and extra-parliamentary actors.

Figure 2. Network Map of Audience Claims and Responses



Source: author's data



Finally, the findings from the content analysis are presented to determine the specific elements and types of claims produced by the most active actors. A closer examination of these claims reveals how different actors construct the interests of constituents in ways that serve their pursuit of representational legitimacy.

In the network map, square symbols represent claims, concepts, or discourses, while round symbols denote actors or individuals. A green tie indicates an actor's positive relationship with or agreement to a claim or concept, while a red tie, in contrast, indicates disagreement or opposition.

Overall, the map reveals a central vertical cluster of claims that effectively separates two opposing camps. Groups that support PKB's claims to represent NU's interests appear on the left side of the map, while

those that reject these claims are positioned on the right. The size and colour intensity of the nodes indicate the frequency with which each actor or claim appears in the media data: the larger and darker the node, the more frequently it occurs in the production of representative claims.

On the left side of the map, the largest node is 'Imin', indicating that Imin is the actor most actively advancing claims in support of PKB's representation of NU. On the right, the largest node is 'Yahya Cholil', indicating that he is the principal actor advancing anti-claims against PKB's representation narrative.

The stark contrast between Imin and Yahya—who emerge as the two most active producers of conflicting claims—reflects a deep-rooted social and political rivalry. This tension traces back to the 2021 NU Congress, during which Yahya was elected



chairman of PBNU, replacing Said Aqil. During his tenure, Said Aqil had generally accommodated PKB's political interests and even publicly asserted that "NU is PKB, PKB is NU." In contrast, Yahya has consistently emphasised NU's neutrality and has explicitly rejected PKB's claims to represent the organisation.

The most contested claims can be seen from the largest nodes on the map, such as 'NU supports AMIN', '*Kiai*³ supports AMIN', and 'PKB represents NU'. These claims are intensely contested, as indicated by the dense network of connecting tie surrounding them, signifying

both high frequency in media production and a considerable volume of anti-claims or rejection.

On both left and right sides of the network map are claims that do not have a direct relation to the opposing group, meaning that these claims were not explicitly refuted. For example, on the left side, claims such as 'Imin represents *santri*' and 'Imin is a blue blood', stand unchallenged by opposing groups. Conversely, on the right side, claims such as '02 is supported by NU' and 'NU is used by PKB' originate from actors opposing PKB.

An analysis of the actors and claims network reveals varied audience responses, ranging from strong acceptance to outright rejection. While many claims garnered both support and rejection, some received only support without rejection. These variations make it difficult to determine conclusively whether

3 A religious figure who leads a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) or holds scholarly authority within the Islamic Nusantara tradition, particularly in *kiai* Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community. In NU society, a *kiai* plays both spiritual and social roles and often serves as a patron in patron–client relationships with students (*santri*) and followers (*jamaah*).



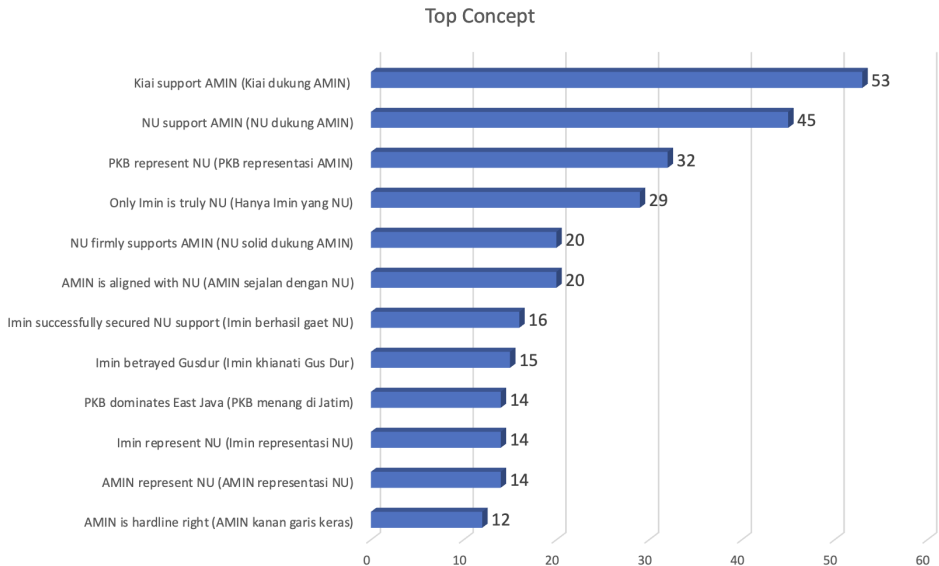
PKB has succeeded in gaining representational legitimacy among NU constituents because the diversity of constituents leads to diverse responses to the representative claims made by PKB. According to Guasti and Geissel's (2019), a claim is considered democratically legitimate only when supported by the relevant constituency. However, this framework presumes a cohesive constituency, which is not applicable in the case of NU, whose members—Nahdliyyin—are internally diverse in political orientation and interest. Within

such a pluralistic community, legitimacy becomes a dynamic and contested process, making it challenging to establish a singular or unified measure of representational success.

The actor-claim network map also shows that many of the representative claims revolve around the construction of NU's interests. Of the 29 contested claims, the three most prominent were 'Kiai supports AMIN' (53 mentions), 'NU supports AMIN' (45 mentions), and 'PKB represents NU' (32 mentions). Both PKB and PBNU, along with



Figure 3. Top Concept 2023-2024



Source: author's data

various other actors, competed to define and claim representation over the interests of the *kiai*. These interests are particularly contentious, as *kiai* are widely regarded as influential religious leaders with loyal constituencies. Their authority enables them to guide the political preferences

of their *santri*, making their endorsement a powerful asset in electoral mobilisation (Chalik, 2010; Ulzikri, 2019).

From a total of 75 identified claim concepts, the author constructed a concept frequency diagram, focusing only on concepts that appeared in more than ten statements. The figure



shows the frequency with which each concept is invoked; however, it is important to emphasise that the counts include both supporting and opposing (anti-claim) statements. As such, the frequency does not reflect the sentiment (positive or negative) associated with a particular concept, but rather its prominence or contestation within the discourse. High-frequency concepts thus represent discursive battlegrounds where political actors and organisations most actively engage.

Categorising claims by concept allows for a clearer understanding of how NU interests are constructed by various actors, including politicians, PBNU officials, academics, and polling institutions. For example, NU is constructed as a group susceptible to manipulation, as an institution in need of reform,

as a supporter of President Jokowi, or as aligned with other political figures. More specifically, many actors also claim that the preferences of *kiai*—such as their support for particular candidates—constitute part of NU's collective interest. Even claims about the values and interests of the late Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus⁴ Dur) remains a contested symbolic resource, with ongoing disputes about whether Gus Dur endorsed Imin, or whether Imin represents his political and moral ideals.

One of the most debated and symbolically charged concepts is the claim that 'Only Imin is NU'. This claim contests the struggle over who most authentically embodies the NU identity. Such phenomenon reflects a core dynamic in the process of making representative claims.

4 "Gus" is a term of endearment and respect, commonly used in pesantren and traditional Javanese communities to refer to the son of a *kiai* or a respected figure.



As Hatherell (2021) argues, political actors frequently formulate representative claims through narratives that resonate with audiences, since narrative is a central means through which individuals interpret and make sense of the political world.

Behind the contestation over who hold the most legitimate claim to be recognised as an “NU person” lies an important social and historical context. Imin is the great-grandson of KH Bisri Syansuri, one of the NU’s founder, and the nephew of Gus Dur. Despite the complex political dynamics between them, their familial relationship remains close. Within Nahdliyyin discourse, this “blue blood” lineage commands significant respect. Although this discourse did not always occupy a central position in NU’s identity politics, it began to gain prominence following the NU Congress in Situbondo during the 1980s. At

that time, Gus Dur’s symbolic authority was consolidated, particularly in representing the Asy’arian strand within NU’s political landscape (Ali, 2004). To this day, the Asy’arian or *muassis* (founder) lineage continues to be revered and strategically employed to garner legitimacy and support, as demonstrated by Imin and his supporters within PKB.

The discourse network map in Figure 2 further illustrates the partiality of certain academics and polling institutions, whose claims are often treated as objective facts. For example, Politika Research Consulting stated that NU constituents support AMIN, while Indonesia Political Opinion asserted that PKB hold substantial influence within NU’s voter base. In contrast, Poltracking challenged this view, contending that PKB does not dominate electoral support in East Java. Other

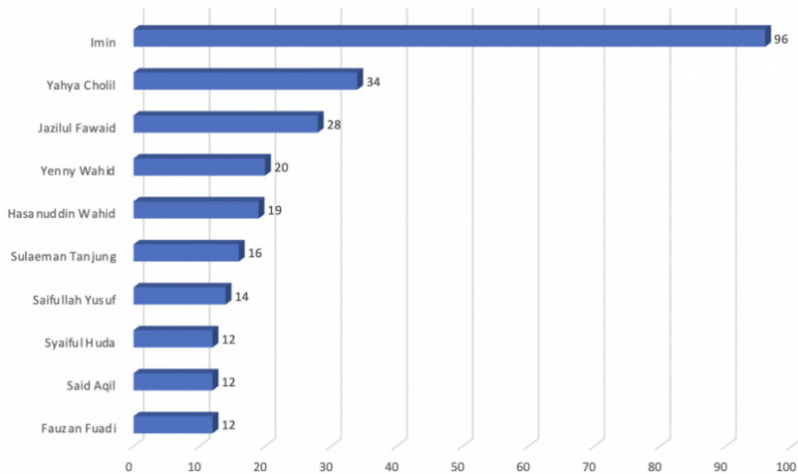


institutions, such as Indikator and LSI, similarly argued that NU constituent are not solidly aligned with AMIN, and that their votes are likely to fragment in the 2024 presidential election.

Academics have also offered different claims. Ahmad Sahidah, a lecturer at Nurul Jadid University, claimed that Imin successfully secured NU support after joining the Coalition of Change. Conversely, Khoirul Umam from Indostrategic argued that Imin actually failed to boost AMIN's electability among NU constituent. Meanwhile, Sufyan Abdurrahman from Telkom University rejected the notion that NU vsupport for AMIN would be consolidated.

From the total of 95 individuals identified as claim-makers, the author highlights the ten most prominent actors based on their frequency of appearances, as illustrated in Figure 4. Imin emerges as the most prolific, with 96 claim statements. Yahya Cholil follows as the second most active actor, with 34 claims—positioned in direct opposition to Imin. Jazilul Fawaid, a PKB politician, ranks third with 28 claims. Other key figures include Yenny Wahid, Hasanuddin Wahid, Sulaeman Tanjung, Saifullah Yusuf, Syaiful Huda, Said Aqil, and Fauzan Fuadi, each contributing fewer than 16 claims.

Figure 4. Top Actors 2023-2024



Source: author's data

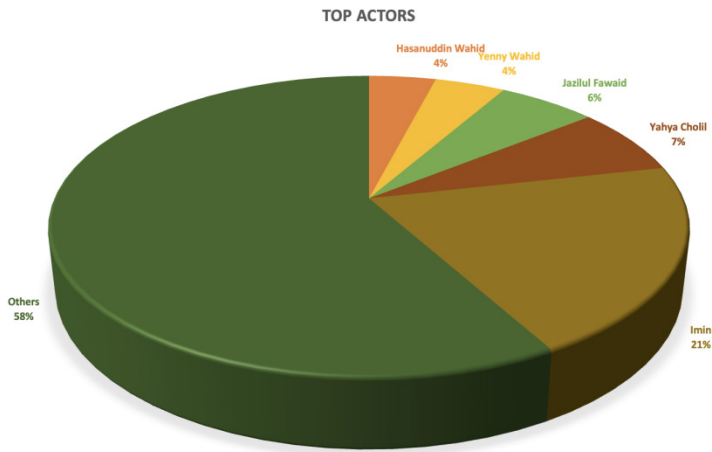
This diagram not only shows that the dynamic nature of the contestation over this claim—evident from the closely matched number of pro and contra statements—but also highlights the overwhelming dominance of a single actor in shaping the discourse. This dominance is most clearly depicted in Figure 5, which reveals that Imin accounts for 21% of the total number of claims.

This proportion—nearly one-quarter of all claims—underscores Imin's significant role in driving the narrative on representation. In stark contrast, the other top five actors do not come close to this level of influence. Yahya Cholil, for example, who ranks second in terms of claim production, is responsible for only 7% of the total claims.

Furthermore, Jazilul Fawaid, Yenny Wahid, and Hasanuddin Wahid contribute merely 6%, 4%, and 4% respectively.

within the context of each organisation's interests and institutional background. PKB, as the organisation most actively

Figure 5. Actor Dominance



Source: author's data

In addition to grouping individual actors, the author also categorised them according to the organisations they represent, as illustrated in Figure 6. This organisational grouping serves to streamline the data and to better interpret the dynamics

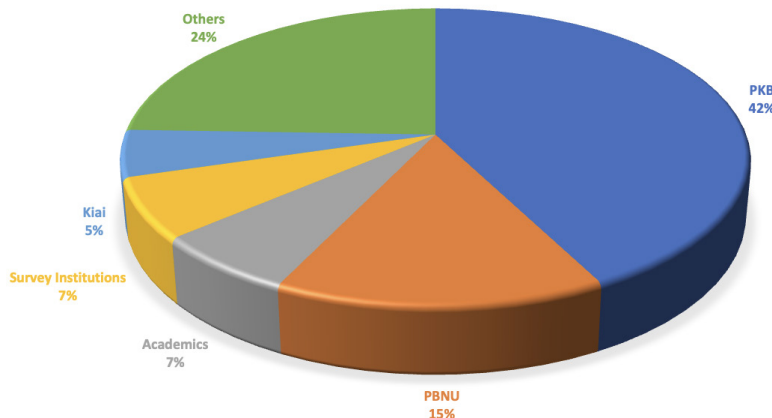
engaged in the production of the representative claims analysed in this study, accounted for the largest share, contributing 199 claims—equivalent to approximately 42% of the total. In second place is the PBNU, which issued a substantial

number of counter-claims in response to PKB's assertions, producing a total of 70 claims or about 15% of the overall dataset. Academics and polling institutions, which presented a range of perspectives regarding PKB's claim to represent NU, each contributed 7% of the total claims. Meanwhile, *kiai* and *pesantren*⁵ institutions were responsible for 5% of the

total claims. The remaining claims came from various other organisations, including political parties such as Functional Group Party (Golongan Karya), PDIP, United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan/PPP), Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), National Democratic Party (Partai Nasional Demokrat/ NasDem), Democratic Party (Demokrat), as well as campaign teams (Team 02 and Team 03), foreign media outlets, and various other entities.

⁵ Traditional Islamic boarding schools led by *kiai*, serving as religious and socio-cultural institutions within NU communities.

Figure 6. Top Organisations and their Dominance





PKB produced a substantial proportion of the representative claims related to NU, accounting for 42% or 199 claims. Imin, as Chairman of PKB, also emerged as the most prolific individual actor, responsible for 96 claims, equivalent to 21% of the total. However, consistent with Hatherell's (2021) hypothesis, PKB's capacity as a political party in Indonesia to issue representative claims that secure legitimacy from a broad constituency within Indonesian society remains limited. This limitation opens up an empty space in representation that can be utilised by CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In this study, this space has been partially occupied by PBNU, which contributed 70 claims, or 15% of the total. Its Chairman, Yahya Cholil Staquf, ranks second only to Imin in the number of claims produced.

By applying the theoretical framework of representative claims in the Indonesian political context, this study enables a comparative analysis of the representative claims employed by parliamentary (PKB) and extra-parliamentary (PBNU) actors. Both actors actively compete to assert political claims on behalf of NU, wherein their discourses not only interact but also contend with one another, as outlined by Hatherell (2021).

Beyond mapping the discourse network and actors, the author further analyses the individual statements and classifies them within structured tables. The analysis focuses particularly on two central figures in the contestation over NU representation: Muhaimin Iskandar as Chairman of PKB and Yahya Cholil Staquf as Chairman of PBNU. Each statement is evaluated using Saward's (2010) framework of representative



claims, which identifies four key elements: M (the claim-maker), S (the subject considered representative), O (the intended constituency), and R (framing of the nature or interests associated with O).

Furthermore, the classification of claim types follows the typology proposed

by Guasti & Geissel's (2019), which analyses the relationship between S and O in order to determine the legitimacy of M's justification. Based on this assessment, claims can be categorised as representations, misrepresentations, interest/value claims, or simple proclamations.

A. Muhaimin Iskandar/Imin

Table 2: Elements and Forms of Muhaimin Iskandar/Imin Claims

No.	Statement	M	S	O	R	Linkage	Form of Claim
Imin - Kiai support AMIN							
1	But the majority of NU <i>ulama</i> and <i>kiai</i> have always been consistent in supporting PKB, this is what is called the heir to the history of NU's struggle.	Imin	-	NU clerics	support AMIN	ideological similarity (linkage to Imin/PKB implicitly)	representation claim
2	Alhamdulillah, in a short time I got a complete answer from the <i>ulama</i> , all <i>istikharah</i> , all ideas, and all of them approved the pairing of Mas Anies and me.	Imin	-	scholars	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims



3	Chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB) Muhaimin Iskandar alias Cak Imin claimed to have received support from NU <i>ulama</i> and young figures in East Java.	Imin	-	clerics and young leaders of NU East Java	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims
4	I was ordered by the <i>kiai</i> at the PKB Congress in Bali in 2019, Muhaimin Iskandar Ketum PKB 2024 must run as a presidential or vice-presidential candidate.	Imin	-	Kiai	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims
Imin - PKB represents NU							
1	Historically, NU and PKB have shared similar modest economic backgrounds.	Imin	PKB, mediocre	NU	PKB is the party	common background	representation claim
2	I, PKB, and my friends are like water from the source of the political struggle of <i>Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah</i> . Water from the source of the Nahdlatul Ulama mountain.	Imin	PKB, heir to the political struggle	NU	-	the similarity of the ideology of the struggle of <i>ahlussunah wal jamaah</i>	representation claim
Imin - NU support AMIN							
1	I'm sure that ordinary NU-minded people, not the elites--will vote for AMIN. People who truly live by NU's values will stay loyal to AMIN.	Imin	-	NU citizens	support AMIN	-	value/interest claims
2	It's just a matter of taking care of proving that PKB voters are steadfast, that the grassroots choose cadres, that NU chooses NU, that NU chooses NU who chooses NU activists, or that East Javanese choose East Javanese.	Imin	NU, East Java	NU members, East Java	support AMIN	both NU and East Javanese	representation claim

Source: analysis by the author



Muhaimin Iskandar, commonly known as Imin, is the Chairman of PKB and a vice-presidential candidate in the 2024 presidential election. He is the most prolific claim-maker in this study, with some of the most frequently invoked concepts in his statements, namely: '*Kiai* support AMIN,' 'PKB represents NU,' and 'NU support Imin.' Table 5 shows how Imin constructs the narrative that both he and PKB represent NU, while also aligning NU's interests with his own political objectives.

In the discourse surrounding '*Kiai* support AMIN,' Imin predominantly puts forward interest or value claims. These involve asserting the preferences or orientations of a constituency—in this case, various *kiai*, including NU-affiliated *kiai*, *ulama*, *habaib*, leaders of Muslimat NU, and young NU figures in East Java—without necessarily positioning himself

as their direct representative. The main interest he attributes to this group is their support for the AMIN ticket.

Nonetheless, Imin also makes explicit representational claims. For instance, in referencing '*ahlussunnah wal jamaah*', he not only appeals to shared ideological roots but also asserts that the majority of *ulama* will continue to support AMIN due to the alignment between their theological stance and the political movement he embodies. This marks a shift from merely articulating values to positioning himself as a representative of those values.

In the discourse 'PKB represents NU,' the claim takes the form of a more direct representative. Imin consistently constructs a narrative of connectedness between PKB and NU, drawing on shared economic, ideological, values, and teachings. He frequently

refers to PKB as the “*heir*” to NU’s legacy, a rhetorical device intended to legitimise both the party’s alignment with Anies Baswedan’s presidential campaign and his own claim to represent NU.

Finally, in the discourse ‘NU support AMIN,’ Imin attempts to convince the audience that NU-affiliated voters will inevitably support him in the 2024 presidential election. These statements are

predominantly value/interest claims, as they do not explicitly frame him as the subject of representation. However, one notable representative claim emerges when Imin invokes regional and cultural affinity—suggesting that NU members should vote for fellow NU members, and that East Javanese citizens should support candidates from their own region.

Table 3. Elements and Forms of Yahya Cholil/Yahya’s Claims

No.	Statement	M	S	O	R	Linkage	Form of Claim
Yahya - Kiai support AMIN							
1	If there is a claim that the PBNU <i>kiai</i> approves, it is absolutely not true because there is absolutely no discussion in PBNU about candidates, there has never been any discussion in PBNU about presidential candidates.	Yahya	-	PBNU	neutral	rejecting claims of interest	Misrepresentation
2	There is no (vice-presidential candidate) on behalf of NU. If there is a claim that PBNU <i>kiai</i> approve, it is absolutely not true.	Yahya	-	PBNU	neutral	reject claims of interest	Misrepresentation



Yahya - PKB represents NU							
1	Gus Yahya then said that the relationship between PBNU and PKB is really not close, just like with other political parties. Indeed, it is not close, just like the PBNU's relationship with other parties, because we consider all of these to be the same.	Yahya	-	PBNU	not related to PKB	reject claims of interest	Misrepresentation
2	Political parties are welcome to fight for the people's trust. But, I repeat once again, there are no candidates on behalf of NU.	Yahya	-	NU	there is no candidate who represents it	rejects PKB's claim of representation (implicit)	Misrepresentation
3	Yahya has often said that PKB is not a political party that represents PBNU.	Yahya	-	PBNU	not related to PKB	reject claims of interest	Misrepresentation
Yahya - NU supports AMIN							
1	There is no presidential candidate endorsed by PBNU, especially if there are individuals who act on behalf of NU and carry the name of NU for political purposes.	Yahya	-	PBNU	there is no candidate who represents it	rejects AMIN's claim of representation (implicit)	Misrepresentation

Source: analysis by the author



Yahya Cholil, as Chairman of PBNU, leads the organisation at the heart of NU community. Despite his formal leadership position, in accordance with Saward's (2010) theory of fluid representation, both Yahya and PBNU continue to issue representative claims to secure legitimacy as the true representatives of all NU constituent. As shown in the previously discussed network map, Yahya is actively involved in shaping claims across three main concepts: 'Kiai support AMIN,' 'PKB represents NU,' and 'AMIN represents NU.'

The majority of Yahya's statements take the form of misrepresentation or anti-claims, —claims that directly challenge or reject the assertions made by Imin and other actors affiliated with PKB. Yahya consistently maintains that PBNU, NU, and the broader community of NU *kiai* do not endorse the AMIN

presidential ticket and reject PKB's self-positioning as NU's political representative. He explicitly affirms that there is no formal political alignment between NU and PKB, and that no political party has the official mandate to represent NU.

Notably, Yahya does not go into great detail when articulating the specific values or interests of NU or PBNU. This may reflect the already strong legitimacy of his position (Saward, 2010), as he heads the PBNU—an institution widely accepted as NU's official representative body. His leadership was established through a democratic process in the Mukhtar NU and is broadly recognised within the NU community. In contrast, while PKB has historically maintained close ties with NU, it currently lacks a formal institutional mandate affirming its political representativeness of NU.



Table 4. Elements and Forms of the Claim 'Kiai support AMIN'

No.	Statement	M	S	O	R	Linkage	Form of Claim
PKB - Kiai support AMIN							
1	<i>Kiai</i> will offer prayers to anyone who comes to them. But deep down, <i>Inshaallah</i> their hearts remain with PKB and Cak Imin.	Daniel Johan	PKB and Cak Imin	<i>kiai</i>	support AMIN	heart and historical proximity	Value/ interest claims
2	I am sure, I am sure (<i>ulama</i> support AMIN). Gus Muhaimin is not a vice-president who comes to the <i>kiai</i> when he wants to run for president. If the others, as far as I know, only come to the <i>kiai</i> when they want to be president or vice-president. Gus Muhaimin has no interest, visiting is something that is mandatory.	Hasanuddin Wahid	AMIN	scholars	support AMIN	Imin's closeness to <i>kiai</i>	Value/ interest claims
3	Many <i>kiai</i> , Islamic boarding schools, <i>masyayikh</i> , <i>gus</i> fully back up Gus Imin, yes. And that's natural because Gus Imin is the grandson of the founder of NU.	Syaiful Huda	Imin, grandson of NU founder	<i>kiai</i> , <i>pesantren</i> , <i>masyayikh</i>	support AMIN	primordial similarity (implicit)	Value/ interest claims
PBNU - Kiai support AMIN							
1	Gus Muhaimin has no strategy or recipe to embrace NU residents, even the <i>ulama</i> who used to support him are now slowly changing.	Saifullah Yusuf	Gus Muhaimin, there is no strategy	<i>ulama</i>	not supporting AMIN	rejects PKB's claim of representation (implicit)	Misrepresentation Claim



2	The majority of the <i>ulama</i> are inclined to vote for Mr Prabowo. I get a lot of calls from <i>kiai</i> from villages ... they are interested in fighting to win Prabowo.	Saifullah Yusuf	-	village <i>kiai</i>	support Prabowo	-	Value/ interest claims
Others - Kiai support AMIN							
1	<i>Inshallah</i> , there is no doubt that Mr Anies Baswedan, who is behind Gus Imin, is the commander of the <i>santri</i> , who is nicknamed by the community, not institutionally, but the community, called <i>kiai</i> and <i>habaib</i> , gives such a title.	Mujib Imron (<i>kiai</i>)	Imin, <i>santri</i> commander	<i>kiai</i> and <i>habaib</i>	support AMIN	back-ground similarity (implicit)	Representation claim
2	Moreover, Anies has also travelled to Islamic boarding schools and <i>sowan</i> to <i>kiai</i> throughout East Java and was well received.	Ambang Priyonggo (Academician)	-	<i>kiai</i> throughout East Java	received Anies	-	Value/ interest claims
3	Many <i>kiai</i> and <i>gus</i> will remain with Mr Prabowo. I have checked with the base, <i>Inshallah</i> Mr Prabowo is increasingly becoming the top choice of the people of East Java.	Sarmuji (Golkar)	-	<i>kiai</i> , <i>gus</i> , East Java community	support Prabowo	-	Value/ interest claims
4	According to him, Ganjar is a well-known religious figure and has a good relationship with Nahdliyyin. Therefore, he thinks the <i>kiai</i> will accept Ganjar.	Deddy Sitorus (PDIP)	Ganjar, religious	<i>kiai</i>	support Ganjar	good relationship with Nahdliyyin	Representation claim

Source: analysis by the author



The analysis of the table generally shows how actors from different organisations compete in constructing claims about the interests of *kiai* to the public. From PKB, several prominent actors such as Daniel Johan (Chair of the Natural Resources and Energy Division, Central Executive Board of PKB), Halim Iskandar (Minister for Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions, brother of Muhaimin Iskandar), Fauzan Fuadi (Chair of the PKB faction in the East Java), Hasanuddin Wahid (Secretary General of PKB), and Syaiful Huda (Chair of Commission X). They make various claims linking *kiai*, *ulama*, *pesantren*, and *masyayikh* to support for the AMIN presidential ticket. The ways in which they frame the relationship between AMIN and the *kiai* differ. Some emphasise historical ties between Imin, PKB, and NU, while others rely

on primordial connections, such as Imin's lineage as the grandson of NU's founder. Others still draw on personal traditions such as *sowan*—visiting *kiai*—as part of his political conduct.

From PBNU, only Saifullah Yusuf (PBNU Secretary General) emerges as a prominent actor making claims. Interestingly, his assertions diverge from those of PBNU Chairman Yahya Cholil. While Yahya consistently refutes PKB and AMIN's claims to NU and *kiai* representation, Saifullah Yusuf explicitly claims that the *kiai* support Prabowo. For example, he states that most *ulama* tend to favour Prabowo, even if they have not had direct contact with the candidate or his campaign team. This claim, coming from PBNU's Secretary General, contradicts PBNU's official position of neutrality, often asserted by its Chairman.



Beyond PKB and PBNU, actors from a wider range of organisations also engage in constructing constituent interests. These actors include politicians from Gerindra, Golkar, PDIP, Team 03, AMIN's team (Team 01) and various others, including academics and *kiai* not affiliated with the main political or religious institutions. While some *kiai* act as claim-makers, the object of their claims is often other *kiai* or *habaib*, demonstrating that *kiai* themselves are both subjects and producers of representative claims. Academics and polling institutions, while not overtly partisan, also express support or opposition through the framing of their claims.

Constituencies invoked in these claims vary, including *kiai*, *ulama*, *gus*, *pondok*, and *habaib* from specific regions such as Yogyakarta, Jombang, and East Java. The types of claims

range from value or interest claims to misrepresentation or delegitimising PKB/AMIN claims. For example, Nusron Wahid (Golkar politician) claims that *kiai* do not support AMIN; Budi Sulistyo (PDIP politician) claims that *kiai* should not be politicised; Muhammad Fawaaid (Gerindra politician), Prabowo (Gerindra politician), Yenny Wahid (Gus Dur's daughter), and Sarmuji (Golkar politician) claim that *kiai* support Prabowo; Deddy Sitorus (PDIP politician) claims that *kiai* supports Ganjar; while Mustafied (AMIN's team), Ambang Priyonggo (academic), and Mujib Imron (*kiai*) claim that many *kiai* and *pondok* support AMIN. These diverse and conflicting claims illustrate the intense contestation over NU and *kiai* representation during the 2024 campaign.



Conclusion

This study reveals the intense contestation of representation between parliamentary institutions (political parties) and extra-parliamentary actors (CSOs, media, and religious leaders) in the context of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. By employing discourse network mapping and content analysis of representative claims, several conclusions can be drawn:

First, the response to PKB's representational claims over NU is highly varied and cannot be neatly categorised as wholly accepted or rejected. Each claim is met with differing degrees of endorsement and opposition. This complexity suggests a need to expand the theory of representative claims—particularly Guasti & Geissel's (2019) model—to better account for plural constituencies. The assumption that constituents

represent a unified body capable of either accepting or rejecting a claim fails in contexts like NU, where legitimacy emerges from a spectrum of reactions across a diverse base.

Second, the contestation of claims is enacted through the construction of NU's interests, self-image, counter image, and even the image of other figures. Most claims centre on *kiai* as a key political constituency capable of mobilising electoral support. These actors are not mere objects of political discourse but also active agents who make claims about others. Thus, *kiai* appear simultaneously as audience, object, and producer in the network of representative claims.

Third, representation cannot be secured solely through formal mechanisms such as party elections and congresses. Even when formal legitimacy



is achieved, representational authority remains open to contestation from competing actors.

Finally, the discourse network map reveals how certain academics and polling institutions—despite their appearance of neutrality—play a partisan role through the strategic framing of claims. As Saward (2010) notes, facts themselves can be constructed to support actors' interests in achieving representation.

The use of Saward's (2010) theory of representational claims, as extended by Guasti & Geissel (2019) has helped the author to map and examine the types of claims emerging in the contestation for NU representation. The findings offer an important lens for analysing how representation operates in Indonesia's religious-political context. However, the observed patterns deviate from Saward's

emphasis on the substantive correspondence between representatives and constituents. Instead of evaluating whether PKB substantively represents NU's values, this study has focused on the contestation of claims aimed at mobilising electoral support.

Accordingly, this study does not claim to assess whether NU's interests are genuinely represented by PKB or any other actor. Rather, it examines the struggle for representative claims during a political campaign period without showing the discourse battles that may occur during the policy-making process, which should be more able to explain how substantive representation processes take place.



References

- Abror, A. (2019). Representasi Politik Tokoh Muhammadiyah dan Nahdatul Ulama dalam Pemilihan Umum Legislatif di Kota Bandar Lampung Tahun 2019. *Jurnal Analisis Sosial Politik*, 4(1) 36-41.
- Aditya, N. R., & Setuningsih, N. (2023). Konflik Yaqut Vs PKB, Berawal dari Imbauan Pilih Pemimpin Berujung Ancaman Disiplin. *Kompas.com*. Retrieved from <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/10/04/09260481/konflik-yaqut-vs-pkb-berawal-dari-imbauan-pilih-pemimpin-berujung-ancaman?page=all>
- Adryamarthanino, V. (2022). Sejarah Berdirinya Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB). *Kompas.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2022/01/19/130000979/sejarah-berdirinya-partai-kebangkitan-bangsa-pkb?page=all>
- Ali, F. (2004). Merosotnya Politik Simbolik Nahdliyyin. In M. Aminudin (eds.), *Menyingkap Kemelut PKB: Kontroversi Reposisi Saifullah Yusuf* (pp. 19–22). Jakarta, Indonesia: Pustaka Sinar Harapan.
- Arifin, M. (2024). Sekjen PBNU: Jangan Pilih Calon yang Didukung Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. *Detik.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.detik.com/jatim/berita/d-7145046/sekjen-pbnu-jangan-pilih-calon-yang-didukung-abu-bakar-baasyir>
- Azmi, F. (2024). Peta Suara Nahdliyin di Jatim, Benarkah Klaim Wasekjen PBNU Condong ke 02? *Detik.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.detik.com/jatim/berita/d-7133681/peta-suara-nahdliyin-di-jatim-benarkah-klaim-wasekjen-pbnu-condong-ke-02>



- Burhani, A. N. (2019). Lessons from Madura: NU, Conservatism and the 2019 Presidential Election. *ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/201972-lessons-from-madura-nu-conservatism-and-the-2019-presidential-election-by-ahmad-najib-burhani/>
- Chalik, A.I (2010). Religion and Local Politics: Exploring the Subcultures and the Political Participation of East Java NU Elites in the Post-New Order Era. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 4 (1), 109-150.
- Ernes, Y. (2024). Prabowo-Gibran Unggul di Jatim Versi Indikator, Gus Ipul Bicara 2 Faktor. *detikNews*. Retrieved from <https://news.detik.com/pemilu/d-7172002/prabowo-gibran-unggul-di-jatim-versi-indikator-gus-ipul-bicara-2-faktor>
- Guasti, P., & Geissel, B. (2019). Rethinking Representation: Representative Claims in Global Perspective. *Politics and Governance*, 7(3), 93-97. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2464>
- Hatherell, M. (2021). Elected and Non-elected Representative Claim-Makers in Indonesia. In Vandenberg, A., Zuryani, N. (eds.), *Security, Democracy, and Society in Bali: Trouble with Protection*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan
- Ignazi, P. (2021). The Failure of Mainstream Parties and the Impact of New Challenger Parties in France, Italy, and Spain. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 51(1), 100–116. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2020.26>



- Irawan, W. (2024). Hasil Pilpres 38 daerah di Jatim, Prabowo-Gibran raih 16.716.603 suara. *ANTARA*. Retrieved from <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4004541/hasil-pilpres-38-daerah-di-jatim-prabowo-gibran-raih-16716603-suara>
- Leifeld, P., & Haunss, S. (2012). Political Discourse Networks and the Conflict Over Software Patents in Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(3), 382-409. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02003.x>
- Leifeld, P. (2016). Discourse Network Analysis: Policy Debates as Dynamic Networks. In Jennifer Nicoll Victor, Alexander H. Montgomery, and Mark Lubell (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Networks* (pp. 301-326). Retrieved from <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ugm.ac.id/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190228217.013.25>
- Lembaga Survei Indonesia. (2023). Rilis Survei Nasional Isu-Isu Nasional dan Peta Kompetisi Pilpres.
- Nasrudin, N., & Sudiro, S. (2022). Gusdurian Islamic Social Movement: Political Discourse, Resource Mobilization, and Framing. *International Journal of Social Science and Religion (IJSSR)*, 3 (3), 251-276. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v3i3.93>
- Ni'am, S., & Asril, S. (2024). Anggap PBNU Tak Lagi Netral, Gus Nadir Ungkap Mobilisasi Dukungan untuk Prabowo-Gibran. *Kompas.com*. Retrieved from <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/01/22/15384201/anggap-pbnu-tak-lagi-netral-gus-nadir-ungkap-mobilisasi-dukungan-untuk>

- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., & Robertson, C. T. (2023). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. Retrieved from https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf
- Pangaribowo, W. S. (2024). Ketum PBNU Gus Yahya Tegaskan NU Tetap Netral Meniru Sikap Sri Sultan HB X. *Kompas.com*. Retrieved from <https://yogyakarta.kompas.com/read/2024/01/29/101223578/ketum-pbnu-gus-yahya-tegaskan-nu-tetap-netral-meniru-sikap-sri-sultan-hb>
- Rohman, A. Z. F. (2018). Kristalisasi Fakisonalisme PKB dan PKNU Pasca Pemilihan Presiden 2004. *Jurnal Transformative*, 1(1), 21-33.
- Saward, M. (2010). The Representative Claim. *Oxford University Press*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199579389.001.0001>
- Triono, A. L. (2023b). Survei SMRC: 40 Juta Anggota NU Jadi Pemilih di Pilpres 2024. *NU Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/survei-smrc-40-juta-anggota-nu-jadi-pemilih-di-pilpres-2024-uqHiN>
- Triono, A. L. (2023a). Alvara: Suara Warga NU Jadi Penentu di Pilpres 2024. *NU Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/alvara-suara-warga-nu-jadi-penentu-di-pilpres-2024-JnJsy>
- Ulzikri, A. R. (2019). *Politik Nahdlatul Ulama Dalam Pemilihan Presiden Dan Wakil Presiden 2019: Studi Pada Warga Nahdlatul Ulama Kota Bandar Lampung* [Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Lampung]. Retrieved from <http://digilib.unila.ac.id/59166/>