

# HIDDEN NATIONALISM IN INDONESIA ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL EDUCATION

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the practices of strengthening nationalism in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) pesantren, as well as to examine the role of the Directorate of State Defense under the Ministry of Defense in promoting nationalism policies in Indonesia. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study, using in-depth interviews. The findings of this study show that the reinforcement of nationalism in Muhammadiyah pesantren is carried out through a hidden curriculum emphasizing the concept of Darul Ahdi wa al-Syahadah. In contrast, NU pesantren is implemented through a minimalist curriculum that integrates love for the homeland into ritual and social activities. Although not explicitly stated in the formal curriculum, both organizations consistently internalize national values as part of faith. Meanwhile, the Directorate of State Defense stresses the need to remove the stigma of militarization and develop state defense as character education. However, a policy gap is identified, as nationalism is often perceived merely as a military task, and few ministries or institutions have adopted state defense as a framework for their programs. The study concludes that pesantren hold significant potential in strengthening students' national identity through cultural and non-formal channels. Therefore, synergy is required among the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in formulating an integrated nationalism curriculum that aligns with pesantren culture.

**Keywords:** nationalism, pesantren, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, state defense

## INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is a crucial foundation for Indonesia as a plural nation, binding together diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural communities. Since the republic's early days, pesantren and their students have played a strategic role in the struggle for independence, whether through physical jihad, strategic resistance, or the strengthening of national spirit. Yet this historical narrative has become increasingly marginalized within contemporary national education discourse. Such a situation raises concerns that younger generations, particularly pesantren students, may lose their historical awareness and national identity, which serve as vital social capital (Azra, 2022). As traditional Islamic educational institutions,

pesantren continue to play a strategic role in instilling the values of nationalism in their students (Murdianto, 2025).

Throughout history, pesantren and santri have made significant contributions to the independence struggle through physical resistance, strategic efforts, and the reinforcement of national spirit (Hafidzin & Ekaningrum, 2020; Sauri et al., 2018; Zulfikar & Roesminingsih, 2023). However, these historical narratives are now often forgotten or marginalized in national education discourse. This creates a serious challenge, as younger generations—especially pesantren students—risk losing the historical awareness and national identity that are essential social capital (Azra, 2022; Hanif et al., 2024; Listrianti & Mundiri, 2020). Hence, strengthening nationalism through education becomes critical to ensure the continuity of the patriotic spirit in facing globalization and contemporary political dynamics (Athoillah et al., 2024).

Nationalism education in Indonesia faces significant challenges amid globalization and rapid technological development (Semma et al., 2024). On the one hand, young people are increasingly exposed to global cultural flows; on the other hand, uncontrolled exposure to information often gives rise to disintegrative narratives, radicalism, and a crisis of national identity (Mulyaningsih et al., 2019; Mustopa et al., 2024). Within this context, pesantren remain vital in strengthening national awareness, as they have long served as a space for shaping the character and morality of the younger generation (Haripin et al., 2020).

Previous research has focused on nationalism education in formal schools (Dhitami & Saleh, 2025) or portrayed pesantren as centers of moderate Islam without discussing their integration with state policy (Ubaidillah & Faiz, 2025). This article distinguishes itself by bridging that gap, offering an analysis of pesantren as key actors in nationalism education that are directly linked to state defense policy. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating how pesantren can strengthen the national identity of young people through educational mechanisms rooted in tradition, while remaining relevant to the national development agenda.

This article aims to analyze how nationalism is interpreted and internalized within pesantren education, particularly in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama institutions. It also examines the state's role through the Directorate of State Defense of the Ministry of Defense in promoting the integration of nationalism education into formal policy. Thus, this study offers a new perspective on the relationship between pesantren, nationalism, and defense policy, positioning pesantren both as ideological strongholds and strategic partners in nation-building.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employ a qualitative approach with a case study, As the primary aim is to understand how pesantren internalize nationalist values, the research focuses on their educational practices. The research subjects include the Muhammadiyah Pesantren Development Institute (LP2), the Rabithah Ma'had al-Islamiyah (RMI) of NU, several pesantren in Java selected purposively, and the Directorate of State Defense of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia as the policy stakeholder. Data collection was carried out through three main techniques:

1. In-depth interviews with Muhammadiyah and NU leaders, pesantren caregivers, students, and officials from the Directorate of State Defense.
2. Observation of pesantren activities such as flag ceremonies, sermons, and traditions embodying national values.
3. Document study, including laws, pesantren curricula, Muhammadiyah congress documents, NU pledges, and Ministry of Defense policies on state defense.

The research findings were then discussed in a focus group discussion involving the three major institutions, and the results were interpreted and presented in the form of data analysis.

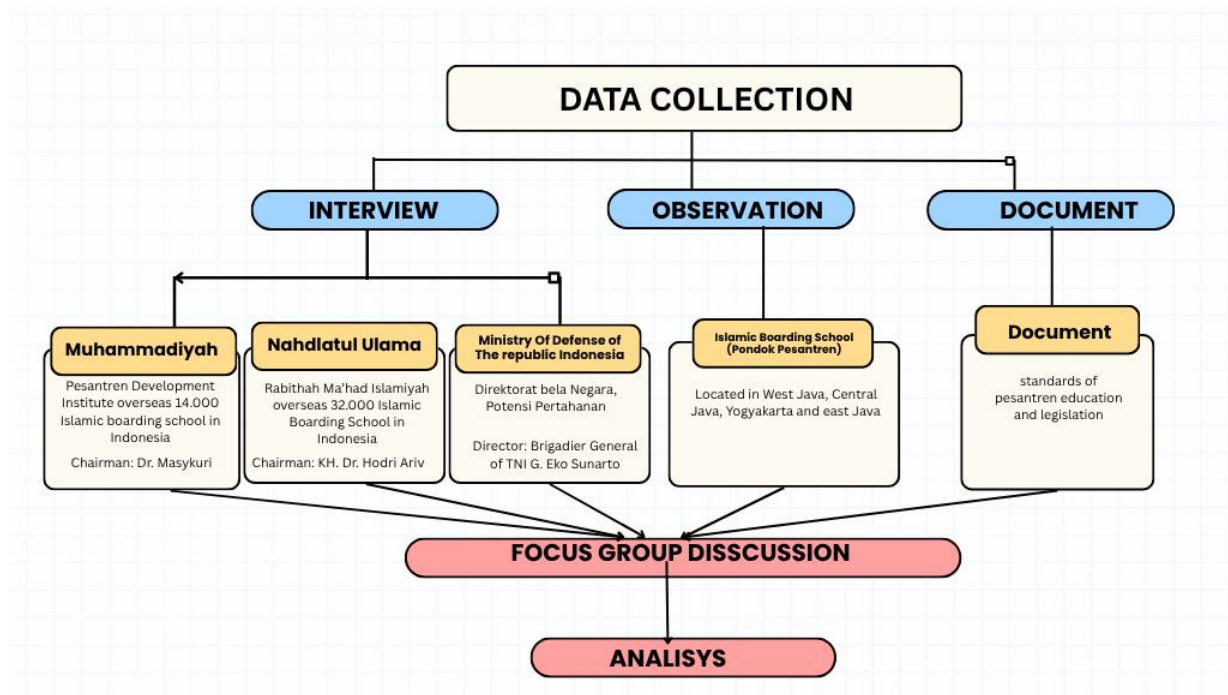


Figure 1. Research Method Flow

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### *The Meaning of Nationalism in Muhammadiyah (Academic Version)*

The *Lembaga Pengembangan Pesantren* (LP2) Muhammadiyah is a strategic body for fostering and developing Muhammadiyah pesantren (*PesantrenMu*). It is mandated to improve institutional quality, strengthen the curriculum, and instill national character in students. This role aligns with the decision of the 47th Muhammadiyah Congress in Makassar (2015), which affirmed the Indonesian state based on Pancasila as *Darul Ahdi wa al-Syahadah*. The concept emphasizes that Indonesia is a product of national consensus (*darul ahdi*) that must be preserved, while also serving as a testimony (*al-syahadah*) for Muslims to demonstrate their commitment through concrete contributions to the nation (Muhammadiyah, 2015; *Suara Muhammadiyah*, 2020). Thus, nationalism in Muhammadiyah's perspective is interpreted as political loyalty and a call of faith to maintain and strengthen the state.

Interviews with leaders of Pondok Pesantren Mu'allimin Yogyakarta indicate that nationalism within Muhammadiyah's tradition is considered a necessity and no longer a subject of debate. Nationalism manifests through routine practices such as flag-raising ceremonies, singing *Indonesia Raya* and *Sang Surya*, and students' participation in internal and external activities that cultivate love for the homeland. Although no specific department or formal plan on nationalism exists, national values are integrated into the curriculum through Civics (*Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan*), lesson plans (*RPP*), and leadership training programs. As a cadre school of Muhammadiyah, Mu'allimin emphasizes national, religious, and humanitarian awareness as the foundation of student development. The pesantren's long history as a center of resistance and even serving as the office of the Ministry of Finance when Yogyakarta was the nation's capital serves as historical evidence of Muhammadiyah's attachment to Indonesian nationalism.

Further, interviews with Dr. Masykuri, the head of LP2 Muhammadiyah, emphasize that nationalism education in Muhammadiyah pesantren largely occurs through the hidden curriculum. National values, unity, and Indonesian identity are not always documented in formal curricula. Still, they are embodied in practical activities such as national seminars, public dialogues featuring national figures, and participation in national commemorations. Muhammadiyah's educational vision goes beyond producing religious scholars (*ulama*); it also aims to develop leaders, educators, preachers, and entrepreneurs with national awareness. Collaboration with the government is evident in activities such as Independence Day celebrations and community service programs at the local level, even though these are not always formally recorded in the curriculum.

Documentary study of the Muhammadiyah Pesantren Education Standards (2017) for junior and senior high schools also reinforces this finding. The *Ismuba* curriculum (Islam, Muhammadiyah, and Arabic) consists of 13 core principles, one of which (point 10) stresses the importance of national unity and values. This framework directs the curriculum to build students' national character and awareness as a foundation for preserving Indonesia's unity. Hence, Muhammadiyah's curriculum focuses on religious and academic aspects and cultivates integrated national attitudes (Muhammadiyah, 2017).

In short, Muhammadiyah's understanding of nationalism can be seen through three main dimensions: an ideological basis, a historical basis, and a practical basis, realized through LP2 policies and the *Ismuba* curriculum. Although not always formalized in explicit curricula, nationalism remains an inherent and fundamental element of Muhammadiyah pesantren education.

### **1.1. The Meaning of Nationalism in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)**

The official institution under PBNU responsible for fostering NU pesantren is *Rabithah Ma'had al-Islamiyah* (RMI). Rather than functioning in an instructive manner, RMI operates coordinatively with thousands of NU pesantren across Indonesia. Its role is to facilitate, support, and safeguard pesantren values, scholarly, national, and cultural, so that they remain relevant to contemporary demands without losing their *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* tradition (RMI PBNU, n.d.; NU Online, 2023).

For NU, nationalism education in pesantren is deeply rooted in Indonesia's struggle for independence—historical legacies—such as KH. Hasyim Asy'ari's 1945 *Jihad Resolution* (the foundation of today's *Hari Santri*), the Hizbullah troops headquartered in pesantren, and even Pangeran Diponegoro's close alliance with *kiai* and *santri* during the Java War (1825–1830) form a strong historical consciousness in the *santri* identity. However, during the New Order era, ties between pesantren and the military weakened, as engagement with pesantren became more political than substantive (Bruinessen, 2022).

RMI views this as a stripping of *santri*'s historical identity from their nationalist roots, even though their contributions serve as moral legitimacy for shaping the future. NU emphasizes that religious backgrounds, rather than weakening nationalism, have historically strengthened Indonesian unity. Unlike some Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East that negate nationalism, Indonesian pesantren have consistently upheld NKRI, with no history of pesantren leaders advocating rebellion against the state.

Curricularly, RMI promotes a minimalist model—rather than a rigid, standardized curriculum to preserve the diversity of pesantren (some focusing on linguistics, others on tafsir or fiqh). Within this flexible framework, however, nationalist values are explicitly and implicitly inserted. These include singing *Indonesia Raya* and *Yaa Lal Wathan*, flag ceremonies, and community engagement. Thus, nationalism education in NU pesantren is realized less through theoretical teaching and more through lived practice and hidden curriculum.

### **1.2. The Directorate of State Defense's Perspective**

The military perspective, represented by the Directorate of State Defense of the Ministry of Defense, highlights that contemporary nationalism is no longer confined to the military domain. The Ministry seeks to eliminate the stereotype of militarization by framing state defense as character education. This shift aligns with policy changes positioning state defense as a comprehensive effort involving all elements of society, not just the armed forces. In this sense, state defense education in Indonesia must be understood within civic education—nurturing critical, religious, and nationally oriented citizens.

To implement this vision, several legal instruments have been introduced. Presidential Regulation No. 115 of 2022 designated the Ministry of Defense as the lead sector, mandating all ministries/agencies and local governments to implement state defense programs. This mandate is further supported by derivative regulations, including Ministerial Regulations No. 8, 9, and 14 of 2022, and No. 2 of 2025, which serve as technical guidelines. The constitutional basis lies in Article 27(3) of the 1945 Constitution, which declares state defense a right and duty of every citizen, and Article 68 of the Human Rights Act, which requires citizen participation in defense efforts.

The Ministry of Defense has collaborated with more than ten ministries/agencies, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Strategically, it uses the "name of Kemenag" when engaging pesantren, ensuring that *santri* communities better receive state defense messages. One example was a pilot project

in a pesantren in Ciamis, West Java. The Ministry has also signed a memorandum of cooperation with BRIN to strengthen research on state defense, aiming to produce evidence-based policy.

## Discussion

The reinforcement of nationalism in Muhammadiyah and NU pesantren is not explicitly formulated in formal curricula. In Muhammadiyah, hidden curriculum is the medium for internalizing national values through everyday practices. In NU, a minimalist curriculum allows for flexibility across pesantren while ensuring the integration of patriotic values. Though different in terminology, both approaches share the same objective: embedding nationalism as an integral part of pesantren education.

Findings also highlight a gap between pesantren perspectives and state policies. In society, nationalism or *bela negara* is often perceived solely as a military responsibility. At the governmental level, few ministries/agencies use state defense regulations as the main reference in designing programs.

To be effective, nationalism narratives must be communicated in ways that resonate with pesantren culture, rather than through rigid, militaristic communication. With their unique Islamic traditions, Pesantren contextualize nationalism through values of faith, unity, and love for the homeland. For this reason, coordination among the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense is essential in designing a nationalism curriculum that is not only legal-formal but also contextually embedded in pesantren education.

Weak intersectoral coordination is evident in the absence of an integrated nationalism curriculum. Currently, references tend to be budget standards (*SBM* and *SBK*) from the Ministry of Finance, focusing more on technical spending than substantive nationalist values. This has led to a "waiting game" among ministries, with no clear consensus on the definition, scope, or implementation of nationalism and state defense in institutional programs. Without a national consensus, nationalism risks remaining rhetorical rather than serving as an operational and measurable framework for education and governance.

Overall, nationalism in pesantren has thus far developed *by nature*—emerging organically from traditions, practices, and deeply rooted religious culture. What is needed is a move *by design*—structuring these values into a clear curriculum supported by interministerial synergy. A well-designed nationalism curriculum would preserve inherited national values while producing high-quality human resources capable of contributing significantly to Indonesia's 2045 Golden Vision.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that strengthening nationalism in Muhammadiyah and NU pesantren is largely carried out through hidden curriculum and minimalist curriculum. Muhammadiyah interprets nationalism as part of faith, while NU embeds it through cultural and ritual practices. Although not formally written into curricula, national values are consistently internalized in students' daily lives.

At the policy level, a gap remains: nationalism is still often perceived as a purely military duty. The legal mandate of state defense has yet to be fully understood or translated into programs across ministries/agencies. Greater synergy among ministries is necessary to design a nationalism curriculum that is both legal-formal and contextually aligned with pesantren traditions. Pesantren education has great potential to strengthen national identity through cultural and non-formal pathways. The state must expand the meaning of *bela negara* beyond militaristic notions, framing it instead as character education rooted in Islamic values and pesantren traditions.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

NC: Writing –original draft, Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Visualization; AS: review and editing, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Validation; APS: Formal analysis, Methodology, Validation; AAP: Writing –review and editing, Methodology, Validation; DQ: Writing –review and editing, Validation; YS: Methodology, Supervision, Validation; IR: Methodology, Supervision, Validation; TLT: Validation; HAI: original draft; NRA: original draft.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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