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Charles Darwin University

Gus Dur's Enduring Legacy

## Accruing Religious Merit in the Afterlife

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*Published in:*  
Politics and Governance

*DOI:*  
[10.17645/pag.7874](https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7874)  
[10.17645/pag.7874](https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7874)

Published: 08/03/2024

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Franklin, N. (2024). Gus Dur's Enduring Legacy: Accruing Religious Merit in the Afterlife. *Politics and Governance*, 12, 1-16. Article 7874. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7874>, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7874>

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## Gus Dur's Enduring Legacy: Accruing Religious Merit in the Afterlife

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**Submitted:** 22 November 2023 **Accepted:** 31 January 2024 **Published:** 8 March 2024

**Issue:** This article is part of the issue “Indonesian Heroes and Villains: National Identity, Politics, Law, and Security” edited by Nathan Franklin (Charles Darwin University) and Hans Hägerdal (Linnaeus University), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i380>

### Abstract

Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Indonesia's fourth president (1999–2001) and leader of the traditionalist Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (1984–1999), continues to influence Indonesia in positive and meaningful ways despite his death in 2009. He proved that Islam and a pluralistic political culture were compatible and that Indonesian Islam had a global role. His legacy continues through the Wahid Foundation, Nahdlatul Ulama, and the National Awakening Party. The Wahid Foundation operates under the directorship of his daughter, Yenny Wahid, and is dedicated to improving Islam and Indonesian society through documenting religious intolerance and injustice and by issuing recommendations. Following Nahdlatul Ulama's National Congress in December 2021, its leadership has been dominated by Gus Dur's allies, including his wife and four daughters, and his former presidential spokesperson Yahya Cholil Staquf, all of whom have a deep commitment to his values. Gus Dur's former political party, the National Awakening Party, remains another institution which supports pluralism and secular inclusiveness. However, the relationship between Gus Dur's allies and this party remains fractured, just as it was before he died. Despite an impeached presidency, a fallout with the National Awakening Party, and the considerable time that has passed since his death, he has produced an enduring legacy. Public deference to the late Gus Dur is reminiscent of the nine saints who Islamised Java half a millennia ago. This is because traditionalist Muslims believe that one's deeds which produce on-going benefits to society will, in the afterlife, continue to accrue religious merit, and millions visit Gus Dur's grave every year to demonstrate this.

### Keywords

Abdurrahman Wahid; Gus Dur; Indonesia; Islam; Nahdlatul Ulama; National Awakening Party; Politics; Wahid Foundation

## 1. Introduction

The impact of Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009), affectionately known as Gus Dur, on Indonesian society continues in significant ways, despite an impeached presidency in 2001, expulsion from his own political party in 2008, and his death the following year. Throughout his life, his approach to the modern Indonesian state on political, religious, and social matters provided Indonesians with a rare type of open-minded and progressive leadership. Nonetheless, Gus Dur was polarising and far from the perfect leader in terms of compromise and maintaining cohesion, even as president. Yet, he remains a symbol of peaceful and intellectual Islam, as well as reform and social justice, which has influenced Indonesia's brand of political Islam and liberalism more than any other person. He is also one of the few mainstream political figures who stood up to the military and religious extremism and was part of the political reform movement (*reformasi*) that toppled President Soeharto and his New Order Regime (1966–1998). It should then come as no surprise that many Indonesians consider him a national hero (*pahlawan nasional*) and a statesman (*negarawan*). Followers (*nahdliyin*) from the traditionalist Islamic organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), consider him a saint (*wali*). Regardless of the formalisation of these titles, millions of Indonesians behave in ways that indicate that for them he was all these things.

Gus Dur's actions were highly divisive, including failures in his presidency (1999–2001), but his pursuit of political reform and social justice provided Indonesians with a moral compass and a commendable legacy, which deserves examination. Gus Dur's life is already well documented, but how can we measure Gus Dur's lasting impact on Indonesian society? In what follows, this article explores why Gus Dur is remembered, by whom, and what he represented, reflecting an Indonesian understanding of his continuing legacy. For analysis, we will consider three institutions of Indonesian society that Gus Dur influenced in distinct and personal ways. First, the Wahid Foundation (WF) which continues under the guidance of his daughter, Yenny Wahid; second, NU and its leadership; and finally, the Muslim-inclusive National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa; PKB). Respectively, they represent a research centre, an Islamic organisation, and a political party. Together, they form important layers of civil society, with common goals centred around pluralism, justice, and reform. They represent "group politics," providing a link between the government and the governed (Heywood, 1997, p. 252), which is part of Gus Dur's legacy. It should be noted that I personally met and spoke with Gus Dur on numerous occasions in 2007 and 2008, and I travelled with him through East Java. During this same period, I also met and interviewed the then-head of NU, Hasyim Muzadi, several times. I discussed politics and NU with both Gus Dur and Muzadi.

Acknowledging that there are some counter-discourses mostly in respect of Gus Dur's political weaknesses, these do not diminish what he represented. His example remains a foundation for social justice and progressive thinking on pluralism, tolerance, harmony, interfaith dialogue, as well as Indonesia's motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) and the state ideology of Pancasila (five principles: religion, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice). He was not just philosophical about his principles and would command his people to defend churches and minorities (Fealy, 2010; Witoelar, 2001, p. 54). Gus Dur's legacy is a rich source of ideas and practices on the separation of Islam and the state, the interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the political neutrality of NU. NU has never formally endorsed PKB, although it is the ideological embodiment of NU and the party that helped Gus Dur achieve the Indonesian presidency in 1999. His concept of Indigenising Islam (*Pribumisasi Islam*) influenced NU's Islam of the Indonesian Archipelago (*Islam Nusantara*) idea to fight religious radicalism from 2015 onwards. Gus Dur wanted to improve Indonesia's image as a responsible, democratic middle-world power, as do his allies and supporters

today. To this end, his WF monitors the role of both state and non-state actors on human rights issues, such as the ongoing persecution of Ahmadiyah followers (an Islamic group considered deviant because it recognises a prophet postdating Muhammad) and the dubious blasphemy charge against former Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) because of a doctored video clip in 2017. This article contends that Gus Dur is overwhelmingly remembered by ordinary Indonesians for his good deeds and his contributions to improving society, which *nahdliyin* believe produces religious merit (*pahala*), which continues to flow to him in the afterlife (*akhirah*).

## 2. Saint Abdurrahman Wahid

On 30 December 2009, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) died at age sixty-nine. Gus Dur's funeral was attended by thousands of people, including President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), ministers, politicians, social activists, Chinese Indonesians, and former members of the Indonesian Communist Party (Parti Komunis Indonesia), which remains banned (Harsaputra, 2010). The diverse range of attendees reflected Gus Dur's prominence across Indonesian society; such disparate groups of people were probably never going to gather like this again. From this perspective alone, Gus Dur remains irreplaceable.

Gus Dur had long been regarded as a "living saint" by millions of Muslims across Indonesia (Barton, 2002, pp. 31–21). His grave is a place of pilgrimage and one of the most popular religious burial sites in the country, continuing to attract prominent people from the president down. Most years it receives over a million visitors, with a peak of 1.3 million in 2018 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2019, p. 270). The religious pilgrimage (*ziarah*) to the holy burial grounds, particularly for the nine saints (*wali songo*) who supposedly Islamised Java in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is a fundamental part of NU culture. *Nahdliyin* believe that *ziarah* can bring religious merit (*pahala*), and even special powers (*ilmu*), to those who visit and recite prayers (*doa*), chant God's name, and other religious incantations (*wirid* or *zikir*), to demonstrate devotion and closeness to God (Franklin, 2014, pp. 113–114).

In 2022, the head of NU, Yahya Cholil Staquf (Gus Yahya), declared Gus Dur the "tenth saint," as "Sunan Abdurrahman Wahid," at the 13th Remembrance Ceremony (*Haul*) for Gus Dur (Triono, 2022a). The title *sunan* recognises him as a holy missionary, which honours his life as an example for other Muslims. The stories of the *wali songo* are legendary, including supernatural powers and missionary success. For *nahdliyin*, the spirits of deceased saints (*wali*) provide a vital communication link to God. Consequently, politicians, business people, and ordinary Indonesians seek blessing (*doa restu*) from both living Islamic clergy and the spirits of the *wali* (Franklin, 2014, pp. 146, 149). It should be noted reformist Muslims, like Muhammadiyah, acknowledge the deeds of *wali*, but they do not venerate or supplicate at their graves (Franklin, 2014, p. 224).

From birth, Gus Dur was effectively NU royalty. His maternal grandfather Kyai Bisri Syamsuri (1886–1980) and paternal grandfather Kyai Haji Hasyim Asy'ari (1875–1947) are held in high esteem as founders of NU (Munir, 2022, p. 51). Gus Dur's father, Abdul Wahid Hasyim (1914–1953) was a state minister without portfolio, an adviser to the Ministry of Religion in at least one of the early cabinets of 1945–1946, and finally Minister of Religious Affairs from 1949 to 1952 (Anderson, 1972, pp. 110–111; Feith, 1962, pp. 47, 150, 180; Finch & Lev, 1965, pp. 2, 8–9). In 1964, President Soekarno (1945–1966) granted national hero status to both Asy'ari and Hasyim (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 1964a, 1964b). Gus Dur remains denied the national hero status by the agency responsible on the basis that his presidency was terminated, and he has not been

dead long enough, but if he had not been president, he may have been granted it already (“Dewan gelar soal status pahlawan Gus Dur,” 2019). Almost every year his name is put forward for the title of national hero by various politicians and public figures, including President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and twice by prominent female politician and NU member Khofifah Indar Parawansa (Khofifah Usulkan Gus Dur, 2019; Movanita, 2015; Wicaksono, 2017).

Of the seven Indonesian presidents to date, Gus Dur remains the most liberal and reformist. During his short presidency (20 October 1999 to 23 July 2001) he removed the 1967 law that restricted Chinese Indonesian traditions, tried to remove the ban on communism, and held conciliatory dialogues with Aceh and West Papua (Barton, 2002, pp. 292–293; O’Rourke, 2002, p. 362; Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2000). Although he did not support East Timor’s independence because of the potential for bloodshed, he apologised on behalf of his nation for all the violence and killings related to the 30 August 1999 plebiscite on self-determination (Barton, 2002, pp. 261–262; O’Rourke, 2002, p. 267). He also succeeded in “taming” the military, separated the military from the police, pushed the military out of parliament, furthered regional autonomy initiated by his predecessor President Habibie, and tried to speed up the law on corruption by proposing for those charged with corruption to be considered guilty until proven innocent (Barton, 2002, p. 384; Ramstedt, 2009, p. 329; Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, 2000; O’Rourke, 2002, p. 393; Shoesmith et al., 2020, p. 361). There were of course failures in his presidency, most significant were his inability to stop the violence in Maluku, his sudden firing of ministers, and unpredictable actions causing alarm among allied parties which in turn led to his impeachment (Barton, 2002, pp. 334, 370). After his presidency, he defended those persecuted by hardline Muslims, most famously Inul Daratista, the dangdut singer who attracted scorn because of her provocative buttocks-shaking drill (*ngebore*) dance, and celebrity transwoman Dorce Gamalama (Ahmad, 2022; Ibrahim, 2021). In June 2008, Gus Dur clashed with Habib Rizieq, the leader of the vigilante Islamic Defenders’ Front (Front Pembela Islam; FPI), over freedom of religion, including the right of the Muslim minority group Ahmadiyah to exist, which played out publicly in the media (Franklin, 2009).

In his final years, Gus Dur spent much of his time travelling around Java. The reasons for this travel were a mixture of politics and religious events, NU conferences, and visiting people (*silaturahmi*), but he always attracted huge crowds. Gus Dur advocated the “free to be politically active” (*Bebas Politik Praktis*) concept so NU members could vote for, or join, any political party. In one of his final publications, *Ilusi Negara Islam (The Illusion of the Islamic State)* co-written with Ahmad Syafi’i Ma’arif former head (1998–2005) of the reformist Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah, Gus Dur’s central argument was the need to protect the Pancasila and the Unitary State of Indonesia (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia*) against hardliners (*garis keras*), including the pan-Islamic Indonesian Party of Liberation (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia; HTI) and the Justice Prosperous Party (Partai Keadilan Indonesia), because they favoured an Islamic state (A. Wahid & Ma’arif, 2009). Gus Dur also invested agency in the establishment of WF, which focuses on the consequences of policies and laws on people’s lives and defends the idea that Indonesia’s pluralistic society must be protected. For two decades, the foundation has carried his name and continues his moral approach to calling out injustices.

### 3. Wahid Foundation

The Wahid Foundation was initially founded as the Wahid Institute, on 7 September 2004, in response to a changing world after the 9/11 attacks in the US, as well as Indonesia’s own experience of terrorism and

ethnic and religious violence (Wahid Institute, n.d.). Its broader objective was to support democracy and deepen *reformasi*, in a way that would respect electoral outcomes and avoid violence. Since 2005 it has documented religious violations, and in 2008 began producing yearly reports. In 2016, it was renamed the Wahid Foundation to enhance its international reputation and capacity as a philanthropic organisation, rather than just a research centre (Alamsyah M Djafar, personal communication, February 10, 2022). To date, it has produced dozens of reports and publications, as well as countless articles and press releases related to political, religious, and social issues, which are available on its website ([www.wahidfoundation.org](http://www.wahidfoundation.org)).

Since Gus Dur's death, his daughter, Yenny Wahid, has continued as director and used her high-profile image to further the work of WF through meetings with leaders and important people in Indonesia and from around the world. At both a regional and global level, WF facilitates dialogue and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. There are also partnerships with governments and institutions globally, including Australia, the US, France, the UN, and many others (WF, n.d.). Collaboration is wide-ranging, such as empowering women, poverty alleviation, and religious tolerance. Projects of late have included Peace Village (*Desa Damai*), a UN-sponsored program enhancing the role of women in achieving tolerance, social development, and expanding economic opportunities. Another is the Australian government-funded Peace School (*Sekolah Damai*) program, supporting the participation of youth on matters of peace, inclusion, and opposing violent extremism, and the capacity building of teachers (WF, n.d.).

Yenny is often involved in issues of national significance, such as Papua and women's role in terrorism. In 2021, she met with Papuan cultural figure Ondo George Awi who recalled meeting her father and valued his suggested solutions to the problems in Papua through education programmes (WF, 2021). President Wahid is remembered fondly there because he changed the province's name back to Papua from Irian Jaya and because of his willingness to engage in dialogue. In addition to promoting educational programs in Papua, Yenny has supported the right of Papuans to display the Morning Star flag, as it represents a cultural symbol, and not an act of treason (Halim & Galih, 2020). She has also pressed on the importance of women in preventing terrorism ("Empowerment prevents women," 2018). Survey data shows that women are less likely to engage in terrorism, and when they do, it is usually in supportive roles, and rarely as perpetrators (WF, 2018). As Yenny herself emphasised, the importance of this work was brought into sharp focus when women were involved in terrorist attacks in Surabaya in May 2018 ("Empowerment prevents women," 2018).

WF's ongoing task is to document intolerant incidents but also reports on positive stories of tolerant and harmonious acts. There are annual accounts of incidents, descriptions, and analyses of particular trends, such as hate speech and physical violence, which flare up because of the "politicization of religion," as in the case of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election which coincided with blasphemy charges against Governor Ahok (Noor et al., 2018, pp. 2, 38). Common to WF publications are strategies and recommendations for improvement, directed at all levels of government, parliament, the president, ministers, the judiciary, the police and other state institutions, the media, and civil society groups, for them to strengthen their commitment to the protection of people's right to freedom of religion and belief. It is difficult to measure the extent to which these reports and recommendations affect government policies, but the foundation does command the attention of the government, particularly when Yenny is involved.

In 2020, WF published its most comprehensive report to date, *A Decade of Monitoring Freedom of Religion and Belief*, covering religious violations in Indonesia between 2009 and 2018. Its findings detailed



1,033 violations by the state and 1,420 violations by non-state actors (Djafar et al., 2020, pp. 133–136). The five most common infringements by non-state actors included intimidation and threats (205 violations), hate speech (195), physical attack (161), accusations of apostasy (136), and prohibited activities (132; Djafar et al., 2020, pp. 135–136). The FPI was responsible for the greatest amount with 153 violations (Djafar et al., 2020, p. 125). Violations by the state included restricting or closing places of worship (163), criminal punishment because of religion (155), non-intervention (121), restricting or closing religious activities (117), and discrimination (116; Djafar et al., 2020, p. 133). The significance of all this is that many of these violations go unpunished, and WF cites Indonesian laws that are used as justification for such actions, particularly Law 1/1965: Prevention of Abuse and/or Blasphemy of Religion, commonly referred to as the 1965 PNPS Law (Djafar, 2020, pp. 1, 7). In fact, Yenny stated in response to the blasphemy conviction of Ahok that this law has sent more than 100 people to jail since 2004 and it should be abolished (WF, 2017).

In its end-of-year report in 2015, WF reported a rise in hate speech in Jakarta, primarily directed at Governor Ahok, because of his religious and ethnic identity, Chinese Christian (Y. Z. Wahid et al., 2015, p. 43). In 2017, when he ran unsuccessfully for re-election, WF recorded ten separate actions directed at him and six to his supporters (Noor et al., 2018, p. 30). Notwithstanding, the government's tolerance for FPI ran out and went after its leader Habib Rizieq. In April 2017, he fled to Saudi Arabia to avoid charges relating to anti-pornography laws and disrespecting state symbols (Suryana & Taufek, 2020). Upon returning to Indonesia in November 2020, Rizieq was charged with Covid-19 protocol breaches, and, in early December, six of his bodyguards were killed in a shootout with police ("Indonesian Islamic cleric Rizieq Shihab arrested," 2020). By 30 December, FPI was banned (Indonesian Government, 2020). This followed the 2017 banning of HTI because it opposed the Pancasila state in favour of an Islamic state (Indonesian Government, 2017). Data sourced over fifty months at the end of SBY's presidency and fifty months at the beginning of Jokowi's presidency showed a decline in religious violations under Jokowi. The biggest reduction was in physical attacks, only 39, compared to 106 under SBY (Djafar, 2020, p. 5). In terms of state-sponsored violations, under SBY, regional governments were responsible for 272 violations and the police were blamed for 173 violations, whereas under Jokowi it fell to 157 and 28 violations respectively (Djafar et al., 2020, pp. 155–181). According to this data, Jokowi's crackdown on religious extremism and intolerance has shown success.

Four people are listed as founders of WF, namely Gus Dur, Greg Barton, Yenny Wahid, and Ahmad Suaedy. Of these, Yenny remains the most prominent. This has helped the profile of WF and has provided her a platform to remain in the public eye, given the fact that her political ambitions have been unsuccessful. Since 2008, Yenny's leadership of the National Sovereignty Party, which changed to the New Indonesia National Sovereignty Party (Partai Kedaulatan Bangsa Indonesia Baru), has achieved no major milestones, including no seats in parliament (Yenny Wahid, n.d.). She remains publicly critical of her former party, PKB, particularly its leader, Muhaimin Iskandar, who had her and her father expelled from the party in 2008, which she has openly stated was "a coup," and she frequently reiterated this during the led up to the 2024 elections ("Yenny ungkap wasiat Gus Dur," 2023). Her unofficial political stance of "anyone but Muhaimin" and his PKB, has seen her endorse politicians with questionable human rights records, such as Prabowo Subianto in 2009 and 2014 (Asri, 2014). However, it should be acknowledged that a contributing fact for her support was that her husband was a member of Prabowo's Gerindra party (Asri, 2014). In 2023, she pledged support for the Ganjar Pranowo (with vice presidential candidate Mohammad Mahfud Mahmodin) in the 2024 presidential election because their values aligned with her and her father's (Tim Redaksi, 2023). Like Gus

Dur, her political actions have not appeared to have negatively impacted the work or reputation of WF, and she usually relinquishes her position as WF director temporarily if she is involved in political campaigning.

#### 4. National Awakening Party

PKB is one of Indonesia's most successful political parties. Since its creation on 23 July 1998, it has represented partisan and practical politics for NU. The party's symbols resemble those of NU, including the colour green and the world surrounded by nine stars. However, beyond these basic Muslim characteristics, and its foundational base in Pancasila, the party is moderate and pluralistic. Apart from a few religious terms, such as "inner self and outer world" (*lahir dan batin*) and "to have moral character" (*berakhlakul karimah*), PKB's "vision" and "mission" statements read like the larger, secular-nationalist parties, with a commitment to the 1945 Constitution, human rights, modernity through education, law, economic development, and democratic empowerment (*Visi dan Misi*, n.d.). PKB continues to reflect the values and ideas of its most prominent founder, Gus Dur, just as its original declaration a quarter of a century ago detailed, the party seeks to create a unified Indonesia that protects its people, provides prosperity, freedom, lasting peace, and social justice in the world (*Sejarah Pendirian*, n.d.).

The high point for PKB was in the early years of *reformasi*. At the June 1999 election, the party attracted one in eight votes (12.61%; *Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, 2009), making it the third most popular party, while its leader, Gus Dur, became president. But Gus Dur's presidency might never have happened. His association with certain people, including the current chairperson of NU, Yahya Cholil Staquf, was crucial because Yahya was a member of the Electoral Commission (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*; KPU). KPU wanted to reject Gus Dur as a political candidate on medical grounds, but Yahya fought to have him passed so he could enter parliament (*Laksana & Staquf*, 2021, p. 36), which allowed him to win the presidency. In 2004, KPU denied Gus Dur's presidential candidacy when he tried to stand again for the position because he was considered medically unfit (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, 2004).

In the five elections PKB has contested from 1999 to 2019, it has been ranked in the top five most popular political parties, except in 2009 (declining to 4.94% from 10.57% of the vote in 2004; *Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, 2009), after an internal conflict saw Gus Dur's expulsion when his nephew, Muhaimin Iskandar, successfully wrested control of the party in 2008. Also, a rift within Gus Dur's PKB in 2006–2007 resulted in the creation of another NU-aligned party, the Ulama National Awakening Party (*Partai Kebangkitan Nasional Ulama*), which attracted 1.5% of the 2009 vote (*Franklin*, 2014, pp. 77, 184–185). Consequently, PKB dropped to seventh most popular but regained most of its support in the elections of 2014 and 2019, respectively, 9.04% and 9.69% (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, 2014, 2019). Its leader, Muhaimin, deserves credit for this, as well as the 2019 presidential victory after he convinced President Jokowi to choose a new running mate, namely Ma'ruf Amin, to represent the NU consistency (*Fealy*, 2018).

Strikingly, PKB has only had three chairpersons, namely Matori Abdul Djilil (1998–2001), Alwi Shihab (2001–2005), and Muhaimin Iskandar (since 2005). All three were removed by Gus Dur because they were accused of being co-opted by external forces and not towing the party line ("External interference blamed," 2008). To avoid the fate of his predecessors, Muhaimin held an extraordinary meeting with his faction of PKB. He took his case to the Supreme Court, which recognised him and his group as the legitimate leaders of PKB. Muhaimin then focused on improving relations with NU. This was most obvious when Helmy Faisal,



a member of PKB, became General Secretary of the NU Executive Board (*Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama*, PBNU) from 2015 to 2021, and Ma'ruf Amin as the Supreme Leader of PBNU became Indonesia's vice president in 2019. Helmy even pledged NU's support for the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin victory ("NU satu suara," 2019). In 2020, PKB's secretary general, Hasanuddin Wahid, stated "Gus Dur's greatest legacy to this nation was PKB" ("Peninggalan terbesar Gus Dur," 2020). Although this was likely a public relations stunt, it does reflect how Gus Dur is still held in high esteem by PKB. However, generally the party avoids mentioning his name, because Yenny is quick to counter such things, to denounce PKB and her cousin, Muhaimin. In late 2023, PKB felt confident enough to support Muhaimin as vice-presidential candidate, pairing with presidential candidate Anies Baswedan, for the February 2024 election.

Still, Muhaimin's political career was started by Gus Dur, and, eventually, he was able to re-create himself after he was made minister of labour and transmigration in President SBY's cabinet in October 2009. Under Muhaimin's leadership, PKB has been stable, been given ministries, and supported most of the government's key policies, including the Omnibus Bill, moving the country's capital city, energy transition, and changes to the Corruption Eradication Commission (*Bijak Memilih*, n.d.). PKB was rated the party that was most pro-equity in economic policy, the third most committed to *reformasi*, and, on other indices, it lies between the Islamic parties and secular-nationalist parties on issues like status as progressive or conservative, the role of Islam in politics, and women in politics (Aspinall et al., 2018).

In October 2023, for the first time since 1999, PKB successfully registered a candidate for the presidential team. It is unlikely that the Anies-Muhaimin pair will win according to the polls, but the experience and the high-profile nature of the presidential race could propel Muhaimin into the small circle of the political elite. Like other failed candidates, we will likely see him try again. PKB and Muhaimin will not be able to rely on the support of PBNU since its current leadership reiterated its commitment to political neutrality and has been stacked by Gus Dur's allies and immediate family members. If Muhaimin wishes to increase his popularity, he will have to reconcile with NU, including Gus Dur's family and supporters. This seems unlikely, given that Yenny has said that her father's dying wish was to remove Muhaimin as PKB leader ("Yenny ungkap wasiat Gus Dur," 2023).

## 5. Nahdlatul Ulama

NU was formed in 1926 to formalise traditionalist Islam, which had developed in Indonesia over many centuries. This was during the Dutch colonial era when competing Islamic movements were advancing their interests (Franklin, 2020), like Muhammadiyah—which focuses on reforming and purifying Islam—formed in 1912. NU emphasises the concept that Indonesia was peacefully Islamised by the nine saints (*wali songo*), which has recently been extended to include contributions by Gus Dur. Today, NU is the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia and is part of the socio-religious fabric of national identity and cultural life. It boasts that some 80 to 90 million people acknowledge some form of religious or cultural identity to NU (Triono, 2021a). Taking this number at face value, it represents over a third of the country's 270.2 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020, p. 12). This identity is loose and does not compel them to vote for NU-aligned parties but is an important demographic because of its size and dominance in Indonesia's main island of Java. NU maintains political neutrality in a doctrine known as *Kembali ke Khittah* (Return to Origin), as declared by Gus Dur when he became head in 1984 (Franklin, 2014, p. 21). For fifteen years Gus Dur led NU making it both moderate and relevant in national life, while surviving Soeharto's

New Order Regime, which empowered him as a key figure in the *reformasi* movement which achieved democratisation in 1998.

PBNU has had three leaders since Gus Dur vacated the position in 1999, namely Hasyim Muzadi (1999–2010), Said Aqil Siradj (2010–2021), and Yahya Cholil Staquf (since late 2021). Muzadi was stable but conservative in his leadership (Fealy, 2017). He managed his relationship with Gus Dur well by avoiding public disagreements and maintaining respectful relations, particularly at NU events where the former president would attract more attention. I personally observed their relationship at the NU East Java Regional Conference (Konferensi Wilayah; Konferwil) on 2–4 November 2007 in Probolinggo, when Ali Maschan Moesa was elected NU head of East Java. Siradj was progressive and more charismatic than Muzadi, and he did not have to manage Gus Dur who passed away three months before he became leader. Siradj made his mark in 2015 when he directed NU to combat Islamic extremism and terrorism because of the growing threat of Islamic State (IS). Although Islamic preachers like Abu Bakar Ba'asyir had been pushing Islamic extremism for years (Franklin, 2008), pledges of allegiance to IS, and Indonesians in Syria urging their fellow country folk to join (Lloyd & Dredge, 2014), prompted a national response, which included help from NU. Consequently, NU created *Islam Nusantara* (Islam of the Indonesian Archipelago) to advance moderate Islam and counter Wahabism and violent *jihad* (holy war).

*Islam Nusantara* is the most comprehensive theological NU program designed since Gus Dur's reforms of the 1980s, namely *Kembali ke Khittah* and *Pribumisasi Islam* (Indigenising Islam). Fundamentalist and radical groups, like HTI and FPI (both now defunct), opposed *Islam Nusantara*, arguing that it represented a deviant stream and was tantamount to secularisation and Westernisation (Njoto-Feillard, 2015; Putra, 2020). The doctrine of *Islam Nusantara* is underpinned by jurisprudential debate initially promoted by Gus Dur and continued by his successors and other NU intellectuals (Njoto-Feillard, 2015). Reflective of NU's loose nature, NU's former head, Muzadi, did not support *Islam Nusantara* because it was too exclusive and Indonesia-centric, arguing that it needed to promote universal values for the common good (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*; Akbar, 2015). Muzadi was often critical of Siradj, particularly Siradj's political actions like his personal support for Jokowi's for president, arguing there should be no relationship with politics while head of NU (Hermawan, 2014). This was ironic since Muzadi ran for vice-president in 2004, pairing with Megawati, but they were defeated by SBY and his running mate Jusuf Kalla. To date, Siradj has never been directly involved in politics. However, under Siradj's leadership, there was creeping politicisation of NU from PKB, which ended when Yahya became head. Siradj was an ally of Muhaimin, and before the 2019 election, he stated he would personally support Muhaimin if President Jokowi picked him as the candidate for vice president (Florentin, 2018). Although this did not happen in 2019, Muhaimin hoped that Siradj would retain the leadership and provide support for his political aspirations in the February 2024 election (Syechbubakr, 2022).

Yahya comes from an eminent NU family. His younger brother, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, is the minister of religious affairs (appointed on 23 December 2020), and his uncle is prominent NU figure Mustofa Bisri (Sari, 2021). Yahya has pledged to revive the ways of Gus Dur (Triono, 2021b). Gus Yahya, as he is known, is humorous and entertaining, like Gus Dur was, but at the same time soft and can listen, which is essential in running a massive organisation like NU. Gus Yahya continues to support *Islam Nusantara*, and his priorities are, as NU approaches 100 years old, world peace and action on climate change (Hasyim & Yew-Foong, 2022; Maknunah, 2023). Gus Yahya details his history with Gus Dur in the book *Menghidupkan Gus Dur (Bringing Gus Dur to Life)*; Laksana & Staquf, 2021). Interestingly, he puts Gus Dur's political failures down to him being a statesman and prioritising

humanity over political engineering (Laksana & Staquf, 2021, p. 32). Yahya acknowledges disappointment in Gus Dur's presidency, but he was convinced that Gus Dur had a grand plan.

In the PBNU organisational structure of 2022–2027, Gus Dur's camp has returned to fill key positions, including his wife and four daughters. The former first lady, Shinta Nuriyah, and eldest daughter, Alissa Wahid, are chairpersons on the Religious Advisory Board, while Yenny Wahid is chairperson of Strategic Innovation Development, Anita Wahid is deputy chairperson of the Ma'arif Education Institute, and Inayah Wulandari Wahid is secretary of the Indonesian Muslim Cultural Arts Institute (Susunan lengkap, 2022; Triono, 2022b). This is unprecedented and sends a clear signal to PKB that NU no longer tolerates politicisation, at least from Muhaimin. In late 2022, Yahya stated, that "NU would not be involved in practical politics" and that NU was not to be "used as a tool by PKB or co-opted by PKB" ("Yahya Staquf tak mau," 2021). He reiterated, with Yenny by his side, that "there will not be a presidential or vice-presidential candidate representing NU" (Syechbubakr, 2022).

Total depoliticisation of NU seems impossible. PBNU's membership includes people who are or have been, directly involved in politics. These include Gus Dur's nephew Saifullah Yusuf of PKB and former Gus Dur cabinet minister and current East Java governor, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, who has been allied with various parties. Others, not necessarily associated with Gus Dur include, Amin Said Husni of PKB, Choirul Sholeh Rasyid and Taj Yasin Maimoen from the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan), Nasyirul Falah Amru from the Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrat Indonesia Perjuangan), and Nusron Wahid (no relation to Gus Dur) of Golkar. The current PBNU treasurer is Gudfan Arif, who was once very active with Gerindra and is the oldest son of the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) Sunan Drajat headmaster Kyai Abdul Ghofur; Ghofur is also politically active in East Java and has direct links to Prabowo (Franklin, 2014, pp. 177–178). The challenge for Yahya, like all PBNU leaders, remains keeping NU executive positions politically neutral, as well as the cohesion of the organisation, including managing the regions where the neutrality of NU at the district and provincial level becomes blurred and difficult to enforce. During Yahya's leadership, we will likely hear frequent references to his old boss and mentor Abdurrahman Wahid in terms of moral guidance, particularly as the country prepares for a new president in 2024; of the three candidates, namely Anies, Ganjar, and Prabowo, there is a likelihood that the latter will win, according to the polls, because of his pairing with President Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka for vice president, substantially boosted Prabowo's popularity.

## 6. Conclusion

Gus Dur left an active moral and political legacy, which remains alive in the consciousness of mainstream Indonesian society. Just as the *wali songo* legends are retold and romanticised, Gus Dur's legacy offers much for Indonesia's political and religious culture, so much so that his supporters do not have to compete with memories of the problematic aspects of Gus Dur, as president or otherwise. Although his presidency changed Indonesia in profound ways, this is only part of the Gus Dur narrative. His actions outside the presidency have ongoing effects, and his long-term structural and ideological legacy continues in the autonomy and vibrancy of the three institutions discussed in this article. Gus Dur found unique methods to fight for justice and improve society, which are advocated in different forms through WF, PKB, and NU. In everyday life, Indonesians continue to remember Gus Dur in unique and meaningful ways. Recognition includes popular symbolism, such as his appearance in cartoons and memes, internet articles and social

media posts, T-shirts, and party and institutional advertising paraphernalia. A simple search of social media, particularly in Facebook and Instagram accounts of NU and WF, shows frequent references to Gus Dur. Even the West Papuans have adopted him; for example, a book concerning Gus Dur's role in Papua features a cover showing an edited photograph of him wearing a bird of paradise headdress like a tribal chief (Pekei, 2013).

Today, millions of Indonesians and many institutions view Gus Dur as a source of national pride and an exemplary model on matters of national consciousness, morality, justice, equality, pluralism, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and Pancasila. Thousands praise him daily at his grave, to honour his legacy and draw power in their lives. In terms of the political dynasties that have emerged, Gus Dur was not against them, so long as they used their privileged positions for the benefit of all. He, apparently, even said that he would oppose his own children if they did not act in the best interests of society (Mohamad, 2023). Arguably Yenny Wahid is the unofficial representative of Gus Dur. She is constantly referred to in the Indonesian media as the “daughter of the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia (RI) Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)” (Ramadhan, 2023) or “the second daughter of the late Gus Dur” (Puspitalova, 2023). However, it is unlikely that she will become a serious political player, at least while Muhaimin leads PKB. That said, NU appears to be in the firm grip of Gus Dur's allies, which will probably continue into the 2030s. How they use the organisation to improve Indonesian society and politics will become clearer in the fullness of time, as will the temptation to join politics, which will inevitably arise for some. PKB, NU, and WF continue to provide Indonesians, and the Muslim world, an example of institutions of moderate and progressive Islam that can help strengthen important layers of a modern civil society. Gus Dur's contribution is more than just a legacy in this life, as the ongoing benefits to society provide him with religious merit (*pahala*) in the afterlife, which will accrue further in his sainthood. Given all this, it seems only a matter of time before Gus Dur's supporters are successful in gaining recognition for him as a “national hero,” and his moral status would fully justify that recognition as a national figure.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Hans Hägerdal for his helpful comments and suggestions.

### Funding

This article was produced with the assistance of a Rainmaker Grant from Charles Darwin University.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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