

THE POLITICAL SPIRITUALITY OF TUAN GURU BATAK SABBAN RAJAGUKGUK: MODERATING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COHESION IN NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract. This research analyzes the spiritual-political perspectives and contributions of Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk amidst the challenges of polarization and the politicization of religion in North Sumatra. As a Sufi scholar and intellectual figure, TGB offers a model that bridges spirituality with the realities of practical politics. Employing a qualitative method with a case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary studies. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify and elaborate on the meanings derived from the data. The findings indicate that TGB's spirituality is neither apolitical nor escapist; rather, it serves as an ethical and practical foundation for socio-political engagement. He views politics as an instrument for *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) aimed at realizing the common good (*kemaslahatan*), not merely as an arena for power struggles. TGB's contributions are multidimensional: intellectually, he emerges as a scholar-academic who integrates tradition with modern science; socio-politically, he acts as a moral actor and mediator who safeguards social cohesion; and in terms of leadership, he bequeaths an inclusive and transformative neo-Sufi model. By rejecting identity politics and promoting Sufistic moderation, TGB demonstrates that spirituality can be a crucial counterbalancing force in preserving diversity and strengthening the foundations of democracy. This model offers relevant inspiration for religious leadership in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Tuan Guru Batak; political spirituality; sufism; moderation; Islamic politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of religion in Indonesia's political landscape has long been a complex and crucial subject of academic inquiry, attracting the attention of both scholars and political practitioners. Since the independence struggle, the relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia has been closely intertwined, shaping its social, cultural, and governmental dynamics. As a nation of remarkable religious and ethnic diversity, Indonesian politics is built upon a foundation of pluralism. However, history also records that religion has often been instrumentalized to consolidate political power, by both the government and certain political groups [1], [2]. This phenomenon creates a persistent tension, where religious narratives, on one hand, serve as a unifying bond, yet on the other, become a trigger for political polarization. Particularly in recent decades, the use of religious sentiment for pragmatic political ends has increased, posing serious challenges to social stability and democratic integrity in Indonesia [3], [4].

Spirituality—as the internal and ethical dimension of religion—plays a distinct role that differentiates it from mere ritualism or dogmatism. Spirituality offers a transformative approach that can balance political rationality with inner wisdom. Unlike the politicization of religion, which focuses on electoral interests, spirituality in politics can function as a tool to mediate conflicts, de-escalate tensions, and promote more inclusive and justice-based policies [5]. However, a primary challenge arises from the polarization caused by identity politics and political pragmatism, which often threatens the values of moderation. This situation underscores the urgent need for religious figures who can maintain their spiritual neutrality while actively engaging in the public sphere, as suggested by various studies [6].

The figure of Tuan Guru Batak Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk (TGB) presents a unique and relevant case study. TGB is a Sufi tarekat (order) scholar of Batak ethnicity who holds a moderate worldview. He consistently seeks to integrate spiritual values into politics while maintaining a balance between religious principles and practical political

interests [7]. As a figure with significant influence in North Sumatra, TGB functions not only as a spiritual leader but also as a personage with bargaining power in the local and national political arenas. His involvement in various political activities, without being partisan, reflects how a cleric can leverage spiritual authority to influence political dynamics without compromising religious integrity. This role aligns with research findings indicating that religious figures often act as “political brokers,” capable of shaping public opinion and guiding the political choices of the community through their moral influence [8], [9].

Although the role of religion in Indonesian politics has been extensively studied, particularly concerning the politicization of religion and the influence of major organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah [1], [2], [10], a significant research gap remains in understanding the specific role of a spiritual leader from a Muslim minority ethnicity within a multicultural region. The majority of literature focuses on the general phenomenon of religious politicization [3], [11] or the historical role of Sufism in politics [12], [13], but there has been no in-depth study on how a contemporary Sufi scholar like Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk integrates the spirituality of his tarekat with Batak local wisdom. TGB’s unique approach to navigating polarization, mediating tensions, and promoting moderation amidst the political dynamics of North Sumatra has not been adequately explored.

This research offers novelty by holistically examining how TGB practices his spirituality to shape a political ideology that is moderate, inclusive, and relevant to preserving social cohesion amidst modern challenges. This study is expected to fill a literary void by presenting a model of spiritual leadership that functions as a counterbalance to pragmatic and sectarian politics. Therefore, this research aims to fill the aforementioned gap by investigating in-depth how TGB, as a cleric and spiritual leader, practices his spirituality in the political realm. Specifically, this study poses two main questions: (1) How is the spirituality of Tuan Guru Batak manifested in his social and political practices? and (2) What are TGB’s contributions to the political dynamics in North Sumatra? Through the analysis of TGB’s case, this research is expected not only to provide new insights for the academic literature on the relationship between religion and politics but also to offer a relevant model of religious leadership for strengthening democracy and preserving diversity amidst the challenges of polarization and modernization.

Behind these encouraging participation figures, however, lies a more complex social reality. The formation of political preferences among Muslim women in North Sumatra is not solely determined by rational choice or objective political information but is strongly influenced by potent sociocultural dynamics. Deeply rooted patriarchal values, power structures within the family, and the influence of religious figures are significant factors that shape electoral decisions [4], [5], [6]. In many cases, women’s political choices are not fully autonomous but are frequently the result of negotiation or even deference to a collective will—be it that of a husband,

parents, or community leaders [5]. This condition indicates that formal participation does not always correlate with substantive autonomy in the political sphere, as articulated in Taylor’s concept of the ‘politics of recognition’, where political acts can be an effort to gain social recognition rather than an expression of full autonomy [7].

Previous studies indicate that women’s political preferences in Indonesia are often shaped by family, community, and limited political education [4], [5], findings that are also relevant in North Sumatra. This phenomenon was evident in the 2018 Gubernatorial Election, where certain candidate pairs intensively mobilized support through religious networks and Islamic symbols [6], [8]. In such a sociocultural space, women’s political preferences often do not reflect individual independence but rather mirror the intersection of various social, religious, and symbolic power structures that have long been internalized.

However, amidst these structural pressures, women are not merely passive victims. Islamic history records the active involvement of women in the political sphere since the era of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), including in political allegiance (*bai’at*), proselytizing (*da’wah*), and even armed struggle (*jihad*) [9]. Such religious narratives have the potential to become a foundation of legitimacy for women’s political participation, provided they are actualized in an inclusive, contemporary context. In this framework, women are not just recipients of direction but are also active agents in reproducing, interpreting, and even negotiating the values that influence their decisions. The reproduction of patriarchal values, for example, does not solely stem from external pressures but also from women’s own participation within families and religious communities that internalize these norms [4]. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of substantive political education and women’s limited access to in-depth political information [10].

The Concept of Spirituality in Politics

The concept of spirituality in politics—often termed political spirituality—describes the integration of transcendental values into political goals, policies, and governance [14]. Distinct from mere formal religiosity, political spirituality seeks to create social harmony and address contemporary challenges, such as social, economic, and environmental issues, through an approach grounded in noble values. Within this framework, spirituality does not merely function as a tool for legitimation but plays an active role in shaping a political vision that is just, inclusive, and sustainable. Therefore, this approach rejects the dichotomy between the spiritual and political worlds, viewing them instead as mutually enriching domains [14].

The relationship between spirituality and politics has been a subject of philosophical and theological reflection since classical times. Augustine and Louis Dumont, as cited by Palaver, are two pivotal thinkers who discussed the link between religion and power in the form of an “encompassing hierarchy” [15]. Augustine argued that political authority must be rooted in spirituality, where God’s sovereignty is the ultimate source of legitimate power. Meanwhile, Dumont

highlighted the complexity between secular power and religious values, suggesting that politics is never entirely free from a transcendent dimension. In this framework, politics is not a morally neutral entity but an ethical space where spirituality functions as a guide and mentor [15].

Political spirituality, therefore, does not stop at ritualism or dogmatism but evolves into a transformational approach that encompasses dimensions of ethics, social concern, and a commitment to humanity. Core values such as empathy, social justice, equality, and environmental responsibility become the heart of a spiritually-infused political project. In this context, spirituality becomes a primary driver in formulating dignified and responsible public policies [16], [17]. This form of spirituality in politics also includes leadership based on compassion and inner wisdom, holistic policy planning, and the building of cohesive communities.

However, the integration of spirituality into politics is not without its challenges. The dominance of the secularist paradigm in modern politics tends to marginalize the role of spirituality, assuming that politics must be religiously neutral. This tension creates a need for an approach capable of bridging spiritual values with the principles of secular democracy [15]. Furthermore, other challenges include materialism, which shifts focus from noble values to pragmatic gains, and the complex plurality of values in multicultural societies. Integrating spirituality effectively requires a reflective, contextual, and interdisciplinary approach. Spirituality must be understood not as a substitute for rationality but as a complement that balances power with compassion and efficiency with meaning. In this way, it can serve as a normative foundation for shaping a more humane, inclusive, and sustainable form of politics.

The Relationship between Religion and Politics in Indonesia

The relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia is a complex phenomenon deeply bound by history, culture, and the constitution. The country adopts neither a fully secular system nor a theocracy, but rather a model described as symbiotic. This relationship allows religion and the state to influence each other without one dominating the other. Pancasila, as the state ideology, accommodates religious principles within an inclusive national framework, making religious values part of the national narrative without negating pluralism [18]. This model differs from Western secularism as it does not enforce a total separation of religious and political institutions [19]. The 1945 Constitution also reinforces the legitimacy of religion's contribution to national life by constitutionally recognizing the right to religious freedom [20].

Post-Reformasi, the participation of religion in formal politics has become more open. Although Islamic parties are active in electoral contests, they have never dominated national politics. This is due to internal fragmentation and limitations in reaching voters across religious and cultural lines [21]. The influence of religion in Indonesian politics is more mediative than hegemonic. Azra observes that individual piety does not always correlate with political support, as voters often consider pragmatic aspects or a

candidate's performance [22]. This indicates that religion functions more as a moral force in public discourse than as a dominant political vehicle.

Indonesia's legal dynamics also reflect this unique relationship through a system of legal pluralism, where positive law, customary law (*hukum adat*), and Islamic law coexist. The implementation of Islamic law, such as in the fields of marriage and inheritance, demonstrates the institutional legitimacy of religious norms [20]. The Constitutional Court plays a crucial role as a mediator that maintains the balance between religious values and the principles of a state based on the rule of law [19], affirming the role of religion while rejecting the dominance of religious law over the constitution.

However, the presence of religion in politics also faces challenges. Allen and Barter note that religion-based political ethnocentrism can threaten tolerance and social harmony in a multicultural society [23]. Therefore, the moderation of religion (*moderasi beragama*) has become an important strategy to balance religious involvement without sacrificing pluralism [24]. The role of information technology further complicates this relationship, as social media has become a new arena for religious populism that can fracture social cohesion [25].

Despite its potential for conflict, the relationship between religion and politics also holds constructive potential. Religion can be a source of social energy for justice and solidarity. Religious organizations often play advocacy roles in social issues, demonstrating a positive aspect of religious engagement. This relationship must be viewed within a dynamic framework that opens space for collaboration, especially in the context of decentralization, where religious influence varies greatly according to local dynamics. Historically, the Reformasi era transformed the face of religious politics, making it more open and competitive [18].

Overall, the relationship between religion and politics in Indonesia is multidimensional, dynamic, and non-uniform. Religion functions as a source of values, morality, and social mobilization but does not institutionally dominate the power structure. Pancasila, legal pluralism, and religious moderation are the main pillars that maintain the equilibrium of this relationship. A deep understanding of these dynamics is essential for situating the role of religious figures like Tuan Guru Batak within a broader context, as he attempts to navigate these complexities with his spiritual approach.

Political Polarization and the Politicization of Religion in North Sumatra

Political polarization in North Sumatra cannot be separated from the rise of the politicization of religion, where religious values are instrumentalized as a strategic political tool in electoral contests. This shift transforms religion from a private spiritual realm into a public arena fraught with power interests, creating an identity-based chasm that erodes social cohesion [26]. This polarization occurs through the manipulation of religious symbols, which are exploited to win voter sympathy.

Religious figures and organizations have a strategic role in mass mobilization. In the 2018 North Sumatra Gubernatorial Election, their role was significant in directing public opinion based on faith-based affiliations. Organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Al-Washliyah leveraged their moral legitimacy to strengthen the political position of certain candidates, blurring the line between religious advocacy and electoral interests [27]. This polarization is exacerbated by ethnic and religious identity politics, which have become critical elements in voter behavior in North Sumatra, as seen in the 2019 General Election and the 2020 Medan Mayoral Election [28]. Political campaigns often promote exclusive identity narratives, contributing to deep social segmentation.

The politicization of religion is not limited to discourse but has also given rise to a polarization of hatred. Sembiring et al. note that calls to vote for a “leader of the same faith” became a dominant campaign tool, creating the perception that non-Muslim candidates were unworthy of support [26]. This narrative reinforces exclusivism and fuels social suspicion. This polarization has also extended into the digital space, where religious issues are manipulated to attack political opponents with provocative labels, damaging the foundations of diversity and social order [28].

Despite these challenges, mitigation efforts exist. The Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) and interfaith leaders play an important role through interfaith dialogues and community activities to rebuild trust. Sembiring et al. show that the direct involvement of religious figures in nurturing their communities inclusively can reduce political tensions [26]. Furthermore, promoting tolerance through educational institutions and the media serves as a long-term strategy for building an inclusive and rational political consciousness.

Inclusive governance is also needed, with policies that not only guarantee representation but also integrate the aspirations of all communities. It is crucial to steer the role of religious organizations in a constructive and ethical direction, away from pragmatic collaborations that are ultimately damaging [27]. This phenomenon of polarization also reflects an immature culture of inclusive politics and unequal access to political education. However, the history of peace and the existence of interfaith communities in North Sumatra offer significant potential as social capital for building a model of inclusivity [28].

Overall, political polarization and the politicization of religion in North Sumatra are challenging structural phenomena. These dynamics are triggered by identity mobilization but are also counterbalanced by collective efforts from civil society, religious leaders, and the government. A thorough understanding of these dynamics is crucial for contextualizing the role of Tuan Guru Batak, who seeks to navigate these complexities with his spiritual approach.

Moderation and Sufism in Political Movements

Sufism, or *tasawwuf*, is often perceived as apolitical, yet in practice, it has a history of active involvement in political dynamics. History shows that several Sufi orders became engines of resistance against colonialism, such as the

Qadiriyya movement in Algeria and the Sanussi in Libya [29]. This involvement indicates that Sufism is not merely a spiritual expression detached from worldly affairs but a force for collective mobilization. Sufi orders, with their strong social networks and solid leadership structures, can be effective political agents in certain contexts.

In the modern era, the involvement of Sufism in politics persists, albeit with new challenges. In post-Arab Spring Egypt, Sufi orders with millions of followers had limited political influence. This was due to weak political organization, a lack of electoral experience, and the rise of populism that eroded their power [30]. This failure demonstrates that a large mass base does not guarantee political success without effective strategy and management.

Moderate thought within Sufism offers an important bridge for responding to contemporary dynamics. Ali Jum’ah, a Sufi scholar from Egypt, emphasizes moderation based on *tawhid* (monotheism), *shari’a* (Islamic law), and spirituality as an ethical foundation for social and political life [31]. This approach is relevant for mitigating polarization and radicalism. In Indonesia, Sufism has also experienced a revival in response to extremism. Sufi *tarekat* have become a crucial part of strengthening moderate and nationalistic Islamic narratives, spreading messages of peace and tolerance [32].

Sufistic moderation is also reflected in social practices that emphasize service, as seen in the Hizmet Movement led by Fethullah Gülen. This movement stresses altruism, or selfless service, in building a just civilization through educational and humanitarian networks [33]. The movement is a tangible example of how Sufism can operate in the non-partisan political sphere, harmoniously integrating spirituality, organization, and social goals.

In Indonesia, Sufism is also beginning to attract a younger generation that internalizes the values of political piety—political engagement grounded in piety and spiritual integrity [34]. This demonstrates Sufism’s potential as an ideological basis for a new, more humane political ethic. In a global context, Sufism is often regarded as a third way between extremism and secularism, offering a balanced approach that rejects violence while remaining concerned with socio-political realities [29]. However, Sufism also faces challenges in contemporary politics, especially in confronting populism. Weaknesses in organizational structure and communication strategies often leave Sufi orders marginalized in electoral competition [30]. Therefore, institutional modernization and communication strategies are urgently needed to keep Sufi values relevant.

Overall, Sufism possesses a significant history and potential in politics, both through direct and socio-cultural channels. The moderate character of Sufism makes it an alternative to radicalism and identity politics. Its main strength lies in its ethical, spiritual, and collective approach, which can serve as a moral and social resource for building a visionary and transformative politics.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach is relevant for understanding subjective meanings and complex social phenomena, such as the role of spirituality in political dynamics, allowing the researcher to deeply explore the thoughts and contributions of a central figure. A case study was chosen because it facilitates a holistic investigation of a unique and contextual phenomenon where the boundary between the phenomenon and its context is not clearly evident [35].

The research was conducted in North Sumatra, specifically in areas central to the activities of Tuan Guru Batak Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk, such as Simalungun and Medan. This location was purposively selected due to its direct relevance to the research subject. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and a literature study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Tuan Guru Batak himself, community leaders, and academics. Documentation included books, articles, sermon recordings, and media publications. The literature study was performed to strengthen the theoretical foundation and to contextualize the findings.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process constitutes a simultaneous cycle between data collection, organization, and interpretation [36]. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation—comparing data from various informants—and member checking, which involved reconfirming interview findings with the sources. Finally, this research upheld ethical principles by maintaining informant confidentiality, securing voluntary consent, and refraining from data manipulation to preserve scientific integrity and accountability.

The research is grounded in the intersectional methodological framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This approach rejects the reduction of women's identity to a single dimension (such as gender, religion, or ethnicity) and instead emphasizes that their political experiences are formed through the dynamic intersection of religion, culture, and social networks [34]. By adopting Crenshaw's logic, this study not only describes the influence of each factor but also analyzes how these three elements converge, conflict, and are negotiated in the formation of women's political identity. This allows the researcher to uncover a complexity of autonomy that cannot be confined to a simple dichotomy of "victim" versus "rational actor."

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk

Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk, affectionately known as Tuan Guru Batak (TGB), is a Sufi scholar, intellectual, and figure of pluralism who plays a significant role in the socio-political dynamics of North Sumatra. As the *mursyid* (spiritual guide) of the Naqsyabandiyah Tarekat of Serambi

Babussalam, TGB inherited the spiritual leadership from his father, the late Syekh H. Abdurrahman Rajagukguk Qs., who passed away in 2010. He has not only continued the *tarekat* (Sufi order) tradition but has also modernized its *da'wah* (proselytizing) methods by utilizing digital media, such as the "Sufi Live" platform on social media. This approach reflects his effort to actualize spiritual teachings in a contemporary context, positioning him as a relevant neo-Sufi figure [22].

TGB is a figure who integrates spiritual depth with academic intelligence. He pursued doctoral studies in Islamic Communication and Broadcasting at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Medan, and is an active lecturer at various universities. This combined background shapes his holistic perspective, enabling him to bridge religious, nationalist, and cultural discourses in all his activities [7]. TGB's exemplary conduct is also evident in his social activities that transcend faith boundaries, such as welcoming non-Muslim guests and attending their celebrations, which serves as tangible proof of his commitment to religious harmony. For him, *tawhid* (the oneness of God) is not merely a personal belief but also an ethical foundation for building social justice.

The epithet "Tuan Guru Batak" holds deep, multidimensional meaning, reflecting not only his identity but also his social position. First, the title "Tuan Guru" is a term of reverence within the Naqsyabandiyah Tarekat for a spiritual guide (*mursyid*). Second, the moniker "Batak" is attached because he hails from the Batak ethnic group, residing in a predominantly non-Muslim environment, yet has successfully built an inclusive spiritual base accepted by diverse groups. Third, the epithet has become a symbol of harmony and the spiritual intellectualism of Batak Muslims, owing to his active engagement in proselytism, social work, and national affairs [37]. In an interview, TGB explained that his mission is to sow universal love (*rahmat*) and accept diversity as divine will (*sunnatullah*), rather than promoting religious exclusivism.

In a challenging socio-political context, TGB has emerged as a figure offering spiritual solutions. He asserts that "a Sufi has a moral and humanitarian responsibility to save his brethren from hatred and chaos" [37]. His *da'wah* style, which emphasizes the functions of *risalah* (social transformation) and *rahmat* (compassion) through a courteous and locally-rooted cultural approach, has made him an agent of peace in the pluralistic society of North Sumatra. Overall, TGB is a central figure who has successfully integrated Sufi spirituality, tolerance, and nationalism within the framework of Indonesian identity, making him an inspiration for inclusive and transformative peace movements.

Spirituality as a Principle of Collective Action

Spirituality plays a fundamental role in shaping the socio-political orientation of Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk, who positions his Sufi experience as the basis for his community engagement. In an interview, TGB stated, "I was born from the womb of parents who had devoted themselves to the spirituality of the Sufi Tarekat, the Naqsyabandiyah

Tarekat... since childhood, I have witnessed how people here practice the *tarekat*, undertaking spiritual seclusion (*suluk*).” This statement indicates that spiritual values have shaped his character, value orientation, and worldview from an early age. Spirituality is not a peripheral aspect but an existential identity that influences how he understands society, power, and public service. In the multicultural context of North Sumatra, the spirituality he embraces has also become a means to foster an awareness of peaceful coexistence while strengthening his contributions to the public sphere [37].

The spirituality embraced by Syekh Ahmad Sabban does not remain in the personal dimension but develops into a transformative principle of collective action. He explained, “Because the majority here is non-Muslim... from this, I grew up with life experiences that involved spirituality from a young age... Because generally, the *tarekat* is the practice of *tasawwuf* (Sufism). *Tasawwuf* is the theory. The *tarekat* is its practice, its practitioners.” This statement reinforces the argument that, from his perspective, spirituality is not dogmatic but dialogical and functional. In a pluralistic social environment, he develops spirituality as a cross-faith approach that is solution-oriented, not exclusive. His experience in the *tarekat* serves as an epistemological tool for building harmonious inter-religious relations and strengthening his public contributions. Therefore, spirituality can be interpreted as a socio-political path embedded in collective action for the common good (*kemaslahatan umat*) [37].

This view is supported by community leader Dr. Hasrat Samosir, who assesses Syekh Ahmad Sabban’s spiritual background as a combination of cultural heritage, family upbringing, and academic formation. He asserts, “His thoughts, I believe, are characteristic of a great person. He is not exclusive, not just internal, but external as well... I see that his spiritual thoughts were built through... lineage (*zuriat*), parental guidance, and also a strong academic foundation.” This quote indicates that spirituality is not born in a vacuum but through a complex historical and social construction. Spirituality, in this case, becomes part of a collective memory, local discourse, and a reflective instrument used to interpret reality. Within this framework, spirituality functions as an ethical and methodological foundation for responding to socio-political problems contextually. Support from this external figure demonstrates the social legitimacy of Syekh Ahmad Sabban’s position within an interfaith community [38].

Furthermore, an academic perspective reinforces the strategic value of spirituality in politics. Prof. Ansari Yamamah stated, “Spirituality is essential in the political game. For what purpose? Politics without spirituality will become like Machiavellian politics. It will justify any means to achieve an end.” This view is highly relevant today, as political practices tend to suffer from value erosion. Spirituality, in this framework, functions not only as a moral corrective but also as an alternative value system that promotes politics oriented toward the common good [39]. These findings align with literature that positions spirituality

as an ethical and existential force in politics. According to Houssaini, spiritual-political integration aims to create social harmony and address social challenges through an approach rooted in noble values [14]. In this context, TGB is positioned not only as a spiritual figure but also as a public intellectual playing a strategic role in shaping the moral direction of society.

Manifestation of Spirituality in Social and Political Practice

In the view of Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk, spirituality is not merely a ritualistic expression or an individual act of worship, but a process of forming deep social consciousness. This concept aligns with the idea of spiritual-political integration, which describes the incorporation of transcendental values into political governance and objectives [14]. TGB explains that *dhikr* (remembrance of God)—a profound spiritual practice—is not only about a vertical relationship with God but also has a horizontal manifestation. He asserts, “The culmination of this *dhikr*... is when one is able to become a servant of Allah who implements the value of their closeness [to God] with fellow humans” [37]. This statement shifts the traditional understanding of spirituality from a purely contemplative aspect to an active and practical approach, where spirituality is present in the form of tangible contributions to welfare and humanity.

The spirituality that TGB embodies also functions as an ethical guide and mentor, a concept reflected upon by classical thinkers such as Augustine and Louis Dumont [15]. In contrast to morally neutral politics, TGB’s spirituality becomes the primary driver in formulating dignified and responsible public policies, emphasizing core values like empathy, social justice, and a commitment to humanity. This is reflected in his words, “The higher one’s spirituality, the higher their humanitarian values. The greater the value of their good deeds (*amal soleh*). The higher their consciousness to perform good deeds, charitable acts, social works” [37]. This quote indicates a positive correlation between spiritual depth and contributions to the common good, positioning spirituality as a driving force for social change based on compassion and justice.

In practice, TGB’s spirituality also involves a distinct moral quality, marked by wisdom and gentleness. He affirms, “The wiser, the more sagacious one becomes, not quick to point fingers, not quick to pass judgment, not quick to blame...” [37]. Such a sagacious attitude is crucial for bridging spiritual values with the principles of secular democracy, which often face the challenges of pragmatism and value plurality [15]. This approach is reinforced by Dr. Hasrat Samosir, who sees TGB’s spirituality as a foundation for building civilization. He states, “His [spirituality] is not limited to our understanding of spirituality or worship in the form of ritual devotion (*ibadah mahdhah*) alone, but also includes non-ritual devotion (*ghairu mahdhah*), social interactions (*muamalah*), and strategy or politics (*siasat*)” [38]. This confirms that the spirituality actualized by TGB transcends ritual boundaries and extends into the socio-political sphere.

Academic perspectives, such as that of Prof. Ansari Yamamah, further strengthen the argument that spirituality in

politics serves as an essential normative foundation. According to him, “If Indonesian politics is not filled with spiritual values... then Indonesia could be destroyed” [39]. This statement suggests that spirituality is not escapist but is constructive to worldly realities and functions as a cultural and civilizational energy. Thus, TGB successfully practices a spirituality that balances power with compassion and efficiency with meaning, making him a model of morally-grounded and responsible leadership.

Political Da'wah as an Ethical-Transformative Instrument

Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk introduces a new paradigm for understanding the relationship between politics and *da'wah* (Islamic propagation), where politics is not an end goal but an instrument for conveying spiritual values. He asserts, “Politics is an instrument of *da'wah*. An instrument is a tool, a means...” [37]. This view reflects a transformative *da'wah* model that utilizes the public and political spheres as media for disseminating ethical and solution-oriented Islamic values. This paradigm appropriately and proportionally places religion and the state in a symbiotic relationship where neither dominates the other [18]. His involvement in politics is not driven by an ambition for power, but by a moral impetus to present a message of divinity and humanity. In his perspective, politics infused with *da'wah* can produce policies that are not only effective but also rooted in moral values and the public good.

This approach is highly relevant in the multicultural context of North Sumatra. Syekh Sabban emphasizes that his life experience in a heterogeneous environment has strengthened his attitude of openness and tolerance in political activities. “They used to think, why am I so tolerant... accepting all figures... but they didn't understand. I come from a background of being raised in heterogeneity” [37]. This perspective underscores that politics should not be a divisive tool but rather a meeting space for diverse views for the sake of the common good. This style of political *da'wah* reflects a synergy between social plurality and divine principles, making it a unifying rather than a hegemonic force.

Community leader Dr. Hasrat Samosir confirms that Tuan Guru plays a crucial role in nurturing relationships with all political forces without losing his spiritual direction. He explains, “He cannot be separated from synergy and collaboration” [38]. This approach reflects a flexible and non-partisan political activism that remains engaged in democratic processes. Within the framework of political *da'wah*, synergy with various parties is considered a strategy to broaden the influence of Islamic values without being trapped in ideological conflicts. His emphasis on religious moderation serves as a key strategy to balance religious involvement without sacrificing pluralism [24]. This also aligns with efforts to mitigate polarization in North Sumatra, where interfaith figures play a vital role through dialogue and community activities to rebuild trust [26].

Academically, Prof. Ansari Yamamah reinforces this analysis by placing political *da'wah* within a broader framework: building a civilization with a holistic approach. He states, “He is also an academic, a practitioner of Sharia

economics... Meaning, as a Tuan Guru, he possesses a national societal perspective from an economic standpoint” [39]. This statement shows that *da'wah* touches not only on religious aspects but also on economic, cultural, and socio-political ones. Thus, political *da'wah* in TGB's view is not merely symbolic but is strategic and operational in community life, making it a model of Islamic politics that is welcoming, moderate, and progressive.

An Islamic Political Reflection on the Role and Views of Tuan Guru Batak

An Islamic political reflection on the views of Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk reveals a rich dimension that is both contemplative and practical. The political ideas advanced by TGB are not formalistic but stem from Islamic moral principles reinforced by deep Sufi spirituality. This perspective aligns with the concept of *imāmah* (leadership) in classical Islamic political theory, which emphasizes that leadership is a trust (*amanah*), not merely an ambition for power. This is affirmed in a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH: “Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock” (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). Thus, TGB's role as a scholar-politician cannot be separated from this ethical consciousness, where politics is understood as a vehicle for presenting *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all the worlds) in a pluralistic society.

TGB's critique of the moral leadership crisis and identity politics plaguing the political elite also finds grounding in Islamic political theory. He voices concern over the scarcity of role models capable of upholding noble values. As explained by Hasan Bakti Nasution et al., moderate Islamic figures have a crucial role as “interpreters of religious doctrine” who can function as agents of change if they side with universal Islamic values [40]. This view indicates that scholars like TGB are not just spiritual symbols but are ethical political actors who voice the principles of justice and reject divisive, segregationist patterns.

Furthermore, the Sufi teachings that form TGB's intellectual framework act as an ethical filter in his political activities. In the treasury of *tasawwuf*, leadership is a form of service, not domination. This is strengthened by the word of Allah SWT: “Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due...” (QS. An-Nisa': 58). This verse serves as the ethical foundation for TGB's entire political outlook: that office is a trust, not a privilege to be bought and sold. This line of thought is consonant with Alwi Shihab's views in his work *Islam Inklusif* (Inclusive Islam), which stresses that Islamic politics should be oriented towards liberation, not division [41]. Therefore, through his Sufi approach, TGB is present not only as a spiritual leader but also as a spokesperson for justice and humanity.

TGB is also able to formulate a political framework that is inclusive and based on *rahmah* (compassion). He discusses politics not just as an electoral strategy but also in terms of *maqāsid*—the higher objectives of Sharia, which include the preservation of religion, life, intellect, property, and lineage. In this context, he avoids opportunistic leadership styles,

consistent with the hadith of the Prophet warning of the danger of office becoming a source of regret if not executed properly. As found in the research of Hasyimsyah Nasution et al., the revitalization of contemporary Sufism serves as a fortress against exclusive identity politics [42]. Consequently, TGB has successfully grounded an Islamic politics that is ethical, tolerant, and oriented toward the common good, proving that Islamic politics does not lose its spirit (*ruh*) as long as it is practiced with ethical and Sufi values and a commitment to the people.

The Relevance of Contemporary Sufism

The perspective and role of Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk can be understood as part of the revitalization of contemporary Sufism, which is highly relevant in the modern political context. History demonstrates that Sufism, though often considered apolitical, has a record of active involvement in political dynamics. Several Sufi orders became engines of resistance against colonialism, such as the Qadiriyya movement in Algeria and the Sanussi in Libya [29]. This involvement proves that Sufism is not merely a spiritual expression detached from worldly affairs, but a force for collective mobilization. The model of Sufism advanced by TGB, which Dr. Hasrat Samosir terms a “new Sufism reform movement,” revitalizes *da'wah* by utilizing digital platforms and cultural approaches [38]. This demonstrates that Sufism is dynamic and capable of adapting to the demands of the times.

Contemporary Sufism, as exemplified by TGB, serves as a moral fortress against exclusive identity politics and polarization. Amidst the rampant manipulation of religion for political gain, the Sufi approach offers a perspective that emphasizes universal values such as compassion (*rahmah*), wisdom (*hikmah*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). This approach aligns with the thought of Ali Jum'ah, who stresses spirituality-based moderation as the foundation of political ethics [31]. In TGB's Islamic political reflection, diversity is acknowledged as *sunnatullah* (God's decree), not as a threat, which is consistent with the view of Mardian Idris Harahap, who sees moderate Islam as a “form of collective *ijtihad* (scholarly interpretation) in safeguarding social cohesion amidst diversity” [43]. Thus, TGB successfully grounds an Islamic politics that is ethical, tolerant, and oriented toward the common good, proving that Sufism is a balanced “third way” that rejects violence yet remains concerned with socio-political realities.

Despite its great potential, contemporary Sufism also faces challenges in politics. In Egypt, for instance, Sufi orders with millions of followers had limited political influence post-Arab Spring, owing to weaknesses in organization and electoral strategy [30]. This experience shows that a large mass base does not guarantee political success without effective strategy and management. Therefore, institutional modernization and communication strategies are urgent necessities for Sufi values to remain relevant and competitive in the political arena.

The relevance of contemporary Sufism also lies in its ability to offer a more ethical and benefit-oriented political narrative.

Sufistic social practices, such as those seen in the Hizmet Movement led by Fethullah Gülen, emphasize altruism or selfless service in building civilization through educational and humanitarian networks [33]. This movement is a tangible example of how Sufism can operate in the non-partisan political sphere, harmoniously integrating spirituality, organization, and social goals. In Indonesia, Sufism has also begun to attract a younger generation that is internalizing the values of political piety, which is political engagement grounded in piety and spiritual integrity [34]. TGB has successfully grounded an Islamic politics that is ethical, tolerant, and oriented toward the common good, proving that Sufism is a balanced “third way” that rejects violence yet remains concerned with socio-political realities.

Tuan Guru Batak presents the figure of a cleric who not only possesses traditional authority but is also grounded in a strong academic approach. His intellectual contribution is evident in the production of scholarly works that combine religious authority with sociological approaches and local wisdom. According to Prof. Ansari Yamamah, TGB is a Muslim scientist who productively blends the Islamic scholarly tradition with contemporary theories. He has also pioneered a “modern *tasawwuf*” and “new Sufism” that seeks to actualize spiritual values in the context of the times through digital media [38]. This contribution places him as a significant part of the *Islam Nusantara* intellectual movement, enriching Islamic epistemology without becoming trapped in the traditionalist-modernist polarization [7].

TGB has successfully integrated spiritual authority with a moderate socio-political consciousness. His political role is not partisan but that of a social mediator who bridges the interests of the community and the government. As asserted by Dr. Hasrat Samosir, he is active in providing enlightenment within state institutions and offering input in formal forums like the Development Planning Deliberation (*Musrenbang*) [38]. His inclusive and universal political stance makes him a figure of social cohesion respected across ethnic and religious lines, as he rejects exclusive identity politics [39]. This model aligns with the views of Fealy and Azhar et al., who observe a shift in the role of clerics towards being more moderate, participatory, and educational [44], [45].

Overall, Tuan Guru Batak provides a model of clerical leadership that is progressive and contextual. He capably combines three crucial dimensions: spirituality as a moral basis, intellectuality as a methodological foundation, and socio-political alignment as a practical manifestation. This leadership model is relevant as an antithesis to transactional politics and as an inspiration for the younger generation to engage in politics with strong idealism and ethics. TGB has shown that a cleric is not merely a guardian of tradition but also a driver of change and a pioneer of knowledge renewal, making his politics a manifestation of values, not just strategy.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research concludes that amidst the challenges of political polarization and the politicization of religion, the figure of Tuan Guru Batak (TGB) Syekh Ahmad Sabban Rajagukguk offers an essential spiritual-political perspective. This view, supported by Sufi spirituality, successfully bridges the dichotomy between religious teachings and the realities of practical politics. Through his profound spiritual practices, TGB manifests spirituality not as an isolated personal expression but as an ethical foundation for collective action. The concept of political spirituality he advances demonstrates that *dhikr* and inner wisdom have tangible manifestations in the form of active social contributions and mediation, establishing him as a respected unifying and balancing figure in a multicultural society. From the overall analysis, TGB's contributions can be seen in three main dimensions: intellectual, socio-political, and leadership modeling. Intellectually, he emerges as a scholar-academic who integrates the authority of tradition with a scientific approach, enriching the treasury of Islamic thought with local and contextual nuances. Socio-politically, he acts as a moral actor who rejects partisan politics yet actively provides strategic input in formal forums such as the Development Planning Deliberation (*Musrenbang*). Lastly, TGB bequeaths an inclusive and transformative neo-Sufi leadership model that effectively counters identity politics and populism by promoting Sufistic moderation as a balanced middle path. Therefore, TGB is not merely a guardian of tradition but also a pioneer who has successfully proven that Islamic politics can be conducted ethically and tolerantly, making him a crucial inspiration for strengthening the foundations of democracy and preserving diversity in Indonesia.

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