

## The Contributions of Nahdlatul Ulama to World Peace: A Taxonomy Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

Entering a century after its establishment, it goes without saying that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has significantly contributed to World Peace through its engagements in societies, ranging from the promotion of moderate values to addressing conflicts in many countries. However, some empirical phenomena, especially when it was carried out by a faith-based entity, often get portrayed differently in academic settings. How do NU's contributions to World Peace get incorporated into academic discourse? Using the taxonomy method, this article aims to analyze the contributions of NU to World Peace in the existing academic literature. It maps the consensus and ongoing debate on how NU exert its influence for peace and divides the literature into four taxonomical themes; (1) norm dissemination; (2) international diplomacy and peace-brokering; (3) education practices, and; (4) political practices. This paper concludes that NU's contributions are widely recognized in academic discourse, but some gaps still need to be addressed in further research.

**Keywords:** Nahdlatul Ulama, World Peace, Taxonomy, Literature Review

### ABSTRAK

Memasuki satu abad setelah berdirinya, sudah jelas bahwa Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) telah berkontribusi signifikan terhadap Perdamaian Dunia melalui keterlibatannya di masyarakat, mulai dari promosi nilai-nilai moderat hingga penyelesaian konflik di banyak negara. Namun, beberapa fenomena empiris, terutama yang dilakukan oleh entitas berbasis agama, seringkali digambarkan berbeda dalam konteks akademis. Bagaimana kontribusi NU terhadap Perdamaian Dunia bisa dimasukkan ke dalam wacana akademis? Dengan menggunakan metode taksonomi, artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kontribusi NU terhadap Perdamaian Dunia dalam literatur akademis yang ada. Laporan ini memetakan konsensus dan perdebatan yang sedang berlangsung mengenai bagaimana NU mengerahkan pengaruhnya bagi perdamaian dan membagi literatur ke dalam empat tema taksonomi; (1) sosialisasi norma; (2) diplomasi internasional dan perantara perdamaian; (3) praktik pendidikan, dan; (4) praktik politik. Tulisan ini menyimpulkan bahwa kontribusi NU diakui secara luas dalam wacana akademis, namun beberapa kesenjangan masih perlu diatasi dalam penelitian lebih lanjut.

**Kata Kunci:** Nahdlatul Ulama; Perdamaian Dunia; Taksonomi; Tinjauan Pustaka

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## INTRODUCTION

Peace studies scholars have commonly used a structural approach in analyzing the causes, processes, and solutions of conflicts to achieve a desirable human condition. According to Galtung, peace should be achieved not only in the absence of direct violence (*negative peace*), but also in the establishment of social justice, equity, and the elimination of the root causes of violence (*positive peace*) (Galtung, 1969). Therefore, peace studies scholars need to pay attention not only to direct violence but also to the indirect forms of violence embedded in social institutions (*structural violence* and *cultural violence*) (Galtung, 1969). Due to its structural nature, peace studies scholars often analyze multiple actors at once, scrutinizing the contribution of each actor in conflict and peacemaking processes and how they correlate to each other.

While most peace studies scholars agree that the structural approach is the most appropriate method to analyze conflicts, there is a widely debated topic on which actors should be the focal point of the analysis. Most realist scholars focused on how the state acts and uses its apparatuses to contribute either to conflicts or peacemaking processes, while liberalists and constructivists mainly focused on how international organizations performed their agencies in certain social and political settings. Due to peace studies' state-centric nature, many non-state actors often get negated from peace studies analysis, including faith-based organizations.

There are various reasons why faith-based organizations are often being negated in peace studies analysis. The most evident reason is their limited resource compared to their state actors and international organizations counterparts. The grassroots and yet narrow nature of these organizations also makes it difficult for peace studies scholar to accommodate them in structural analysis, as their roles are mostly too specific for broader analysis. Being traditionally focused on the role of state actors and international organizations, peace studies scholars also frequently get challenged in using scientifically accepted methods in incorporating faith-based organizations into their analysis.

Despite this condition, there is a growing recognition of the importance of faith-based organizations in contemporary peace studies analysis, particularly those coming from the global south. Many faith-based organizations have empirically shown that they are capable of delivering contributions to peacemaking processes, especially on religious and cultural affairs that often got overlooked by state institutions. As the field of peace studies evolves, there is a collective effort within the academic community to include and recognize the diverse contributions of faith-based organizations in promoting sustainable peace.

Among many faith-based organizations that have taken the attention of peace studies scholars, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) emerged as one of the most discussed actors in peace studies literature. Deemed the largest Islamic organization in the world with more than 95 million followers (Esposito & Shahin, 2013), NU has signified that it is capable of contributing to peacemaking processes from local to international levels.

This article will be divided into three main parts. First, the introduction explains the background, methods used, research purpose, and literature mapping. Second, the discussion will analyze the findings based on the literature mapping explained in the first part. Third, the conclusion will summarize the paper into a short reflection and input for further research on the discussed topic

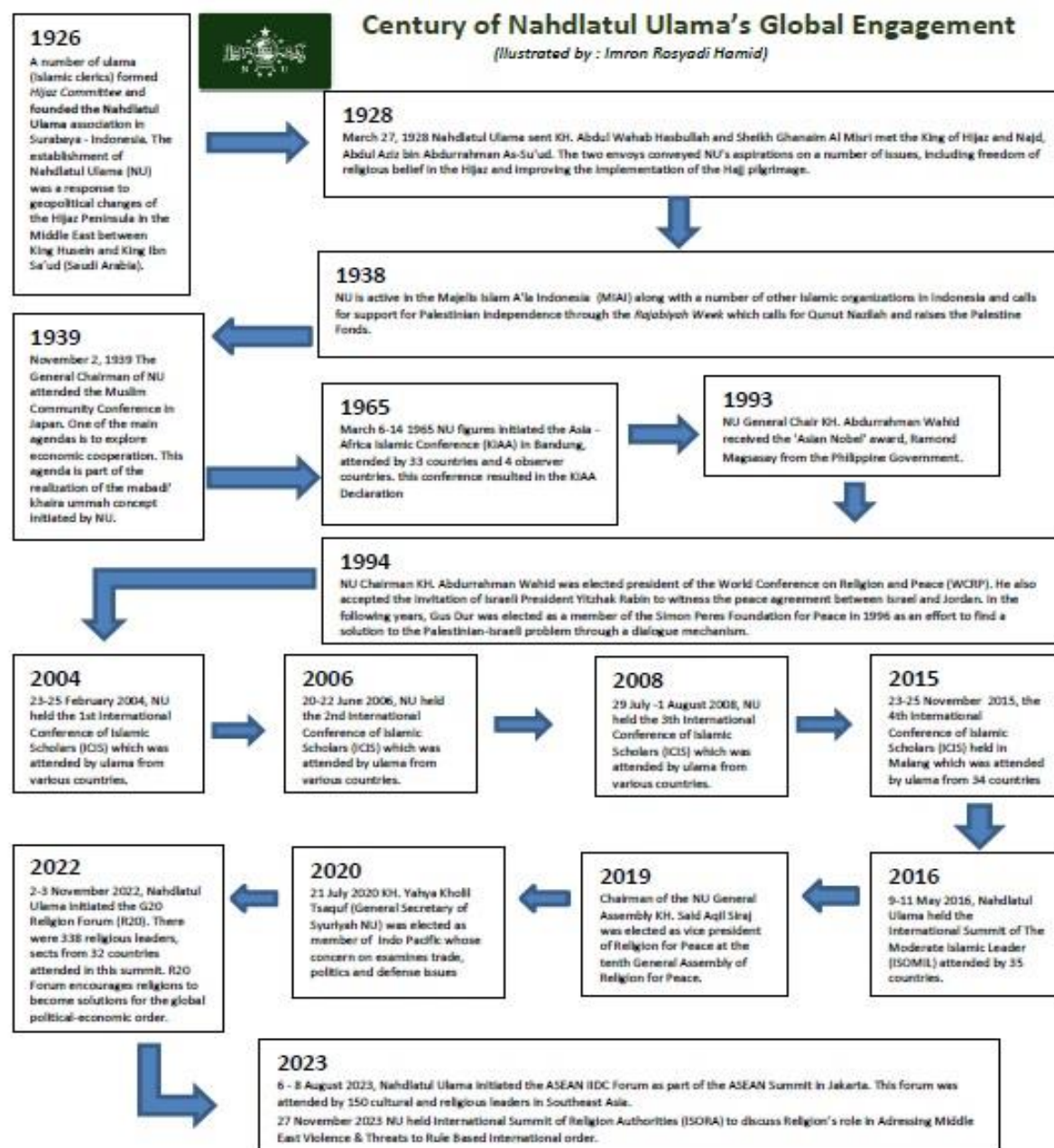
## LITERATURE REVIEW

Founded in 1926, NU's religious views are considered *traditionalist*, in a way that it tolerates local culture as long as it does not contravene Islamic teachings (van Doorn-Harder, 2006). It follows the idea of Ash'arism, which is taking the middle path between *aqli* (rationalist) and *naqli* (scripturalist) tendencies attributed to thinkers like Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi in the field of theology. In the field of jurisprudence, however, NU recognizes the the Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'I schools of law, while it relies on Shafi'I teachings regarding religious practices.

Western media have labelled NU as a relatively progressive and pluralistic Islamic movement (Cochrane, 2015). Nevertheless, NU is a diverse organization with considerably significant conservative factions as well. In spite of this membership diversity, NU is principally supportive of the idea of peace and has historically been active in global engagements on peace and conflict resolution. As illustrated in Image (1), NU has globally engaged with many peace and conflict resolution issues, including

promoting freedom of religious belief, independence and anti-colonialism, and the eradication of the roots of violence. It shows that NU has positioned itself beyond a merely faith-based organization, but also an entity that contributes to world peace.

Image 1. Nahdlatul Ulama’s Global Engagement



Source: illustrated by Imron Rosyadi Hamid

Due to the scope of its community and global engagements, many peace studies scholars have started to incorporate NU in their research agenda. Nevertheless, a comprehensive review that encapsulates the existing literature on NU’s contribution to World Peace is yet to be written. This article tries to fill this gap by analyzing 41 journals found in Google Scholar. Using the taxonomy method similarly deployed by Adonis, this article selected and sorted out literature that are related to the topic, pointed out consensus-debate from them, and synthesized a reflection based on the findings (Adonis, 2019). This article is therefore directed to analyze how the literature on NU’s contribution to World Peace develops by mapping them into four taxonomical categories, which are: (1) norm

dissemination;(2) international diplomacy and peace-brokering; (3) education practices, and; (4) political practices. Considering the amount of available literature, this article specified its limitations to English peer-reviewed journals, as it efficiently facilitates seeing the trajectory of the topics and the ongoing debate within the international academic community.

**Table 1. Literature Mapping on the Role of Nahdlatul Ulama to World Peace**

No	Taxonomical Categories	Literature
1.	Norm dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Religious Moderation or Islam Wasatiyyat</i> (Halid &amp; Bin Yassir, 2024), (Haris, Mohammad Akmal, Sahrodi, &amp; Siti, 2023), (Hasbiyallah, Sulhan, &amp; Khoiruddin, 2017), (Musyarrofah &amp; Zulhannan, 2023), (Nubuwo, 2023), (Wulandari, Annisa, Ningsih, Fahraca, &amp; Idami, 2021), (Zarkasyi, 2018)</li> <li>• <i>Multiculturalism</i> (Ali, 2020), (Arifianto, 2017), (Binfas, Fitriani, &amp; Wahjusaputri, 2018), (Indriyanti &amp; Khoiruroh, 2020), (Jalili, Ulfa, &amp; Sahid, 2023), (Jalili, Ulfa, &amp; Sahid, 2023), (Krismawati, 2020), (Wajdi, 2018) (Mursalat, 2023), (Nazar &amp; Hamid, 2022), (Ridho, Suja, Taufiq, Rahmat, &amp; Nisa, 2023), (Said, Pongsibanne, &amp; Shobariya, 2020; Mushlihin, Narulita, &amp; Aulia, 2021),</li> <li>• <i>Islam Nusantara</i> (Murtaufiq, 2018), (Mushlihin, Narulita, &amp; Aulia, 2021)</li> </ul>
2.	International Diplomacy and Peace-brokering	(Ardiyanti, et al., 2023), (Hamid, 2017), (Haryanto & Syam, 2023), (Hermansyah, Rachman, & Halkis, 2023), (Mahfudin & Sundrijo, 2021), (Mu'min, Yulianti, & Sulacman, 2021), (Nubuwo, 2023), (Pratama & Ferdiyan, 2021), (Selamat, 2023)
3	Education Practices	(Aziz, Yahya, Syukur, & Fathurohman, 2023), (Barton, 2014), (Hasbiyallah, Sulhan, & Khoiruddin, 2017), (Mushlihin, Narulita, & Aulia, 2021), (Purwanto, Mukharrom, Yusdani, & Nasih, 2019), (Safei, 2021), (Suprpto, Lidiawati, Pradana, & Maksun, 2021)
4	Political Practices	(Abadi, Arraki, & Shukyzhanova, 2023), (Al-Ansi & Kartono, 2023), (Arifianto, 2022), (Fearly & Bush, 2014), (Hidayat, Nurjaman, Ahmad, & Alghani, 2022), (Ismail, 2011), (McGregor, 2009), (Yani, et al., 2022)

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a literature review that discusses Nahdlatul Ulama's contribution to world peace. World peace is a topic that will never get old because it is the right of every nation. Google Scholar was chosen as the database because it can be accessed openly. This research applies a qualitative approach by describing the results descriptively. By utilizing a database of articles published from 2017 to 2024 on Google Scholar. The keywords used are "Nahdlatul Ulama Contribution" and "World Peace" which are relevant to this research. Literature Review regarding the Contribution of Nahdlatul Ulama and World Peace analyzes how Nahdlatul Ulama has contributed to world peace. Based on these keywords, 75 articles were found and only 41 articles had topics relevant to this research. The results of the literature review are then explained in table form.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Norm Dissemination

To establish a peaceful society, it is imperative that every individual upholds the values that are acceptable for most, if not all, members of the society itself. Social institutions are therefore functioning as agencies that disseminate those values. Those values then will become a norm if accepted in the

society. Although faith-based organizations are sceptically considered outdated or *conservative* in secular Western societies to disseminate peace values, these groups are still considered important in most Global South Countries. Being recognized as the largest Islamic organization in the world, it is certain that NU has been widely acknowledged as a prominent actor that promotes acceptable peaceful values for societies. What values, then, are being promoted by NU to establish a peaceful society? How does the current academic discourse capture the values that are being promoted by NU? From the existing literature, it appears that three different groups of scholars analyze the values that are being promoted by NU.

The first group discusses how NU promotes religious moderation in its practices. They agreed that religious moderation promoted by NU acknowledges the balance between faith and logic, traditional and modernity, human-to-God relations and human-to-human relations, as well as religious practices and social relationships. From the NU perspective, it is called *Islam Wasatiyyat* or *a just and balanced Islam*. This value is derived from the principle of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (just) (Hasbiyallah, Sulhan, & Khoiruddin, 2017). Within this group of scholars, there is a consensus that *Islam Wasatiyyat* is the principle that prevents its people from religious extremism, which is something that NU tried to keep its followers away from. It is clear that NU has the stance of creating a peaceful society where its followers uphold religious moderation as a reference in daily activities.

The second group discusses how NU promotes multiculturalism and pluralism as values of peace. Slightly different compared to the previous group where the value was intended to arrange religious practices, this group focus on values that arrange social relations. As NU was established in a society where there were hundreds of, if not thousands, ethnicities, customs and cultures, NU has always positioned itself as an Islamic organization that can embrace everyone from all backgrounds. Therefore, this group of scholars is particularly inclined to capture study cases where NU promotes multiculturalism, and to some extent, pluralism, where many people from different religions and cultures can live together in harmony by respecting each others' beliefs. Scholars within this group have a consensus that NU has become an Islamic organization that consistently promotes multiculturalism among Indonesians, be it at the local or national level, and hence contributes to peaceful Indonesian societies.

The third group of scholars focuses on NU's distinctive Islamic values compared to other Islamic organizations around the globe. As prevalent in the last decade, NU has been actively promoting a so-called *Islam Nusantara*, a type of Islamic teaching that was born and is practised in the Southeast Asia Archipelago. According to Said Aqil Siraj, the former chief of NU, Islam Nusantara is not a sect, nor a school of thought in Islam, but more of a *typology (mumayyizat and khasais) of Islam which promotes a polite, cultured, friendly, moralized and civilized Islam* (Prasetyo, 2021). Despite its debated definition on an empirical level, all scholars in this group agreed that NU tried to disseminate this typology of Islamic teaching to promote local values in religious teaching and discourse. There is a consensus among scholars that NU has attempted to shape the discursive meanings of Islam Nusantara for its social and institutional interest. By promoting local values in religious teaching, NU believes that it can incorporate culture, local wisdom, and the way of living from which Islam is practised and establish a diverse yet peaceful Muslim community.

From those three groups of scholars, it can be concluded that all scholars generally agreed with the idea that the values being promoted by NU are peaceful and have positively contributed to the making of peaceful societies. Despite the difference in seeing which values are being analyzed, there is not a notable debate on how and why NU promote its values.

### **International Diplomacy and Peace-Brokering**

It is prevalent in traditional peace studies literature that international diplomacy and peace-brokering are the two most popular means for actors to contribute to peacemaking processes. Although they were usually carried out by state actors, NU has empirically practised international diplomacy and peace-brokering on so many occasions, while the existing literature appeared to have taken these phenomena into account. In this regard, there are at least third points of consensus and one point of debate that can be taken out from the literature.

The first consensus is that all scholars agree that NU has carried out international diplomacy and peace-brokering using soft power as its method. Defined as the ability of states and non-state actors to

influence others to obtain outcomes through attraction to make others “want what they want” based on its resource of culture, values, and policies (Nye, 2008), NU has unsurprisingly chosen to optimize its religious and cultural values to conduct diplomatic efforts. This consensus appears among scholars despite the fact that NU does have a paramilitary group publicly known as *Multipurpose Ansor Front* or *Banser*, which semi-autonomously operates under *Ansor Youth Movement* or *GP Ansor*. Nevertheless, all the literature available mentioned that NU is utilizing its values, such as *Islam Wasatiyyat*, tolerance of cultural diversity, and anti-radicalism in any kind of diplomatic efforts, including international conferences, the mediator of conflict resolution in other countries, and interfaith dialogues. There is yet literature that discusses whether and how NU uses its paramilitary group or any other hard power means for peacemaking processes.

The second consensus is that the geographical coverage of NU diplomatic efforts is limited to Muslim-majority countries in the world, particularly Middle Eastern countries and Afghanistan. Although historically NU has carried out several diplomatic activities in other countries, the available literature only captured NU’s diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan and faith-based international conferences in which NU was the initiator, including ISOMIL and the R20 forum. It shows that all scholars tried to emphasize the leadership value of NU among faith-based or Islamic organizations, but have yet to consider its role in Muslim-minority countries. Nubuwo does mention that NU has contributed to “humanitarian diplomacy” through its Board of Philanthropy (*Lazisnu*) to send humanitarian aid to Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh, in which the refugees were coming from a Muslim-minority country (Nubuwo, 2023). However, the literature does not further explain how NU carried out its diplomacy and peace-brokering for these people in their place of origin.

The third consensus is the fact that all scholars agree on the notion that the diplomatic efforts carried out by NU have a mission to promote religious moderation and combat radicalism or religious extremism. After 9/11, Muslim communities across the globe have been subject to Islamophobia and prejudice from the West. To mitigate this trend, NU always promote its *just-balanced Islam* and moderate values when addressing conflict in international forums and becoming peace mediator. It is unsurprising considering the norm and values that NU has consistently promoted since its establishment and also the captured consensus from the previous part of this paper.

Following the consensus, the compiled literature also shows a point of debate regarding the topic. While it is not explicitly mentioned in their paper, there are two camps of scholars that have different opinions regarding the optimal to carry out international diplomacy. Nubuwo, Hamid, and Hermansyah and el-Syam are inclined to point out the role of NU in multilateral forums. On the other hand, Ardiyanti *et al*, Mahfudin and Sundrijo, Mu’min *et al*, and Pratama are leaning toward scrutinizing bilateral forums as NU’s most important diplomatic effort. This debate is unlikely to occur on an empirical level, but the difference among scholars has ultimately shown the diverse thoughts of scholars in interpreting NU’s contributions to World Peace.

### **Education Practices**

Education plays a crucial role in addressing the root causes of conflict. To build sustainable peace, every individual must be taught to uphold peaceful values, including tolerance, equity, and justice. Therefore, it is unsurprising if scholars analyze NU’s education practices as their contribution to World Peace. Empirically, NU has been heavily involved in education through three channels. First, for early education, NU utilizes *Maarif Education Body of Nahdlatul Ulama* or LPNU to conduct education practices spanning from kindergarten to high school. There are thousands of *Maarif* schools across Indonesia and they are widely known as schools that are actively engaged in promoting the values of NU. Second, NU established dozens of Colleges and Universities across Indonesia that implement its vision for higher education and research. Lastly, although they are not structurally connected to the official bodies of NU, there are thousands of *Pesantren* (traditional Islamic schools) across Indonesia that teach the values and practices of NU on a daily basis. This channel is perhaps the most important pillar of NU’s education practices, as *pesantrens* culturally embed NU’s values in society. However, there is only a point of consensus and debate respectively that can be found from the available literature on the topic.

The consensus is that all scholars agree that the NU educational model is progressive. Many scholars and civil societies in the West assume that the educational model carried out by religious or faith-based organizations is socially conservative as it is concerned with the development of character

and the promotion of morality. However, the NU educational model is generally progressive, as it is not only concerned about morality, but also concerned about humanitarian issues such as pluralism, nationalism, and contemporary issues in societies. It is correct that all education institutions under or affiliated with NU are teaching more traditional Muslim values compared to those under Muhammadiyah for example, but all scholars agree that NU education activities can be seen as a progressive social movement that seeks to embrace modern society with optimism that the understanding of Islam can thrive.

However, there is also a debate regarding which path the progressivity of NU's education practices is heading to. While scholars like Barton and Safei see NU's educational movement as more inclined towards a cosmopolitan society, in the sense that NU promotes pluralism and humanity at the international level, other scholars like Hasbiyallah, Aziz *et al*, and Muslihin see NU's education to embeds nationalist and Indonesian values to its followers. The main difference between the two camps is that the former assumes that NU's values are compatible with the international community, while the latter is more concerned about how NU's followers have to uphold nationalist values particularly to contribute to the peaceful condition of Indonesian society. This debate represents the divergence of ideas among scholars that analyze NU's active contribution to education practices.

### Political Practices

The involvement of NU in politics has been a debated discourse on an empirical level. As a faith-based organization, NU was initially made to promote the religious values of traditional Muslim in pre-independent Indonesia. NU was also involved in the nationalist movement during the establishment of the Indonesian state using all of its available means, including social capital (e.g. *fatwas* for its followers to ban Muslim youth from joining Dutch military service), institutional capital (e.g. siding with Indonesian nationalist movement) and human capital (e.g. its leaders and members involvement during the revolution) (Ismail, 2011). Following Indonesian Independence, NU then transformed itself from a pure socio-religious organization into a political party through a congress in Palembang, April 1952. It became an active political organization that participates in national elections, was involved in the national cabinet, and was also actively campaigning for its values and goals through various political practices (Abadi, Arraki, & Shukyzhanova, 2023). However, NU shifted its orientation following a congress in Situbondo, dated in 1984, which ended with a decision that NU would return to its initial orientation or *Khittah* by not involving its institution in political practices. Since then, NU has become a socio-religious organization that focuses on teaching its values, although many of its leaders (*Kiai*) were and still are involved in politics through other political organizations.

In light of NU's dynamic political orientation, it is interesting to see how scholars captured its political practices in contributing to World Peace. From a peace studies perspective, NU's empirical contribution through political practices can be seen as a means for empowerment, creating a just and peaceful society, promote the value of multiculturalism. From the available literature, however, it is found that there is a point of consensus and a point of debate which can be considered. First, it appears that all scholars agree that the figure of NU's leaders, widely known as *Kiai*, is the most important factor that decides the involvement of NU in practical politics. Regardless of NU's institutional position towards political practices, it is the stance of *Kiai* that would be the reference of its followers to participate in politics, be it in terms of achieving positions of power in Indonesian politics, to normalization and/or reform of historical events (e.g. anti-communist movement in 1965). Some notable *Kiais* that were incorporated into literature include Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder and the first Chief of NU, then Wahab Hasbullah, Hasyim Muzadi, Abdurrahman Wahid, and so on. Henceforth, NU's political practices are better analyzed from the stances and the dynamics among its *Kiais*, rather than from an institutional point of view. All literature also lean to agree that the role and the character of *Kiai*, be it at the national or local level, are the key factors for NU's institutional and social involvement in political practices.

Second, although all scholars agree on the point that the figure of *Kiai* is an important factor in determining NU's political practices, there is an opposite camp of scholars in seeing the influence of *Kiai* in the Indonesian political arena. Fearly and Bush are inclined to see the declining influence of *Kiai* in Indonesian politics, stating that *Kiais* "do not wield the same kind of direct political influence as they



*have historically*” (Fearly & Bush, 2014). Nevertheless, there are also other scholars arguing that *Kiais* still have a powerful influence in shaping the Indonesian political landscape, such as Al-Ansi and Kartono, and Yani *et al.* The latter specifically argue that *Kiais* must be “*put on the front lines for Indonesian political discourses among Nahdlatul Ulama followers*” (Yani, et al., 2022) as they still hold charisma which is crucial to NU’s bargaining power in Indonesian politics. The difference in interpretation among scholars shows that NU’s political practices are widely covered in academic discourses, and undoubtedly expand scientific contribution as to how NU contributed to World Peace

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has mapped the taxonomical topics in which available literature captures how NU contributed to World Peace. Undoubtedly, NU has contributed to World Peace as it engaged in various attempts from the local to international level. Nevertheless, the available literature shows that NU has contributed to World Peace through four general means, which are norm dissemination, international diplomacy and peace-brokering, education practices, and political practices. Each of these topics has its own consensus and ongoing debate by scholars, but the difference in interpretations at the academic level does not necessarily negate the impacts of NU’s empirical contributions. It further shows that NU and its contributions have been recognized by scholars who are willing to incorporate them to the peace studies agenda.

As this paper only utilizes English peer-reviewed journals, there must be certain limitations in terms of diversity of methods, local nuances, and uncaptured NU’s contributions. In the future, further reviews have to take Indonesian and even Arabic contributions into account, as well as other types of literature, including monographs, book chapters, and theses. However, this paper has at least been able to identify the following gaps: (1) the majority of the literature utilize qualitative and descriptive methods, and; (2) certain NU’s contributions can be taken into account, including a larger geographical coverage of its diplomatic efforts, the role of its education bodies (LP Maarif) in disseminating NU’s values, and analyses on the views of NU’s notable figures on the topic. Addressing these gaps in the future will undoubtedly provide scientific contributions and create new discourses regarding NU’s contribution to World Peace specifically, and the role of faith-based organizations in peace studies in general

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