

Conflict Management Solutions for Nahdlatul Ulama Members: Systematic Literature Review Based Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze relevant and effective conflict management solutions for members of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, founded in 1926. Internal conflict within religious organizations, including NU, is a complex phenomenon influenced by ideological differences, political interests, resource struggles, and leadership dynamics at various structural levels. Through a systematic literature review (SLR) of 40 relevant scholarly sources published between 2021 and 2026, this study identifies, classifies, and synthesizes the most appropriate conflict management strategies for the context of a mainstream Islamic religious organization such as NU. The study results indicate that the most effective conflict management approach for NU members is an integrative model that combines the principles of Islamic moderation (tawassuth, tawazun, i'tidal, and tasamuh) with contemporary conflict management theories such as interest-based negotiation, transformative mediation, and strategic leadership in crisis. NU values have been shown to serve as a normative foundation that strengthens internal cohesion and reduces conflict escalation. This study recommends the development of NU value-based conflict management training modules at all levels of the organization and the strengthening of the role of kyai and ulama figures as effective cultural mediators.

Keywords: conflict management; Nahdlatul Ulama; Islamic moderation; religious organizations; mediation; conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, and even one of the largest mass religious organizations in the world, with a membership of over 95 million people spread across the archipelago. Since its founding on January 31, 1926, by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari and other Islamic scholars in Surabaya, NU has played a strategic role in shaping Indonesia's moderate, tolerant, and nationalistic Islamic identity (Jubba et al., 2022).

As an organization with a complex hierarchical structure, extending from the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) at the national level to the village branch board, NU is inextricably linked to various internal conflicts, including structural, ideological, and personal ones. Conflict within a religious organization as large as NU can manifest in various forms: leadership competition between NU-affiliated political factions, differing interpretations of organizational policy direction, tensions between conservative and moderate groups in addressing contemporary



issues, and conflicts of interest in the management of NU-affiliated educational and economic institutions (Barton et al., 2021; Nasikhin & Raaharjo, 2022).

The contestation between conservative and moderate groups within Indonesian Islamic organizations, including Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), has become one of the most significant sources of conflict in recent decades. Jubba et al. (2022) documented that tensions between these two poles of thought not only occur at the level of intellectual discourse but also permeate the institutional realm and organizational decision-making. Meanwhile, Yani et al. (2022) demonstrated that the political orientation of the kyai, as NU's religious elite, has a significant influence on patterns of conflict and consensus within the organization, given the kyai's unique position as both spiritual authority and community leader.

The importance of effective conflict management within the NU organizational context is increasingly pressing as political competition intensifies ahead of the regional and general election cycles, the growth of alternative Islamic movements challenging NU's supremacy within its traditional base, and the pressures of globalization and digital transformation influencing how NU members interact, organize, and manage disagreements (Schmidt, 2021; Waston et al., 2024). In this context, conflict management is not merely a problem-solving tool but a vital institutional competency for NU's continued existence as a cohesive and progressive organization.

This research aims to fill an identified literature gap, namely the lack of studies that systematically integrate contemporary conflict management perspectives with the specific context of mainstream Islamic organizations such as NU. The objectives of this research are: (1) to identify the typology and main sources of conflict among NU members; (2) to analyze the most relevant conflict management models for the cultural and organizational context of NU; (3) to examine the role of Islamic values of moderation in supporting conflict resolution; and (4) to formulate practical recommendations for strengthening conflict management capacity at various levels of NU organizations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, adopting the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol, modified to suit the context of social and Islamic studies. The SLR method was chosen for its ability to synthesize findings from various studies in a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible manner, resulting in more reliable conclusions than conventional narrative reviews.

The research procedure consists of four systematic stages: (1) Formulation of research questions using the PICO framework (Population: NU members; Intervention: conflict management strategies; Comparison: various conflict resolution approaches; Outcome: effectiveness of internal conflict resolution); (2) Comprehensive literature search through Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and SINTA databases using the keywords 'Nahdlatul Ulama', 'Islamic conflict management', 'religious organizational conflict', 'Islamic moderation', 'organizational conflict Indonesia', and combinations thereof; (3) Application of inclusion criteria requiring articles published between 2021–2026, relevant to the

theme of conflict management or Islamic organizations, in Indonesian or English; and (4) Thematic-comparative data extraction and synthesis.

A total of 40 scientific sources met the inclusion criteria and became the analytical corpus of this study. Data were extracted based on five thematic categories: (a) typology of conflict in religious organizations; (b) theories and models of conflict management; (c) the role of Islamic moderation in conflict resolution; (d) strategic leadership and crisis management; and (e) the socio-political context of Islamic organizations in Indonesia. The validity of the findings was maintained through source triangulation, member checking between researchers, and cross-verification with relevant primary literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on a systematic analysis of 40 relevant literature sources, six key dimensions of conflict management were identified as most significant for Nahdlatul Ulama members. Table 1 summarizes the conflict typology and its management strategies within the NU organizational context.

Table 1. Conflict Typology and Conflict Management Strategies in NU Organizations

Conflict Typology	Primary Source	Management Strategy	Key References
Ideological Conflict	Differences in interpretation of the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah; conservative-moderate contestation	Theological dialogue; strengthening the value of tawassuth; mediation by senior scholars	Jubba et al. (2022); Nasikhin & Raaharjo (2022); Afwadzi & Miski (2021)
Political-Power Conflict	Competition for structural positions; different political affiliations; regional and general elections	Interest-based negotiation; leadership rotation; organizational code of ethics	Yani et al. (2022); Barton et al. (2021); Elwan et al. (2022)
Leadership Conflict	The struggle for kyai authority; leadership succession; crisis of traditional charisma	Transformational strategic leadership; systematic cadre development; consensus building	Schaedler et al. (2021); Dasopang et al. (2023); Ma'arif et al. (2022)
Resource Conflict	Organizational asset management; fund distribution; educational institution management	Financial transparency; accountability mechanisms; internal arbitration	Ichsan et al. (2023); Harahap et al. (2023); Burga & Damopolii (2022)
Intergenerational Conflict	The value gap between older and younger generations; digitalization of organizations	Digital integration; cross-generational mentoring; open dialogue forum	Kardi et al. (2023); Wasehudin et al. (2023); Hanafi et al. (2021)

Conflict Typology	Primary Source	Management Strategy	Key References
External Communal Conflict	Friction with other groups; Islamic radicalism issues; Islamophobia	Moderate Islamic communication; cross-organization coalition; public advocacy	Indainanto et al. (2023); Schmidt (2021); Waston et al. (2024)

Source: Synthesis of systematic literature review (2021–2026)

A. Islamic Moderation Approach as a Foundation for Conflict Management

The principles of Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) at the heart of NU's ideology, namely *tawassuth* (taking the middle path), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tasamuh* (tolerance), have been empirically proven to be the strongest normative foundation for conflict management among NU members. Nasikhin and Raaharjo (2022) in their comparative study of religious moderation in NU and Muhammadiyah show that the concept of Islam Nusantara developed by NU consistently prioritizes an inclusive approach in managing differences, both internally and externally.

Afwadzi and Miski (2021), through a comprehensive literature review on religious moderation in Indonesian Islamic universities, found that institutionalizing moderate values within organizational culture significantly reduced the intensity and frequency of destructive conflict. This approach aligns with the findings of Nasir and Rijal (2021), who documented how the "middle path" that characterizes Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) serves as an effective conflict de-escalation mechanism by allowing for dissent without sacrificing organizational unity.

Dasopang et al. (2023) examined the role of religious and cultural education in resolving radicalism conflicts in the Sibolga community and found that an approach that prioritizes the values of togetherness and tolerance, as emphasized by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), can substantially reduce the potential for communal conflict. This finding is supported by Indainanto et al. (2023), who demonstrated that Islamic communication within a framework of religious moderation is an effective strategy for preventing conflict based on differences in belief.

B. Strategic Leadership and Organizational Crisis Management

Schaedler et al. (2021), in a comprehensive study of strategic leadership in organizational crises, identified four key competencies required by organizational leaders in conflict situations: decision-making under pressure, effective crisis communication, building a coalition of support, and restoring trust post-crisis. In the NU context, these four competencies are highly relevant given the organization's scale and the complexity of its network of interests.

Yani et al. (2022) specifically examined the political orientation of *kyai*, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) religious elite, and found that those who successfully maintained their spiritual authority while managing diverse political interests were those who positioned themselves as mediators rather than partisans. This finding highlights the importance of an adaptive and inclusive *kyai* leadership

model in managing internal NU conflict, where the kyai figure plays a role not only as a religious authority but also as social capital that bridges divisions.

Barton et al. (2021) analyzed the dynamics between authoritarianism, democracy, and Indonesian Islamic movements and found that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), with its deep-rooted tradition of deliberation and consensus, has a comparative advantage in managing internal conflict compared to more hierarchical and centralized Islamic organizations. This tradition of shura (deliberation) is an invaluable conflict management asset for NU, as it provides procedural legitimacy to every decision it makes.

Figure 1. Integrative Model of Conflict Management Based on NU Values

NU's INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT		
<p style="text-align: center;">1. NORMATIVE FOUNDATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tawassuth (Moderation) • Tawazun (Balance) • I'tidal (Justice) • Tasamuh (Tolerance) 	<p style="text-align: center;">2. RESOLUTION PROCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict Identification • Dialogue & Deliberation • Mediation by Kyai/Ulama • Negotiation of Interests 	<p style="text-align: center;">③ EXPECTED RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Cohesion • Organizational Consensus • Trust between members • Organizational Resilience

Source: Adaptation of literature synthesis (2021–2026)

C. The Role of Islamic Boarding Schools and Islamic Education in Conflict Prevention

As a distinctive educational institution within the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) serve not only as institutions for transmitting religious knowledge but also as social laboratories for character development and indirect conflict management training. Burga and Damopolii (2022) documented that locally wisdom-based Islamic boarding schools under NU auspices consistently practice a model of religious moderation, which serves as a natural bulwark against radicalization and communal conflict.

Fatahillah et al. (2023) examined the synergy between Islamic boarding schools, local wisdom, and authentic Islamic values in shaping a cohesive Islamic identity and found that NU Islamic boarding schools that successfully integrated local traditions with universal Islamic teachings had significantly lower levels of internal conflict than those that neglected the cultural dimension. Wasehudin et al. (2023) added that the transformation of Islamic education through the Independent Curriculum in NU Islamic boarding schools opens up opportunities for the development of more systematic conflict management competencies among students and administrators.

Hanafi et al. (2021) documented the adaptation of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) to the COVID-19 pandemic and found that those with strong conflict management systems, particularly those led by kyai with transformational leadership competencies, were significantly more resilient in the face of the crisis. These findings confirm that the conflict management capacity built organically through the NU Islamic boarding school tradition is a valuable institutional asset.

Latif and Hafid (2021) examined multicultural attitudes in Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi and found that a pesantren environment

that emphasizes tolerance and respect for diversity produces students who are more competent in managing differences and conflicts. Kardi et al. (2023) added the dimension of the challenge of digitalizing pesantren and recommended the integration of digital platforms as a conflict resolution medium that can reach geographically dispersed NU members. Ma'ruf nahi munkar (enforcing good and preventing evil) in the NU tradition goes beyond the mere dimension of religious rituals, it is a doctrine that encourages active involvement in social improvement and, in the context of higher education, manifests as a social orientation in learning. Nurpratiwi (2021) in her study on the character development of Indonesian students through moral education emphasized that students who have a strong social orientation, as shaped by the values of amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, tend to have higher learning motivation because they interpret education as a tool for social change.

D. Strategic Communication and Deradicalization as Instruments of Conflict Management

Ihsan and Fatah (2021) analyzed the Pancasila deradicalization model and Islamic education in Islamic boarding schools in Central Java and found that a communicative approach integrating national values with the moderate Islamic teachings of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was the most effective instrument in preventing the escalation of radicalism-based conflicts. This approach is relevant in the NU context because the organization has two complementary identities: as an Islamic religious organization and as an organization committed to Indonesian national values.

Schmidt (2021) analyzed the aesthetics of authority in Nusantara Islam and Islamic radicalism in Indonesian films and social media, finding that narratives disseminated through digital platforms significantly impacted conflict dynamics within the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community, particularly the younger generation. Waston et al. (2024) extended this analysis by examining the phenomena of Islamophobia and communism as persistent prejudices that threaten the social harmony of the NU community, necessitating a proactive and well-planned communication strategy.

Indainanto et al. (2023) offer a highly relevant perspective on Islamic communication, promoting religious moderation as an effort to prevent conflict based on differences in belief. They found that a communication approach based on Islamic values of rahmatan lil 'alamin, as pioneered by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), is consistently more effective in de-escalating inter-religious and intra-religious conflict than a confrontational approach.

Table 2. Conflict Management Strategies and Their Effectiveness in the Context of the NU Organization

Conflict Management Strategies		Implementation Level	Level of Effectiveness		Source of Evidence
Islamic Mediation	Value-Based	Branch – Branch – Region	Very	High	Nasikhin & Raaharjo (2022); Dasopang et al. (2023)

Conflict Management Strategies		Implementation Level	Level of Effectiveness	Source of Evidence
Interest-Based Negotiation		Branch Manager – Region	High (★★★★)	Schaedler et al. (2021); Yani et al. (2022)
Cross-Faction Theological Dialogue		PBNU – Region	High (★★★★)	Jubba et al. (2022); Afwadzi & Miski (2021)
Customary Consensus		All Levels	High (★★★★)	Harahap & Hamka (2023); Barton et al. (2021)
Kyai's Transformational Leadership		Branches	Very High (★★★★★)	Ma'arif et al. (2022); Burga & Damopolii (2022)
Moderate Communication	Digital	All Levels (Online)	Medium-High (★★★)	Kardi et al. (2023); Schmidt (2021)
Conflict Training	Management	Cadres & Administrators	High (★★★★)	Schaedler et al. (2021); Moslimany et al. (2024)

Source: Synthesis of systematic literature review (2021–2026)

E. The Role of Multicultural Education and Local Wisdom

Harahap and Hamka (2023) examined the role of philosophy, culture, language, and Islam in the local wisdom of Dalihan Na Tolu, a community in Angkola, North Sumatra, and found its relevance to the local wisdom-based conflict management approach practiced in various Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) communities across the archipelago. Their findings suggest that an organization as large as NU needs to accommodate the diversity of local wisdoms in designing a conflict management system that is contextual and responsive to cultural differences across regions.

Moslimany et al. (2024) in their study of the challenges and opportunities of a holistic Islamic education curriculum recommends integrating conflict management competencies into the NU cadre education curriculum. This holistic approach encompasses cognitive (understanding conflict theory), affective (empathy and emotional intelligence), and psychomotor (negotiation and mediation skills) dimensions. Masturin (2023) reinforces this recommendation by demonstrating the effectiveness of developing moderation-based Islamic religious education materials in shaping members' conflict-resilient character.

Koehrsen (2021) offers a unique perspective on the relationship between Muslims and climate change and how Islam, Muslim organizations, and religious leaders influence perceptions and responses to controversial issues. While the focus is different, Koehrsen's findings are relevant to NU's conflict management because they demonstrate the capacity of religious leadership to change members' perceptions and behaviors on potentially conflict-inducing issues.

F. Conflict Management in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Challenges

The digital transformation that has engulfed all aspects of social life, including organizational life, has introduced a new dimension to the NU conflict management landscape. Social media platforms and instant messaging applications, on the one hand, accelerate the dissemination of information and enable more efficient coordination among millions of dispersed NU members, but on the other hand, they have also become vectors for the spread of hoaxes, provocation, and the rapid escalation of conflict (Schmidt, 2021).

Kardi et al. (2023) documented the challenges faced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in the digital era and recommended the development of digital literacy as a mandatory competency for NU administrators at all levels. Digital literacy in the context of conflict management includes the ability to identify provocative content, verify information before disseminating it, and use digital platforms as a means of de-escalation rather than escalation.

Ichsan et al. (2023) examined the development of Islamic human resource (HR) management in the digital era for MSMEs and cooperatives in Indonesia, and their findings are relevant for strengthening the HR capacity of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organizations. They emphasized the importance of developing digital competencies that remain rooted in Islamic values, including honesty, justice, and accountability, which are the foundation for dignified conflict management.

Table 3. Summary of Practical Recommendations for Conflict Management for NU Organizations

Aspect	Top Recommendations	Implementation Levels	Reference Source
Institutional	Establishment of Conflict Resolution Committees at every level of the NU organization with trained members	PBNU, Region, Branch	Schaedler et al. (2021); Dennis et al. (2023)
Cadre Development Curriculum	Integration of NU value-based conflict management modules in cadre and administrator training	All Levels	Moslimany et al. (2024); Masturin (2023)
Kyai Leadership	Strengthening the role of kyai as methodologically trained cultural mediators	Islamic Boarding Schools & Branches	Yani et al. (2022); Ma'arif et al. (2022)
Digital Technology	Development of NU's internal digital platform for conflict management, reporting, and online mediation	All Levels	Kardi et al. (2023); Ichsan et al. (2023)

Aspect	Top Recommendations	Implementation Levels	Reference Source
Content Moderation	Formation of NU's digital content moderation team to prevent the spread of hoaxes and provocation	PBNU – Region	Indainanto et al. (2023); Schmidt (2021)
Research & Evaluation	Establishment of conflict management study centers at NU universities for data-based research	NU College	Afwadzi & Miski (2021); Nasir & Rijal (2021)

Source: Synthesis of systematic literature review (2021–2026)

CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified and synthesized the most relevant and effective conflict management solutions for Nahdlatul Ulama members through a systematic literature review of 40 scholarly sources. The study's key findings confirm that effective conflict management in the NU organizational context is not simply a technical administrative issue, but rather a complex process with complex theological, cultural, and socio-political dimensions.

The integrative model of NU value-based conflict management resulting from this synthesis demonstrates that the four principles of Islamic moderation—continenence, tolerance, tolerance, and tolerance—function synergistically as a normative foundation that strengthens all implemented conflict management strategies. Transformative kyai leadership, the tradition of deliberation and consensus, community-based mediation, and moderate Islamic communication are the four operational pillars most proven effective in preventing escalation and facilitating conflict resolution within NU.

From a managerial perspective, this study recommends: (1) Institutionalization of conflict management mechanisms through the establishment of conflict resolution committees at all structural levels of NU; (2) Integration of NU value-based conflict management modules into all cadre development and management training programs; (3) Strengthening the capacity of kyai as cultural mediators through structured training programs; (4) Development of digital technology platforms that support online mediation and conflict resolution processes; and (5) Establishment of conflict management research centers at universities under the auspices of NU.

The limitations of this study lie in the nature of a literature review, which cannot replace empirical field data on the actual effectiveness of the identified strategies. Further research using mixed methods with primary data collection at various levels of the NU organization is highly recommended to produce more precise and evidence-based policy recommendations.

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