



## Local Wisdom and Open Governance: The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools in Regional Regulation Formulation in Ponorogo

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### Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) hold a strategic position within the socio-political landscape of Ponorogo Regency, serving as vital pillars of local wisdom. Their potential contribution to public policymaking, particularly in the formulation of regional regulations concerning religious education, remains significant yet underutilized. This study investigates the extent and quality of pesantren participation in local legislative processes, with a focus on the principles of meaningful participation and the integration of Islamic values in policymaking. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with religious leaders, pesantren administrators, and members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in Ponorogo. The findings indicate that pesantren involvement is largely symbolic, hindered by limited access to policy information and the absence of institutionalized participatory mechanisms. These constraints reduce the ability of pesantren to effectively influence regulatory outcomes. The study highlights the need for participatory reforms to enhance inclusive and value-based governance at the local level.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Boarding School; Meaningful Participation; Regional Regulation; Open Governance*

### Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) are among the oldest and most influential educational institutions in Indonesia, playing a crucial role in shaping religious identity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity, particularly in regions with strong Islamic traditions such as Ponorogo Regency, East Java. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024), Ponorogo is home to over 420 registered pesantren, serving approximately 70,000 santri (students), making it one of the densest concentrations of pesantren in Indonesia. This educational ecosystem not only nurtures Islamic scholarship but also fosters civic values and local leadership.

Historically, pesantren have extended their influence beyond religious education. They function as cultural hubs, economic actors, and informal political entities that contribute to community decision-making processes. This multifaceted role positions pesantren as vital stakeholders in regional development, particularly in shaping public policies that reflect community values and local wisdom.

In the framework of local democracy and decentralization, the active involvement of *pesantren* in the formulation of regional regulations (*Peraturan Daerah*, or *Perda*) is essential for ensuring that public policies are not only legally sound but also socially responsive. The concept of meaningful participation has gained increasing attention in democratic governance discourse. Putra et al. (2025), meaningful participation involves substantive, inclusive, and influential public engagement, not merely procedural or symbolic involvement. Participation is a core element of constitutional democracy and is institutionalized in several legal frameworks in Indonesia (Zakhour, 2020, Firdaus et al., 2024).

The Constitutional Court Decision No. 91/PUU-XVIII/2020 affirms that *meaningful participation* encompasses three key components: the right to be heard, the right for inputs to be duly considered, and the right to receive explanations. These elements serve as foundational pillars for legitimizing participatory governance. Complementing this, Law No. 13 of 2022 on the Formulation of Legislation institutionalizes public involvement through both online and offline mechanisms, mandating transparency, access to draft legislation and academic papers, inclusive consultations, and the incorporation of public input into legislative decision-making processes (Chandra et al., 2022).

Meaningful participation yields substantial benefits for both the legislative process and the broader community (Firdaus, 2022). It strengthens the legitimacy of legal norms by fostering public acceptance and respect for the law, which in turn enhances social stability and encourages legal compliance. Moreover, inclusive participation ensures that legislation is more comprehensive, contextually responsive, and aligned with diverse societal interests (Ruslan, 2023).

In the context of formulating regional regulations (*Perda*), meaningful participation should occur across multiple stages of the policy cycle—from problem identification and policy formulation to implementation and evaluation (Nasution & Sapii, 2022). Arnstein's Ladder of Participation offers a useful framework for categorizing the levels of public involvement, ranging from symbolic tokenism to genuine citizen empowerment (Gaber, 2019). Within this framework, the involvement of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) should ideally reach the level of partnership or even citizen control, where they are not merely consulted but are actively engaged in the policymaking process.

Additionally, Habermas's theory of deliberative participation emphasizes that rational, inclusive, and open public discourse is essential for democratic decision-making. For *pesantren*, this implies the need for equal opportunity to express concerns and negotiate policy outcomes, ensuring that regulations reflect their unique institutional and community-based perspectives.

The active involvement of *pesantren* in local policymaking is crucial for actualizing the principles of good governance, which emphasize participation, inclusivity, rule of law, government efficiency, and accountability (Khojanah, 2024). In practice, good governance requires not only formal engagement structures but also transparent processes, accessible information, and robust public accountability mechanisms. However, *pesantren* continue to face structural barriers that hinder their full participation in regional policymaking. These barriers include limited access to policy-related information, low levels of legal and policy literacy, and the absence of institutionalized participatory frameworks.

A case in point is the Draft Regional Regulation on the Facilitation of Nonformal Diniyah Education and Islamic Boarding Schools (Raperda FPDNP). This draft regulation is envisioned to establish a stronger legal foundation for *pesantren* and *madrrasah diniyah*, enhancing educational quality and signaling a progressive phase for Islamic education in Ponorogo. Although the draft is currently under review by the provincial government, the participation of *pesantren* in its formulation has been minimal and predominantly consultative. Their substantive involvement, however, remains vital to ensure the regulation is both inclusive and reflective of the community's values and needs.

Given this context, the present study aims to examine how meaningful participation can be effectively realized in regional legislative processes involving *pesantren*. By exploring their roles, contributions, and the challenges they encounter, the study seeks to propose strategic recommendations to enhance *pesantren* engagement in local governance and policymaking.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to examine the dynamics of meaningful participation by *pondok pesantren* in the formulation of regional regulations in Ponorogo Regency. The case study method was selected for its ability to explore complex social phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including *kiai* (*pesantren* leaders), members and staff of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) Ponorogo, local government officials involved in legislative drafting, and experts in local governance and Islamic education. These interviews aimed to capture diverse perspectives and firsthand experiences regarding the involvement of *pesantren* in local policymaking processes.

Complementary to interviews, document analysis was conducted on selected regional regulations and draft policies relevant to Islamic educational institutions. Key documents included:

1. Regional Regulation (*Perda*) No. 2/2020 on the Control and Supervision of Alcoholic Beverages, which involved inputs from religious and moral communities;
2. The Draft Regional Regulation (*Raperda*) on the Facilitation of Non-Formal Diniyah Education and Islamic Boarding Schools, intended to strengthen the legal recognition and quality of *pesantren* and *madrrasah diniyah*.

Data were analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring themes related to participation, open governance, and Islamic local wisdom. Triangulation between interview data and documentary sources was used to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological design provides an in-depth understanding of how *pesantren* engage with legislative processes and the extent to which their involvement aligns with democratic and inclusive governance principles.

## Result and Discussion

### Role of Pesantren in Regional Regulation Formulation in Ponorogo

The engagement of *pondok pesantren* in the formulation of regional regulations in Ponorogo does not merely serve to confer legitimacy on policymaking, but also to ensure alignment with the needs and aspirations of broader society. Several *pesantren* in Ponorogo have participated in various stages of drafting regional regulations, from public discussions to public hearings. According to *pesantren* leaders in the Ponorogo and Jetis subdistricts, they have been invited to forums to provide input on *pesantren*-based education and Islamic values that should be incorporated into local policies. However, their recommendations are not always taken as standards and are often subordinated to bureaucratic priorities—revealing an imbalance of influence, where *pesantren* wield limited decision-making power.

This imbalance results in regulations that inadequately reflect Islamic values—a concern voiced by a *pesantren* leader in Balong subdistrict, who emphasized that regulations should consider not only positivist legal principles but also Islamic values embedded in society. Scholars likewise note that *pesantren* often remain secondary partners rather than principal actors, diminishing the relevance of regulations when *pesantren* are sidelined.

Nevertheless, pesantren were notably engaged actively during the drafting of the Regional Regulation on the Facilitation of Diniyah Education and Pesantren (*Raperda FPMDP*). In the initial drafting stage, several pesantren leaders stressed the importance of operational funding support for the sustainability of madrasah diniyah. Despite this, the final decisions were predominantly determined by the DPRD and the regional executive, reflecting institutional priorities.

Participation by pesantren faces both structural and substantive barriers:

1. Limited access to regulatory draft information before public consultation stages, which constrains their analytical capacity and the quality of their input. Many pesantren only learn of the drafting process during final stages.
2. Lack of formal communication channels with regional government and DPRD, rendering their participation merely consultative without guaranteed consideration in final legislations.
3. Human resource constraints: Many pesantren lack personnel knowledgeable in legal and public policy matters, resulting in normative rather than legally substantive contributions.
4. Dominance of political actors: Legislative decisions are heavily swayed by DPRD and executive politics, relegating pesantren inputs to the status of "additional references" rather than influential determinations. As stated by the DPRD Chair of Ponorogo, "all inputs from pesantren are accepted, but must align with political priorities," making such participation symbolic rather than impactful.

These obstacles severely limit the substantive role of pesantren in local policy formulation. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to transform pesantren from passive consultation participants to empowered actors capable of effectively advocating for public interests.

### **Correlating Meaningful Participation with Pesantren Involvement**

In Indonesian legal discourse, meaningful participation embodies the principles of people's sovereignty and legislative transparency (Zain et al., 2016, p. 15). It mandates that lawmaking processes be open and accessible, granting citizens the opportunity to actively engage throughout legislative stages to ensure legal outputs are aligned with statutory foundations (Pratama, 2022a, p. 141). This aligns with Article 1 (2) of the 1945 Constitution and Articles 27 (2) and 28 C (2) in stating that citizens have the right to participate in government and nation-building.

Based on Constitutional Court Decision No. 91/PUU-XVII/2020, there are five meaningful participation stages: (1) draft proposal, (2) joint deliberation with legislative bodies and executives, (3) joint approval, with subdivisions into planning, discussion, and enactment phases (Artioko, 2022, p. 78) (Nasution & Sapii, 2022, p. 712). This framework implicitly presupposes two-way engagement between pesantren and regional governments. As Chilvers and Kearnes (2020) argue, citizen involvement enriches decision-making by infusing diverse experiences and perspectives (Chilvers & Kearnes, 2020), resulting in more relevant, effective, and accepted policies. Effective public engagement in policymaking requires not only access to relevant information but also the opportunity to contribute meaningfully and influence final decisions (Androniceanu, 2021). Three key principles to ensure maximal public participation include:

1. Legislative transparency, where every stage of *Perda* drafting is accessible to the public, including pesantren communities.

2. Access to policy information via both online and offline forums for inclusive input on draft regulations.
3. Direct involvement by pesantren leaders in drafting negotiations—through FGDs, DPRD audiences, and representation in policymaking bodies related to Islamic education and religious values in Ponorogo.

Accessibility is essential (Amaluddin & Saputra, 2021): healthy democracy requires clearly accessible channels for pesantren to participate in legislative processes—such as public consultations, structured discussions, and feedback mechanisms (Arana-Catania et al., 2021, Dondokambey et al., 2023). Through such inclusive platforms, the public can voice opinions and contribute to more responsive policy design (Febriani & Wasti, 2023). Participation quality is vital—not only physical presence but active, constructive engagement, fostering ownership and trust in democratic systems (Royo et al., 2020).

However, pesantren participation in Ponorogo remains purely consultative. They may present opinions, yet there is no mechanism that guarantees consideration of their input in the final decision. A deeper analysis reveals that participation does not fully embody meaningful participation due to four structural deficiencies:

1. Lack of transparency: Limited access to draft regulations creates reactive rather than proactive engagement, undermining meaningful contribution.
2. Unclear participation mechanisms: No formal pathways exist to ensure pesantren inputs are integrated into final decisions.
3. Weak capacity of pesantren actors: Many lack legal literacy needed to formulate argumentation with regulatory weight.
4. Accountability gap: No system holds DPRD or government accountable for responding substantively to pesantren inputs. According to open governance principles, every public submission should receive a clear and accountable response (Aituru et al., 2023).

An ideal meaningful participation framework calls for equality in legislative opportunities, regardless of political priorities (Al Fikry, 2022).

Equitable representation in legislative bodies ensures that all community groups—including minority or vulnerable groups—have balanced decision-making power (Owen, 2020). Legislative failure to implement meaningful participation violates transparency principles and risks producing unpopular, potentially unconstitutional regulations (Firdaus et al., 2024, p. 188). This contradicts Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the general will (*volonté générale*), which emphasizes that states must create laws accommodating public interest through participatory legislative processes (Fajri, 2023; Nasution & Sapii, 2022; Pratama, 2022b). Legislation must transcend mere formalities (Mochtar, 2022, p. 176). Understanding and applying meaningful participation is foundational to guiding legal policy and embodying democratic sovereignty (M.T, 2024).

Producing responsive regional regulations is imperative (Andriani, 2023). Political negotiations that neglect public utility lead to populist or conservative regulations (Mahfudz, 2018, p. 30). While political influence is inevitable, laws must incorporate justice, utility, and legal certainty (Dondokambey et al., 2023, p. 8). To operationalize meaningful participation within an open governance framework, the following strategic measures are proposed:

1. Enhance access to information for pesantren to enable early engagement in policy formulation.

2. Establish formal mechanisms to ensure pesantren contributions are considered in decision-making.

3. Strengthen accountability in the legislative process by instituting feedback mechanisms for public participation.

A systematic, directed process will facilitate more effective participation in regional policymaking while reinforcing the principles of transparency, participation, and accountability in Ponorogo's governance.

## Conclusion

The involvement of Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) in the formulation of local regulations in Ponorogo Regency remains largely symbolic, falling short of the principles of meaningful participation central to democratic governance. Despite their inclusion in consultative processes, such as public hearings and focus group discussions, their influence on policymaking remains limited and normative in nature. This limited role stems from structural and substantive barriers, including restricted access to early policy information, a lack of institutionalized participatory mechanisms, low legal literacy among religious leaders, and the predominance of political elites in the legislative process. Consequently, *pondok pesantren* function more as passive participants rather than active stakeholders. To foster inclusive and responsive governance, institutional reforms are required. These include enhancing access to policy information, formalizing participatory pathways, and strengthening accountability in decision-making. Empowering *pondok pesantren* as both moral and legal actors is essential for producing local regulations that are equitable, representative, and aligned with the values of Islamic ethics and social justice.

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