

Digital Religious Discourse: Constructing Legitimacy and Counter-Narratives in *Islami.co*

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: November 10, 2024

Revised: February 23, 2025

Accepted: June 29, 2025

Keywords:

digital religious discourse;
critical discourse analysis;
Islamic authority; counter-
publics; Islami.co

ABSTRACT

Digital controversies around Al-Mā'idah 5:51 and the Ahok case have sharpened struggles over Qur'anic authority in Indonesia's public sphere. This article examines how the progressive portal *Islami.co* constructs religious legitimacy and counter-narratives in this context. Using qualitative critical discourse analysis, it analyzes fourteen opinion and expository articles on verse politicization, Qur'an translation, and digital da'wah, applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Leeuwen's legitimation categories. The study finds three mechanisms of legitimation: (1) semantic reframing of key terms such as *awliyā' wali*; (2) intertextual authority through selective use of classical tafsīr, fiqh, and contemporary scholarship; and (3) moral evaluation foregrounding justice, *maṣlaḥah*, and plural coexistence. These strategies underwrite counter-narratives that decouple voting for non-Muslim leaders from accusations of betrayal, critique *terjemahisme* and post-truth uses of state translations, and oppose *Islam marah* with an ethic of *Islam ramah*. The findings show how progressive Islamic counter-publics linguistically contest conservative monopolies over Qur'anic discourse.

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Please cite this article in APA Style as:

Ats Tsaqofi, et al. (2025). Digital Religious Discourse: Constructing Legitimacy and Counter-Narratives in *Islami.co*. *Mimbar Agama dan Budaya*, 42(1), (225-238). [https://doi.org/ 10.15408/mimbar.v42i1.48924](https://doi.org/10.15408/mimbar.v42i1.48924)

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, Indonesia has witnessed an intensification of religious communication in digital environments, from social media platforms to specialized Islamic portals. Studies on digital religion show how online infrastructures reshape patterns of Islamic learning, authority, and textual circulation, particularly among urban, educated Muslims who increasingly rely on the internet for religious knowledge and public debate (Ichwan et al., 2024; Kholili et al., 2024). At the same time, quantitative analyses of Twitter conversations indicate that religious hashtags such as *#politisasiagama*, *#politikidentitas*, and *#radikalisme* are tightly intertwined with electoral competition and horizontal social conflict (Faizin et al., 2024). This configuration has contributed to heightened polarization, where Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions are mobilized as slogans in political struggles and become markers of group identity rather than objects of sustained hermeneutic engagement (Nurcahyono, 2023). Within this landscape, alternative Islamic media such as *Islami.co* emerge as counter-publics that explicitly promote inclusive, moderate, and socially engaged interpretations of Islam in response to the dominance of conservative and literalist voices in digital space (Shofiyullah, 2021).

Digital religious discourse, therefore, constitutes a crucial domain for contemporary linguistics, especially discourse analysis, pragmatics, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Critical approaches to discourse conceptualize language as a form of social practice in which textual choices are systematically linked to relations of power, ideology, and hegemony (Fairclough, 2003, 2013). In Fairclough's three-dimensional model, religious texts posted on news portals or social media are not only linguistic artefacts but also nodes within broader discursive practices (production, circulation, and consumption) and socio-cultural structures (e.g., Islamism, pluralism, populism). Applying this framework to digital Islam allows us to trace how religious actors construct authority, negotiate orthodoxy, and articulate legitimacy claims in interaction with algorithms, audiences, and platform logics (Ats Tsaqofi et al., 2022; Fairclough, 2013; Santoso, 2018). For Indonesian contexts, where theological arguments are tightly imbricated with questions of national identity, pluralism, and democracy, linguistic analysis of digital religious discourse becomes indispensable for understanding how meanings of "moderate," "authentic," or "deviant" Islam are produced and contested.

Existing scholarship has begun to map these dynamics from several angles. First, research on politicization of Qur'anic verses and religious hashtags in social media documents how salafi-wahhabi labels, accusations of *anti-Pancasila*, and the lexicon of *politisasi agama* and *politik identitas* structure online controversy and help scaffold polarized camps (Faizin et al., 2024; Rosyid & Anoraga, 2023). Second, studies of *e-tafsir* and Qur'anic interpretation on digital platforms show how websites and social media accounts curate interpretive repertoires, sometimes with explicit deradicalization agendas, thereby reconfiguring interpretive authority and reader engagement (Ichwan et al., 2024; Rosyid & Anoraga, 2023). Third, research on Islamic populism and conservative digital Islam highlights how online infrastructures amplify discourses that frame "the ummah" against corrupt elites, and how conservative conceptions of Islam dominate religious narratives on social media (Nurcahyono, 2023). Parallel to this, several studies have specifically examined moderate or progressive Islamic portals, including analyses of

Islami.co and IBTimes.id, focusing on how they promote religious moderation and counteract hoaxes in post-truth contexts (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024; Mahzumi et al., 2025; Shofiyullah, 2021).

Despite these contributions, at least three gaps remain in the literature. First, there are still relatively few linguistically grounded studies that undertake a fine-grained analysis of religious legitimization strategies in explicitly progressive Islamic media. Existing works on digital moderation often emphasize thematic content or theological positioning, while leaving the micro-level linguistic resources of legitimization, such as evaluative lexis, intertextual framing of classical authorities, or the distribution of authorial voice, largely underexplored (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024; Mahzumi et al., 2025). Second, while *Islami.co* frequently appears as a case of “moderate Islam” in digital media studies, there has been no systematic mapping of the counter-narratives it develops against conservative and populist readings of Islam, especially at the level of discourse strategies across different article genres like news analysis, opinion, tafsir-based reflections (Shofiyullah, 2021). Third, previous research has not explicitly investigated how linguistic strategies are mobilized to challenge simplistic translationism (*terjemahisme*) and decontextualized proof-texting, namely, the tendency to reduce complex hermeneutical traditions to decontextualized verse translations that are directly operationalized for political claims. While surveys and populism studies show that conservative and literalist conceptions dominate online religious narratives (PPIM, 2018, cited in Nurcahyono, 2023), we still lack an account of how progressive actors like *Islami.co* discursively contest this dominance through specific textual choices.

This article addresses these gaps by combining a linguistically oriented perspective on digital religious discourse with Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA model. Building on CDA, the study treats *Islami.co* articles as sites where textual features (lexis, modality, intertextuality, argument structure) are articulated with discursive practices (editorial routines, citation of classical and contemporary ulama, engagement with readers) and broader socio-political struggles over Islamic authority and democracy in Indonesia (Fairclough, 2003, 2013). Therefore, this study aims to systematically examine how *Islami.co* constructs religious legitimacy and formulates counter-narratives against conservative and politicized readings of Islam in Indonesia’s digital public sphere. The study’s novelty lies, first, in systematically mapping counter-narratives against conservative and politicized interpretations of Islam in a single progressive Islamic media outlet; second, in operationalizing Fairclough’s CDA framework for digital religious texts, which requires adapting categories such as “synthetic personalization” and “technologization of discourse” to platform-mediated religious communication; and third, in unpacking overlapping regimes of religious authority, scriptural classical, academic expert, and moral ethical, through the close analysis of linguistic resources used to invoke, negotiate, and sometimes decenter these authorities. This dual contribution, at once theoretical and methodological, extends existing CDA applications in Indonesian media beyond political news and advertising to the sphere of digital Islamic discourse.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) design. The analytical framework follows Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA model and van Leeuwen’s legitimization

categories (authorization, moral evaluation, etc.), which are applied to written online texts. The original formulations of these methods are not repeated here; readers are referred to Fairclough, (2003, 2013) and van Leeuwen (2008). In line with (Fraser, 1990) and Warner (2002), the analysis treats *Islami.co* as part of digital Islamic counter-publics, but these concepts function as interpretive lenses rather than as additional methods.

The material for analysis consists of fourteen opinion and expository articles published on *Islami.co* that address Al-Mā'idah 5:51, the Ahok controversy, "Aksi Bela Islam", and/or broader questions of verse politicization, translation, and digital da'wah. The articles are listed in Table 1 and are referred to in the analysis as Data 1–14.

Table 1. Corpus Data

No.	Indonesian (source language)	English (translation)	source
1.	Merebut Tafsir: Al-Maidah 51	Contesting the Interpretation of Al-Mā'idah 5:51	https://Islami.co/merebut-tafsir-al-maidah-51/
2.	Tafsir Auliya dalam Surah Al Maidah: 51	Interpreting "Awliyā'" in Al-Mā'idah 5:51	https://Islami.co/tafsir-auliya-dalam-surah-al-maidah-51/
3.	Indonesia vs Al-Maidah 51	Indonesia vs Al-Mā'idah 5:51	https://Islami.co/indonesia-vs-al-maidah-51/
4.	Quran Melarang Memilih Pemimpin Non-Muslim?	Does the Qur'an Forbid Electing Non-Muslim Leaders?	https://Islami.co/quran-melarang-memilih-pemimpin-non-muslim/
5.	Politisasi Ayat, Terjemahisme, dan post-Truth	Verse Politicization, "Translationism", and Post-Truth	https://Islami.co/politisasi-ayat-terjemahisme-dan-post-truth/
6.	Menjawab Tafsir Politis di Sosial Media; Dari Pilkada Hingga Politisasi Agama	Responding to Political Exegesis on Social Media: From Regional Elections to the Politicization of Religion	https://Islami.co/menjawab-tafsir-politis-di-media-sosial-dari-pilkada-hingga-politisasi-agama/
7.	Skema Makna dan Signifikansi Sebuah Tafsir	The Schema of Meaning and the Significance of an Exegesis	https://Islami.co/skema-makna-dan-signifikansi-sebuah-tafsir/
8.	Politik Agama, Pilkada Jakarta dan Pilpres Amerika: Tanggapan untuk Denny JA	Religious Politics, the Jakarta Regional Election, and the U.S. Presidential Election: A Response to Denny JA	https://Islami.co/politik-agama-pilkada-jakarta-dan-pilpres-amerika-tanggapan-untuk-denny-ja/
9.	Tafsir Al-Misbah: Terjemah Al-Quran Bukan Al-Quran	Tafsir Al-Misbah: A Translation of the Qur'an, Not the Qur'an Itself	https://Islami.co/tafsir-al-misbah-terjemah-al-quran-bukan-al-quran/

No.	Indonesian (source language)	English (translation)	source
10.	Membayangkan Politik dan Islam Sebagai Ideologi Dominan	Imagining Politics and Islam as a Dominant Ideology	https://Islami.co/membayangkan-politik-dan-islam-sebagai-ideologi-dominan/
11.	Ahok Tidak Menista al-Quran	Ahok Did Not Blaspheme the Qur'an	https://Islami.co/ahok-tidak-menista-quran/
12.	Wali Allah, Wali Setan, dan Wali Digital	The Saints of God, the Saints of Satan, and the Digital Saints	https://Islami.co/wali-allah-wali-setan-dan-wali-digital/
13.	Panduan Mengikuti Aksi Demo Bela Islam Jilid 3	A Guide to Participating in the Third "Defend Islam" Demonstration	https://Islami.co/panduan-mengikuti-aksi-demo-bela-islam-jilid-3/
14.	Memahami Kisah Umar bin Khattab dan Abu Musa al-Asy'ari	Understanding the Story of Umar ibn al-Khattab and Abu Musa al-Ash'ari	https://Islami.co/kisah-umar-bin-khattab-dan-abu-musa-asyari/

The analytical procedure adapts standard CDA workflows (Fairclough, 2003, 2013) to a small, theoretically sampled corpus. All Data 1–14 were read several times in full. During this familiarization phase, notes were made on recurring themes (e.g., *awliyā'* / *wali*, *terjemahisme*, *Islam marah / ramah*, Ahok/MUI, social media metaphors such as *belantara informasi*). The texts were then manually coded for segments that (i) redefine key religious terms, (ii) invoke classical or academic authorities, (iii) perform moral evaluations (e.g., justice, *maṣlahah*), or (iv) explicitly criticize conservative readings and institutions.

All data used in this study come from publicly available online articles and contain no personal information. Therefore, the research does not require ethical approval (ethical clearance). Nevertheless, the analysis is conducted carefully to avoid any misrepresentation of the original authors or the media institution.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Summary of Main Findings

Drawing on a corpus of fourteen *Islami.co* articles on the interpretation and politicization of Qur'anic verses such as Al-Mā'idah 5:51 (Data 1–14), this study shows that *Islami.co* constructs religious legitimacy through three main linguistic mechanisms that resonate with broader models of discourse and legitimation (van Leeuwen, 2008; Fairclough, 2013). First, it employs semantic reframing, especially of key terms such as *awliyā'* / *wali* in Data 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, and 12, to shift the meaning from a rigid equation with "political leaders" toward a broader field of alliance, intimacy, and relational proximity. This move exemplifies how lexical choices reconfigure power relations and social identities in discourse (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Second, *Islami.co* relies on intertextual authority, selectively mobilizing classical *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, and contemporary Islamic scholarship in Data 1–5, 7, 9–11, and 14 to ground its arguments within both traditional and academic discourses. In doing so, it exemplifies Fairclough's (2013) view of intertextuality as a key resource in the struggle over meaning and hegemony, as different

interpretive traditions are juxtaposed to contest narrow, politicized appropriations of Qur'anic verses.

Third, the articles foreground moral evaluation, consistently centering justice, social harmony, and plural coexistence as core Islamic values across Data 2–4, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13 (and, more implicitly, Data 3). This pattern aligns with scholarship on digital religion that highlights how online Islamic actors negotiate authority, morality, and public affect (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Cheong et al., 2012). Across the corpus, these mechanisms are systematically mobilized to formulate counter-narratives against conservative and politicized readings of Qur'anic texts, to challenge “translationism” (*terjemahisme*) and post-truth uses of scripture in Indonesian digital politics, and to position *Islami.co* as a progressive digital Islamic counter-public vis-à-vis dominant conservative media.

Beyond these immediate argumentative strategies, the same linguistic patterns also show how progressive digital media seek to cultivate a new ecosystem of religious literacy in Indonesia's public sphere. By emphasizing contextual interpretation, the verification of religious information, and resistance to the simplification of Qur'anic verses, *Islami.co* proposes a reading framework that encourages its followers to engage with religious discourse in more critical and reflexive ways. This orientation further illustrates how progressive Islamic media work to sustain an inclusive religious public, move beyond entrenched political polarizations, and strengthen collective resilience against textual manipulation that often flourishes in post-truth dynamics (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Cheong et al., 2012).

3.2. Constructing Legitimacy

A first pattern in the corpus concerns the way *Islami.co* builds traditional textual authority. Articles repeatedly anchor their argumentation in classical tafsīr and uṣūl al-fiqh debates. In Data 1 (“*Meluruskan Sejumlah Tafsir Surat Al-Maidah 51*”), for example, Nadirsyah Hosen carefully reconstructs the story of ‘Umar and Abū Mūsā not as a prophetic ḥadīth but as *athar ṣaḥābī* and explicitly underlines that none of the canonical ḥadīth collections include the narrative (Data 1). He then traces its transmission through Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Qurtubī, al-Rāzī and others, highlighting divergences in wording, context, and even the identity of the interlocutor (Abū Mūsā vs. Khālīd b. al-Walīd) (Data 1). This close attention to *sanad*, textual variants, and genre (ḥadīth vs. *athar*) allows *Islami.co* to argue from within the tradition that both the verse and its reception history are more contingent and interpretive than conservative preachers suggest. The same narrative is revisited and elaborated in “*Memahami Kisah Umar bin Khattab dan Abu Musa al-Asy’ari*” (Data 14), which systematically reconstructs the various transmitters and versions of the story, thereby strengthening *Islami.co*'s argument that the narrative cannot be treated as a decisive, canonical proof-text for contemporary electoral politics (Data 14). In terms of CDA, this corresponds to what van Leeuwen describes as *authorization* through reference to tradition and expert authority, where past authorities are mobilized to legitimize present positions (van Leeuwen, 2008).

The same article, together with Nadirsyah Hosen's later piece “*Quran Melarang Memilih Pemimpin Non-Muslim?*” (Data 4), systematically reframes *awliyā'* in Al-Mā'idah 5:51 through classical exegetical semantics. Instead of accepting the common Indonesian translation “*pemimpin*”, the articles foreground Ibn Kathīr's gloss in both Al-Mā'idah 5:51 and Al-Nisā'

4:144, where *awliyā'* is interpreted as intimate allies and protectors, those with whom one shares secrets and strategic dependence, rather than formal rulers (Data 1, 4). This semantic reframing is reinforced by Sahiron Syamsuddin's article "*Tafsir Auliya dalam Surat Al-Maidah: 51*" (Data 2), which juxtaposes Hamka's translation ("*pemimpin-pemimpin*") with al-Ṭabarī's reading ("helpers and allies") and Quraish Shihab's rendering ("*teman dekat dan penolong*"), explicitly concluding that the verse does not regulate electoral leadership in a modern nation-state (Data 2). A related semantic move appears in the more popular, thematic reflection on *wali* in "*Wali Allah, Wali Setan, dan Wali Digital*" (Data 12), which traces the polysemy of *wali* across everyday expressions (guardian, patron, close friend, local governor). This text further reinforces the idea that *wali* / *awliyā'* are fundamentally relational notions rather than fixed political offices, thus supporting *Islami.co*'s broader strategy of *semantic reframing*. Through these moves, *Islami.co* does not reject classical authority; rather, its re-selects and re-articulates strands within the tradition to legitimize a more inclusive reading while still appearing textually grounded, a process that resonates with Fairclough's notion of recontextualization in discourse as the selective appropriation of existing discourses and genres (Fairclough, 2013).

A second mechanism of legitimacy is the deployment of academic and intellectual authority. Several writers systematically foreground the institutional roles of contributors, vice-rector, senior lecturer, chair of tafsir associations, doctoral candidate, and situate their arguments within contemporary Qur'anic studies and hermeneutics. In Data 2, Sahiron frames his analysis of *awliyā'* through a triad of "language, historical context, and moral idea", explicitly moving from lexical meaning to *sabab al-nuzūl* narratives (e.g., 'Ubāda b. al-Ṣāmit, Abū Lubāba, alliances before Uḥud) and then to the normative message about trustworthy allies and treaty-keeping (Data 2). Fadhli Lukman, "*Skema Makna dan Signifikansi Sebuah Tafsir*" (Data 7) explicitly mobilizes Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd's distinction between "meaning" and "significance" and Fazlur Rahman's "double movement" to argue that Qur'anic interpretation must connect original context, classical interpretive history, and present socio-political conditions (Data 7). When such theoretical frameworks are presented inside a popular online portal, *Islami.co* accrues an academic ethos that contrasts with the more anti-intellectual, slogan-based tone of much conservative digital da'wah. From a CDA perspective, this corresponds to a hybrid form of legitimation that combines traditional authorization with what van Leeuwen terms *expert authority* and *rationalization*, arguments grounded in scholarly procedures and interpretive methods rather than mere assertion (Fairclough, 2003; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Third, the corpus constructs moral authority by repeatedly centering justice (*'adl*) and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) as decisive Islamic criteria for political judgment. In Data 4, Nadirsyah Hosen quotes Ibn Taymiyya's well-known aphorism that God supports a just polity even if non-Muslim, but does not support a Muslim polity that is unjust, and then translates this into a simple evaluative principle: Muslims should support just leaders, even if they are non-Muslim, and oppose unjust leaders, even if they are Muslim (Data 4). Data 3 (Rumail Abbas "*Indonesia vs Al-Maidah 51*") re-reads classical fiqh about *imāma* and *khilāfa* through the lens of *maqāsid al-sharī'a*, arguing that the essence of leadership is the realization of justice and social order, not the religious identity of the officeholder (Data 3). Other pieces, such as Data 8 and Data 10, explicitly link Qur'anic ethics to broader struggles against discrimination, class oppression, and the instrumentalization of Islam for capitalist or sectarian projects (Data 8, 10). These moral evaluations are not presented as secular humanism, but as the "spirit of Islam", thereby claiming

ethical legitimacy over against those who deploy verses to justify exclusion or hostility towards minorities. In van Leeuwen's terms, this dimension of legitimation relies heavily on *moral evaluation*, that is, evaluative language grounded in discourses of justice, human dignity, and social harmony (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Taken together, these three mechanisms are effective partly because they suture different audiences, pious readers attached to classical authorities, educated urban Muslims responsive to academic reasoning, and broader publics sensitive to justice and coexistence. Compared to conservative digital discourse, which tends to absolutize single translations (e.g., *awliyā* = "pemimpin" in all contexts), suppress intra-Muslim disagreement, and privilege identity markers ("Muslim/non-Muslim") over ethical outcomes, *Islami.co* stages disagreement inside the tradition, foregrounds contextual interpretation, and shifts the evaluative axis to justice, treaty-keeping, and non-betrayal (Data 1–4, 6, 8). This pattern aligns with CDA findings that progressive actors in digital religion often hybridize traditional and modern sources of authority and that legitimation frequently combines authorization (reference to experts and tradition) with moral evaluation (appeals to justice and human dignity) to construct credible counter-hegemonic positions (Fairclough, 2003, 2013; van Leeuwen, 2008). The innovative element in *Islami.co*'s case is how such complex hermeneutics are repackaged into accessible, conversational Indonesian prose, sometimes even with humor or emoticons such as the label "ayat pilkada", without relinquishing scholarly density (Data 6).

Beyond these three mechanisms, *Islami.co*'s legitimizing practices must also be understood within the broader *platformization* of Islamic authority. Digital infrastructures (recommendation algorithms, shareability metrics, and the affective economy of social media) contribute to reshaping which voices are amplified, how authority is recognized, and what kinds of discourse gain traction (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). In this environment, *Islami.co*'s reliance on classical tafsīr, academic hermeneutics, and moral reasoning functions not merely as content selection but as a conscious strategy to intervene in a crowded, accelerated information ecosystem where simplified "religious soundbites" often outperform nuanced scholarship. By grounding its interventions in layered textual genealogies and methodological transparency, *Islami.co* implicitly resists the platform-driven tendency toward reductionism and reasserts the value of interpretive depth as a criterion of legitimacy. From a CDA perspective, this demonstrates how legitimacy is not only constructed through linguistic choices internal to the text but also in dynamic interaction with the socio-technological structures that mediate digital religious communication (Fairclough, 2013).

Furthermore, *Islami.co*'s strategy of combining traditional, academic, and ethical forms of authority contributes to a distinctive mode of counter-hegemonic identity work. This reflects broader observations that digital religious actors increasingly engage in "identity negotiation" by rearticulating what counts as authoritative Islam amid plural and contested publics (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Warner, 2002). Rather than positioning itself in direct opposition to conservative actors, the portal reframes authentic Islamic reasoning through plurality, critical inquiry, and historical consciousness—traits that scholars identify as central to progressive Islamic discourse in digital settings (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024; Mahzumi et al., 2025). Such triangulation enables *Islami.co* to cultivate a hybrid interpretive community that resists binary conservative–liberal typologies and instead promotes an Islamic subjectivity grounded in contextual reasoning, ethical accountability, and epistemic humility. In Fairclough's terms, this reflects a process of *hegemony*

negotiation, where new norms of religious authority and civic engagement are advanced through discursive practice rather than polemical confrontation.

3.3. Counter-Narratives Against Conservative Discourses

The counter-narratives articulated by *Islami.co* are most visible in their semantic deconstruction of Al-Mā'idah 5:51. Several articles converge on the claim that the conservative reading “the Qur'an forbids electing non-Muslim leaders” rests on a double reduction: *first* of *awliyā'* to “political leader”, and *second*, of the verse's war-time context to contemporary electoral competition. Nadirsyah Hosen's and Sahiron Syamsuddin's pieces (Data 1, 2, 4) reconstruct *asbāb al-nuzūl* involving the battle of Uhūd, shifting alliances with Jews and Christians in Medina, and the anxieties of Muslims seeking military protection, thereby relocating the verse into a context of military alliances and loyalty in conflict, not peaceful democratic contestation (Data 1, 2, 4). Rumail Abbas (Data 3) extends this move by showing that classical fiqh debates on *imāma* and *khilāfa* cannot be collapsed into a simple prohibition of non-Muslim political leaders in modern nation-states. In Data 6, Udji Kayang further underlines that using Al-Mā'idah 5:51 as a “Pilkada verse” ignores its original context and flattens complex hermeneutics into electoral slogan. Across these texts (Data 1–4, 6), the counter-narrative does not deny the verse's authority; it denies the *equation* between electoral support for a non-Muslim governor and apostasy or betrayal of Islam that was central to 2016–2017 conservative mobilizations.

A second key strand of counter-narrative targets “translationism” and post-truth politics. Fadhli Lukman's article (Data 5) develops a sustained critique of the sacralization of state-sponsored Qur'an translations (*Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* Kemenag) and their fusion with digital capitalist infrastructures (apps, “one-stop Qur'an” platforms). He shows how the removal of individual translators' names, the emphasis on official authorization, and layouts that visually merge Arabic text and Indonesian translation create the impression that the translation is quasi-canonical (Data 5). In Data 9, M. Alvin Nur Choironi details controversies surrounding revisions of the Kemenag translation, especially the shift in rendering *awliyā'*, and documents how these revisions are represented by some online actors as “*merusak Al-Qur'an*”. In such an environment, any attempt to revise a translation for instance, changing *awliyā'* from “*pemimpin*” to “*sekutu/sekutu dekat*” is quickly denounced as tampering with scripture by users who do not distinguish between the divine text and its human interpretation (Data 5, 9). Lukman names this hermeneutical regime *terjemahisme*, in which lay readers interact with translations as if they were the Qur'an itself, detached from the rich plurality of *tafsīr* (Data 5).

By connecting *terjemahisme* to post-truth dynamics, these texts reframe conservative campaigns around Al-Mā'idah 5:51 as part of a larger pattern in which scriptural fragments are selectively attached to political grievances and amplified through social media regardless of hermeneutic adequacy (Data 5, 9, 10). Counter-narratives, then, are not only theological; they are meta-discursive: readers are invited to reflect on how they relate to translations, to recognize the difference between revelation and its linguistic mediation, and to perceive how politicians and preachers instrumentalize that confusion (Data 5, 6). This corresponds to what theorists of counter-publics describe as reflexive discourse, where marginalized or alternative publics critically thematize the very conditions of communication and representation rather than merely offering opposing content (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002).

A third dimension of counter-narrative is the articulation of “friendly” and inclusive Islam (*Islam ramah*) against “angry Islam (*Islam marah*)”. In the piece on tafsir and social media (Data 6), Udji Kayang contrasts the proliferation of harsh, rage-filled Islamic speech online with the patient, contextualizing style of scholars like Nadirsyah Hosen, who “come down from the mountain” (*turun gunung*) to engage digital audiences (Data 6). The article re-narrates the Ahok controversy not simply as a theological disagreement but as a paradigmatic case of “Islam marah” fueled by misinterpretation, selective quotation, and hoaxes, while positioning *Islami.co*’s contributors as exemplars of *Islam ramah* that insist on contextual reading, dialogical engagement, and intellectual humility (Data 1, 4, 6). The Qur’an’s enduring relevance, in this framing, lies in interpretive practices that balance ritual piety (*ḥabl min Allāh*) and social ethics (*ḥabl min al-nās*), not in the use of verses to mobilize outrage against political opponents (Data 3, 6, 8).

Another important aspect of these counter-narratives is that they operate within what scholars describe as *mediatized religious publics*, where visibility, virality, and emotional intensity shape how religious meanings circulate (Hjarvard, 2008). Conservative interpretations of Al-Mā'idah 5:51 gained traction partly because they aligned with the affective rhythms of social media, anger, fear, and moral outrage travel faster and further than contextual nuance (Ats Tsaqofi et al., 2023). *Islami.co*’s counter-narratives therefore intervene not only at the level of interpretation but also at the level of affective modulation, slowing down fast-moving outrage cycles by reintroducing historical context, linguistic precision, and ethical reflection. This recalibration of affect is itself a discursive strategy, by transforming the emotional economy surrounding Qur’anic interpretation, *Islami.co* works to dislodge the affective power that conservative actors mobilize to anchor their claims in the digital public sphere.

These interventions also perform what media theorists call *epistemic repair*, discursive efforts to restore interpretive order in an environment marked by misinformation, selective quoting, and ideological manipulation (Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Molina et al., 2021). By distinguishing revelation from translation, exegesis from slogan, and context from decontextualization, *Islami.co* reconstructs the epistemic boundaries that are often eroded in moments of political contestation. Rather than merely rebutting conservative arguments, the portal rebuilds the conditions under which Qur’anic reasoning can be responsibly practiced in a digital age. This aligns with broader findings in CDA that counter-hegemonic discourse is most effective when it not only challenges dominant claims but also re-establishes the interpretive frameworks that enable critical judgment (Fairclough, 2013). In this sense, *Islami.co*’s counter-narratives work simultaneously as hermeneutical clarification and as epistemic resistance to the forms of information disorder that sustain conservative dominance online.

Taken together, these strategies disrupt the rhetorical packaging of Al-Mā'idah 5:51 as a “Pilkada verse”. By loosening the verse’s direct link to electoral choice (Data 1–4), problematizing the status of translations and the authority of *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* (Data 5, 9), and re-centering justice, coexistence, and self-critical reflection (Data 3, 4, 6, 8, 10), *Islami.co* weakens the emotional appeal of conservative slogans without abandoning Qur’anic authority. This approach resonates with theories of digital religion that describe progressive actors as working through reframing, recontextualization, and discursive repair rather than frontal doctrinal confrontation (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Cheong et al., 2012). Compared to conservative digital media studied elsewhere, which often rely on decontextualized citations,

affective repetition, and enemy construction, *Islami.co*'s counter-narratives foreground contextualization, plurality of opinion, and meta-communicative awareness as markers of authentic Islamic engagement in the digital public sphere.

A further layer of counter-narrative emerges in “Panduan Mengikuti Aksi Demo Bela Islam Jilid 3” (Data 13), where *Islami.co* reframes the so-called “Bela Islam” protests by providing detailed ethical guidelines for participation. Instead of celebrating mass anger as an index of religiosity, the article emphasizes peaceful conduct, legal compliance, and respect for others' rights as Islamic obligations, thereby redirecting the affective energy of protest into a discourse of accountability and civic responsibility.

3.4. Discursive Positioning of *Islami.co*

The combined effect of these strategies is to position *Islami.co* as a digital Islamic counter-public vis-à-vis both conservative da'wah ecosystems and state-linked religious institutions. Several articles explicitly describe mainstream social media as a *belantara informasi* or “wild” and unregulated space where anyone can claim to be an *ustādz*, hierarchies of knowledge collapse, and hoaxes circulate freely (Data 5, 6, 10). Within this environment, *Islami.co*'s writers frame their interventions as efforts to protect the ummah from manipulation, to “educate” rather than merely mobilize, and to re-insert classical scholarship into everyday digital conversations (Data 1, 5, 6, 8). This self-positioning as guardian-educator distinguishes them from both partisan political actors and from preachers who trade in anger and fear. In terms of public-sphere theory, this corresponds closely to what Fraser (1990) and Warner (2002) call counter-publics, discursive arenas where subordinated or alternative groups formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.

Linguistically, *Islami.co* realizes this positioning through a distinctive register that combines egalitarian address (frequent use of “*kita*”, “*umat Islam Indonesia*”), explanatory meta-discourse (“*mari kita cek kembali*”, “*di sinilah letak persoalannya*”), and argumentative structures grounded in textual citation rather than slogan (Data 1–4, 6, 9). Authors often narrate their own process of checking tafsīr, verifying reports, or comparing translations, inviting readers to join that interpretive labour (Data 1, 4, 5). The tone is simultaneously conversational and authoritative: technical terms such as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*, or *double movement* are introduced in accessible language and immediately tied to concrete political controversies (Data 2, 3, 5). This contrasts sharply with the top-down, declarative style of many conservative digital outlets that present rulings as self-evident and dissenters as deviant. In Fairclough's terms, *Islami.co* practices a form of “conversationalization” and “synthetic personalization” of expert discourse, bringing scholarly registers into a vernacular style while still maintaining their epistemic authority (Fairclough, 2003, 2013).

Islami.co also positions itself in relation to formal religious authorities, especially the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). In several reflections on the Ahok case and the MUI fatwa on Al-Mā'idah 5:51 (Data 2, 5, 11), the site does not deny MUI's legitimacy as a national religious body but questions the prudence of issuing a fatwa that effectively aligns the institution with one camp in a highly polarized electoral context. The argument suggests that by entering short-term political battles over a single verse, MUI risks undermining its role as an umbrella institution for diverse Islamic currents and neglecting more structural issues such as poverty, inequality, and

environmental justice (Data 3, 8, 10, 11). Through this critique, *Islami.co* discursively claims a different form of authority: not juridical power to issue binding opinions, but reflexive authority to evaluate how religious institutions themselves participate in politicization. This echoes Eickelman and Piscatori's (1996) view of Muslim politics as an arena where competing actors struggle over the authoritative definition of Islam in public, and where religious institutions are themselves objects of critical contestation.

In navigating the complex terrain of digital Islamic authority, it is crucial to view the portal's positioning through the lens of mediatization theory, which posits that religious institutions and discourses increasingly adapt to the logic of media rather than simply being mediated by it (Hjarvard, 2008). In this light, *Islami.co*'s self-presentation as "guardian-educator" reflects not only a content strategy but also an institutional adaptation: by funnelling classical scholarship into digital formats, using vernacular address and interactive modalities, the portal aligns with what Hjarvard identifies as a shift in the authority of religion under mediatization. At the same time, the framework of "networked religion" (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), helps explain how *Islami.co* constructs a hybrid interpretive community, one that blends traditional scholar-led authority, academic credibility, and participatory digital culture. Thus, the portal's discursive positioning can be understood as an intersection of mediatized authority and networked religiosity, enabling it to mediate among established *ulama*, academic voices, and digitally savvy Muslim publics.

This educational and pastoral stance is also visible in practical texts such as "*Panduan Mengikuti Aksi Demo Bela Islam Jilid 3*" (Data 13), where *Islami.co* assumes the role of a moral guide for Islamic activism, and in "Wali Allah, Wali Setan, dan Wali Digital" (Data 12), which invites readers to critically reflect on who counts as a *wali* in online environments saturated with charismatic preachers and influencers.

In the wider ecology of digital Islamic authority in Indonesia, this positioning contributes to a pluralization of legitimate voices. *Islami.co* consistently legitimizes interpretive stances that are at once deeply rooted in classical scholarship and supportive of democratic, pluralist citizenship (Data 1–4, 8, 10). By articulating progressive readings from within the tradition, it offers Muslim audiences an alternative to the binary "conservative = faithful / progressive = Westernized" that often structures online polemics (Data 3, 4, 8). At the same time, by diagnosing *terjemahisme* and post-truth dynamics (Data 5, 9, 10), the site opens space for new norms of digital religious literacy, where followers are encouraged to distinguish text from translation, scripture from exegesis, and expertise from populist rhetoric. This resonates with broader work on digital religion which argues that online environments facilitate both the decentralization and re-networking of religious authority (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Cheong et al., 2012).

Overall, *Islami.co*'s discursive practices situate the portal as a mediating node between traditional 'ulamā' (through extensive use of classical tafsīr and fiqh), academic Qur'anic studies (through the voices of university-based scholars), and lay Muslim social media users (through accessible, dialogical style) (Data 1–6, 8–11). In doing so, it contributes to reshaping the landscape of digital Islamic authority in Indonesia: not by displacing conservative actors outright, but by offering linguistically sophisticated, theologically grounded, and morally compelling counter-readings that contest the monopolization of Qur'anic discourse by politicized, literalist voices. From a CDA perspective, *Islami.co* exemplifies how counter-hegemonic projects in digital religious fields operate: by recombining modalities of authority, reframing central texts,

and constructing publics that are invited to see themselves not simply as followers, but as participants in ongoing interpretive work (Fairclough, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that *Islami.co* constructs religious legitimacy in the digital public sphere through three tightly interconnected discursive mechanisms, *semantic reframing*, *intertextual authority*, and *moral evaluation*. By re-defining key terms such as *awliya'wali*, selectively mobilizing classical tafsir, fiqh, and contemporary Qur'anic scholarship, and consistently centering justice, *maṣlahah*, and coexistence, *Islami.co* contests conservative readings of Al-Mā'idah 5:51 without abandoning Qur'anic authority. These strategies underpin a series of counter-narratives that deconstruct the equation between voting for non-Muslim leaders and religious betrayal, problematize *terjemahisme* and post-truth uses of state-sponsored translations, and oppose "Islam marah" with an ethic of *Islam ramah* that combines ritual piety with social responsibility. At the same time, *Islami.co* positions itself as a guardian-educator and mediating node between 'ulamā', academic interpreters, and lay digital publics, thereby contributing to the pluralization of Islamic authority online.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates how a Faircloughian CDA combined with van Leeuwen's legitimation framework and counter-public theory can illuminate the micro-linguistic workings of digital religious discourse in a highly polarized context. The mapping of counter-narratives in a progressive Islamic portal like *Islami.co* highlights that struggles over Qur'anic meaning in contemporary Indonesia are not only theological or juridical, but deeply discursive: they hinge on how texts are framed, who is authorized to speak, and which moral horizons are foregrounded. While the analysis is limited to one platform and one cluster of controversies, it suggests broader implications for the study of digital religion and Islamic authority. Future research could extend this approach by comparing *Islami.co*'s discursive strategies with those of conservative outlets, examining audience reception in comment sections and social media, or tracing how similar patterns of semantic reframing and legitimation travel across other Muslim-majority and minority contexts.

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