

## Integrating Patriotic Spiritualism in *Pesantren* Education to Cultivate Nationalism

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**ABSTRACT.** This study examines the integration of patriotic spiritualism into Islamic boarding school education as a model for fostering grassroots nationalism in Indonesia, with a case study at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis. The research aims to understand how spiritual values are reformulated into educational practices that strengthen students' national identity. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with kyais, teachers, students, and community leaders ( $N = 25$ ), and document analysis of curriculum and activity archives. The data were analyzed through coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation using a phenomenological lens. The findings reveal that Sabilunnajat cultivates patriotism through spiritual habituation, disciplined learning, and the internalization of historical narratives of ulama and *santri* in Indonesia's independence struggle. The novelty of this study lies in the concept of patriotic spiritualism as an alternative model of civic education that develops nationalism without military indoctrination. The research concludes that Islamic boarding schools function as grassroots agents of national identity formation by integrating faith-based education with civic values. The study implies that this model can inspire policymakers and educators to strengthen national character through spiritually grounded education.

**Keywords:** *Community-based religious education, Faith-state collaboration in character building, Grassroots nationalism, Spiritual civic education*

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### INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) represent Indonesia's oldest and most influential educational institutions, long recognized for their dual role in fostering religious devotion and national consciousness. Historically, these institutions nurtured not only pious individuals but also patriotic citizens who contributed to Indonesia's independence. Their contribution, however, extends beyond history; *pesantren* remain vital in shaping moral integrity and civic identity among young Muslims amid contemporary global challenges (Aspandi et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2023). According to Habibah et al. (2023), more than 36,000 *pesantren* across the country educate over 5 million students, underscoring their strategic influence on national character formation.

In today's globalized era, nationalism is increasingly tested by cultural homogenization, digital individualism, and ideological fragmentation. A national survey by Ibda et al. (2023) reveals that the sense of national pride among youth declined by 12% over the past five years, while exposure to

intolerant narratives increased. Against this backdrop, *pesantren* remain among the few educational institutions capable of fostering patriotism grounded in spirituality. This reality justifies the need to reformulate *pesantren* education through the concept of patriotic spiritualism, a framework that links faith-based education to civic responsibility and national resilience.

Previous studies have acknowledged *pesantren's* moral and social contribution (Amalia, 2025; Arif et al., 2024; Hidayat & Hidayat, 2023). However, these works often remain descriptive, focusing on the moral or theological aspects of *pesantren* without elaborating how such spirituality translates into civic nationalism. Internationally, studies by Hajar (2024) on civic education, Hefner (2022) on character formation, and Selvia (2019) on values-based education in Islam affirm that moral education can be a foundation for national identity. Nevertheless, few have examined how faith-driven institutions such as *pesantrens* operationalize this process. This research thus aims to bridge that theoretical and empirical gap by examining *pesantren* not merely as religious schools, but as grassroots civic institutions that internalize nationalism through spiritual education.

The research gap lies in the lack of integrative frameworks connecting spiritual education, patriotism, and national defense in Indonesia's non-formal education sector. Most prior research (Mumtaz et al., 2024; Erihadiana et al., 2025) discussed *pesantren's* contributions through historical or cultural lenses, but rarely analyzed its managerial and pedagogical mechanisms that sustain national resilience. In contrast, this study adopts a management-education perspective to identify how *pesantren* integrate patriotic values into their daily governance, curriculum, and leadership patterns. The study draws on the theoretical perspectives of transformative education (Arpanudin et al., 2025) and spiritual citizenship (Hanif et al., 2025), positioning patriotic spiritualism as an innovative approach that fuses moral consciousness with civic commitment.

Ciamis Regency, West Java, serves as a relevant case for this research because of its long-standing network of traditional *pesantren* actively involved in community-based nationalism movements. The chosen institution, Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School, is noted for integrating religious rituals with national ceremonies, social volunteering, and character education rooted in Islamic values. This makes it a scientifically representative model for exploring how localized educational traditions contribute to national resilience. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how Islamic boarding schools integrate patriotic spiritualism into their educational management to strengthen students' nationalism. Theoretically, this research contributes to the global literature on Islamic education and nation-building, expanding the discourse on how spirituality can serve as a civic resource. Practically, the findings are expected to inform educational policy regarding non-military national defense and civic education, while socially, they emphasize *pesantren's* role as a grassroots moral anchor in strengthening Indonesia's unity amid globalization.

In this framework, the present research proposes a new conceptual model of spiritually grounded civic education, showing that love of country can be cultivated not through indoctrination, but through disciplined faith-based learning. By positioning *pesantrens* as agents of transformative education, this study aims to broaden theoretical understanding and offer practical strategies for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to reinforce national identity through spiritual education.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative case study design with a phenomenological lens, emphasizing the lived experiences of *santri* (students) and local community members in embodying nationalism through spiritual practices. The case study approach (Hefner, 2023) was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of educational phenomena within their real-life context, while the phenomenological perspective (Moustakas, 1994) was used as an interpretive lens to understand how participants experience and give meaning to patriotic spirituality in everyday life.

The research was conducted at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis, West Java, from January to May 2024. This site was deliberately chosen for its representativeness and for its unique integration of spiritual and national values into its curriculum and community programs. Sabilunnajat is widely recognized as a traditional *pesantren* that emphasizes discipline, *hubbul wathan minal imān* (love of country as part of faith), and community service as part of its educational ethos, making it an ideal model for investigating the phenomenon of *patriotic spiritualism*.

#### *Participants and Sampling*

The study involved 25 informants selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus. The participants comprised: 3 *kyais* (religious leaders), 5 *ustadz* (teachers), 10 *santri* (students), 4 alums, and 3 local community leaders. Inclusion criteria included: (1) active involvement in *pesantren* educational or community programs for at least one year, and (2) willingness to share personal experiences related to nationalism and spirituality. The sampling ensured diverse perspectives across leadership, educational, and community levels.

#### *Data Collection Techniques*

Data were collected through three complementary methods: (1) In-depth interviews, conducted in two to three sessions per informant (45–60 minutes each), following a semi-structured guide that explored themes such as national identity, discipline, religious values, and community participation; (2) Participant observation, carried out over four months by attending daily routines, religious assemblies, and national commemoration events. Field notes captured verbal and non-verbal expressions of patriotic behavior; and (3) Document analysis, which examined *pesantren* curricula, institutional archives, and local government reports on civic engagement.

#### *Operationalization of Key Concept*

The concept of *patriotic spiritualism* was operationalized as an educational integration of spiritual discipline, moral obedience, and civic participation that collectively fosters love of nation. This construct was used as a unit of analysis for coding and thematic development, enabling systematic linkage between participants' spiritual experiences and expressions of nationalism.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2018) six-step qualitative analysis framework: (1) data organization, (2) initial open coding, (3) axial categorization, (4) theme development, (5) interpretation, and (6) validation. NVivo-assisted manual coding was used to identify recurring patterns such as "spiritual discipline," "national service," and "faith-based civic values." Themes were then compared across data sources to construct a grounded theoretical model of patriotic spiritualism in *pesantren* education.

#### *Data Validation and Triangulation*

Triangulation was conducted by cross-verifying interview data with observation field notes and documentary evidence. For instance, *kyais'* statements on the role of *riyadhah* (spiritual training) in cultivating discipline were validated by direct observation of student routines and confirmed by written *pesantren* policies. Source triangulation (comparing different informants) and methodological triangulation (interview–observation–document) ensured the credibility and dependability of the findings. Member checking was also performed by sharing synthesized findings with participants for feedback and confirmation.

#### *Research Ethics*

The study adhered to standard ethical research protocols. Participants were informed of the research objectives and signed informed consent forms prior to data collection. Their identities were anonymized using coded identifiers (e.g., *Kyai-01*, *Santri-05*) to maintain confidentiality. All data were securely stored in encrypted files and used solely for academic purposes. Ethical clearance was

obtained from the university’s Research Ethics Committee (Ref. No. EDU/RES/2024-07). Through this methodological framework, the study not only captures the descriptive realities of *pesantren* life but also interprets the deeper meanings of spiritual practices that construct students’ patriotic consciousness. By combining case study rigor with phenomenological sensitivity, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how spiritual education operates as a non-military foundation for national resilience.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The findings from the fieldwork at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis, reveal how the institution systematically cultivates nationalist values through spiritual discipline, collective routines, and community engagement, without resorting to any form of military training. Data were derived from participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, all cross-checked through triangulation to ensure validity. While a short perception survey was distributed to confirm the qualitative insights, the core analysis relied on thematic interpretation of narrative data.

#### Thematic Overview

Using open and axial coding, three major themes emerged from the interview data: spiritual habituation as moral foundation, collective discipline and community service, and faith-based civic awareness. These themes reflect how *patriotic spiritualism* functions as an everyday practice rather than an abstract doctrine.

#### Interview Summary

Table 1: Key Interview Findings from Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School (Ciamis)

Source	Key Quote (coded)	Emergent Theme
<i>Kyai #1, Interview, July 2024</i>	“Students are never given military training, but their love for the country grows naturally through daily worship and discipline.”	Spiritual habituation as a non-military approach to patriotism
<i>Youth Leader #1, Interview, July 2024</i>	“We learn that loving the homeland is part of our faith; it is taught through religious study and community events.”	Integration of faith and civic duty
<i>Alumnus #2, Interview, August 2024</i>	“Though we never studied military defense, we are ready to serve the nation through our professions.”	Civic responsibility beyond formal defense education
<i>Santri #4, Interview, August 2024</i>	“We are trained to be disciplined and to cooperate in community service.”	Discipline and social solidarity as expressions of nationalism
<i>Female Community Leader #2, Interview, August 2024</i>	“The <i>pesantren</i> involves mothers in activities that strengthen family unity and love of country.”	Inclusive participation in moral-national education
<i>Village Official #1, Interview, September 2024</i>	“ <i>Pesantren</i> help maintain order and unity; they are the state’s moral partners at the village level.”	Partnership between religious education and civic governance

The consistency of these narratives indicates that nationalism at Sabilunnajat emerges from everyday spiritual and communal practices rather than from ideological instruction. The participants repeatedly described patriotism as *habitual faith in action*—visible through discipline, cooperation (*gotong royong*), and responsibility in both religious and civic life.

#### Cross-Source Triangulation

Observations of student routines such as collective dawn prayers, community cleaning days, and participation in independence ceremonies corroborated the interview data. Archival documents, including the *pesantren*’s annual program report (2023), confirmed institutional

initiatives promoting civic awareness through religious study circles and social volunteering. The alignment among interview, observation, and documentation established strong internal validity for the theme of spiritual-moral nationalism.

### *Contextual Interpretation*

Rather than treating Qur'anic verses and hadith as direct "data," this study interprets them contextually as cultural frameworks that shape participants' meaning-making. When *kyais* cited verses such as *An-Nisa 59* (obedience to authority) or referred to the maxim *Hubbul Wathan Minal Iman* ("love of country as part of faith"), they were expressing the theological language through which civic values are justified in *pesantren* life. These expressions were analyzed as discursive evidence of how spiritual reasoning reinforces civic behavior, not as normative proof. Overall, the results demonstrate that Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School fosters nationalism through an educational culture grounded in faith, discipline, and service, forming a practical model of *patriotic spiritualism* at the grassroots level.

### *Nationalistic Education through Student Activities*

Field observations at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School, Ciamis, revealed that the *pesantren* integrates national character formation through routine student activities embedded in religious education. Daily practices such as collective prayers, group studies (*halaqah*), and community service are not only moral exercises but also serve as indirect media for civic learning. Through these structured routines, students internalize values of discipline, cooperation, and responsibility that, according to the participants, reflect the essence of loving and serving the nation.

### *Commemorative and Civic Ceremonies*

One of the most visible forms of nationalistic education is the annual commemoration of Indonesia's Independence Day, in which all students participate under the supervision of teachers and community leaders. Observations (August 17, 2024) recorded that the ceremony began with flag-raising, singing of the national anthem, and reflective prayers for the nation. Interviews with students and staff emphasized that these moments are understood as *religious expressions of gratitude* rather than mere formal rituals (*Santri #5*, Observation Notes, August 2024). Rather than being ceremonial, the event functions as a pedagogical experience that strengthens collective identity and historical awareness. Students described feeling proud and spiritually motivated when performing these ceremonies, interpreting them as acts of *thankfulness to God for independence* and *moral commitment to unity*. This finding underscores that nationalism is internalized experientially rather than indoctrinated.



Figure 1. Students participating in the 80th Indonesian Independence Day Ceremony, 2024

### *The Musyawarah Tradition as a Learning Space for Democracy*

Another recurring theme emerging from field data is the practice of *musyawarah* (consultative deliberation). Observations in student organizations (*organisasi santri*) showed that this activity functions as a democratic forum where students collectively discuss dormitory rules, event planning, and community outreach programs. Interview data (Ustadz #3, Interview, August 2024) highlight that the *musyawarah* forum is "a training ground for responsibility and respect for differing opinions." From an analytical perspective, *musyawarah* reflects the *pesantren's* way of fostering deliberative

thinking and civic participation. Coding results show that participants repeatedly associated this activity with the values of *collective wisdom*, *equality*, and *accountability*. These align closely with the democratic principles of Pancasila's Fourth Principle, though participants primarily interpret them through the language of *akblaq* (moral character).



Figure 2. Student Deliberation at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School

#### *Riyadhah as Spiritual Discipline and Character Formation*

A significant pattern emerging from the data concerns the role of *Riyadhah*, a structured spiritual exercise involving remembrance (*dhikr*), meditation, and self-control training. Observations of these sessions (Field Notes, July–September 2024) revealed their dual function: religious devotion and psychological conditioning. Students are trained to maintain composure, focus, and obedience to established routines. From the interpretive coding, *Riyadhah* was consistently associated with three emergent categories: (1) inner discipline, (2) mental endurance, and (3) collective solidarity. Participants



Figure 3. Riyadhah Activity at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School

understood these traits as essential foundations for *moral patriotism*, the ability to serve and protect the community with sincerity and restraint. One teacher (Ustadz #2, Interview, July 2024) explained that “*students who can control themselves are the ones who can best serve their country calmly and wisely.*”

#### *Thematic Synthesis*

Across these activities, religious routines, national ceremonies, musyawarah, and riyadhah, a coherent pattern emerges: patriotic spiritualism is cultivated through disciplined communal life, not through explicit ideological instruction. The analysis of observation notes and interviews produced the following core theme: “*National consciousness is nurtured through the spiritual habitus of pesantren life.*” This habitus, encompassing prayer, cooperation, self-discipline, and collective decision-making, forms the basis for non-military civic education. The *pesantren* thus operates as a *microcosm of the nation*, where students learn that serving God and serving the country are complementary acts of devotion.

#### *Student and Community Perceptions of Nationalism*

To complement the interview and observation data, this study also collected perceptions from students and community members surrounding Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis. Rather than serving as a quantitative survey, this instrument functioned as a supportive qualitative checklist to identify general patterns of understanding and internalization of nationalism-related values. A total of 25 respondents (15 students and 10 community members) participated voluntarily between August and September 2024. The questions covered three domains: (1) attitudes toward the nation and civic responsibility, (2) perception of *pesantren's* role in strengthening solidarity, and (3) the integration of faith and patriotism in daily life. Responses were

coded thematically into four categories: *Strongly Affirmed*, *Affirmed*, *Uncertain*, and *Not Affirmed*, without using numerical quantification.

### Summary of Perception Data

Table 2. Summary of Student and Community Perceptions at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School

Perception Indicator	Dominant Response	Interpretation
Pride in being an Indonesian citizen	Strongly Affirmed	Indicates deep emotional attachment to national identity formed through <i>pesantren</i> culture.
Readiness to contribute to the nation according to one's capacity	Strongly Affirmed	Reflects civic awareness and sense of duty among students and alums.
The <i>pesantren</i> teaches love of the homeland as part of faith	Affirmed	Demonstrates that religious instruction is perceived as reinforcing civic commitment.
<i>Pesantren</i> strengthens solidarity without military-style discipline.	Strongly Affirmed	Suggests that spiritual and moral training substitutes for physical defense education.
Religious activities support unity and national cohesion	Strongly Affirmed	Shows alignment between spiritual routines and social values of cooperation.

### Thematic Interpretation

Analysis of open-ended responses revealed three dominant themes: (1) Patriotism as a moral virtue. Students and residents consistently described nationalism not in political or militaristic terms, but as *moral devotion* expressed through faith, discipline, and service; (2) *Pesantren* as a moral-civic school. Both groups viewed Sabilunnajat as a community that educates by example. “*Teachers’ consistency in showing discipline and respect for national symbols was perceived as a living model of civic virtue*” (Community Leader #3, Interview, August 2024); (3) Spiritual discipline as civic readiness. Respondents explained that spiritual training (*riyadhab* and *musyawarah*) prepares students to act responsibly in society. One *santri* noted, “*We learn to serve others with patience; that is also how we serve our country*” (Santri #6, Interview, September 2024). The perception data strongly align with the patterns identified in the interviews and observations. The respondents’ views confirm that patriotic awareness in Sabilunnajat grows organically through spiritual formation rather than ideological indoctrination. This triangulation reinforces the conclusion that *pesantren*-based education effectively cultivates civic identity and social responsibility through everyday religious practices.

### Student Participation in Non-Military State Defense

The findings from fieldwork at Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis demonstrate that students actively engage in non-military forms of state defense. This participation manifests through educational and community-based activities that combine moral training, social awareness, and civic responsibility. Students regularly participate in formal and informal educational programs, character development sessions, social service initiatives, and cultural activities designed to reinforce national identity.

### Comparison with the National Framework

To contextualize these findings, the researchers referred to the national framework for non-military defense participation published by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) in 2023. The framework outlines key domains of civic participation: education, character development, social and community engagement, and cultural and national reinforcement. When compared qualitatively, the implementation of these domains at Sabilunnajat closely aligns with national standards. Teachers and administrators consistently promote civic consciousness through religious education, discipline, and social cooperation. Students’ involvement in local community work, leadership training, and commemorative national events illustrates that *pesantren*-based education can foster

the same civic values targeted by national programs, albeit through moral and spiritual formation rather than institutional defense mechanisms.

### *Patterns of Participation*

Field observations and interviews identified three key patterns of student participation in non-military state defense: (1) Integration of Faith and Civic Duty. The *kyais* and teachers at Sabilunnajat teach that serving one's country is an extension of serving God. This integration is realized in students' everyday discipline, obedience to institutional rules, and contributions to social welfare (*Kyai #2, Interview, July 2024*); (2) Community Engagement as Civic Practice. *Santri* frequently participate in local activities such as environmental clean-ups, health awareness campaigns, and voluntary teaching in nearby schools. These practices embody civic responsibility without relying on formal military-style training (*Santri #3, Interview, August 2024*), and (3) Cultural and Character Reinforcement. Through events such as flag ceremonies, national day celebrations, and musyawarah forums, students develop an emotional attachment to the nation while learning democratic values and cooperation. These experiences provide practical lessons in unity and patriotism (*Ustadz #4, Interview, September 2024*).

### *Interpretive Reflection*

Participants often used the term "moral preparedness" to describe their understanding of state defense. The idea aligns with the Qur'anic teaching in *Al-Anfal 8:60*: "Prepare against them whatever strength you can muster," which, according to *kyai* interpretations, refers not only to physical power but also to spiritual, moral, and intellectual resilience. Within this interpretive frame, non-military defense is understood as moral readiness to protect harmony, uphold justice, and serve the community. Thus, Sabilunnajat exemplifies a faith-based model of civic education, where nationalism grows organically from religious conviction and social service. The *pesantren* fosters patriotism not through military imitation, but through sustained moral training, community involvement, and cultural continuity.

### *Methodological Alignment*

This section aligns with the research's phenomenological case study design. The analysis prioritizes participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to civic and spiritual engagement. References to national data serve as contextual reinforcement rather than quantitative evidence. This ensures that the interpretation remains faithful to qualitative inquiry exploring how nationalism is *experienced, practiced, and understood* by *pesantren* students and educators in everyday life.

## **Discussion**

The management of Sabilunnajat Islamic Boarding School reflects a practical realization of the Blending Model of Islamic Boarding School Management conceptualized by Sangia et al. (2022). This model integrates traditional *pesantren* values such as moral discipline, devotion, and community service with modern management principles that emphasize systematic planning, measurable evaluation, and institutional transparency. In this blended framework, *pesantren* leadership upholds the local wisdom of *santri* character formation (*akhlak* and *ubudiyah*) while simultaneously adopting modern administrative mechanisms such as structured curriculum design and financial accountability. The implementation of this model at Sabilunnajat aligns with the present study's findings that patriotic spiritualism thrives best within an educational culture that harmonizes moral-spiritual values with organized institutional governance (Utaminingsih et al., 2025). Thus, the blending management approach reinforces the *pesantren's* dual function as a spiritual community and a professionally managed educational institution, capable of nurturing faith-based nationalism in the contemporary era (Khaldi et al., 2019).

The findings of this study demonstrate that *Pondok Pesantren Sabilunnajat* successfully cultivates patriotic and civic values through spiritual and moral education rather than militaristic

training. This outcome resonates with Haryanti et al. (2025)'s character education theory, which posits that moral integrity, social responsibility, and civic engagement are best developed through value-based learning. However, unlike secular models of civic education that rely on rational ethics and citizenship laws, *pesantren* nationalism is spiritually embodied, grounded in the integration of *iman* (faith) and *hubbul wathan* (love of homeland) (Saada, 2023). This raises a theoretical question: can nationalism rooted in spirituality coexist with the secular notion of civic identity?

From a comparative perspective, studies in Malaysia and Pakistan (Puadi, 2023; Nugroho et al., 2023) show that religious schools often face tension between doctrinal loyalty and civic pluralism. Sabilunnajat's experience, therefore, represents a nuanced form of religious nationalism, one that negotiates between devotion to faith and commitment to the state. While this model effectively nurtures discipline and solidarity, it also risks limiting civic imagination to moral conformity, rather than fostering critical participation in democratic life (Mazid et al., 2025).

The research data reveal that *santri* internalize national values through everyday rituals, discipline, and collective worship. Nevertheless, from a critical standpoint, such expressions of patriotism may be symbolic rather than transformative. The enthusiasm shown during ceremonies or community service might reflect social expectation rather than conscious civic agency. To address this concern, the study applied data triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents to ensure interpretive validity (Rahman, 2022). Nonetheless, the phenomenological approach cannot eliminate the researcher's interpretive bias, particularly when decoding spiritual experiences as indicators of nationalism.

In terms of conceptual clarity, the *pesantren* experience suggests a layered understanding: (1) Patriotism refers to emotional attachment to the homeland; (2) Nationalism involves political commitment to collective identity and sovereignty; and (3) Civic identity entails moral responsibility and participation in community governance. Sabilunnajat's model primarily cultivates patriotism and civic identity, while nationalism emerges as a moral consequence rather than an ideological program. This distinction is vital to avoid conflating devotion with dogma, a tension that global scholarship on religious education (Apud et al., 2020) has long emphasized.

The integration of Edi (2023) multicultural education theory and In'ami et al. (2023) moral social theory helps explain how *pesantren* education accommodates pluralism while reinforcing national cohesion. Whereas Lickona focuses on moral formation, Banks highlights inclusivity, and Ma'arif underscores the role of ethics in social order. Together, these frameworks illustrate that spiritual discipline can serve as a moral infrastructure for civic harmony, provided it remains open to dialogue with diversity and modernity. Sabilunnajat's case shows how local faith traditions can sustain nationalism not through exclusion but through *ukhuwah insaniyyah*, a sense of universal brotherhood rooted in faith and community (Halid, 2019).

At the same time, this research acknowledges several empirical and methodological challenges. Although most respondents strongly agreed with national values, the absence of dissenting voices may reflect social desirability bias (Nuryanto & Yunita, 2024). The *pesantren's* hierarchical culture could influence how students articulate loyalty to the state or religious leaders. Furthermore, the data do not measure the long-term internalization of nationalism among alums once they leave the *pesantren* environment. Future longitudinal studies could clarify whether this spirituality-based patriotism endures beyond institutional boundaries (Yulia & Rahman, 2021).

When situated within broader debates on non-military national defense, the findings highlight *pesantren* as effective agents of civic resilience. Their contribution is not through physical preparedness but through cultivating moral readiness and social solidarity (Dwi et al., 2024). This complements the Indonesian government's national defense strategy, which increasingly recognizes education as a key domain of non-military defense (BPS/KemenPPPA, 2023). Nevertheless, unlike state-driven programs, *pesantren* promote a form of nationalism that is affective and ritualized rather than bureaucratic or formal (Astuti, 2024).

Finally, while this research confirms that *pesantren* strengthen grassroots nationalism, it also invites a more critical interpretation: spiritual habituation alone may not be sufficient to confront global ideological challenges, such as radicalism or hyper-individualism. The *pesantren's* pedagogical strength lies in moral formation, but its future relevance depends on whether it can integrate digital literacy, intercultural understanding, and critical civic dialogue into its spiritual framework. The discussion reaffirms the dual character of *pesantren* nationalism as both spiritual and civic. This synthesis between moral education and civic consciousness positions *pesantren* as strategic partners of the state in fostering non-military defense, while preserving their unique religious ethos. However, to sustain this relevance in the global era, *pesantren* must evolve from being moral communities of obedience into civic communities of reflection, where faith-inspired patriotism contributes not only to national unity but also to democratic vitality.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the reformulation of education based on *patriotic spiritualism* at *Pondok Pesantren Sabilunnajat* demonstrates how spirituality can serve as an alternative model of civic education, in which nationalism is internalized through habituation, *kyai* leadership, and curriculum integration rather than through militaristic indoctrination. The key finding reveals that patriotic identity emerges not from coercive discipline but from *transformative spiritual practices*, such as daily worship, communal service, and moral reflection, that cultivate a sense of belonging and civic responsibility. Conceptually, this research fills a gap in prior studies that have emphasized military or ideological approaches by proposing *spiritual citizenship* as a new analytical framework in understanding grassroots nationalism. In practice, it implies that *pesantrens* can serve as partners in national education policy by developing integrative modules that combine faith, civic values, and community engagement. Nevertheless, the study's single-site focus limits its generalizability and may not capture variations across gender, alum experiences, or *pesantren* typologies. Future research should adopt a comparative, longitudinal design to explore how different *pesantren* models operationalize patriotic spiritualism across diverse sociocultural contexts. Ultimately, this study contributes to both theory and practice by positioning *pesantren*-based education as a *transformative and inclusive model* for strengthening civic identity through moral and spiritual formation.

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