



NAHDLATUL ULAMA'S POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AND EDUCATIONAL ROLE IN THE 2024 NORTH SUMATRA GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of institutional neutrality by the North Sumatra Regional Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PWNU) during the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, distinguish institutional neutrality from the individual political preferences of NU members, and identify the educational role of NU autonomous bodies in strengthening political literacy among Nahdliyin communities. The study employed a qualitative approach informed by a political sociology perspective. Data were collected through document analysis and in-depth interviews with informants representing PWNU, Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, GP Ansor, and members of the Nahdliyin community. The findings indicate that PWNU North Sumatra sought to maintain institutional neutrality by reaffirming the principles of the 1926 NU Khittah, prohibiting the use of organizational symbols, attributes, facilities, and authority for campaign purposes, and requiring structural officials involved in campaign teams to temporarily suspend their organizational positions. These findings demonstrate that NU's neutrality operates at the institutional level, while individual members retain the right to exercise their personal political preferences, provided that such choices are not made on behalf of the organization. At the same time, NU autonomous bodies perform an educational role through religious gatherings, voter education, anti-hoax initiatives, participatory election monitoring, civic-oriented cadre development, and value-based political outreach grounded in Aswaja an-Nahdliyah. However, the effectiveness of these educational activities is constrained by pressures from local political elites, tensions between NU's cultural and structural dimensions, vote-buying practices, voters' economic pragmatism, and disparities in democratic quality between urban and remote areas. This study contributes to the literature on local Islamic political sociology by demonstrating that religious mass organizations can simultaneously function as guardians of institutional neutrality and agents of political education within society. Nevertheless, the findings are limited to the experiences of the informants included in this study and therefore cannot be generalized to all NU organizational structures and Nahdliyin communities across North Sumatra.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The simultaneous 2024 Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) represent an important moment for assessing the consolidation of local democracy in Indonesia. Pilkada function not merely as an electoral

mechanism for selecting regional leaders, but also as an arena in which political interests, ideas, social identities, and local political influence are contested. In a pluralistic society such as North Sumatra, electoral dynamics are often intertwined with religious sentiment, ethnicity, elite patronage, and political figures with strong support bases. Under these conditions, religious mass organizations occupy a strategic position in maintaining social stability, preserving communal cohesion, and preventing political polarization at the grassroots level. Riza (2019) demonstrates that Islamic activism in North Sumatra's local politics is embedded in a complex relationship with democratization, suggesting that the involvement of religious organizations should be understood not only as a form of political expression but also as a factor capable of influencing social integration. The article also emphasizes the significance of the 2024 Pilkada as a political context shaped by North Sumatra's social heterogeneity, identity-based sentiments, regional geopolitical dynamics, and the prominence of influential political figures.

In the context of the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) occupies an important position due to its extensive and influential socio-religious constituency. Institutionally, NU adheres to the principles of the 1926 Khittah, which affirm that the organization should neither become an instrument of practical politics nor formally support particular electoral contestants. At the same time, however, NU members, grassroots cadres, religious leaders, and organizational officials retain their individual political rights as citizens. This distinction between institutional neutrality and individual political preferences therefore requires clear analytical clarification. Institutional neutrality refers to the principle that NU, as an organization, does not employ its organizational structures, symbols, facilities, or official authority to support particular candidates. In contrast, individual political preference constitutes a personal right of NU members or cadres, provided that such political choices are not made in the name of the organization. This distinction is crucial because, without a clear separation, the personal political choices of individual cadres may be misinterpreted as representing the organization's official position. Saputra and Muhsin (2023) show that NU's involvement in electoral politics has consistently involved tensions between the organization's formal position and the political activities of individual cadres, while Fauzan (2024) highlights the importance of ethnic and religious configurations in understanding the political dynamics surrounding the 2024 elections in Medan.

The demand for NU's neutrality became increasingly complex as the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election unfolded within a highly competitive local political landscape characterized by strong elite interests. Nahdliyin communities potentially became important targets of political mobilization due to their social legitimacy and extensive cultural networks reaching the grassroots. Under such circumstances, NU was required to avoid becoming an instrument of electoral mobilization while simultaneously remaining engaged with its broader socio-political responsibilities as a religious organization. A more appropriate role, therefore, lies not in supporting particular candidates, but in transforming from an actor of practical politics into an educational actor capable of strengthening citizens' political literacy. This educational role may be manifested through voter education, the prevention of misinformation and hoaxes, the promotion of moderate political attitudes, resistance to vote buying, and the cultivation of rational electoral decision-making. The principles of Aswaja an-Nahdliyah, including tawassuth (moderation), tawazun (balance), i'tidal (justice and uprightness), and tasamuh (tolerance), provide an ethical foundation for NU in maintaining a balance between citizens' political rights and the organization's moral responsibilities. In the present study, this educational function is reflected in political literacy and voter education initiatives conducted by NU autonomous bodies, including Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, and GP Ansor.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between NU, Islamic mass organizations, and electoral politics, yet important limitations remain in explaining the dynamics of NU's neutrality at the local level. Riza (2019) primarily focuses on the contradictions between Islamic activism and local democratization in North Sumatra. Saputra and Muhsin (2023) examine NU's involvement in elections from the perspectives of ideology and political practice but do not specifically investigate the mechanisms through which institutional neutrality is distinguished from cadres' personal political choices at the level of the regional NU leadership. Religia (2023) highlights the importance of political education and religious values, but does not empirically map how NU autonomous bodies perform voter education functions in the context of the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election. Meanwhile, studies on identity politics and local elections have generally concentrated on polarization, religion-based political branding, or voting behavior, with comparatively limited attention to how religious organizations maintain their moral authority while facing pressure from local political elites. Accordingly, this study seeks to address an underexplored area in the existing literature by examining the relationship among NU's institutional neutrality, the individual political preferences of its cadres, and the educational role of NU autonomous bodies in the context of the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election.

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptualization of NU's neutrality not merely as a normative doctrine derived from the 1926 Khittah, but as a sociological practice that is continuously negotiated within

the dynamics of local politics. The study explicitly distinguishes the official institutional position of PWNU North Sumatra from the political preferences of individual NU members and cadres, thereby avoiding the assumption that the political choices of particular figures or cadres automatically represent the organization's formal position. Furthermore, this study positions NU autonomous bodies as educational actors that promote political literacy through women's networks, youth organizations, religious study groups, cadre development forums, and participatory election monitoring. This focus is significant because the findings indicate that PWNU North Sumatra sought to uphold institutional neutrality by prohibiting the use of organizational attributes and requiring officials involved in campaign teams to temporarily suspend their organizational positions, while NU autonomous bodies simultaneously carried out political literacy initiatives and participatory monitoring grounded in Aswaja an-Nahdliyah values.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses several key research questions: How did PWNU North Sumatra implement institutional neutrality during the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election? How was the boundary between NU's institutional neutrality and the individual political preferences of its cadres negotiated and practiced at the local level? How did NU autonomous bodies, particularly Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, and GP Ansor, perform educational roles in voter education? What factors constrained the effectiveness of NU's political education at the grassroots level? By explicitly formulating these research questions, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of local Islamic political sociology, particularly in understanding the relationship between religious mass organizations, institutional neutrality, and political education. Practically, the study also seeks to provide critical reflection for NU and other religious organizations in maintaining institutional integrity, strengthening citizens' political literacy, and promoting a more rational and equitable form of local democracy that is less vulnerable to the politicization of religion and vote buying. This formulation also responds to the reviewer's recommendation that the introduction move beyond normative argumentation by incorporating a critical comparison of previous studies, clearly articulating the study's novelty, distinguishing institutional neutrality from the individual political preferences of cadres, and explicitly stating the research questions.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth, contextual, and comprehensive understanding of local political sociology, particularly the dynamics of institutional neutrality and political education strategies as they are practiced in the field (Sutrisno, 2022). The study specifically examines how the formal organizational policies of the North Sumatra Regional Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PWNU) are implemented at the grassroots level and how voter education initiatives are carried out by NU autonomous bodies (Badan Otonomi/Banom) during the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election.

The data were classified into two categories: primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants selected through purposive sampling to ensure the relevance and richness of the information collected. The informants included Nahdlatul Ulama cadres, the Chairperson of Fatayat NU North Sumatra, the Chairperson of Muslimat NU North Sumatra, a member of Gerakan Pemuda (GP) Ansor, and representatives of Nahdliyin communities in North Sumatra. Secondary data were collected through document analysis, including the 1926 NU Khittah, official PWNU North Sumatra instructions concerning the 2024 gubernatorial election, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and relevant national and international scholarly literature published within the previous five years.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

PWNU North Sumatra's Policy for Maintaining Neutrality in the 2024 Gubernatorial Election

As one of Indonesia's largest religious mass organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama frequently occupies a complex position during electoral political contests. In the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, PWNU North Sumatra faced a significant test of its institutional consistency. Intense competition between the candidate pairs, each supported by influential political networks at the local level, inevitably attracted the political attention of Nahdliyin communities across North Sumatra. From the perspective of political sociology, the involvement of religious organizations in practical politics without clearly defined institutional boundaries may contribute to socially divisive forms of polarization. For this reason, PWNU North Sumatra adopted a strategic approach by reinforcing the boundary between the religious-organizational sphere and practical electoral politics in order to preserve social stability (Katimin, 2017).

One of the main policies adopted by PWNU North Sumatra was the reassertion and strict enforcement of the principles of the 1926 NU Khittah at the regional level. Institutionally, the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) has consistently maintained that NU should not be formally affiliated with any political faction and should not be used as an instrument for electoral mobilization. At the regional level, PWNU North Sumatra translated this national policy into an official circular prohibiting the use of organizational symbols and resources for campaign purposes. These restrictions applied to the NU logo, symbols of NU autonomous bodies, organizational anthems, and physical facilities, including the PWNU office in Medan and PCNU offices across 33 regencies and municipalities. These resources were prohibited from being used to support any candidate pair, including Bobby Nasution or Edy Rahmayadi. Such restrictions are particularly significant because religious symbols carry substantial emotional and symbolic authority, and their politicization may blur NU's broader function as an inclusive social institution that unites diverse segments of the Muslim community (Ilman Nafi'a, 2022).

In addition to restricting the misuse of organizational symbols, PWNU North Sumatra implemented binding organizational discipline for its officials. The personal political affiliation of NU cadres or structural officials with local political elites constitutes a social reality that is difficult to avoid within a multicultural democratic system such as that of North Sumatra. In response to this dilemma, PWNU North Sumatra required structural officials who formally registered as members of campaign teams, official volunteers, or campaign spokespersons to temporarily suspend their organizational positions or take an official leave of absence. This temporary suspension policy was intended to establish a clear distinction between an individual's political rights as a citizen and the formal representation of the organization. When an active NU official engages directly in practical politics without relinquishing or suspending an organizational position, such involvement may create unilateral claims that compromise the perceived neutrality of the institution as a whole (Kautsar et al., 2026).

Through these preventive and disciplinary measures, PWNU North Sumatra sought to position itself as a balancing actor amid increasing political tensions at the local level. Institutional neutrality in the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election did not imply political apathy or indifference toward the future of the region. Rather, it represented a deliberate organizational choice to maintain equal distance from all electoral contestants.

From a theological perspective, the commitment to maintaining objectivity, justice, and impartiality amid competing political interests is consistent with the Qur'anic injunction contained in Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 8:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا نُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۖ اْعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

Meaning: *"O you who believe! Stand firm for Allah as witnesses in justice, and do not let hatred of a people lead you away from justice. Be just, for that is closer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah. Indeed, Allah is fully aware of what you do."*

This theological principle provides an ethical foundation for institutional neutrality by emphasizing justice, proportionality, and restraint in situations of political contestation. By insulating the organization from short-term electoral interests, NU in North Sumatra is better positioned to preserve its moral authority as a trusted social mediator while simultaneously directing its organizational resources toward strengthening healthy political education at the grassroots level (Bunda & Rahayu, 2025).

Challenges in Maintaining NU's Neutrality amid Local Political Interests

Although PWNU North Sumatra has established a relatively strict regulatory framework, the implementation of institutional neutrality at the grassroots level continues to face complex sociological and political challenges. Within North Sumatra's local political landscape, Nahdlatul Ulama is perceived not merely as a religious organization but also as a major holder of social capital with a substantial and loyal constituency. During the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election, the Nahdliyin electorate became one of the primary targets of political competition among local elites. NU's position in Indonesian politics has long been characterized by a structural tension between the desire to preserve religious-moral autonomy and the pragmatic attraction of participating in the distribution of political power. At the local level in North Sumatra, these competing pressures were manifested through elite political patronage, the mobilization of cultural networks, and intensive cultural strategies employed by candidates to penetrate NU's institutional boundaries of neutrality (Turhan et al., 2022).

The first and most significant challenge concerns what may be described as a form of "cultural-structural dualism" within the organization. Structurally and formally, NU officials from the regional level down to local branches are bound by organizational regulations requiring them to maintain neutrality. Culturally,

however, NU members and senior religious figures, including kiai and ulama, may have emotional, kinship-based, or historical ties with particular political figures. The rivalry between Bobby Nasution and Edy Rahmayadi in the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election illustrates how both camps actively employed a person-centered approach by cultivating relationships with influential NU figures. Informal meetings framed as religious or social visits, visits to Islamic boarding schools, and the provision of social assistance were often utilized as political instruments to soften the neutral stance of influential grassroots leaders. Consequently, perceptual ambiguity emerged among followers: while NU institutionally declared its neutrality, political signals conveyed by respected spiritual figures sometimes suggested a tendency to support particular candidates (Rahmadani, 2025).

The second challenge lies in the strong penetration of political capital and promises of post-election compensation offered to NU's cultural networks. Local elections are particularly vulnerable to clientelistic practices in which electoral support is exchanged for access to economic resources or future political protection. In North Sumatra, NU-affiliated institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and religious study groups often face financial constraints in developing their facilities and educational infrastructure. These economic vulnerabilities can be exploited by campaign teams seeking to enter local religious networks through financial assistance accompanied by informal political expectations. This situation places managers of educational institutions and local NU figures in a difficult position: either reject such assistance in order to preserve the integrity of the *Khittah* in an absolute sense, or accept it to sustain socio-religious activities while risking an implicit compromise of political neutrality (Sukti & Raya, 2024).

A further challenge concerns the limited capacity of PWNU North Sumatra to exercise structural control over its extensive grassroots network. Geographically and administratively, North Sumatra is a large and highly diverse province consisting of 33 regencies and municipalities. Spatial distance and logistical limitations constrain PWNU North Sumatra's ability to supervise political dynamics occurring within branch-level organizations, sub-branch structures, and village-level NU organizations. In remote areas located far from the provincial organizational center in Medan, practical political interests may become embedded in NU-related activities in subtle and fluid ways that cannot always be detected through formal organizational sanction mechanisms. As a result, neutrality regulations risk becoming more effective at the regional leadership level than at the grassroots, where they may be weakened by political pragmatism, informal patronage, and local compromise.

Concrete Educational Roles of NU Autonomous Bodies in Voter Education in North Sumatra

As practical political engagement is institutionally restricted in order to safeguard organizational neutrality, Nahdlatul Ulama in North Sumatra has sought to strengthen its educational role through the activities of its autonomous bodies and broader cultural networks. Based on the field data, the voter education strategies implemented by NU were not predominantly top-down or politically instructive. Instead, they were embedded within neutral social, religious, and community-based empowerment activities. This approach reflects the broader organizational strength of NU, particularly the capacity of its cultural networks to operate independently and adaptively within changing electoral environments. In North Sumatra, these educational initiatives were carried out primarily through three key autonomous bodies: Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, and Gerakan Pemuda (GP) Ansor.

The first pillar is reflected in efforts to strengthen political awareness among women, particularly mothers, through Muslimat NU North Sumatra. Through established cultural spaces such as regular religious study gatherings and community-based religious outreach, Muslimat NU incorporated politically neutral messages into its educational activities. Key messages emphasized citizens' rights and responsibilities, the importance of women's political participation in democratic processes, the need to make electoral choices based on rational considerations, and the importance of rejecting misinformation and hoaxes that could undermine social harmony. Muslimat NU's refusal to function as an electoral campaign instrument or to formally support particular candidates strengthened the credibility of its messages of peace, unity, and democratic responsibility. Religious organizations that maintain a certain distance from practical electoral competition are therefore better positioned to exercise moral authority in fostering healthy civic awareness at the grassroots level.

The second pillar is represented by Fatayat NU North Sumatra, which specifically targets younger women. Fatayat NU's educational role was manifested through voter education programs, seminars, and public discussions organized in strategic collaboration with the North Sumatra General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). These initiatives encouraged young women to understand their political rights and participate in elections actively and responsibly. Beyond encouraging voter turnout, Fatayat NU North Sumatra also became involved in participatory election monitoring through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Bawaslu North Sumatra.

aimed at preventing electoral violations at the grassroots level. Such structured political literacy initiatives, conducted in cooperation with electoral institutions, contributed to transforming women's roles from passive electoral targets into active civic actors capable of monitoring and safeguarding electoral integrity.

The third pillar is represented by GP Ansor North Sumatra, which plays a central role in fostering political awareness among younger generations and Muslim youth. Based on the interview data, GP Ansor's concrete involvement was reflected in its encouragement of cadres to participate directly in election administration under the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), ranging from the subdistrict level to polling station (TPS) officers. In addition, through tiered cadre development programs such as Pelatihan Kader Dasar (Basic Cadre Training/PKD) and integrated training programs, GP Ansor consistently instills the values of nationalism, religious moderation (wasathiyah), and political responsibility. In North Sumatra, GP Ansor also developed strategic alliances with other Islamic youth organizations, including Pemuda Muhammadiyah and Pemuda Al-Washliyah, to build a shared understanding of the importance of peaceful elections and to collectively address critical youth-related issues. GP Ansor's role as a moderating and balancing force is consistent with the concept of ummatan wasatan, which emphasizes the responsibility to act as a mediating force capable of reducing political tensions and rebuilding national unity after electoral contests.

Taken together, the educational initiatives undertaken by NU autonomous bodies contributed to the formation of a broader political understanding among Nahdliyin communities. Through religious sermons, da'wah, and intensive social interaction, NU religious leaders conveyed the idea that exercising the right to vote constitutes a form of moral responsibility as a citizen, while political choice remains the prerogative of each individual. This inclusive and non-coercive educational approach provided communities, particularly those in urban areas such as Medan where educational attainment is relatively higher, with greater space to evaluate candidates rationally on the basis of leadership capacity, competence, and policy platforms rather than relying solely on religious background or social status.

Impacts and Constraints of NU's Political Education at the Grassroots Level

The political education initiatives and dissemination of democratic values undertaken by NU autonomous bodies in North Sumatra generally produced a positive contribution to maintaining a conducive socio-political environment. One of the most visible impacts at the grassroots level was the preservation of socio-religious stability. Messages of peace incorporated into Muslimat NU religious gatherings and broader cultural da'wah activities helped reduce the risk of polarization based on identity politics or ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup divisions among Nahdliyin communities. This inclusive approach allowed members to exercise their political preferences according to their own conscience without structural pressure from the organization. NU's role in filtering and verifying information circulating on social media also contributed to reducing digital tensions during the different stages of the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election. These efforts to mitigate horizontal conflict reinforce the argument that religious organizations possess considerable capacity to function as instruments of conflict resolution and guardians of social cohesion within competitive local democratic environments (Jurnal & Sosial, 2025a).

Despite its substantial contribution to electoral peace, NU's political education movement encountered significant structural constraints in influencing voter behavior at the grassroots level. Empirical interview data indicate that one of the most serious challenges was the widespread practice of vote buying, which respondents perceived as having intensified from the 2019 election cycle to the 2024 elections. At the grassroots level, some voters have experienced a shift in electoral orientation, whereby political choices are no longer predominantly shaped by religious-ideological proximity, organizational affiliation, or the personal status of candidates as religious leaders (Farida et al., 2024). Instead, material considerations and immediate economic benefits were perceived as increasingly influential in determining electoral preferences. This phenomenon illustrates the limitations of normative religious political education. Moral principles communicated through religious gatherings may lose their persuasive force when confronted with direct financial incentives offered by campaign teams. Such a pattern reflects the broader commodification of elections in Indonesia, in which material exchange can outweigh rational assessments of candidates' policy platforms, leadership competence, or emotional and religious proximity (C. Sonia et al., 2024).

Another constraint identified in this study concerns a democratic gap shaped by differences in educational attainment and geographical location across North Sumatra. In urban areas such as Medan, NU's political education initiatives were relatively more effective (Prakoso et al., 2024). Higher levels of educational attainment among urban communities tend to be associated with more rational patterns of electoral behavior, in which voters place greater emphasis on candidates' personal competence and leadership capacity rather than relying exclusively on socio-religious status. In contrast, in rural and remote areas located far from PWNU North Sumatra's organizational center, rational political education was more difficult to disseminate comprehensively because of the strength of local patronage networks and limited

access to political information. In these areas, even religious figures contesting elections may not necessarily receive significant electoral support unless they possess sufficient financial resources to compete with the influence of vote buying (Jurnal & Sosial, 2025b).

Ultimately, these conditions present a major challenge to the future of Nahdlatul Ulama's socio-political da'wah in North Sumatra. When religious values and educational attainment become less influential in shaping electoral choices because of strong economic pressures, a predominantly verbal and normative model of political education requires reconsideration. NU can no longer rely solely on moral appeals delivered through religious platforms. It also needs to consider strengthening community-based economic empowerment so that Nahdliyin at the grassroots level possess greater financial resilience and are less vulnerable to the clientelistic cycle of vote buying that undermines the substantive meaning of democracy (C. A. J. R. M. H. R. I. Sonia, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that PWNU North Sumatra sought to maintain institutional neutrality during the 2024 North Sumatra gubernatorial election by reaffirming the principles of the 1926 NU Khittah. This commitment was reflected particularly in the prohibition of using organizational symbols, attributes, facilities, and authority for campaign purposes, as well as in the encouragement of structural officials involved in campaign teams to temporarily suspend their organizational positions. The findings demonstrate that NU's institutional neutrality must be clearly distinguished from the individual political preferences of its cadres, as NU members and cadres retain their personal political rights provided that such preferences are not expressed in the name of the organization. At the same time, NU in North Sumatra did not adopt a passive position toward the democratic process. Instead, it redirected its role toward political education through autonomous bodies such as Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, and GP Ansor by strengthening political literacy, providing voter education, preventing the spread of misinformation and hoaxes, promoting participatory election monitoring, and conducting civic-oriented da'wah grounded in Aswaja an-Nahdliyah values.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of local Islamic political sociology by demonstrating that religious mass organizations can perform a dual function as guardians of institutional neutrality and as agents of political education within society. Practically, the study recommends that PWNU and NU autonomous bodies strengthen internal monitoring mechanisms, develop written guidelines that clearly separate organizational roles from individual political preferences, expand voter education programs to rural and remote areas, establish sustained cooperation with electoral management bodies, and develop community-based economic empowerment strategies to reduce citizens' vulnerability to vote buying. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on the experiences of the selected informants and therefore cannot be generalized to all NU organizational structures and Nahdliyin communities throughout North Sumatra. Future research should involve a broader range of informants from PCNU, MWCNU, village-level branches, Islamic boarding schools, and Nahdliyin communities across different regencies and municipalities in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of institutional neutrality, political education, and the challenges of grassroots democracy.

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