
Blater VS Kiyai: The Dynamics of Dualism in The 2024 Sampang Regional Election Contest

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Abstract

The 2024 Sampang Regional Election is an arena for political contestation that is able to bring together two great powers in traditional Madura society, namely Blater and Kiyai. Blater is someone who represents a traditional power based on local social and cultural influences. When dealing directly with a Kiyai, he becomes a symbol of religious authority that has spiritual legitimacy among religious people, especially students. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of competition between these two forces in fighting for political support, as well as their impact on voter patterns, social stability, and the ongoing democratic process in Sampang today. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the political strategy, narrative built, and alliance formed between Blater and Kiyai. In addition, this study also examines how the power of this dualism is able to influence people's perception of local leadership patterns and how they use cultural and religious symbols to strengthen their respective political positions. The results of this study are expected to provide in-depth insights into the interaction between traditional and religious forces in the local political context, as well as the implications of democracy at the regional level.

Keywords: *Blater, Kiyai, the power of dualism, social stability, political strategy.*

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INTRODUCTION

This research contains and reveals historical facts in the political contest of the 2024 Sampang Regional Election which states that in the contest of the regional elections who play and become actors in the regional elections are two people who are very sacred by almost most of the Madurese people who have great power in mobilizing the votes of the people, the Regional Head Election (Pilkada) is one of the important democratic mechanisms in determining the direction of policy and development at the local level. In Sampang Regency itself, the 2024 regional elections will be a political contest that attracts attention to be reviewed further, and many parties also highlight it. With the presence of two big forces that played a significant role in this contest, namely: Blater and Kiyai. The phenomenon of involvement between Blater and Kiyai in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election is a reflection of complex local political dynamics. Kiyai, as a religious leader, has a strong mass base among students and religious people. They are often a reference in political decision-making, including in the election of regional heads. On the other hand, there are the Blaters who have influence through their social networks and the physical strength they have. They are often protectors and mediators in social conflicts, thus gaining support from people who feel safe under their protection. These two forces play a very important role in determining the political direction in Sampang, at the local level, especially in the 2024 regional election contest.

In the 2024 Sampang Regional Election, the support from these two groups has become very crucial and very crucial. Kiyai and Blater both have a mass base in different communities, but both also have the same strength in mobilizing support from the community. Kiyai, as a person who understands religion, is often the determinant in giving blessings to the candidate for regional head, while Blater is able to mobilize the masses through their social networks. The combination of support from both groups can be decisive for victory in the 2024 regional elections. Previous research that I have found also shows that the relationship between Kiyai and Blater in Madura local politics is often dynamic. Sometimes they work together, collaborate with each other to support the same candidate, but it is not uncommon for conflicts of interest to occur between them. This kind of phenomenon shows that local politics in Madura, especially Sampang, is not only determined by the power of political parties, but also by the social forces that exist in the local community today. The interaction between Blater and Kiyai in the 2024 Sampang regional elections reflects the complex dynamics of local politics. The rivalry between the two is not only competing for support, but also has the potential to collaborate in achieving each other's political goals. This research also aims to help understand the role and influence of Blater and Kiyai in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest, as well as how the interaction between the two in making campaign strategies influences the election results of the Sampang community itself.

There is various tangible evidence where a Kiyai has very large political power, very strong in Madura society. It can be seen in the context of the previous elections, in 2013-2018 in Bangkalan Regency. in that period, Bangkalan was led by a regent who has a Kiyai background, namely K. Makmun Ibn Fuad, who is the son of the former regent of Bangkalan before the 2003-2013 period of RKH. Fuad Amin Imron. A similar thing has also happened in

Sampang regency itself in the 2013-2018 period, Sampang was led by a Kiyai, namely: KH. Fannan Hasib. Likewise, what happened in the Sumenep district in 2010-2015, KH. A. Busyro Karim led Sumenep for 10 years or 2 periods. Likewise, vice versa, there is a blater group in Madura society which is no less powerful than the Kiyai group. Blater in Madura society is also highly respected and respected as Kiyai, because blater has its own high authority so that the community is very reluctant to be with these blater groups. Blater is a community group based on courage, arrogance, immunity, and close to criminal things that are closed. In Madura, this blater group is also no less important than the Kiyais; it is like a pillar in giving views and social life. Blater is also a very useful group, especially in terms of politics and power in traditional Madura society.

In the phenomenon of the 2024 regional elections, Sampang Regency is one of the areas that is quite interesting or highlighted by many Indonesians. The 2024 election contest, which took place in Sampang City, has the main actors who have the same base in the 2024 Regent leadership contest. Both of these candidates have a good track record in leading. KH Mohammad bin Muafi Zaini, or familiarly called Ra Mamak, is a former member of the East Java DPRD for two periods, served as chairman of the Golkar party DPD in Sampang Regency, and as the founder and caretaker of the Nazhatut Thullab Prajjen Islamic Boarding School, Camplong. Meanwhile, the rival of Ra Mamak itself, namely H. Slamet Junaidi or familiarly known as aba idi, is no less interesting to see his track record. Aba Idi is a former regent of Sampang, previously in the 2019-2024 term, and was a member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia from the Nasdem party faction from 2014-2019. When he served as the regent of Sampang, H. Slamet Junaidi or aba idi himself has made a lot of awards and is considered to be able to bring many changes through his infrastructure programs, such as: Concretization, Hotmix Street, Sampang Sport Center, Health Facilities, Trunojoyo Square, Construction and revitalization of school buildings, construction of the South Ring Road and so on that can be enjoyed by the people of Sampang today.

Actually, there is no previous research that specifically discusses this kind of thing, according to the title I raised above, but there are several previous articles or research that have the same theme about the contest for the 2024 Sampang Regional Elections, so that it becomes sustainable and relevant to the title I explained above. The research is as follows:

The research conducted by Wahyudi Pramono shows that although Kiyai has great influence, the strength of Blater and Klebun (village heads) is also very dominant. The results of the 2018 Sampang Regional Election show that the support of Blater and Klebun (village heads) can shift the traditional authority of Kiyai.

Another research conducted by Eni Syafitri also highlights how the relationship between Blater and Kiyai has been going on for a long time, with the two influencing each other in determining the election results

The Kiyai versus Blater Phenomenon: In this article, the role of each party, Kiyai and Blater, in the contest for the regional head election in Madura, especially in Sampang itself, is

discussed. This article also highlights how these two groups are often major actors in elections and how they influence election outcomes.

Patron-Client Politics in Sampang Regency: This study discusses the patron-client relationship between Kiyai and the people of Sampang. This research also shows how a Kiyai has a great influence in determining the political choices of the community and how a Blater is able to play an important role in influencing the choice of voters from each layer of Sampang society.

Dynamics of Competition for the Roles of Kiyai and Blater in the Village Head Election in Banyumas Village, Sampang District, Sampang Regency: This thesis discusses the competition between Kiyai and Blater in the election of village heads. The study also highlights how these two groups affect local political life and how the competition that occurs between them affects their communities.

The novelty of this research lies in a deep critical approach to the interaction between Blater and Kiyai as two major powers competing with each other in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest, which has a significant influence in mobilizing the voices of the people of Sampang. This research not only describes the role of each group separately, but also explores the dynamics of their competition and collaboration in the context of the 2024 Sampang Regional Elections. By focusing on political strategies, the narratives used, and their impact on voter patterns and social stability, this study offers a new perspective that is more in-depth than previous studies. In addition, this study relates the phenomenon of Blater and Kiyai to the latest social, political, and technological developments, which provides a contemporary context for this dualism of power. Thus, this research not only helps to enrich the literature on local politics in Indonesia but also provides new insights into how these traditional and religious forces adapt and compete in modern democracies. This is able to make this research relevant and significant in understanding the dynamics of local politics that continue to develop.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand in depth the dynamics of competition between Blater and Kiyai in the 2024 Sampang Regional Elections. I chose this approach because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of complex socio-political phenomena in local contexts.

Research location

This research was conducted in the Sampang district, Madura, which is the main location in the 2024 regional election contest. The choice of this location is based on the relevance of the distinctive social and cultural context, where Blater and Kiyai have a significant influence on the local community, especially in Sampang.

Research subjects: Subjects in this study include.

- a) Blater and Kiyai figures who are directly involved in the 2024 Sampang regional elections.
- b) A successful or supportive team from both parties either individually or in groups.
- c) The voting community in Sampang itself, including groups influenced by Blater and Kiyai.

Data Collection Techniques

- a) **Participatory Observation** The researcher conducted direct observation in various campaign activities, political meetings, and social interactions between Blater, Kiyai, and the people of Sampang. This observation aims to understand the social and symbolic dynamics that arise in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest.
- b) **The Documentation Study** secondary data was collected through various sources such as local media news, activity reports, and official documents related to the 2024 Sampang Regional Elections. This documentation is used to strengthen the analysis and provide context to the observed phenomena.

Note: In-depth interviews were planned as part of the data collection technique, but could not be carried out properly due to limited access to key informants. Therefore, this study focuses more on observation and documentation as the main source of data.

Data analysis techniques: Data are analyzed using thematic analysis methods, which involve.

- a) Encoding data to identify key themes.
- b) Interpretation of the theme to understand the dynamics of competition between Blater and Kiyai.
- c) Triangulation of data to ensure the validity and reliability of research results.

Theoretical framework: This study uses the theory of power and legitimacy to analyze how Blater and Kiyai build their influence in the Sampang election contest. In addition, local political theory is also used to help understand the social and cultural context that affects the dynamics of competition.

This research method is designed to provide an in-depth and holistic understanding of local political contestation, the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest, by emphasizing the social, symbolic, and cultural dynamics that shape the relationship between local political actors and society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dynamics of the competition between Blater and Kiyai show how these two forces compete and fight each other in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest, between traditional forces and modern religious forces that intersect with each other, but sometimes they also collaborate together, but they also often fight independently in the context of local politics, especially in the 2024 Sampang Regional Elections. Blater's political strategy in the 2024 regional elections relies on the strength of local social and cultural influences, thus showing how this traditional figure is able to articulate socio-cultural values in the practice of electoral mobilization. His existence is not only as a historically respected figure in society, but also as a catalyst who is able to establish an emotional and symbolic connection with grassroots communities, lower layers of society, and communities that are directly involved in local political dynamics. Blater's influence moves through personal relationships, social networks, and cultural rituals that are still alive in the Sampang community to this day, so that he is able to make himself an effective actor in directing public opinion and mobilizing votes ahead of the 2024 regional elections. A study conducted by Haqqullah and Fauziah (2025) shows that the Blater's dominance in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election creates social pressure legitimized by local cultural norms, strengthening their role as determinants of voter preferences. In addition, Holifah (2012) also highlights how Blater, as a local strongman, plays a strategic role in the candidate's victory through social influence and symbolic power in his community. Meanwhile, Kiyai's figure plays a central role in mobilizing political support through his religious authority. With moral and spiritual legitimacy firmly embedded in the social structure of Madura society, Kiyai is able to mobilize a network of students, alumni, and pesantren who are emotionally and ideologically connected to him. This support is not only individual, but also collective and structured, making Kiyai a respected and followed patron in political decision-making. In the context of the 2024 Sampang Regional Election, Kiyai's influence such as KH Muhammad bin Muafi A. Zaini, who is known as the caretaker of the Nazhatut Thullab Islamic Boarding School and a member of the East Java Provincial Parliament, has become very significant. His moderate and inclusive approach to *da'wah*, as well as his involvement in community empowerment, made him a figure that was widely accepted by various levels of society. Research by Wahyudi Pramono (2024) also confirms that Kiyai, along with Blater and Klebun, is a local actor who determines the political direction of the Sampang community, although in some cases Kiyai's power is starting to compete with other figures such as Blater. In addition, Nawawi's study (2015) also shows that the power of Kiyai Islamic boarding schools in Karang Penang is able to shift the political choices of the community significantly, making them a strategic social capital in local electoral contests.

This interaction reflects a unique and interesting but also complex dualism of power, where the two not only fight for political support but also compete in building a narrative in the midst of different societies about this issue of local leadership. This research also shows that the existence of Blater and Kiyai cannot be separated from the social and cultural context of the traditional Madura society itself, which is able to form a unique and interesting political dynamic to be studied.

However, it is important to note that this competition also poses social challenges, especially related to the potential for social fragmentation and the use of religious or cultural issues as political tools in the struggle for regional power seats, in the contest of the 2024 Sampang regional elections. Thus, this study suggests the need for efforts to build harmony in the midst of the differences between traditional and modern religious forces in support of a more inclusive democratic process later.

Based on various previous studies, articles and scientific journals, news and newspapers, as well as the results of surveys conducted by several prediction sources, it shows that the dynamics of local politics in Madura, especially in the 2024 Sampang regional election contest, are still colored by the competition between these two dominant social groups, namely between *Blater* and *Kiyai*. There are several main findings that I can describe in the following results and discussion:

The dominance of *Blater* and *Kiyai* in local politics:

We cannot deny, avoid, and ignore that in the current local politics that holds and is able to control the votes of the local people of Madura, especially the people of Sampang, that there is a dominance of great power that only rests on these two groups, namely the *blater* and the *Kiyai*. *Blater* is a group that has a strong influence on social and security aspects in Madura. They are known for their courage and strong loyalty network in controlling political and social situations (Rozaki, 2009). Meanwhile, *Kiyai* has a strength based on spirituality and morals, especially through a network of Islamic boarding schools and a wide religious influence in Madurese society (Susanto, 2007). The two are often in opposing positions in power struggles at the local level, including in regional head elections.

Based on the results of the previous survey from ELSIPOL and ARCI, before the simultaneous regional elections, it showed that the pair of Gus Mamak (*Kiyai*) and Mas AB (supported or backed up by *Blater*) was superior with an electability of **39.5%** (Mandate) vs **35%** (Jimad Sakteh). The key factors for Mandat's victory in the survey include:

Gus Mamak's religious charisma as *Kiyai* has a likability rate of 91.3%.

The support of the *Blater* network (such as Mat Jari, Mat Ribut and Karjito) which is effective in mobilizing the masses, this attitude is shown in the form of a viral video which lasts approximately 0.11 minutes, with enthusiasm and clenched the hands of both Mat Jari, Mat Ribut and Karjito stating "Bismillahiromanirrohim, I am a community leader who is ready to win the MANDATE". The people's desire for a change of government after the incumbent's leadership is considered less responsive by the people themselves.

Pattern of political mobilization in the 2024 Sampang regional election

In the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest, the pattern of political mobilization shows a close relationship between local social structures and candidates' electoral strategies. In the midst of Madurese people who still uphold authoritarian figures, political support is not

only shaped by work programs or visions, but also by long-rooted social relations. Kiyai and blater figures become key actors in this process, each representing a different symbolic power and social network. Their role reflects how local politics in Madura is still heavily influenced by patronage. Patronage in the political context is a reciprocal relationship between **patrons** (people who have power or resources) and **clients** (people who need support or protection). These relationships are usually informal and personal. And personal closeness that ultimately also determines the direction of public support for certain candidates.

In the 2024 Sampang Regional Election, candidates who receive support from *Kiyai* tend to be able to get votes from students and other Islamic boarding school communities, while candidates supported by *blater* rely on the mass base of informal groups that have a wider social network (Lutfi & SH, 2020).

Patron-client politics is still the main characteristic of political events in Madura, where support for candidates is often given based on personal relationships and economic interests (Kurniawan & Kurniasari, 2014).

Conflict of interest and conflict in the regional elections

In the midst of a close local political contest, symbols and interests. The 2024 Sampang Regional Election is not only an arena for votes, but also a collision ground between two social forces that have different characters and strategies. The competition between Kiyai and blater in mobilizing support often goes beyond the electoral realm, touching on sensitive social and cultural aspects. The tensions that arise from these differences in approaches can open up space for conflict to develop, both in the form of social pressure and the potential for violence that disrupts the stability of local democracy.

Regional elections in Sampang often cause friction between these two groups, especially related to the political strategies used. *Blater* is more likely to use pragmatic approaches and informal power, while *Kiyais* rely more on moral and religious legitimacy (Hannan & Abdillah, 2019). In some cases, these tensions can develop into open conflicts that can lead to the use of violence or social pressure against voters or society (Aman, Aziz, & Syarifah, 2023).

The role of political parties in bridging the gap

In a complex local political landscape such as Madura, political parties not only function as electoral vehicles but also as strategic actors that seek to bridge social and cultural gaps between groups. As the contest between Kiyais and blaters intensifies, political parties face challenges in embracing both in order to broaden their support base. This effort opens up space for the dynamics of compromise and negotiation that do not always go smoothly.

Some political parties in Madura are trying to embrace these two groups to gain wider electoral support. This is done by accommodating the interests of each group through resource distribution or political compromise (Personal, 2015).

However, this strategy often does not run smoothly due to differences in ideology and political mobilization methods used by each group (Kosim, 2007).

The Role of Dualism in Kiyai-Blater

Kiyai, in the context of the Sampang Regional Election, plays the role of a moral leader who has a strong influence base in the pesantren environment and religious community. Figures like Gus Mamak used religious legitimacy to build an image as a "pro-populist" figure, close to the aspirations of the lower society and traditional Islamic values. This legitimacy is not only symbolic, but also an effective social capital in shaping voters' political preferences (Personal, 2015).

On the other hand, blater serves as a practical political driver that relies on informal networks, including mass mobilization and negotiations with klebun (village heads). Blater's support for a particular candidate, such as Mandate, reflects a strong local power collaboration strategy and is based on loyalty and pragmatic interests (Hannan & Abdillah, 2019). The collaboration between Kiyai and Blater in supporting certain candidates shows a pattern of synergy between symbolic and structural forces, although it is not uncommon to also cause internal tensions in the process of political consolidation.

Swing voters and determining factors

Based on the latest survey data, as many as 25.5% of voters in Sampang are still in the undecided category, showing that the dynamics of political competition are still very fluid and vulnerable to changes in the direction of support. These swing voters are a crisp target in a candidate's campaign strategy, but the approach used is not always effective. Analysis from ARCI (Accurate Research and Consulting Indonesia) states that money politics is predicted to be less effective in influencing people's choices, especially when compared to the influence of local figures such as blater, Kiyai, and klebun. All three have the capacity to shape public opinion through social networks and symbolic authority that have long been rooted in Madurese society (ARCI, 2024).

Thus, political strategies that rely solely on material incentives tend to fail if they are not accompanied by cultural and relational approaches that are appropriate to the local context. The dynamics of the competition between Blater and Kiyai in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election are a complex manifestation of the dualism of local socio-political forces that are full of meaning. This competition is not just an electoral battle, but also a symbolic negotiation between traditional authorities with a protective pattern and religious authorities with a normative nature. On the one hand, Blater represents a grassroots force that upholds social solidarity, masculinity, and community resilience, while Kiyai brings moral legitimacy, spiritual representation, and value order derived from the Islamic tradition of Islamic boarding schools.

This analysis is important because they have different arenas of mobilization: Blater tend to operate in informal social spaces such as markets, closed networks, or public spaces

that are vulnerable to social conflict. Meanwhile, Kiyai operates in religious institutions, taklim assemblies, and Islamic boarding schools that form a values-based political culture. The interaction between them forms a fluid pattern of power that can be antagonistic or cooperative depending on the configuration of interests. Through the Weberian approach of power theory, Kiyai derives *charismatic legitimacy* from his religious base, while Blater uses *traditional legitimacy* derived from social reputation and patron-client practices. In the context of the Regional Elections, these two forces play an important role in shaping people's political preferences through the narrative of identity and collective memory.

For example, when Gus Mamak carries a religious image, he not only sells work programs but also symbols of piety; on the contrary, Mas AB who is supported by Blater sells stability and alignment with local security. Furthermore, the emergence of Blater's support is not just a political endorsement, but a strategic action to maintain access to resources and bargaining positions for local governments. Their mobilization strategies are more pragmatic and loyalty-based, often involving social performatives such as declarations of support on social media, viral videos, and mass mobilization. On the contrary, Kiyai shapes voters' preferences through ideological instruments and moral values, such as recommendations from religious pulpits or political fatwas. In this case, local politics in Sampang is not only a field of electoral competition, but also an arena for the battle of discourse between *praxis politics* and *symbolic politics*.

The potential for social fragmentation also needs to be examined. When these two forces compete with each other without a healthy mediation space, society is polarized in terms of identity: becoming "followers of Kiyai" versus "followers of Blater". This has the potential to create horizontal conflicts if there is no inclusive political governance based on local reconciliation. The politics of money, although present, is still less influential than the suggestive power of the two figures; this shows that symbolic power is still much more resonant than mere material transactions.

On the other hand, political parties that try to bridge the two camps are also not in a dominant position. They function more as administrative vehicles than ideological actors. In this study, it appears that power relations in Sampang are *extra-party politics*, where informal power determines the direction of contestation. Interestingly, swing voters who have not made a choice (25.5%) are targeted by both camps. This shows that narrative, performance, and representation are the main instruments in attracting voters and not solely the vision and mission of the candidate.

In other words, the 2024 Sampang Regional Election is not only an arena of competition and contestation between candidates, but also an arena of proof between two power constructs: power based on religious charisma vs power based on social resistance. This competition illustrates how local democracy in Madura is shaped by symbolic interactions, patronage, and complex identity negotiation.

Final results of the 2024 Sampang regional elections: Surprising political reality

In every political contest, the final result is an inevitability that must be accepted by all parties. Those (parties) who lose, even with a heavy feeling to be able to accept it, are required to be open-minded and respect all democratic processes that are running. While they (the winners) celebrate the success with gratitude and euphoria. The regional elections are not only a place for power struggles, but also a reflection of the social dynamics, collective hopes, and symbolic tensions that accompany local political journeys.

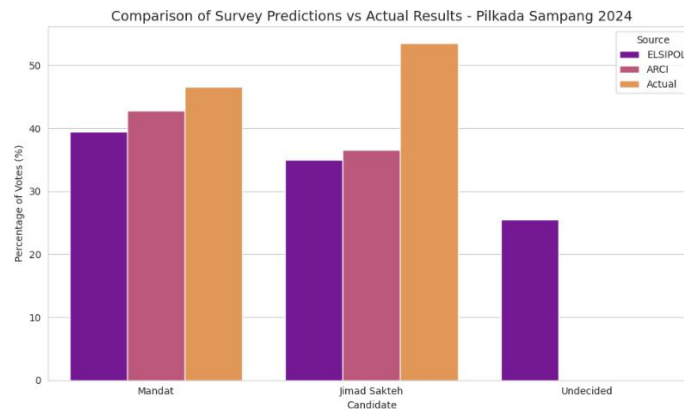
In the 2024 Sampang regional election, the final result of this contest ended with the victory of the number 2 pair, Slamet Junaidi and KH Ahmad Mahfud (Jimad Sakteh), who won a total of 338,482 votes, 43,877 votes ahead of the number 1 pair, KH Muhammad Bin Muafi Zaini and Abdullah Hidayat (Mandate), who obtained a total of 294,605 votes. With a total of 633,087 valid votes, with voter participation of 645,722 votes. The victory of Jimad Sakteh, the number 2 pair, spread across 9 of the 14 sub-districts, shows that the strength of the support base is not only centralized but also geographically evenly distributed. This is an important indicator in reading the patterns of local social and political mobilization.

Contrast with initial survey predictions

Interestingly, the results of the victory differed significantly from the initial predictions of the survey released by two major survey institutions:

- a) ELSIPOL noted that the electability of the Mandate pair was at 39.5%, ahead of Jimad Sakteh, who was only 35%, with 25.5% of voters having not made a choice.
- b) ARCI even recorded a greater advantage in Mandate, with an electability of 42.8% compared to Jimad Sakteh, which was only 36.5%.

Both surveys have predicted that the Mandate pair has a great chance of winning, especially because the public's level of liking Gus Mamak, which reached 91.3%, is far above that of the incumbent. However, unfortunately, political statements say otherwise. Jimad Sakteh actually managed to reverse the initial prediction to be able to win the 2024 Sampang regional election contest. This opens up our deeper analysis of voter dynamics, campaign effectiveness, and the role of local actors who play a role in the 2024 Sampang Regional Election contest.



The image above clearly shows how the predictions of the two survey institutions, ELSIPOL and ARCI, differ from the final results of the election. It can be seen that:

- Mandat is predicted to excel in both surveys, but loses in real results.
- Jimad Sakteh managed to reverse the prediction and win the contest.
- Voters who have not made a choice (25.5%) in the ELSIPOL survey are most likely to be the determinants of victory.

Sociological analysis: between figures, networks, and field realities

Jimad Sakteh's victory not only reflects electoral strength, but also the effectiveness of the social network built with blater and Kiyai. In the context of Sampang, moral figures and practical figures play their central role in shaping people's political preferences.

- Blater acts as a liaison between the political elite and grassroots communities, using an informal approach and emotional closeness.
- Kiyai, as a moral figure, provides strong religious and symbolic legitimacy, especially in Islamic boarding school communities and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)-based villages.

The combination of these two was able to create a social coalition that was able to break through the limits of the electability of the initial survey, proving that local politics is not always subject to statistical logic, but to social relations and community beliefs.

Theoretical reflections: from postmodernism to the politics of affection

In the framework of postmodernism, Jimad Sakteh's victory can be read as a form of disruption to the dominant narrative formed by surveys and the media. Society is no longer entirely subject to representations of electability, but rather to affective experiences and symbolic proximity. It also shows that money, politics, and formal campaigns are not always the main determinants. Instead, the politics of affection and informal networks became more decisive forces in local contests such as Sampang.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the complex competitive dynamics between Blater and Kiyai as two major forces in the local political contest in the 2024 Sampang Regional Elections. This interaction between traditional and modern religious forces shows a rivalry that is not only political but also reflects a deep symbolic battle in Madurese society. Blater with its local social and cultural influence base, and Kiyai with its religious legitimacy, each used distinctive strategies to mobilize political support and build a leadership narrative. The results of this study confirm that this dualism of power not only shapes voter patterns but also affects social stability in Sampang. Their rivalry, while sometimes stirring up tensions, is also a reflection of how local communities respond to political dynamics within the framework of modern democracy. In an even broader context, this research contributes to the understanding of how traditional and religious forces can adapt and compete in the midst of ever-evolving social and political change. This research is expected to be a reference for future studies that want to explore more about the interaction between social, cultural, and religious forces in local politics, as well as be able to provide practical insights to build harmony in support of a more inclusive and sustainable democracy.

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