

NURTURING NATIONALISM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE ANSOR YOUTH MOVEMENT AND MUHAMMADIYAH YOUTH IN DEFENDING THE NATION AS A FORM OF CIVIC INVOLVEMENT.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the strategic contributions of two Islamic-based youth organizations. Ansor Youth Movement and Muhammadiyah Youth are working to actualize the values of national defense and strengthen civic engagement amid contemporary socio-political challenges in Indonesia. The background of this study is rooted in the urgent need to revitalize the concept of national defense, which is no longer limited to militaristic dimensions but also involves the role of citizens in maintaining social integration, interfaith tolerance, and national unity. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, conducted in Tangerang Regency, Banten Province. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretive meaning analysis. The findings reveal that the actualization of national defense by both organizations is implemented through cadre education, leadership training, and public advocacy grounded in national and religious values. Their involvement in cross-identity social actions, collaboration with the government, and efforts to counter intolerance serve as tangible forms of active citizenship. Furthermore, the development of social capital through solidarity, norms of reciprocity, and trust networks has proven crucial in strengthening civic resilience and national security. This article recommends the enhancement of harmony between youth organizations, government institutions, and educational entities in constructing an inclusive, critical, and value-based model of citizenship.

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INTRODUCTION

Amidst the rapid flow of globalization, digitalization, and an identity crisis, the importance of national defense as a pillar of national resilience has again received significant attention. National defense is no longer understood solely as a militaristic obligation, but more broadly as a manifestation of the collective responsibility of all citizens. In Barry Buzan's (1991) view, national security is measured by military defense, identity, and social and political stability. Indonesia's multicultural and democratic context makes national defense a multi-layered effort that must involve all elements of the nation, including religious-based youth organizations.

Huntington (1996) in *The Clash of Civilizations* emphasized that modern conflicts are fueled more by differences in cultural and religious identity than by ideology. Therefore, citizen participation in maintaining social cohesion and nurturing diversity is crucial (Afiyanto & Sun, 2024; Erlande et al., 2024). Defending the nation is not merely about symbolic loyalty; it must be accompanied by active involvement in national life. Within the civic engagement framework, Bellah (1985) emphasized the importance of moral values and collective responsibility in fostering a strong civic culture. Cooperation, social empathy, and moral courage are integral to national defense in a democratic society. National defense must be grounded through a contextual and cultural approach. Azra (2004) stated that national defense in Indonesia cannot be separated from the role of inclusive and humanistic religious values. In a spiritual society like Indonesia, religion is a source of motivation for social action, including maintaining national unity. Islamic youth organizations such as GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah have a strategic position in integrating Islamic values and nationalism as a basis for national defense. Classical sociologist Durkheim (1893) asserted that social integration in modern society can only be achieved through organic solidarity, a collective consciousness that grows from the diversity of social functions. Youth movements are crucial in creating spaces for dialogue, cross-identity cooperation, and social participation that foster national solidarity (Ainin & Tabrin, 2024). In this context, defending the nation means maintaining harmonious and productive social relations amidst differences.

Currently, Indonesia faces a worrying challenge of national disorientation. Political polarization, rising intolerance, and the spread of hate

speech on social media are symptoms of social fragmentation that could threaten national unity. Siradj (2019) warns that if the national narrative is not maintained, the public sphere will be filled with radicalism and exclusivism that contradict the values of Pancasila. In such conditions, national defense must be carried out inclusively and based on education and social role models. Nye (2004), through the concept of soft power, states that a nation's strength lies not only in weapons and the economy, but also in the values and culture possessed and disseminated by its citizens. Therefore, national defense must utilize the potential of local culture, religious values, and the spirit of togetherness deeply rooted in Indonesian society. GP Ansor and Muhammadiyah Youth, active in social da'wah and national advocacy, can be strategic soft power agents in maintaining the nation's social sovereignty. Baswedan (2008) stated in his study of civic education that a democratic nation requires active citizens aware of their rights and obligations. Citizen involvement in monitoring, providing input, and participating in public policy is part of national defense in the democratic era (Prayogi & Rahmawati, 2021). It requires the presence of youth organizations as trainers and facilitators so that citizens can actively engage in policy spaces. Latif (2017) emphasized that "becoming Indonesian" is a historical, cultural, and moral process that must be continuously championed. In his view, the revitalization of Pancasila as a shared national value must be carried out through concrete and down-to-earth social movements. Pemuda Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah have the cultural advantage of bridging the gap between religious and national values, which are experiencing decadence in social practice.

Barber (1984), through the concept of "strong democracy," explained that democracy will only be strong if citizen participation is high and that participation is deliberative, critical, and responsible. It aligns with the spirit of national defense, which obeys the state and actively directs the country towards the common good. Therefore, youth movements must be encouraged to become a vehicle for developing the character of reflective and contributing citizens. Wahid (1999) provides the view that there is no contradiction between Islam and nationalism, but that they can be two mutually supporting forces. The spirit of nationalism can grow from Islamic values that are inclusive, compassionate, and peaceful. In the context of GP Ansor, this is realized through social work, advocacy for tolerance, and countering radicalism at the

grassroots level. Maarif (2005) also reinforces that nationalism is part of faith when understood in the spirit of *rahmatan lil alamin* (blessing for the universe). According to him, national defense is carried out not only by defending territory, but also by defending humanity, justice, and national unity. Muhammadiyah Youth realizes this through various social, educational, and advocacy activities in remote areas. Coleman (1988), in his theory of social capital, explains that social connectedness, norms of reciprocity, and shared trust are essential foundations for building a strong and disintegrative society. Religion-based youth organizations that develop social networks and solidarity across identities can be key drivers of national defense.

Contemporary issues such as youth unemployment, moral crisis, and low digital literacy are real challenges that can erode national resilience. Zuhro (2020) from BRIN emphasized that knowledge-based national defense must be developed so that youth are not merely rhetorical but solution-oriented and reflective about national issues. In this regard, youth organizations are responsible for educating, guiding, and mobilizing citizens. Giddens (1991) offered the concept of reflexive citizenship, namely, citizens who are not merely passive recipients, but critical and aware of their role in safeguarding the community. It is the new face of national defense in modern society. GP Ansor Youth and Muhammadiyah Youth, with all their network capacity and values, can act as a bridge between the state and the people in the spirit of visionary national defense.

The contributions of GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah in maintaining diversity, upholding national values, and expanding public participation demonstrate that national defense is not merely a slogan, but a vibrant and sustainable social movement. As explained by Jürgen Habermas (1989), the public sphere must be filled with rational and communicative citizens. Therefore, the task of youth is not only to stand in the ranks, but also to think, guide, and voice national values in every aspect of life. Verba, Scholzman & Brady (1995) added that civic engagement is not limited to participation in elections or political organizations, but includes social involvement, citizen education, and collective action that impacts people's lives. It emphasizes the position of GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah as agents of change relevant to shaping the character of national defense in the post-truth era.

Through various perspectives and expert opinions, it is clear that national defense in the contemporary Indonesian context must be interpreted broadly as a collective effort by citizens to maintain national integrity, nurture diversity, and strengthen social cohesion through active involvement in public life. Challenges such as radicalism, national disorientation, and information disruption demand an approach to national defense that is no longer coercive, but participatory and transformative. In this context, Islamic youth organizations such as GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah are strategic agents of civic education, activators of social capital, and protectors of Indonesian values. Their involvement in national preaching, advocacy for tolerance, and community strengthening is a concrete form of civic engagement that can serve as the foundation for values-based national defense. Therefore, an in-depth qualitative study is needed to understand how these movements work to foster nationalism and expand civic engagement in the contemporary era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the meaning and social dynamics from the participants' perspectives. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) stated that a qualitative approach aims to generate a deep understanding of social reality by directly observing the research subjects. This approach is suitable for studying national defense practices by Islamic-based youth organizations such as GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah because it involves complex values, beliefs, and social contexts. Creswell (2014) adds that qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meaning of social actions and cultural symbols in community life.

This research takes a case study approach focusing on two organizations: the Ansor Youth Movement and Muhammadiyah Youth, which operate in Tangerang Regency, Banten Province. Case studies were chosen because they allow in-depth exploration of specific phenomena within a real-life context. According to Yin (2018), case studies are beneficial for answering the questions of "how" and "why" a phenomenon occurs, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are unclear. In this study, the social, cultural, and religious contexts significantly influence how youth from both organizations interpret and implement the values of national defense

as a form of civic engagement.

The data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document studies. Interviews were conducted with administrators, GP Ansor, and Pemuda Muhammadiyah members at the regional level, community leaders, and related parties. Patton (2002) stated that in-depth interviews allow researchers to understand the subject's perspective authentically and contextually. Participatory observation was conducted to observe the organization's social activities, national education, and public advocacy activities. Meanwhile, document studies were used to examine the organization's Articles of Association/Bylaws, activity reports, media publications, and digital narratives as supporting data. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretation of meaning, as explained by Miles and Huberman (1994), who stated that qualitative analysis is an iterative process between data and interpretation, to find patterns and in-depth meaning from data obtained in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GP Ansor and Muhammadiyah Youth actualize the values of national defense through cadre education and leadership training. This process prepares cadres to understand the organization's ideology and fosters collective awareness of maintaining national unity. Training such as DTD (Integrated Basic Training) and PKD (Basic Leadership Training) at GP Ansor, Baitul Arqam, and Muhammadiyah Leadership Training integrates the spirit of nationalism, anti-radicalism, and the strengthening of national values. According to Freire (1970), liberating education will shape humans as subjects of social change, which is highly relevant to the cadre development patterns of these two organizations. Dewantara (1930s) emphasized a similar point: that education must produce citizens with social responsibility and national morals.

The national advocacy carried out by GP Ansor and Muhammadiyah Youth does not always take formal forms, but rather through cultural and religious activities imbued with ideological meaning. Dhikr (remembrance), tahlil (religious recitation), and spiritual study groups within Ansor serve as spaces for internalizing the values of unity and anti-extremism. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah Youth conveys national values through scientific studies,

thematic sermons, and community service. Geertz (1973) emphasized that religious symbols and practices are how society interprets the world. Thus, religious activities serve as an effective medium for conveying messages of national defense that are contextual and touch on the cultural roots of society.

The cadre education carried out by both organizations can be understood as a form of positive hegemony, as proposed by Gramsci (1971). In the concept of *cultural hegemony*, Gramsci explained that ideological domination is carried out not through coercion, but through value consensus. The cadre education and religious narratives used by GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah are a hegemonic strategy to strengthen the values of Pancasila and moderate Islam in a society exposed to intolerant and radical ideologies. National symbols such as the red and white, Pancasila, and the national anthem are often featured in GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah religious activities. This integration is part of an effort to form a collective identity that upholds the unity between religion and state. Smith (1991), through the theory of ethnosymbolic nationalism, emphasizes that symbols and rituals play an important role in shaping national consciousness. GP Ansor, for example, displays the red and white flag in its tahlil akbar (religious prayer gathering), while Pemuda Muhammadiyah incorporates nationalistic values into its sermons and cadre training.

GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah are active in building civic engagement through cross-identity social action. For example, GP Ansor is often involved in guarding non-Muslim houses of worship during religious celebrations, while Pemuda Muhammadiyah initiates humanitarian movements in disaster-affected areas. According to Verba, Scholzman & Brady (1995), it aligns with civic engagement, which states that citizen participation is not limited to formal politics but includes social service activities and strengthening community solidarity. In addition to direct involvement in the field, both organizations consistently voice public issues through various media. Advocacy against intolerant local regulations, criticism of discriminatory policies, and participation in Musrenbang are forms of *civic action* demonstrating high civic awareness. Habermas (1989), in his theory of the public sphere, emphasized that civil society has a vital function in shaping rational and communicative public opinion, as well as being a partner of the state in deliberative democracy.

GP Ansor, through Banser (the Multipurpose Ansor Front), actively

monitors intolerant and radical groups, including by securing interfaith activities. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah Youth employs an intellectual approach through anti-radicalism literacy and digital training. Benhabib (1992) emphasized that civil society actors are guardians of inclusivity in a democratic society, particularly amidst the threat of social exclusion and identity violence. Both organizations actively collaborate with state institutions and local communities to address strategic issues such as religious moderation, national education, and digital literacy. GP Ansor synergizes with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), while Muhammadiyah Youth collaborates with the Ministry of Education and Culture and local governments. Etzioni (1995), in communitarian theory, explains that the balance between individual rights and social responsibility is key to building a healthy society, and cross-institutional collaboration manifests this balance.

In their activities, GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah implement two forms of social capital: bonding (strengthening within groups) and bridging (building bridges across groups). It strengthens networks of trust and participation across identities. Putnam (1993) states that bonding and Bridging are necessary to maintain social structures and build inclusive and conflict-resilient societies. Both organizations contribute to the cultural and social development of the nation-building projects through these various activities. *Anderson (1983) states that a nation is an imagined community* formed through collective narratives. The national narrative voiced by GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah has become part of the national imagination, strengthening Indonesia's identity as a pluralistic, religious, and civilized nation. GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah have also successfully expanded their influence through networks with the media, NGOs, and other civil society groups. Castells (2012) in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* states that modern social movements gain strength through digital networks and horizontal solidarity. Both have utilized digital platforms and strategic partnerships to expand the influence of national values.

Organizational activities shape political awareness and serve as a medium for vibrant civic education. Dewey (1916) emphasized that democracy is a way of life that demands collective experience and active participation. GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah serve as concrete civic laboratories, where

cadres learn about leadership, solidarity, and social responsibility. The involvement of both organizations in responding to social disruptions such as hoaxes, digital radicalism, and political polarization demonstrates that defending the nation now requires a values-based approach, not coercive force. Latif (2017) reminds us that the revitalization of Pancasila must be carried out through down-to-earth social movements, not merely normative ones. Both organizations have responded to this challenge with collective action. Their primary strength lies in their ability to unite Islamic and Indonesian identities in one breath. Wahid (1999) and Maarif (2005) emphasize that Islam and nationalism are not two opposing entities, but rather two forces that support each other when supported by inclusive and compassionate values. Based on all of the above, it can be concluded that national defense carried out by GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah is a form of cultural, social, and educational action that targets the roots of society. It aligns with Buzan's (1991) understanding that national security encompasses social and identity dimensions. These organizations have become guardians of national values in the most profound and relevant sense.

Table 1. Actualization of National Defense Values

Aspect	Actualization of National Defense Values by GP Ansor	Actualization of National Defense Values by Muhammadiyah Youth	Theoretical Concept	Activity
Cadre Education and Training	DTD (Basic Integrated Training), PKD (Basic Leadership Training)	Baitul Arqam, Muhammadiyah Leadership Training	Liberation Education (Freire, 1970), Social Education (Dewantara, 1930s)	Cadre education, leadership training based on nationalism, anti-radicalism, and strengthening national values.
Internalization of National Values	Dhikr, tahlil, and religious study activities to strengthen the values of unity and anti-extremism	Scientific studies, thematic sermons, and community service as a medium for spreading national values	Cultural Hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), Ethnosymbolic Nationalism (Smith, 1991)	Tahlil Akbar, with the red and white flag, thematic sermons, and religious activities that include nationalistic values
Civic Engagement	Securing non-Muslim houses of worship, participation in social actions	Humanitarian care movement in disaster-affected areas	Civic Engagement (Verba et al., 1995), Public Sphere (Habermas, 1989)	Securing interfaith houses of worship, humanitarian service in disasters, and advocacy for intolerant regional regulations
Participation in Public Issues	Advocacy against discriminatory policies, participation in Musrenbang	Criticism of discriminatory policies, involvement in Musrenbang	Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), Communitarian Theory (Etzioni, 1995)	Advocacy for inclusive policies, participation in development planning deliberations

Aspect	Actualization of National Defense Values by GP Ansor	Actualization of National Defense Values by Muhammadiyah Youth	Theoretical Concept	Activity
Strengthenin g Social Capital	Bonding (strengthening internal groups), Bridging (bridging between groups)	Bonding and bridging across organizations	Social Capital (Putnam, 1993), Democratic Citizenship (Benhabib, 1992)	Collaboration with state institutions and local communities, strengthening trust networks between groups
Role in Nation Building Projects	Integration of religion and state in national identity	Instilling national values in cadre training materials	Imagined Communities (Anderson, 1983), Modern Social Movements (Castells, 2012)	Strengthening the collective identity of the Indonesian nation through national symbols and rituals in religious activities
Role as a Media for Civic Education	Civic education based on inclusive and social values	Citizenship education based on digital literacy and religious moderation	Democracy as a way of life (Dewey, 1916), Civic Education (Latif, 2017)	Teaching about social solidarity, anti-radicalism literacy, citizenship, and religious training

The table above illustrates how the two organizations implement the values of national defense in various aspects and activities that they have carried out, as well as their relationship to related theories.

GP Ansor and Muhammadiyah Youth play a crucial role in actualizing the values of national defense through cadre education, strengthening national values, and active involvement in social activities. Both organizations focus on formal aspects and employ a more inclusive approach through religious and cultural activities to convey messages of nationalism and anti-extremism. Through educational programs such as the Integrated Basic Training (DTD) and Basic Leadership Training (PKD) at GP Ansor, Baitul Arqam, and Muhammadiyah Leadership Training, these two organizations instill awareness of the importance of maintaining national unity. The instillation of national values by these two organizations also involves the integration of national symbols into religious activities, such as the red and white flag and the national anthem, further strengthening national identity.

The civic engagement demonstrated by GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah indicates that they serve as social mobilizers and agents of change in building solidarity between groups. GP Ansor's interfaith security efforts for houses of worship and Pemuda Muhammadiyah's humanitarian initiatives reflect the inclusive values they champion, aligning with the concept of *civic engagement*, which emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in social life. Furthermore, both organizations actively criticize discriminatory

policies and participate in the Musrenbang (Regional Development Planning Forum) to ensure that the resulting policies favor the interests of all levels of society, including minorities.

GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah have demonstrated that their national defense efforts are not merely normative but involve concrete actions to strengthen the values of Pancasila, religious moderation, and democracy. These two organizations contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant nation-building project through various activities such as faith-based civics education, digital literacy, and religious moderation. The national narrative they construct, by integrating Islam and nationalism into one, further strengthens the identity of the pluralistic and religious Indonesian nation. Thus, GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah are crucial forces in maintaining and actualizing the values of national defense in Indonesian society today.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion describes the answers to the research hypothesis and/or objectives, or the scientific findings obtained. The conclusion does not repeat the results and discussion, but rather a summary of the findings as expected in the goals or hypotheses. If necessary, the conclusion can also include actions to be taken concerning further ideas from the research. GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah have played a significant role in strengthening the spirit of national defense and active civic engagement amidst Indonesia's social and political dynamics. Through cadre development activities, leadership training, strengthening national ideology, and involvement in community social actions, these two organizations have grounded the values of national defense in a tangible and contextual form. Not only focusing on internalizing values among their members, they also actively respond to national issues openly and inclusively, foster cross-identity communication, and contribute to building peaceful spaces amidst the potential for societal polarization.

Their role in maintaining interfaith tolerance, expanding public participation, and building social solidarity is clear evidence that defending the nation is not only the responsibility of formal state institutions but also part of the awareness and responsibility of civil society. In terms of civic engagement, the presence of GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah has proven that youth can be a driving force for social change oriented toward values, devotion, and integrity. The implications of their involvement demonstrate that strengthening

active citizenship character critically requires spaces for expression, sound political education, and an organizational culture that supports diversity and collaboration. The practices implemented by these two organizations form solid social capital, build trust among citizens, and activate community participation in maintaining social order, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a spirit of nationalism. It is crucial for creating social and national resilience based on participation, not repression.

Therefore, the government needs to provide broader support through facilitation, recognition, and program harmony with values-based youth organizations. Academics and educational institutions are expected to use the experiences of GP Ansor and Pemuda Muhammadiyah as learning materials in formulating applicable and transformative civics curricula. Meanwhile, other youth organizations can learn from and emulate the collaborative and contextual approaches employed by these two organizations, thereby creating a mutually supportive youth movement ecosystem that strengthens national identity, democracy, and social solidarity as the primary foundations of future national resilience.

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