

## Managing Democratic Education within *Pesantren* Traditions: A Multi-Case Study of Islamic Boarding Schools in Cianjur, Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT.** Democratic education in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is frequently understood as an implicit cultural outcome of religious traditions rather than a product of intentional institutional governance. This study addresses this gap by examining how democratic education is organised and enacted within *pesantren* management structures. Using a qualitative multi-case study of three *pesantren* in Cianjur, Indonesia, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analysed through cross-case thematic comparison. The findings reveal a hybrid governance model in which participatory practices are embedded within *kyai*-centred authority. Democratic planning is conducted through consultative forums, organisational arrangements combine hierarchical leadership with student self-governance, and democratic enactment occurs through student organisations, deliberative forums, and regulated leadership elections. Monitoring relies primarily on dialogic evaluation and collective reflection. Conceptually, the study introduces a tradition-based democratic governance model. It reframes democratic education in *pesantren* as a process of guided participation, extending hidden curriculum theory by demonstrating how participatory values are institutionally structured within faith-based educational settings. These findings contribute to broader debates on culturally embedded democratic governance in education.

**Keywords:** *Democratic education; guided participation; hidden curriculum; Islamic boarding schools; pesantren governance; tradition-based democratic governance.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of democratic education has become a global priority as educational institutions are increasingly expected to counter the spread of radical ideologies through value-based learning and participatory governance. International studies emphasize that democratic competencies are not only transmitted through formal curricula but are shaped through institutional management, leadership patterns, and participatory practices embedded in everyday educational processes. Within the Indonesian context, this agenda is particularly relevant due to the persistence of radical narratives that adapt to social and digital environments, requiring educational responses that are culturally grounded and structurally sustainable. *Pesantren* occupy a strategic position in this landscape because of their long historical role in shaping religious authority, moral formation, and

community networks. Their influence extends beyond formal instruction through alumni relations and social legitimacy, making them effective sites for the transmission of value across generations (Sadiyah et al., 2019).

However, democratic education in *pesantren* cannot be understood solely as a doctrinal alignment with pluralism; it must be examined as a managerial process that structures participation, authority, and deliberation. This perspective shifts the discussion from normative compatibility to institutional practice (Abrori et al., 2022). By focusing on management functions, democratic education is treated as an organizational phenomenon rather than a purely cultural attribute. Such an approach enables a more precise analysis of how participatory values are operationalised within religious educational systems. *Pesantren* traditions provide a distinctive organizational environment characterized by hierarchical authority, moral leadership, and communal learning structures that shape decision-making processes and social interaction. The study by Hendriawan et al. (2026) describes *pesantren* as subcultural systems with stable value orientations, ritual practices, and internal governance patterns that regulate everyday life. These characteristics create both opportunities and constraints for democratic education, as participatory mechanisms must operate within a framework of charismatic leadership and moral legitimacy.

The principle of *al-muhafadzah 'alal qadim al-shalih wal akhdzu bil jadid al-aslah* illustrates an adaptive logic that allows institutional innovation without disrupting traditional authority. This adaptive capacity is crucial for understanding how democratic practices are negotiated rather than imposed (Tyas et al., 2020). The teaching of classical texts, ethical habituation, and communal discipline provides the normative basis for interpreting concepts such as justice, consultation, and collective responsibility. Yet the presence of these values does not automatically indicate structured democratic learning (Dirawan et al., 2023). Their educational impact depends on how they are planned, organised, implemented, and evaluated within *pesantren* management systems. Therefore, the relevance of *pesantren* tradition to democratic education lies in its institutional governance rather than in its symbolic alignment with democratic ideals. Analysing these managerial dynamics provides a more rigorous understanding of how participation is cultivated in religious educational settings.

Existing scholarship has largely examined *pesantren* in relation to character education, religious moderation, and cultural resilience, highlighting the compatibility between Islamic values and democratic principles (Abrori et al., 2022). Studies on *kyai* leadership and value-based learning (Nurmayuli, 2023) demonstrate the central role of moral authority and habituation in shaping student behaviour. Research on *pesantren* typologies of Basri et al. (2019) further reveals institutional diversity in curriculum orientation and pedagogical models. However, these studies predominantly frame democracy as a normative value or cultural disposition rather than as an outcome of educational management. Despite acknowledging participatory practices such as deliberation and student organisation, prior research rarely analyses how these practices are structurally designed, coordinated, and evaluated (Yusup et al., 2021).

The managerial mechanisms that enable or limit democratic learning remain underexplored. This gap is significant because institutional governance determines whether democratic values become lived experiences or remain symbolic references. Moreover, the relationship between *pesantren* typology and variations in participatory management has not been systematically compared. Addressing this limitation requires an analytical framework that connects leadership, organisational structure, and program implementation. Such a framework allows democratic education to be examined as an institutional process rather than an incidental cultural effect. The regulatory framework in Indonesia strengthens the expectation that *pesantren* contribute to the formation of democratic and socially responsible citizens, as articulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 and Law No. 18 of 2019. These policies position *pesantren* as formal actors within the national education system while preserving their cultural autonomy. This dual positioning creates a managerial challenge: integrating participatory educational practices within traditional governance structures (Lyu et al., 2025).

The four management functions proposed by March (2016), planning, organising, implementing, and controlling, provide an analytical lens to assess how democratic values are operationalised in institutional routines. From this perspective, democratic education is not limited to classroom instruction but encompasses decision-making procedures, leadership selection, program evaluation, and student participation. The role of the *kyai* becomes particularly significant because charismatic authority shapes organisational legitimacy and determines the scope of participatory space (Marlina et al., 2026). Value-based leadership influences how consultation forums, student organisations, and collective problem-solving mechanisms are structured. Thus, democratic learning emerges through guided participation rather than procedural equality. Understanding this configuration requires examining how managerial practices mediate between hierarchy and deliberation. This approach also clarifies how accountability is constructed through social norms rather than formal performance indicators.

Based on these considerations, the main research problem lies in the absence of a comparative and managerial analysis of democratic education within *pesantren* traditions. Previous studies have not systematically explained how planning, organisational design, program implementation, and evaluation processes shape participatory learning across different institutional typologies. This study addresses that gap by conducting a multi-case analysis of the Al-Barkah, Al-Hasbi, and Al-Riyadl pesantrens in Cianjur Regency, focusing on the interactions among leadership, organisational structure, and student governance. The novelty of this research lies in conceptualising democratic education in *pesantren* as a form of guided participatory management embedded within traditional authority systems. This perspective extends the hidden curriculum debate by demonstrating that informal value transmission is structured through institutional design rather than occurring spontaneously.

The study also provides a cross-typology comparison that reveals how different organisational models produce varying patterns of participation while maintaining a shared deliberative ethos. The objective is to analyse how management functions shape democratic practices and to identify a contextual governance model rooted in religious tradition. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to discussions of democratic education in faith-based institutions and, practically, to the development of culturally grounded participatory management. By linking organisational processes with value formation, this research offers a framework for understanding how democracy can be cultivated within hierarchical educational environments.

## **METHOD**

This study is grounded in an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm that views democratic education as a socially constructed process shaped by everyday interactions within *pesantren* governance. From this perspective, participatory values are not treated as fixed attributes but as meanings negotiated among *kyais*, teachers, and *santri* through institutional practices (Sugiyono, 2022). Symbolic interactionism provides the analytical lens to examine how democratic concepts such as deliberation, leadership, and collective responsibility are produced, interpreted, and legitimised in routine organisational settings. This framework enables the study to trace how authority, language, rituals, and decision-making forums function as symbolic arenas in which participation is guided rather than procedurally equal (Maharani & Saputri, 2024).

Consequently, the analysis focuses on the interactional processes through which managerial actions structure opportunities for voice, consultation, and accountability. By positioning democratic education as an interpretive organisational phenomenon, the research connects micro-level interactions with institutional governance. This approach is appropriate for examining value transmission in religious educational environments where hierarchy and participation coexist. The methodological orientation, therefore, emphasises meaning-making, negotiated authority, and contextually embedded practice.

A multi-site embedded case study design was employed to enable cross-typology comparison of democratic education management across three *pesantren* in Cianjur Regency: Al-Barkah, Al-Hasbi, and Al-Riyadl. These sites were selected through purposive sampling to represent distinct institutional models: a salafiyah *pesantren* focused on classical texts, a hybrid *pesantren* integrating formal schooling, and a *pesantren* providing equivalency education programmes. This variation allows analytical comparison of how organisational structure influences participatory mechanisms. The unit of analysis comprises actors, managerial processes, and institutional forums through which democratic practices are organised.

Data were collected over one academic cycle to capture routine decision-making, leadership selection, and program evaluation. The embedded design enables examination of both institutional patterns and interactional dynamics within each site. Cross-case analysis was used to identify convergent governance logics and context-specific variations. This comparative strategy strengthens analytical generalisation rather than statistical inference. The design aligns with the study’s objective of theorising democratic education as guided participatory management within traditional authority systems.

Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in *pesantren* governance and student organisation. A total of 36 informants were included: three *kyais* (one per *pesantren*), nine teachers, nine student administrators, and fifteen *santri* members. Inclusion criteria required active participation in planning meetings, organisational management, leadership selection, or evaluation forums, while individuals without institutional roles were excluded from the core sample but remained part of the observational context. This composition ensures representation of both authority holders and participants in democratic processes. *Kyais* were selected to examine value-based leadership and decision legitimacy; teachers to analyse program coordination; student administrators to explore organisational implementation; and *santri* to capture experiential interpretations of participation. The sampling strategy prioritises information-rich cases rather than numerical balance. Data saturation was reached when recurring interactional patterns and governance mechanisms were consistently observed across sites. This transparent specification of actors clarifies the empirical basis of the analysis. It also enables systematic comparison of role-based perspectives on democratic practice.

Table 1. Operationalisation of Democratic Education Management in *Pesantren*

POAC Function	Interactional Focus	Democratic Indicators	Data Sources	Analysis Mode
Planning	Deliberative meetings and agenda setting; legitimacy discourse of <i>kyai</i> –teachers– <i>santri</i>	Consultative forums, proposal opportunities, and recognition of student voice	Meeting observations, planning documents, elite interviews	Interaction mapping of voice, validation, and authority framing
Organising	Role construction and hierarchy–participation balance in student governance	Functional student roles, negotiated responsibilities, procedural coordination	Organisational statutes, role descriptions, and interviews	Role and structure analysis of participatory space
Actuating	Ritualised participation in programs, elections, and collective problem-solving	Guided leadership selection, deliberative decision-making, shared program execution.	Activity observations, election processes, reports	Discourse analysis of participation patterns and decision pathways
Controlling	Dialogic evaluation and moral accountability practices	Feedback forums, collective reflection, norm-based accountability	Evaluation meetings, reflective notes, and institutional records	Comparative analysis of evaluative narratives

Cross-case	Typology-based variation in guided participation	Procedural differences, shared deliberative ethos	All sites	Cross-case synthesis for governance model building
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This matrix operationalises democratic education as an interactionally organised managerial process. Each POAC function is examined as a symbolic arena where participation is negotiated within traditional authority, enabling cross-case comparison and conceptual generalisation. Data collection combined participant observation, in-depth interviews, and institutional document analysis, each aligned with the four management functions of planning, organising, implementing, and controlling. Observations focused on consultative meetings, student organisation activities, leadership elections, and evaluation forums to capture interactional patterns and symbolic practices. Interviews were semi-structured and explored how actors interpreted participation, authority, deliberation, and accountability within managerial routines.

Documentary sources included organisational structures, program schedules, leadership guidelines, and evaluation records to trace formalised governance mechanisms. Rather than cataloguing activities, data collection was directed by analytical questions concerning how participatory space is structured, who is authorised to speak, how decisions are negotiated, and how accountability is enacted. This alignment ensures that empirical materials correspond directly to the conceptual framework. Field engagement over several months enabled observation of cyclical managerial processes rather than isolated events. Reflexive field notes were used to document interactional contexts and researcher positioning. Triangulation across methods and actors was applied to corroborate interpretations of democratic practice.

Data analysis followed an iterative, theory-informed interpretive process. All interviews and field notes were coded using a combination of deductive categories derived from the POAC management framework and inductive themes emerging from interactional data. Symbolic interactionism focused on language use, role negotiation, ritualised consultation, and the moral framing of decisions. Within-case analysis identified how each *pesantren* structured participatory governance, while cross-case comparison examined how typological differences shaped the scope and form of guided participation (Kusuma, 2021).

Analytical memos were used to connect managerial structures with the lived experiences of democracy. Credibility was ensured through member reflection with key informants, peer debriefing, and systematic comparison of observational and documentary evidence. An audit trail documented coding decisions, category development, and cross-site synthesis to support dependability and confirmability. Thick contextual description enables readers to assess transferability to other faith-based educational settings. The analytical outcome is not a procedural evaluation but a conceptual model of democratic education as an interactionally organised managerial practice. This model explains how hierarchical authority and participatory learning are institutionally reconciled within *pesantren* governance.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### *Participatory yet Kyai-Centred Democratic Planning*

Planning across the three *pesantren* was institutionalised through annual formal meetings that brought together the *kyai* council, teachers, and student administrators, indicating the routinisation of consultative forums within organisational governance. These meetings functioned as arenas for articulating institutional goals, determining flagship programmes, and aligning budget priorities, while also providing structured opportunities for participants to propose activities and implementation strategies. Field data show that teachers and student leaders were able to introduce

programmatic ideas, particularly related to organisational activities and scheduling, which were subsequently discussed collectively before being synthesised into a unified plan.

Anticipatory considerations regarding policy changes, resource capacity, and program feasibility were also negotiated in these forums, demonstrating that planning involved forward-looking organisational assessment rather than administrative formalities. In Al-Riyadl, planning outcomes were disseminated hierarchically to ensure shared understanding across organisational levels, while Al-Barkah and Al-Hasbi incorporated student input more directly in the formulation stage. These practices indicate that consultation operated as a structured managerial routine rather than an incidental interaction. The presence of multiple actors in agenda-setting processes reflects an embedded participatory mechanism within institutional planning. However, participation was mediated through established organisational roles rather than open deliberation.

Despite the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, final validation of planning decisions remained concentrated at the *kyai* level, whose moral authority provided the primary source of institutional legitimacy. Informants consistently described the *kyai* as the ultimate reference point for resolving competing proposals and determining program priorities, particularly when deliberations produced divergent recommendations. This centralised endorsement did not eliminate consultation but functioned as a mechanism for harmonising collective input with institutional values and long-term direction. The planning process, therefore, combined deliberative discussion with authoritative confirmation, producing a governance pattern in which participation was guided rather than procedurally equal. Student representatives contributed primarily to operational aspects, such as activity design and implementation timelines, while strategic orientation and value alignment were retained at the leadership level. This distribution of roles structured participation without dissolving hierarchical order. The *kyai*'s involvement also ensured that proposed programmes were evaluated according to moral and educational criteria beyond technical feasibility. As a result, the planning outcomes reflected negotiated agreement within a value-based leadership framework.

Cross-case comparison reveals that *pesantren* typology influenced the scope and form of participatory planning while maintaining a consistent consultative logic. Hybrid institutional settings, particularly Al-Hasbi and Al-Riyadl, involved a broader range of actors and more formalised dissemination mechanisms, enabling wider organisational engagement in agenda alignment. In contrast, the salafiyah-oriented environment of Al-Barkah maintained a more limited yet structured participatory format, in which consultation occurred within defined organisational boundaries. Nevertheless, all sites demonstrated a common pattern in which planning was conducted through collective discussion, role-based input, and centralised validation. This indicates the presence of a shared governance model characterised by negotiated participation anchored in charismatic authority. Planning, therefore, functioned as a managerial process that balanced deliberative interaction with hierarchical legitimacy, producing programmatic decisions that were collectively informed yet institutionally unified. The recurring combination of consultative forums, role-differentiated input, and *kyai* endorsement across the three cases suggests an embedded model of guided participatory planning within *pesantren* governance.

#### *Hybrid Organisational Structures Combining Hierarchy and Participation*

All *pesantren* exhibited formal organisational structures that clearly defined roles for *kyais*, teacher councils, and student administrations, indicating the existence of internal governance systems. Leadership authority remained hierarchical, yet functional responsibilities were distributed to enable student participation in program coordination and daily management. At Al-Barkah, the head of the *pesantren* held ultimate policy authority, while the teacher council served as the programme implementer, and the student head served as liaison for democratic activities. A similar tiered structure was observed at Al-Hasbi, where student committees managed technical execution of activities under teacher supervision. In Al-Riyadl, organisational arrangements extended to

include parents as partners in program evaluation forums, expanding the participatory network beyond internal actors.

Table 2. Organizational Structure of Human Resources at Al-Barkah Islamic Boarding School

Position	Main Duties
Islamic Boarding School Leadership	Decision-making, policy direction setting
<i>Kyai</i> Council	Program formulation and education policy development
Teachers Council	Technical implementer of learning and guidance for Islamic boarding school students
Student Leader	Coordinator of <i>santri</i> activities

Division of roles in the organizational structure of Al-Barkah Islamic Boarding School. The head of the boarding school holds the ultimate authority in policy direction, while the Council of *Kyai* is responsible for program formulation. The Teachers' Council serves as the executive body, while the Head of Students acts as the liaison between teachers and students in carrying out democratic activities such as managing the student organization.

Table 3. Distribution of Key Roles in the Organization of Al-Hasbi Islamic Boarding School

Management Unit	Main Duties
<i>Kyai</i> Council	Policy makers, program directors
Teachers/Ustadz	Learning activity implementer and student advisor
Student Leader	Coordinator of the <i>santri</i> organization and liaison between ustadz and <i>santri</i>
Program Committee	Technical implementer of specific activities according to the <i>pesantren</i> agenda

The organizational structure of Al-Hasbi Islamic Boarding School gives clear authority to each management unit. The division of tasks is hierarchical and tiered to ensure the smooth implementation of programs while still allowing for student participation, especially in activities directly related to the democratization of the boarding school.

Table 4. General Organizational Structure of Al-Riyadl Islamic Boarding School

Unit	Main Duties
Islamic Boarding School Leadership	Policy makers and program directors
Ustadz Council	Learning and coaching program implementer
Student Organization Management	Daily activity implementer and coordinator between students
Student Parents	Program evaluation partners in the meeting forum

The organizational structure at Al-Riyadl Islamic Boarding School is hierarchical but also provides opportunities for collaboration among leaders, teachers, students, and parents. This structure supports the implementation of democratic education, which requires the involvement of various parties.

#### *Democracy as Lived Practice through Student Governance*

Democratic learning across the three *pesantren* was operationalised through student governance structures that organised daily activities, coordinated programmes, and facilitated internal deliberation. Students were assigned formal responsibilities within organisational units, including scheduling duties, managing events, and overseeing peer discipline, which required them to negotiate tasks collectively and maintain accountability to both teachers and institutional regulations. Routine meetings functioned as decision-making arenas where operational issues were discussed, alternatives were proposed, and agreements were reached through consensus-oriented dialogue. These practices provided repeated exposure to shared authority within clearly bounded

roles, allowing students to experience participation as an organisational obligation rather than an abstract concept.

Informants consistently described these forums as spaces for learning how to articulate positions, respond to differing viewpoints, and implement collectively agreed outcomes. The distribution of responsibilities also created interdependence among members, reinforcing the need for coordination and mutual monitoring in programme execution. Through these structured interactions, democratic engagement was embedded in everyday governance rather than limited to episodic events. The experiential nature of these processes positioned participation as a habitual practice linked to institutional routines. As a result, democratic competencies developed through role performance, interactional negotiation, and task-based collaboration.

Leadership selection constituted a central mechanism through which participatory experience was formalised. All *pesantren* implemented a guided electoral model in which candidates were identified based on moral conduct, academic competence, and organisational experience before being presented to the student body for voting. This sequence combined institutional screening with collective choice, enabling students to engage in electoral procedures while ensuring conformity with *pesantren* value standards. Campaign activities, vision presentations, and voting processes created structured opportunities for public expression, candidate evaluation, and acceptance of majority outcomes. Following elections, elected leaders were responsible for coordinating programmes and reporting progress in periodic meetings, reinforcing accountability to their peers and supervisors. Informants noted that this process trained students to balance personal preference with institutional criteria when selecting leaders.

The presence of supervision did not eliminate participation but framed it within normative boundaries that emphasised responsibility and ethical conduct. Variations across sites were observed in the level of procedural formalisation, with hybrid *pesantren* adopting more elaborate election committees and salafiyah settings applying simpler mechanisms. Despite these differences, all cases demonstrated the integration of participatory selection within organisational governance. Leadership rotation further ensured that multiple students experienced representative roles over time.

Deliberative learning was also reinforced through curricular and co-curricular activities that required collective problem-solving and discussion. Forums such as *babtsul masail*, class deliberations, and collaborative learning sessions enabled students to analyse issues, formulate arguments, and reach decisions grounded in shared references. In Al-Hasbi and Al-Riyadh, scheduled dialogue sessions allowed students to convey programme feedback directly to teachers, while Al-Barkah relied more on mentoring channels that conveyed student perspectives indirectly through organisational representatives. These interactional pathways created multiple layers of communication between students and institutional authorities.

Peer monitoring systems, including duty rosters and group responsibilities, further required students to negotiate compliance and resolve minor conflicts internally before escalation. Informants indicated that these practices cultivated acceptance of collective outcomes and reinforced the importance of procedural order. Democratic engagement, therefore, emerged through repeated cycles of discussion, decision, implementation, and reflection embedded in daily life. Cross-case comparison shows that participation was consistently structured, supervised, and role-based across institutional typologies. The findings indicate that democratic experience functioned as a lived organisational practice shaped by guided interaction, shared responsibilities, and deliberative routines.

#### *Control Mechanisms Blending Moral Authority and Managerial Evaluation*

Evaluation processes in the three *pesantren* were conducted through periodic meetings, direct supervision, and continuous communication between leaders, teachers, and student administrators.

Monitoring focused on program implementation, discipline, and organisational performance, with feedback delivered verbally and through written notes. In Al-Riyadl, post-activity meetings generated records used as references for subsequent planning cycles, while Al-Hasbi emphasised collegial discussions to review progress and identify corrective actions. Al-Barkah applied routine consultations between leadership and teachers to ensure alignment with institutional goals.

Student performance was assessed through both behavioural observation and activity reports, reflecting a combination of formal and informal accountability. Evaluation forums allowed participants to report challenges, propose adjustments, and collectively determine follow-up actions. Despite the presence of performance comparisons with initial plans, control mechanisms relied primarily on dialogic reflection rather than numerical indicators. Leadership oversight remained central, with *kyais* providing final guidance on corrective measures. Cross-case analysis indicates that accountability was constructed through shared discussion, moral reminders, and continuous supervision. Control, therefore, functioned as an iterative learning process linking reflection, feedback, and program adjustment.

### *Curriculum Integration and Institutional Ethos*

Across the three sites, democratic values were embedded within curricular and co-curricular activities rather than presented as standalone subjects. Learning processes combined theoretical discussion with practical engagement through student organisations, deliberative forums, and community interaction. Teachers reported integrating contemporary issues into discussions of classical texts, enabling students to connect ethical teachings with social realities. Extracurricular programs, talent development activities, and organisational training were planned at the beginning of the academic cycle and evaluated periodically. Rules and responsibilities were socialised to both students and parents, reinforcing shared expectations and accountability. Reward and sanction systems were applied consistently to maintain organisational discipline. Student cadres were developed through affiliated youth organisations, providing extended participation networks. Although no specific textbooks on democracy were used, values such as consultation, responsibility, and respect for difference were transmitted through etiquette instruction and collective decision-making practices. Community engagement activities further linked internal governance with broader social participation. Cross-case comparison shows a consistent institutional ethos characterised by guided participation, structured roles, and deliberative interaction embedded in daily routines.

## **Discussion**

### *Tradition-Based Democratic Governance in Pesantren*

The findings of this study indicate that democratic governance in *Pesantren* does not operate according to the logic of liberal procedural democracy but rather through managerial rationality embedded in socio-religious traditions. Decision-making processes are structured around practices of deliberation, moral legitimacy, and communal responsibility, so that participation is not understood as a purely individual expression, but as a culturally mediated social practice (Boldt, 2018; Ast, 2019; Møller, 2021; Dwinata et al., 2025; Shalihin, 2025). Consultative planning routines and role-based organizational arrangements suggest that governance stability is maintained more by ethical authority and collective norms than by formal regulation. This pattern extends previous studies of Islamic boarding school leadership that place trust, service, and moral sustainability as primary sources of institutional legitimacy (Nurmayuli, 2023; Utomo & Nadia, 2024; Bustomi et al., 2025). The integration of classical text learning with contemporary social issues also demonstrates that democratic reasoning develops through interpretive engagement and reflective dialogue, rather than simply through the transmission of formal civic knowledge. Thus, educational practices in *Pesantren* reflect a deliberative perspective that grounds democratic learning in dialogue and shared meaning-making (Marlina et al., 2026).

The organizational evidence presented in Table 5 demonstrates that structural differentiation can coexist with communal deliberation, resulting in a hybrid form of governance that is neither fully hierarchical nor fully egalitarian. This configuration demonstrates that democratic practices can be institutionalized within a value-based authority system without losing organizational coherence. The presence of consultative forums at various levels of leadership reflects a distribution of responsibility that maintains the unity of collective norms. This finding aligns with the perspective of educational organizations as loosely coupled systems, where coordination occurs through the negotiation of meaning and social relationships rather than through rigid bureaucratization (Weick, 2012). In this context, leadership practices in *Pesantren* also reflect the principle of distributed leadership, namely, leadership as a collective practice that emerges from interactions among organizational actors, rather than the monopoly of formal authority (Spillane, 2006). Furthermore, the sustainability of communal deliberation appears to be supported by a high level of relational trust, marked by mutual respect, moral responsibility, and commitment to shared goals, which is a crucial prerequisite for increasing the capacity of educational organizations (Bryk et al., 2010).

Table 5. Organizational Structure Model of the Islamic Boarding School

Name Model	<i>Pesantren Al-Barkah</i>	<i>Pesantren Al-Hasbi</i>	<i>Pesantren Al-Riyadl</i>
Advisor ( <i>Pembina</i> )	<i>Pembina</i>	<i>Pembina</i>	<i>Pembina</i>
Advisor ( <i>penasehat</i> )	<i>Penasehat</i>	<i>Penasehat</i>	<i>Penasehat</i>
General Leadership	<i>Kepala</i>	<i>Ketua Umum</i>	<i>Pimpinan Umum</i>
Vice Leadership	<i>Wakil Kepala</i>	<i>Wakil Pimpinan</i>	<i>Wakil Pimpinan</i>
Secretary	<i>Sekretaris</i>	<i>Sekretaris</i>	<i>Sekretaris</i>
Treasurer	<i>Bendahara</i>	<i>Bendahara</i>	<i>Bendahara</i>
Curriculum	<i>Kurikulum</i>	<i>Seksi Pendidikan</i>	<i>Kurikulum</i>
Student Management ( <i>pengurusan santri</i> )	<i>Pengasub Kobong</i>	<i>Pengurus Kobong</i>	<i>Pengurusan Santri</i>
Facilities	<i>Sarana</i>	<i>Sarpras</i>	<i>Sarana</i>
Public Relations	<i>Humas</i>	<i>Humas</i>	<i>Humas</i>
Extracurricular Supervisor	<i>Pembina Ekstrakurikuler</i>	<i>Koordinator Ekstrakurikuler</i>	<i>Pembina Ekstrakurikuler</i>
Student Organization	<i>Hisab (Himpunan Santri Al-Barkah)</i>	<i>Ikatan Pengurus Putera-Puteri Alhasbi (IP3A)</i>	<i>Badan Eksekutif Santri (BES)</i>

Structurally, the organizational models in the three *Pesantren* demonstrate a uniform management pattern, with differences primarily in local terminology that reflects the identity of each institution without altering its basic institutional function. Task-sharing documents indicate that each unit has a clear job description, while role distribution is determined through collective deliberation and consensus. This practice demonstrates that the deliberative tradition serves not only as a cultural value but also as an operational governance mechanism within the organization. From the perspective of contemporary educational organization theory, this practice demonstrates how shared norms can serve as a social coordination infrastructure, obviating the need for excessive administrative control. Therefore, democratic governance in *Pesantren* can be understood as a system that is culturally grounded, normatively regulated, and organizationally embedded, where tradition is not an obstacle to participation but rather a source of stability that enables deliberative practices to unfold sustainably (Hajar, 2024).

#### *Hybridization of Charismatic Leadership and Participatory Management*

Empirical evidence indicates a systematic integration of the charismatic authority of the *kyai* (Islamic boarding school) and structured participatory mechanisms in Islamic boarding school governance. Leadership legitimacy remains central, yet serves as a moral framework that guides rather than suppresses collective engagement among organizational members. A purposeful leadership selection process, consultative planning, and dialogic evaluation forums demonstrate that participation occurs within mutually agreed-upon normative boundaries. This finding

challenges the dichotomous assumption in organizational literature that often separates charismatic leadership from democratic management practices. Instead, moral authority appears to act as a coordinating mechanism that maintains value alignment while enabling stable collective participation (Alam & Miah, 2024; Bryk et al., 2010). From an educational leadership perspective, this situation reflects the practice of distributed leadership, where authority is not fully centralized but is channeled through relationships of trust and shared responsibility among organizational members (Spillane, 2006).

The allocation of merit-based roles within a traditional hierarchical structure demonstrates a form of internalized functional differentiation, which not only supports organizational efficiency but also serves as an arena for leadership learning for students. The screening of student leaders based on ethical integrity and academic capacity demonstrates that representation is understood as a moral mandate, not simply a result of electoral popularity. This pattern aligns with the perspective of modern deliberative democracy, which emphasizes the legitimacy of rational deliberation, reflective dialogue, and normative accountability in decision-making processes (Dryzek, 2012; Fishkin, 2018). The consistent presence of oversight within participatory spaces demonstrates that mentoring practices function as a pedagogical mechanism that transmits democratic values through daily interactions. Thus, *pesantren* leadership operates not only as an administrative structure but also as a social process that shapes institutional culture through role models, relational closeness, and collective moral learning (Bolden, 2011; Harris, 2013).

Table 6. Meetings at the Islamic Boarding School

Types of Meetings	Participants	Agenda	Time
Internal Islamic Boarding School Leadership Meeting	Foundation Advisors, Foundation Advisors, General Leadership, Kyai Council	Designing the Islamic Boarding School Program, Developing the Islamic Boarding School Structure, Determining Personnel, and Establishing the Main Duties and Functions of Personnel.	Approaching the beginning and end of the Islamic boarding school year
Limited Leadership Meeting	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council, Teachers' Council	Dissemination of the results of the Internal Islamic Boarding School Leadership Meeting. Strengthening the Islamic Boarding School Program. Assignment of Duties to Teachers/Ustadz (Islamic Teachers) in charge of Islamic Boarding School subjects.	Approaching the Beginning of the Academic Year
Joint Islamic Boarding School Meeting	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council, Teachers' Council/Asatidz Council, Student Management, and Organizations.	Dissemination of Islamic Boarding School Programs at the Beginning of the Year. Strengthening Programs. Determination of Management (Kobong). Determination of Student Organization Duties.	Beginning of the school year.
Joint Islamic Boarding School Meeting	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council, Teachers' Council/Asatidz Council, Student Management, and Organizations.	Evaluation of New Student Admissions. Strengthening the implementation of learning and extracurricular activities.	Beginning of the year
Islamic Boarding School Leadership Meeting	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council.	Determination of candidates for Student Leader based on student proposals.	Beginning of semester 1

Monthly Evaluation Meeting	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council, Teachers' Council/Asatidz Council, Student Management, and Organizations.	Program Evaluation and Progress Reports for each Sector.	Every month, the time and date are different for each Islamic boarding school. It has only been held once a month.
Semester 1 Meeting	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council, Teachers' Council/Asatidz Council, Student Management and Organizations	Program Evaluation Preparation for Semester Promotion.	
Semester 2 and End-of-Year Meetings.	Islamic Board Leaders, Kyai Council, Teachers' Council/Asatidz Council, Student Management, and Organizations.	Reports from all sectors to the Islamic Boarding School Leadership.	End of year.

The data in Table 6 reinforce this interpretation by showing that deliberation is institutionalized through a multi-layered cycle of organizational meetings, from core leadership meetings to monthly and annual evaluations involving various institutional actors. This meeting structure demonstrates that deliberation is not merely a symbolic practice but rather an operational mechanism that continuously connects program planning, implementation, and evaluation. The evaluation forum allows for cross-sector feedback exchange, while the *kyai's* openness to input from program leaders creates a space for shared responsibility in managing *pesantren* learning. This practice reflects the character of educational organizations as loosely coupled systems, in which coordination occurs through social interaction and shared values, without relying on rigid bureaucratization (Weick, 2012). Thus, *pesantren* governance demonstrates that religious traditions can function as social infrastructure that stabilizes participatory practices, allowing organizational democracy to develop through the integration of moral authority, relational trust, and institutionalized deliberative mechanisms.

#### *Student Governance as a Living Laboratory of Democracy*

The findings indicate that student governance functions as an experiential arena where democratic competencies are cultivated through routine organisational practice. Participation is enacted through task coordination, deliberative meetings, leadership rotation, and collective accountability, transforming organisational roles into pedagogical instruments. This supports international evidence that co-curricular civic engagement is essential for meaningful democratic learning (Maghfiroh et al., 2024). Rather than being confined to classroom instruction, democratic experience is embedded in daily institutional life, enabling repeated cycles of discussion, decision, implementation, and reflection.

Guided elections and role-based responsibilities demonstrate that representation is linked to organisational performance and peer accountability. This aligns with research showing that structured student governance strengthens leadership capacity and conflict resolution skills (Chinhara & Kuyayama, 2024). The integration of *babtsul masail* and collaborative learning further indicates that argumentative dialogue serves as a core mechanism for democratic reasoning (Lee et al., 2025). These practices cultivate acceptance of collective outcomes while maintaining respect for institutional norms. The presence of multiple communication channels between students and teachers suggests that voice is mediated rather than unrestricted, reinforcing the concept of bounded participation.

This evidence extends the hidden curriculum scholarship by showing that democratic values are transmitted through managerial routines rather than solely through informal socialisation. Organisational structures, evaluation forums, and leadership mechanisms collectively form a

pedagogical environment where participation is learned through practice. Student governance, therefore, operates as a living laboratory in which democratic identity is shaped through interaction, responsibility, and institutional embeddedness.

#### *Democratic Education as an Organic Mechanism for Preventing Radicalism*

The integration of participatory governance with moral pedagogy indicates that democratic education functions as a structural form of ideological resilience. Rather than relying on counter-radicalisation programmes, *pesantren* cultivate moderation through deliberative routines, collective responsibility, and dialogic problem-solving. The incorporation of classical texts with contemporary issues fosters interpretive flexibility and reduces binary reasoning, supporting findings that critical engagement with tradition strengthens moderate religious outlooks (Yensathit et al., 2025). Organisational differentiation and role distribution create internal checks and balances that limit the concentration of authority and reduce opportunities for exclusivist narratives. Student governance bodies provide spaces for negotiation and shared decision-making, which research identifies as protective factors against ideological rigidity (Wasiaturrahma et al., 2020). The dialogic evaluation mechanisms shown in Table 4.5 indicate that accountability is constructed through collective reflection rather than coercive control. Such processes encourage openness to feedback and discourage absolutist claims.

Daily mentoring relationships among *kyais*, teachers, and students foster strong relational bonds that serve as social safeguards against radical influence. This relational proximity enables early detection of behavioural deviations and reinforces communal norms of moderation (Nurmayuli, 2023). Preventive dynamics are therefore embedded in organisational culture rather than implemented as separate interventions. The convergence of participatory management, moral authority, and deliberative learning forms an organic system of democratic socialisation that strengthens ideological resilience. These findings contribute to counter-radicalisation literature by demonstrating that value-based governance structures can serve as long-term preventive mechanisms within religious education.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that democratic education in *pesantren* operates primarily as an embedded governance culture rather than a formal curricular subject. Democratic practices are enacted through everyday organisational interactions, including deliberative dialogue, shared responsibilities, guided leadership selection, and participatory evaluation. These processes generate a participatory social order grounded in moral authority and communal responsibility. The main contribution of this study is the formulation of a tradition-based democratic governance model within Islamic educational institutions. The findings demonstrate that charismatic religious leadership and participatory management structures are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing. The *kyais'* authority functions as an ethical anchor that legitimises participation, while student governance provides a practical arena for deliberation and collective decision-making. This perspective extends prevailing democratic education theories largely developed in secular schooling contexts by illustrating how democratic practices can emerge organically within value-based religious institutions. The study also reconceptualises the hidden curriculum as an organisational mechanism that structures democratic interaction and responsibility. Although limited to three *pesantren*, the findings provide a conceptual foundation for future comparative research on democratic governance in faith-based education.

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