



POWER RELATIONS AMONG CAREGIVERS, USTAZ, AND STUDENTS AS WELL AS THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL COMPLIANCE IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24260/ngaji.v6i1.185>

Received: 30 April 2026; Accepted: 13 June 2026; Published: 21 June 2026

ABSTRACT: This article examines the power relations among caregivers, ustaz, and students and how these relationships shape social compliance in Islamic boarding schools. From the perspective of the sociology of educational institutions, this study argues that social obedience in boarding schools is not formed naturally, but through networks of power relations legitimized by religious authority, boarding school traditions, and daily supervision systems. Using a qualitative case study approach at the An-Najah Student Boarding School, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and institutional documentation. The results reveal three main mechanisms for fostering social compliance: first, interpreting orders as an integral part of scientific ethics; second, seniority structures and management systems that strengthen social control; third, religious worship and learning routines used as a medium for collective obedience training. This study concludes that social compliance in boarding schools grows from an understanding of values and mutual agreement, rather than merely from coercion, making boarding schools places for students' character formation and social identity.

Keywords: Power Relations, Social Compliance, Scott, Religious Authority, Islamic Boarding School

ABSTRAK: Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji relasi kuasa yang terjalin antara pengasuh, ustaz, dan santri serta bagaimana hubungan tersebut berkontribusi dalam pembentukan kepatuhan sosial di lingkungan pondok pesantren. Berperspektif sosiologi lembaga pendidikan, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa ketaatan sosial di lingkungan pesantren tidak terbentuk secara alami, melainkan melalui jaringan relasi kuasa yang dilegitimasi oleh otoritas agama, tradisi pesantren, dan sistem pengawasan harian. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis studi kasus di Pesantren Mahasiswa An-Najah, data dikumpulkan melalui teknik observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi kelembagaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat tiga mekanisme utama pembentukan kepatuhan sosial, yaitu: pertama, pemaknaan perintah sebagai bagian tak terpisahkan dari adab keilmuan; kedua, struktur senioritas dan sistem kepengurusan yang berfungsi memperkuat kontrol sosial; ketiga, rutinitas ibadah dan pembelajaran yang dijadikan media pelatihan kepatuhan secara kolektif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepatuhan sosial yang terbentuk di pesantren tumbuh dari pemahaman nilai dan kesepakatan bersama, bukan semata-mata hasil paksaan, sehingga menjadikan pesantren sebagai wadah pembentukan karakter dan identitas sosial santri.

Kata Kunci: Relasi Kuasa; Kepatuhan Sosial; Santri; Otoritas Keagamaan; Pondok Pesantren

1. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools have long been known as one of the main pillars of Islamic education in Indonesia, which not only functions as an institution of religious

learning but also as a socio-cultural institution that shapes the character and identity of the ummah (Resta Tultuffia Sari et al., 2025). As an original Indonesian institution, pesantren has five main elements that are its characteristics: the existence of boarding schools, students, mosques, kyai as leaders, the oldest Islamic educational institution and has unique characteristics in its learning system and life pattern (Hanif et al., 2023). Life in Islamic boarding schools will certainly always get the spotlight from various media and society. One of them is caused by the behavior of the people who live in it (Aminah, 2025). In this environment, a main social phenomenon is formed in the form of hierarchical relationships between caregivers, ustaz, and students that are not only educational, but also contain a dimension of power that runs continuously in daily life. This power relationship is clearly seen in the way rules are conveyed, obeyed, and supervised in the pesantren environment. Where the power relationship in the pesantren itself is centered on the authority of the kiai as the holder of the highest power (charismatic), which regulates students through the mechanism of discipline, spiritual obedience, and a culture of patronage.

The structure of the relationship between the kiai-kiai (the leader of the cottage), the students, and other elements (the kiai family, administrators, alumni) is often described through the metaphor of a strong hierarchy: high respect for the kiai, the role of the kiai family as the guardian of legitimacy, and social rules that require certain manners (Stuart & Muzakki, 2026). The obedience of students is often not seen as ordinary obedience, but is interpreted as a form of moral and religious obligation. Obedience is a form of social influence in which a person is willing to carry out the orders given to him (Maghfiroh & Hanurawan, 2021). Obedience can also be understood as a disciplined attitude towards an order or rule set by a person or agency with full awareness.

Thus, obedience is a positive behavior born of a choice. This means that a person or individual chooses to do, obey, respond critically to a rule, law, social norm, request or desire from someone who has authority or who has an important role. The urgency of this study for the sociology of education lies in understanding how power works, and shapes social behavior. Empirically, the initial data from observations at the Anajah Student Islamic Boarding School clearly illustrates how power relations run, are distributed, and function in institutional life. That power in pesantren is not something that is forced unilaterally, but a network of relationships that are structured, have communication mechanisms, and run reciprocally (Jannah, 2025).

Power relations are defined as a reciprocal relationship between the authority and the obedient party, where there is the ability to influence the behavior of others according to the wishes of the authority holder. The obedience of the students can be described as that the students will accept the statement of the kiai without the courage to ask again, speak if asked, and carry out the order or request of the kiai, without the courage to refuse it (Syarif, 2012). The power relationship is explained through two elements, namely the relationship of power to thought and the relationship of power to the body. The relationship of power over thought is about truth based on knowledge, while the relationship of power over the body is an object of power that is bound to knowledge and culture with the aim of becoming a productive body with established rules (Jumiati et al., 2023).

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the relationship between kyai and santri in the Indonesian pesantren environment not only reflects the function of religious education, but also displays a social structure in which authority and knowledge are closely related to symbolic power and institutional hierarchy. Obedience is associated with the perception of kiai leadership which involves the cognitive of the students and the affection of the students to think and feel how a leader leads a group of individuals who have expectations and trust in their leaders. Students as the pesantren community will certainly feel and assess what kind of people are obeyed as long as the students live in the pesantren (Ma'rufah et al., 2014). Islamic boarding schools have historically also played a role as a center for da'wah, community empowerment, and social transformation (Abrori et al., 2026).

The attachment of pesantren to local social structures makes it an important actor in the formation of religious authority, moral discipline, and communal solidarity. In the sociology of education, this concept is key to reading social phenomena in research because it explains how orders, rules, and norms move from caregivers to ustaz to students. This relationship is not only understood as a relationship between superiors and subordinates, but is bound by religious symbols, cultural norms, and institutional practices. In Islamic boarding schools, power is not only in the form of formal power, but power wrapped in moral and religious values, so that it is accepted as a natural thing and must be respected. Religion in its position as a power-forming space starts from its role and social function which is trusted, even believed to be the highest source of morality. Religion is a set of life values that contain many demands of life that are noble and noble (Hannan & Abdillah, 2019).

The power relationship in the pesantren environment is clearly seen from various aspects that run every day. First, it can be seen from who is involved in it: there are caregivers as the main leaders who hold the highest authority, ustadz who serve as a bridge and intermediary for the leader's hands, and there are students who are the parties who receive guidance and rules. Second, it can also be seen from the way they interact and act. Power here is not only a matter of giving orders, but also running through joint discussions when drafting rules, evaluating activities, and making mutually agreed decisions. Third, it can be seen from the way information and orders are delivered. Communication runs in an orderly and tiered manner. Everything runs neatly through the management path, both at the central level and at the complex level. And fourth, it can be seen from the impact it has on character education. This relationship forms the mindset of students that obeying orders is part of responsibility and obligation. This fosters respect, self-awareness, and creates an orderly atmosphere that runs on its own, where rules are maintained even if the caregiver is not always by their side.

Obedience comes from the word obedience. According to KBBI (Great Indonesian Dictionary), obedience means liking to follow orders, obeying orders or rules and being disciplined (Purwanti & Amin, 2016). Meanwhile, Social Compliance is defined as a form of individual or group behavior that conforms to norms, rules, or expectations that apply in an institution or society. This concept explains how educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools are able to shape the behavior, culture, and social relations of their citizens. Social obedience is not just the act of following rules, but the result of the process of socialization, internalization of values, and environmental pressure that makes a person feel obliged or appropriate to obey these

rules for the sake of order and common goals. In Islamic boarding schools, obedience is reinterpreted as the identity of the students, namely obedience as a form of respect and a means of character formation. Student compliance is the result of a complex interaction between internal factors in the form of self-control and external factors that include structure, culture, and social relations in the pesantren environment. Like lectures, in pesantren this lecture is not only a means to convey rules, but also shapes the way of thinking of students so that they understand that obedience to the rules is not just an obligation, but part of a better self-formation process (Moh. Kholilurrohman et al., 2025).

Previous studies that discussed the majority of pesantren focused on the education system, curriculum, development history, and social role in society. Most of the research is normative or administrative, so there is not much that has been elaborated in depth about the social mechanisms behind it, especially how power is distributed, how rules are internalized into habits, and how the meaning of obedience is built from the religious consciousness of students. This research is here to fill this gap by focusing on three main objectives, namely: analyzing how orders and directions are interpreted as part of scientific manners, explaining the role of seniority structures in maintaining social control, and assessing the function of worship and learning routines as a medium for forming collective obedience.

Theoretically, this study uses three main concepts as the basis for analysis. First, Power Relations, which are defined as reciprocal relationships in which there is the ability to influence the behavior of others, which works through two main aspects, namely the knowledge-based aspect of thinking and the body aspect based on the rules and the prevailing culture (Jumiati et al., 2023). Second, Social Compliance, which is understood as the result of the process of socialization and internalization of values that are divided into aspects of formal rules, daily habits, social support, social control, and individual responses. Third, Religious Authority, which is a form of power based on religious knowledge and character, so that the orders given are considered as an extension of the value of religion itself (Harnadi et al., 2021). In the pre-modern era, religious authority relied on a system of sanad and a clear scientific genealogy (Nurhamidin et al., 2025). Max Weber divided authority into three forms: traditional, legal, and charismatic authority. Traditional authority refers to the authority possessed by a leader in a traditional society, who has the authority to interpret and enforce the applicable rules (Rachmadin, 2021). These three concepts are used to dissect and explain the social mechanisms that occur at the research site.

This research was carried out using a qualitative approach with a type of case study at the An-Najah Student Islamic Boarding School. This approach was chosen because it aims to understand social phenomena in depth, not just numbers or statistics. This is in line with Creswell's (2021, p. 15) opinion that "where researchers not only want to know 'what' and 'how much', but also want to dig into the 'why' and 'how' it happens. This approach provides a more comprehensive, objective, and meaningful picture of the problem under study". This location was chosen because it has characteristics that are relevant to the research focus, namely a strong compliance culture, a clear and tiered management structure, and a tradition of deliberation in policy making. The data in this study was collected through three main techniques, namely direct observation of daily life, in-depth interviews with caregivers, administrators, and students, and the collection of official institutional documents. All data obtained are then analyzed through the stages

of data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification to obtain valid and reliable results.

The data sources in this study were determined purposively or deliberately selected according to information needs. The main resource persons include: Caregivers, Security Administrators as representatives of field implementers and power brokers (ustadzah), and students as parties who accept and implement the rules. The selection of informants aims to get a complete view: from the side that understands the position in the middle of the structure, to the side that executes the order directly. This is where the main problem for sociology lies: inequality or differences in position and power (Plummer, 2021). Other informants are added if new information is found that has not yet been unearthed.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Interpretation of Commands as Scientific Manners

Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews conducted in the field, it was found that the main findings were that every order, direction, or policy conveyed by caregivers was not interpreted simply as bureaucratic rules or ordinary orders. More than that, all the provisions given are understood and lived as an inseparable part of scientific manners as well as the moral obligation of a student. Various studies confirm that the relationship between kiai santri in pesantren contains distinctive patron-client elements (Ali et al., 2026). Student compliance with a regulation in the Islamic boarding school is very necessary to realize the vision and mission of the Islamic boarding school as an effort to develop the Islamic boarding school (Rizki Hidayat et al., 2024). The role of Islamic boarding schools in shaping and preparing the Islamic generation cannot be separated from a kyai (Muhtador, 2020). This is clear from the statement of one of the speakers:

"For me, the rule is a natural thing from the caregiver because it is a form of my obedience to yes, it's like a teacher... It is a form of obedience like a student to his teachers."

This pattern of meaning is formed because of the way of delivering messages or commands used in the pesantren environment. Caregivers often convey policies or directions using figurative language, advice, or parables that contain deep meaning, not just rigid instructions. This is in line with the view of Harnadi et al. (2021) who stated that authority in Islamic boarding schools is built through a value and exemplary approach, not just coercion. Although sometimes the message is difficult to understand its meaning directly, the students still try to interpret it and carry it out seriously. This is done because students view that obeying the caregiver's orders is a form of respect for the teacher, a means of self-improvement, and a way to get closer to Allah SWT. In this context, it can be seen that there are three elements that are interconnected, namely the caregiver as the main authority holder, the administrator or ustaz as the message intermediary, and the student as the executor who is aware of their obligations.

The social conditions that exist in the An-Najah Student Islamic Boarding School strongly support the formation of this meaning. As an Islamic boarding school with an open system, where students interact directly with the wider community, this instilling the value of obedience is intended as the main provision for students to be able to adapt and behave politely wherever they are. Culturally, the relationship between kyai and santri has long been based on respect, full trust, and strong inner bonds. This is in

accordance with Jannah's (2025) research which states that the relationship between kyai and santri in modern pesantren still maintains traditional values that are the basis for the legitimacy of power. Organizationally, the tiered structure also ensures that the values instilled by caregivers can be channeled and understood to the lowest level of students. There is no external pressure that forces this to happen, but rather grows from the cultural strength of the pesantren itself.

This finding confirms the theory of power relations that states that effective power is not physically coercive power, but power that is able to legitimize itself through mutually agreed values and norms. Here, education in pesantren does not only function as a place for knowledge transfer, but also as a forum for instilling value and forming harmonious social relationships. This is in line with Weber's (2021) view of charismatic authority, where power is received out of trust in the leader's personal qualities. That power is not always responded to with rejection, but can be responded to through understanding and adjusting values if the basis of legitimacy is strong. If compliance is based solely on administrative aspects, then compliance will disappear once there is no supervision. However, in this pesantren, compliance continues and is maintained because it has become part of the identity of the students, which proves that the meaning of values is the core of the social structure of the institution.

2.2 Seniority Structure and Management System as Social Control

The second finding in this study shows the existence of a seniority structure and a well-organized management system, which serves as the main tool to strengthen the social control mechanism among fellow students. Based on the explanation given by the security manager:

"The position of the administrator is an intermediary from the caregiver to the administrator, then the administrator to the student, and vice versa from the student to the new administrator, later to the caregiver."

This shows that the organizational structure in this pesantren runs in stages and in an orderly manner, divided into central administrators and administrators at the complex or dormitory level with a very clear division of duties and authority. This is supported by the official document of the pesantren in the form of the Organizational Structure Chart of the An-Najah Student Islamic Boarding School in 2026 which contains details of the positions, main duties, and responsibilities of each administrator.

Based on the observation data, it is interesting to note that every new policy or rule is not unilaterally or authoritarianly handed down by caregivers. Before being determined, the policy is always discussed and discussed together in regular meeting forums involving administrators. As expressed by one of the speakers:

"Every time there is a definite policy from Abah Umi, inviting the management to discuss... The management does not accept outright, but processes whether the students are able or not."

This is strengthened by the evidence of documents in the form of a neatly written organizational structure chart and division of work areas, which proves that this system was deliberately built to maintain order while bridging good communication between leaders and members.

The relationships between factors in this structure reinforce each other. The policies prepared are always based on religious law, pesantren traditions, and the

condition of students' abilities, so that they are relevant and easily accepted. Communication lines that run bidirectionally and in stages ensure that the message conveyed is intact and not convoluted. The power relationship that is evenly distributed to the administrators makes the burden of supervision not only rest on the caregiver. This is strengthened by the existence of documentary evidence in the form of Minutes of the Monthly Management Meeting which records the process of discussion and decision-making, which proves that this system was deliberately built to maintain order while bridging good communication between leaders and members. In addition, social support arises naturally because students feel that the applicable rules are the result of mutual agreement, not coercion by one party. The norms that apply in the environment also consider that obedience to more senior administrators is part of the manners that must be maintained.

This social relationship occurs in a strict but still flexible hierarchy, where caregivers are positioned as the main actors of policyholders, while managers act as implementers as well as supervisors. The function of seniority here is as a guide, observer and assessor of the learning process received by students, especially in outside learning (Mujamil et al., 2023). The situation that strengthens the running of this system is the existence of periodic performance evaluation reports and the differentiation of rules that are adjusted to the level of student education, between the junior high school level and the student level. Although sometimes there is a potential for misunderstanding due to the often used figurative language style, this can be well mitigated due to the collective belief among students that all rules made must be aimed at their good and progress. The positive consequences of this system are the creation of an orderly life order, the training of leadership spirit in the administrators, and the management of the institution that runs efficiently and effectively. These findings confirm the assumption that social control in pesantren works not by violence, but through a neat and structured network of social relationships.

2.3 *Worship and Learning Routines as a Medium of Collective Obedience*

The third finding of this study proves that the series of worship routines and daily learning activities that run in pesantren serves as the main and most effective medium in the formation of collective compliance. Tangible evidence of this can be seen from the documentation of daily activities which shows the regularity of all activities that run exactly according to the set schedule, starting from waking up early, compulsory worship, study activities, to night rest. The participation of students in these activities is not driven by fear or compulsion, but grows from the understanding that regularity is part of the character education process that they are undergoing. The caretaker of the pesantren itself emphasized that social obedience is broadly interpreted as the ability to socialize, cooperate, and do good to others, all of which are trained continuously through daily routine activities. This is in line with the opinion of Fauziyah & Hanif (2026) who stated that habituation plays a role as the main foundation for the formation of discipline and obedience in the pesantren dormitory environment.

Islamic boarding schools respond to the need for character formation by developing strategies that are structured but still adaptive. The activity schedule is arranged in detail but still adjusted to the age and level of education of the students, so it is not burdensome. The negotiation process also continues, where before the schedule is

set, the management and representative students are given the opportunity to provide input. This is recorded in the document for the preparation of the educational calendar for the 2025/2026 school year which contains notes of proposals and revisions from student representatives. The strategy of strengthening values is carried out by instilling an understanding that every routine activity, be it worship or study, is not just an administrative obligation, but a means of getting closer to Allah SWT and practicing a sense of personal responsibility. There is no reduction in the main activities, in fact, the institution always tries to add social value content to every activity so that students are used to mingling and benefiting the surrounding environment.

The implementation of this strategy has a very high value for the development of institutions and personal students. First, it can foster strong character education qualities that are difficult to find in other public education institutions. Second, it can break down social barriers and instill a sense of equality among students because, in the prayer line or study class, everyone has the same position. Third, training, discipline, and responsibility will be the main provisions when they return to the wider community. Fourth, this strategy is sustainable and relevant throughout time because it is firmly rooted in the culture and religious teachings that are embraced together. This is supported by research by Abrori et al. (2026), which emphasizes that a value- and tradition-based approach enables pesantren to have high social resilience.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the concept of religious authority, proving that it is not only symbolic or theoretical but is actualized and practiced in real terms through daily routine activities. For the world of education in general, this provides an important lesson: character education will not succeed if it is taught only through theory in the classroom, but must be integrated into a lifestyle and routine carried out consistently. This routine has also been proven to produce real social changes in students, namely the transformation from people who do not understand the rules to being orderly, from being individualistic to being cooperative, and from being rude to being polite. This change in behavior remains visible and felt when they interact again in public.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion described above, it can be concluded that social mechanisms are closely interrelated and operate simultaneously in the formation of social compliance at the An-Najah Student Islamic Boarding School. First, social obedience is formed through the interpretation of orders and directions as part of scientific manners, so that the obedience that arises grows from respect and inner awareness, not solely because of coercion or the threat of punishment. Santri views all directions from caregivers and ustaz as both a moral and a religious obligation that must be carried out sincerely. Second, the seniority structure and an organized management system serve as the backbone of the pesantren social system, effectively distributing authority and maintaining social order and control independently. Through multi-level communication channels and a culture of deliberation, policies can be conveyed, discussed, and agreed upon together to create an orderly yet democratic order. Third, the series of daily worship and learning routines is the main forum where these values of obedience are practiced, habituated, and ultimately form the character of collective obedience among all pesantren residents.

The three mechanisms do not stand alone but unite and strengthen one another to form a complete and robust Islamic boarding school cultural system. The concepts of power relations, social obedience, and religious authority used in this study proved highly relevant and explained how the social order operates in Islamic boarding schools. Power operates subtly through religious values and beliefs; obedience is formed through a long process of internalizing those values, and authority becomes the primary basis of legitimacy accepted by all elements of pesantren society.

This research certainly still has limitations, as observation and analysis are carried out only at one location of the pesantren with certain characteristics. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers conduct a comparative study involving several pesantren with different types and backgrounds, and use a mixed-methods approach so that the results obtained are broader and deeper, and can describe variations in social relationship patterns in the world of pesantren.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude to all caregivers, administrators, and students of the An-Najah Student Islamic Boarding School who granted permission, time, and very valuable information during the research process. Thank you also to Saizu State Islamic University Purwokerto for the support and facilities provided until the completion of this article.

Conflict of Interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest, either material or non-material, in the implementation of research or writing this article.

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