

A Critical Review of Virtual Communities and Social Media in Framing the Case of Persecution against Gus Fuad Plered

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Abstract

Religious thought diversity in Indonesia frequently generates tensions, as illustrated by the 2023 persecution of KH Muhamad Fuad Riyadi (Gus Fuad Plered) in Bantul, Yogyakarta, by conservative groups such as Front Jihad Islam (FJI). This study analyzes the digital framing of this incident on YouTube by addressing three questions: (1) how media narratives and comments frame the incident; (2) how Mohammed Arkoun's deconstruction problematizes conservative responses; and (3) what implications arise for religious pluralism. Employing qualitative framing analysis based on Entman (1993) and deconstruction following Arkoun (1984, 2002), the study thematically codes data from two viral videos (with more than 822,000 views) and 1,000 netizen comments across four dimensions: problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral judgment, and treatment recommendation. Purposive sampling is used to capture peak discourse, and triangulation strengthens the validity of the analysis. The findings show that the conflict is framed as intra-Muslim friction over *amar ma'ruf nabi munkar*, with Gus Fuad's critique of habib figures reframed as symbolic blasphemy; the causes are linked to epistemological divides concerning religious authority, intensified by platform algorithms; moral judgments predominantly condemn violence as violating Islamic *adab*; and proposed solutions emphasize dialogue and digital literacy. Through Arkoun's lens, the

study reveals dogmatic rigidity that obstructs contextual *ijtihad* and constrains pluralistic engagement. The study concludes that social media functions as a polarizing arena in post-FPI religious conflicts while simultaneously providing a space for counter-framing that supports pluralism, thereby advancing the literature on digital religious communication and underscoring the need for Islamic organizations to promote multidisciplinary *da'wah* and media education to foster tolerance within Indonesia's diverse *ummah*.

Keywords: Religious Persecution; Framing Analysis; Social Media; Mohammed Arkoun; Religious Pluralism

INTRODUCTION

Religious thought diversity in Indonesia often sparks tensions among groups, particularly when critical discourse challenges orthodox interpretations (Asmara, 2020). The persecution incident against KH Muhamad Fuad Riyadi (Gus Fuad Plered) in Bantul, Yogyakarta, in early 2023, exemplifies this dynamic (KumparanNews, 2023). The event involved physical and symbolic confrontations by conservative Islamic groups against Gus Fuad, igniting widespread debate on social media and digital platforms.

Gus Fuad Plered, based in Pleret, Bantul, Yogyakarta, boasts a rich scholarly background. His name, "Fuad", was bestowed by Abuya KH Muhammad Dimiyati al-Bantani, senior murshid of seven tariqas, who also authorised him as a *kiai* and *pesantren* leader. His father, H. Ahmad Abdul Bakdi, descends from Kiai Abdurrouf Wonokromo of the Sunan Ampel lineage via Sunan Bonang; his mother, Hj. Siti Muyassarotul Maqosid traces to Kiai Sangidu, linked to Kiai Nur Iman (son of Amangkurat IV) and Hamengkubuwono I. Early education included boarding at *pesantrens* in Wonokromo and Jejeran, Bantul, plus tutelage under figures like Habib Anis al-Habsyi and Syaikh Zaini bin Abdul Ghani al-Banjari (Prass, 2025).

Gus Fuad founded Pesantren Roudlatul Fatihah under his grandmother *Nyai* Sangidu's guidance, emphasising *fiqh*, Qur'anic tafsir, *sunnah*, and *tasawwuf* from salaf *ulama* such as Imam al-Ghazali, Imam Nawawi, Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani, Ibnu Hajar al-Asqalani, and Habib 'Ali al-Habsyi. Beyond traditional teaching, the *pesantren* advances digital *da'wah* via Gus Fuad Channel and ROFA Channel (an Islamic music group). Gus Fuad is also a

journalist, literary writer, painter, and influencer blending religion, art, and public engagements (Purniawan, 2023b).

The conflict escalated when Gus Fuad's statements on *Habib* figures were deemed provocative by groups like Front Jihad Islam (FJI), successor to Front Pembela Islam (FPI), whose members were disbanded by the government in 2020 for breaching national norms. Viral YouTube videos documented the persecution, fueling pro-contra polarisation with hundreds of thousands of views and thousands of netizen comments (Purniawan, 2023a).

This study analyses the incident's dynamics using two primary theoretical frameworks. First, Robert N. Entman's (1993) framing theory, delineating four elements: define problems (Gus Fuad's statements as a trigger), diagnose causes (ideological and religious understandings), make moral judgment (ethical polarisation on social media), and treatment recommendation (deliberation as a solution). Second, Mohammed Arkoun's (1984; 2002) deconstruction theory, critiquing classical Islamic dogma and advocating a historical-critical, multidisciplinary approach for open, moderate, and non-violent rethinking (Arkoun, 2006).

Previous research on digital religious conflict in Indonesia has highlighted framing patterns and polarisation dynamics. Sebastian et al. (2021) analysed media framing of the disbandment of the FPI using Entman's model, found the dominance of the "security threat" narrative, which reinforced the stigma of conservatism. Wildan et al. (2023) examined netizens' responses to contestation of language ideology in the 2019 presidential election on horizontal, vertical, and individual patterns. Zuhri (2022) applied Arkoun's deconstruction to religious group discourse on social media, showing how genealogical dogma hinders contextual *ijtihad*. Meanwhile, Rusdi (2021), in the case of intolerance in Yogyakarta, found that the recommendation for "deliberation" rarely appeared in viral comments. Finally, Pratama and Annuha (2024) explore NU's progressive digital preaching, confirming that a multidisciplinary approach is highly effective in curbing extremism when supported by media literacy. These studies confirm the relevance of Entman-Arkoun's dual framework to this research. Still, none have specifically analysed the post-2024 persecution of Gus Fuad Plered, so this study fills this gap with recent viral YouTube data.

This study contributes to the literature on digital religious communication in Indonesia, filling gaps in the framing analysis of post-FPI religious conflicts. Findings aim to offer recommendations for Islamic organisations managing critical discourse in the social

media era. Research questions in this study include: (1) How is the Gus Fuad persecution framed in media narratives and public comments? (2) How does Arkoun's deconstruction explain conservative groups' exclusive responses? (3) What are the implications for religious pluralism in Indonesia? For this reason, this research is interesting to understand and study more comprehensively.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach (Rosidah et al., 2023) employing Robert N. Entman's (1993) framing analysis design, which emphasises the processes of problem selection and salience in media discourse to shape public interpretation. This method was selected for its suitability in dissecting how the persecution incident against Gus Fuad is constructed through digital narratives, including fact selection, problem diagnosis, moral evaluation, and solution recommendations. The analysis was conducted thematically and iteratively to uncover dominant framing patterns in public responses.

Primary data were collected from two main viral videos on the YouTube platform, serving as the epicentre of digital discourse on the incident. The first video from *Harian Surya* (<https://youtu.be/iG2eVrR2y7E?si=9-rr87hA1HYulMXr>) garnered 822,000 views and documents the persecution atmosphere directly (*Harian Surya*, 2024). The second, a YouTube Short from *Rozalikij* (https://youtube.com/shorts/kAQ0CoFFkVI?si=v2_JeGaMZEll_iVZ), highlights the role of Front Jihad Islam (FJI) figures in the action. Secondary data comprised top comments from netizens (n=500 per video) and supporting narratives from related posts on platforms (*Rozalikij*, 2024).

Data collection utilised purposive sampling, selecting videos based on virality (>100,000 views), content relevance to the core event, and representation of pro- and anti-Gus Fuad dynamics. Public comments were analysed from the first 7 days post-upload to capture peak discourse momentum. Techniques included screen captures, manual transcription, and metadata extraction via tools for initial categorisation.

Data analysis followed Entman's four dimensions: (1) problem definition through identification of actors and key issues; (2) causal interpretation via cause-effect patterns in narratives; (3) moral evaluation of comments' ethical assessments; and (4) treatment recommendations based on proposed solutions by netizens. This process incorporated

source triangulation (videos, comments, media narratives) and qualitative content analysis for recurring theme coding, ensuring reliability through inter-coder agreement.

To maintain validity and research ethics, netizen identities were anonymised, facts were cross-verified with credible news sources, and the researcher's reflexivity was documented via field journals. Study limitations include the focus on YouTube, which may not represent Indonesia's full digital spectrum; future recommendations suggest expansion to TikTok and longitudinal analysis.

RESULTS

A Glimpse into the Chronology of the Persecution of the Gus Fuad Plered Case

This incident originated from a controversial statement made by Gus Fuad Plered in one of his sermon videos, which subsequently went viral on social media. In the video clip, Gus Fuad remarked, "Those *habibs*, if their only job is to cause chaos in Indonesia, just tell them to return to their home countries." Although uttered in the context of critiquing provocative actions by a handful of religious figures, this statement was interpreted differently by various parties, particularly sympathisers of the *Habaib* and conservative Islamic mass organisations. It was perceived as an insult to the *honour* of the *habaib*, who have traditionally been accorded a symbolically sacred status by segments of the Muslim community (Hadi, 2023).

Responses to Gus Fuad's statement extended beyond virtual criticism on social media, escalating into concerning real-world actions. Groups such as *Front Jihad Islam* (FJI), *Komando Jihad* (KJ), and former members of *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) converged on Gus Fuad's residence in Pleret, Bantul, Yogyakarta, initially intending to voice objections and seek clarification. However, what should have been a space for peaceful dialogue devolved into a tense situation ripe for physical violence. Footage from channels like *Harian Surya* and *Rozaliki* captured scenes of commotion, provocative shouts, and mass pressure demanding a public apology from Gus Fuad. He narrowly escaped a mass beating, thanks to the swift intervention of *santri* (Islamic students) at the site who secured his safety and prevented further violence (Rozaliki, 2024).

The event rapidly proliferated across digital spaces, polarising public opinion into two primary camps. One side vehemently condemned Gus Fuad's remarks as an affront to

the habaib, while the other defended him and sharply criticised the use of violent methods to address differing views. The *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) community, along with its wings such as *Ansor*, *Banser*, *Pagar Nusa*, and *Pemuda Gusdurian Nusantara* (PGN), institutionally mobilised to provide moral and physical support at the scene. This action not only bolstered Gus Fuad's position but also conveyed a normative message that persecution or physical threats against religious scholars are unjustifiable in any democratic societal context.

The escalating conflict, with its potential to fracture the *ummah* and induce social instability, necessitated security intervention. Local police stepped in to secure the area, facilitating mediation at a neutral venue that led to a peaceful agreement between both parties (Allie, 2020). Nevertheless, authorities upheld the rule of law by pursuing criminal proceedings against one of the main provocateurs involved in the violent acts. This approach reaffirmed the commitment of a constitutional state to legal supremacy, where vigilante justice holds no legitimacy (Mate, 2017).

Overall, this incident reflects the complex dynamics of socio-religious relations in Indonesia, where divergent symbolic interpretations can swiftly ignite conflicts. Analysing such phenomena is crucial for understanding patterns of digital polarisation and the amplifying role of social media in sensitive issues (Muhtarom & Ichsan, 2025). Furthermore, the event underscores the urgency of law-based tolerance education and inclusive interfaith dialogue to prevent recurrences of similar violence in the future.

Framing Study in the Persecution Case against Gus Fuad Plered

Analysing this incident through Robert Entman's framing theory (1993) provides profound insights into how the media and the public framed the conflict. Entman's framing theory emphasises four key elements: defining the problem, diagnosing the causes, making a moral judgment, and making a treatment recommendation. This approach is particularly relevant for unpacking digital and social polarisation dynamics in intra-Muslim tensions in Indonesia. The following delineates each element in detail, expanded with contextual analysis and structural implications.

1. Define Problem

The primary problem defined in media and public framing is internal friction within the Muslim community, particularly concerning the practice of *amar makruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). Gus Fuad Plered critiqued a handful of religious

figures who exploit their symbolic status—such as the "habib" title—to mobilise masses and incite social instability. However, this substantive critique was reframed as blasphemy against sacred religious symbols. This framing shifts focus from provocative behaviour to violations of traditional authority hierarchies, thereby undermining the legitimacy of rational criticism (Dacey, 2012).

2. Diagnose Causes

The causes of the conflict are diagnosed as epistemological differences regarding religious authority and contemporary *da'wah* methodologies. One group views *Habib* as immune to critique due to prophetic lineage, while others emphasise public accountability for harmful actions. This polarisation is exacerbated by social media dynamics, where platform algorithms reinforce echo chambers through decontextualised clips (Talamanca & Arfini, 2022). Such posts stir sectarian emotions, dividing society between supporters of Gus Fuad's substantive critique and defenders of *the Habaiib's* symbolic identity.

3. Make Moral Judgment

The moral judgment emerging in public framing highlights the contradiction between violence claimed as *tabayun* (clarification) and Islam's essence of *adab* (etiquette), *rahmah* (compassion), and *musyawarah* (consultation). Media spotlight how such mass actions test the collective morality of the *ummah*: prioritising identity symbolism or universal Islamic civility? This judgment critiques the hypocrisy where defence in religion's name violates those very religious norms (Hilmy, 2010).

4. Treatment Recommendation

The dominant solution recommendations in public discourse involve strengthening an inclusive dialogue culture and cross-madhab understanding. Gus Fuad consistently calls for tempering anger with reason, resolving issues through knowledge rather than emotion or physical violence. Organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) emphasise law-based mediation, while communication experts recommend digital literacy to counter sensational framing (Mudhofi et al., 2025).

The broader implications of this framing are the potential for social fragmentation in Indonesia's plural society. Entman's theory illustrates how dominant frames shape public reality perception, risking deepened divides among Islamic groups. Empirical studies in Indonesia, such as post-212 polarisation research, support findings that social media accelerates negative framing cycles.

From a sociology of religion perspective, this conflict reflects symbolic competition in globalised Islamic flows. Habib, as an Arab "soft power, encroaches on the space held by local scholars like Gus Fuad, representing Nahdliyin traditions. Entman framing reveals how these narratives are reproduced to maintain cultural hegemony, with implications for national ummah cohesion.

Methodologically, this framing analysis can be enriched with qualitative content analysis of over 1,000 related posts on X (Twitter) and TikTok. Preliminary data show dominance of pro-*Habib* hashtags (#HabibKami), reinforcing the defined problem as identity attack, while pro-Gus Fuad camps use #DialogBukanKekerasan to emphasise moral judgment.

In a rule-of-law context, police intervention exemplifies effective treatment recommendation, affirming legal supremacy over emotional framing. Yet, long-term challenges include building community resilience against framing manipulation via critical media education in *pesantren* and madrasah. In conclusion, Entman's framework not only dissects this event but also provides a blueprint for preventing similar conflicts. By understanding framing patterns, stakeholders can design targeted interventions, promoting sustainable socio-religious harmony in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

Progressive Islamic Studies in the Dynamics of the Gus Fuad Plered Case

From the perspective of progressive Islamic thought offered by Mohammed Arkoun, this incident reflects the failure of some Muslims to build a rational, open, and contextual religious discourse. Gus Fuad, as a scholar and cultural figure, attempts to open a critical space toward religious practices that he deems irrelevant to the Indonesian context. However, certain groups respond with an exclusive attitude, imposing a single interpretation, and even employing symbolic and physical violence. Such responses demonstrate an inability to accept diversity in Islamic interpretations, which contradicts the dynamic spirit of *ijtihad* (Ibrahim, 2014).

Arkoun invites Muslims to deconstruct frozen legacies that cause religion to lose its adaptability to changing times. In this case, instead of dialoguing differences, the offended groups opt for a repressive approach. Yet, in a plural and democratic society like Indonesia,

an open debate space is a necessity. An anti-critical stance and excessive sacralization of religious symbols only narrow the space for Muslims' own critical reasoning, hindering the development of inclusive thought (Salazar, 2023).

Furthermore, Arkoun's thought emphasises a historical-critical approach to sacred texts, viewing the Qur'an not as a static narrative but as a living text in constant dialogue with social realities. This incident illustrates how some Muslims reject such deconstruction, clinging to rigid orthodoxy that ignores contemporary contexts. In Indonesia, where Islam has evolved amid the cultural diversity of the Nusantara archipelago (Khalim, 2025), this approach becomes a barrier to harmonious integration between religion and nationality.

Moreover, the event mirrors broader challenges in building a civil Islamic society in the modern era. Gus Fuad's efforts to revitalise religious practices through an Indonesian lens align with Arkoun's vision of applicable, non-dogmatic Islam. However, the exclusive reactions from conservative groups reveal the dominance of a defensive theological paradigm, which often sacrifices universal humanistic values like tolerance and dialogue (Joseph, 2015).

Thus, this incident is not only significant in the current context but also serves as a reflective mirror on how ready Muslims are to face differences and manage religious diversity in a mature and dignified manner. It reminds us of the need for progressive clerical education that integrates rational critique with faith foundations, ensuring Islam remains relevant amid globalisation dynamics (Whyte, 2024).

Finally, from Arkoun's viewpoint, events like this call for reforming Islamic thinking methodologies toward a holistic and contextual discourse. In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, the success of this reform will determine whether Islam can become a moderate force supporting democracy and pluralism (Khalim & Parut, 2025) or get trapped in cycles of internal conflict that harm all.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islam, as a religion that upholds the spirit of peace and deliberation (*musyawarah*), demands that its adherents safeguard social harmony with awareness that the image of the *ummah* is continuously observed by the global community. In Indonesia, a Muslim-majority nation grounded in *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution as a

rule-of-law state, the persecution incident involving Gus Fuad illustrates the dangers of exclusive and dogmatic thinking within segments of the *ummah*. The analysis shows that such tendencies can be mitigated through Entman's framing theory and Arkoun's deconstruction approach, which foster multidisciplinary understanding, shared perspectives, and a focus on collective welfare (*maṣlahah*). In the contemporary landscape of religious organisations, social media emerges as a pivotal arena that can either escalate or de-escalate tensions, making a deep grasp of these theories crucial for adherence to norms of nation-building, religious practice, and digital ethics. Consequently, religious organisations are called to enhance the quality of their *da'wah* so that it is educational, inclusive, and soothing, thereby managing diversity in a mature manner and strengthening Islam's contribution to democratic pluralism in Indonesia.

Scientifically, this study contributes to the discourse on religion, media, and democracy by integrating Islamic normative principles with critical communication theories, specifically Entman's framing theory and Arkoun's deconstruction to clarify how doctrinal interpretations, organisational practices, and digital ecosystems interact in the formation and resolution of intra-ummah conflict. Theoretically, it refines understanding of how moderate, critical, and multidisciplinary awareness can serve as a framework for interpreting and managing religious controversies in a pluralistic rule-of-law state. Practically, it offers religious organisations and policymakers a conceptual lens for designing *da'wah*, communication strategies, and regulatory guidelines that are normatively grounded, conflict-sensitive, and responsive to the dynamics of social media.

Future research is recommended to empirically examine how framing and deconstruction processes operate in specific cases of religious contention across different organisations and digital platforms in Indonesia, including comparative analyses of escalated versus successfully de-escalated conflicts. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies could investigate how exposure to critical, moderate, and multidisciplinary religious discourse affects attitudes and behaviours among various Muslim constituencies, both online and offline. In addition, further work should explore the design and impact of structured digital-ethics education and media-literacy programs within religious organisations, with a view to strengthening democratic pluralism, safeguarding *maṣlahah*, and enhancing Islam's constructive role in Indonesia's evolving public sphere.

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