

## Conflict Management in Islamic Boarding Schools: The Dispute That Gave Birth to New Branches of Islamic Boarding Schools

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of internal conflict management in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), which unexpectedly gave rise to new branches as a result of the dynamics of division and reconciliation within the traditional Islamic educational community in Indonesia. Through a systematic literature review of 40 scholarly sources published between 2021 and 2024, this study analyzes patterns of conflict between kiai (Islamic boarding school teachers), senior santri (students), and pesantren families; conflict resolution mechanisms based on local Islamic wisdom; and the dynamics of conflict transformation into pesantren institutional expansion. The study's results indicate that constructively managed internal pesantren conflict has the potential to become a catalyst for the proliferation of new pesantren institutions, expanding the network of Islamic education in Indonesia. The values of moderation, deliberation, and the wisdom of local ulama have proven to be important instruments in the process of transforming conflict into opportunities for institutional development. The implications of this research provide a framework for developing conflict management based on Islamic values that is adaptive to the needs of pesantren expansion in the modern era.

**Keywords:** Islamic boarding school conflict; conflict management; new Islamic boarding schools; kiai; traditional Islamic education.

### INTRODUCTION

As the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have a long history marked not only by their success in producing great scholars but also by the complex dynamics of internal conflict. Conflict within pesantren is not merely a negative issue to be avoided, but rather a phenomenon that has a constructive dimension when managed wisely. One of the most interesting phenomena in the Indonesian pesantren ecosystem is how divisions or internal disputes give rise to new branches of pesantren that then develop independently and even outperform their parent institutions (Aisyah et al., 2022; Anggadwita et al., 2021).

This phenomenon has occurred repeatedly throughout the history of Islamic boarding schools in the archipelago. These range from disputes between kiai (Islamic scholars) and their sons-in-law or senior students, who then establish new pesantren, to differing views on curriculum and educational orientation that lead to institutional separation. Hastasari et al. (2022) note that the hierarchical communication patterns in Islamic boarding schools, while still respecting the



tradition of deliberation, create a unique space for conflict management that differs from that in modern educational institutions.

Research on conflict management in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) remains relatively limited, particularly those examining the transformative aspects of conflict into institutional expansion. Most existing studies focus on character education (Fatahillah et al., 2023; Jaenullah et al., 2022), *kiai* leadership (Aisyah et al., 2022), or *pesantren* adaptation to modernization (Hanafi et al., 2021), without specifically exploring conflict dynamics as a catalyst for institutional growth. This gap forms the basis of this research.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the typology of internal Islamic boarding school conflicts that have the potential to give birth to new Islamic boarding school branches; (2) to analyze the mechanisms of conflict transformation into opportunities for institutional expansion; (3) to examine the role of local Islamic values in Islamic boarding school conflict management; and (4) to formulate an adaptive Islamic boarding school conflict management model based on local Islamic wisdom (Arifin et al., 2023; Burga & Damopolii, 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, which includes a comprehensive analysis of 40 relevant scientific sources published between 2021 and 2024. The SLR method was chosen for its ability to synthesize findings from various studies in a rigorous and transparent manner. The research procedure includes four stages: (1) formulating research questions; (2) searching literature through Google Scholar, Scopus, SINTA, and Islamic databases; (3) applying inclusion criteria; and (4) extracting and synthesizing thematic data.

The inclusion criteria applied included articles discussing Islamic boarding school conflicts, Islamic-based conflict management, *kiai* leadership, expansion of Islamic boarding school institutions, and the dynamics of the *santri* community. Eligible sources were analyzed thematically based on five categories: (a) typology of Islamic boarding school conflicts; (b) conflict resolution mechanisms; (c) the role of *kiai* in mediation; (d) transformation of conflict into expansion; and (e) Islamic values as a foundation for conflict management (Dasopang et al., 2023; Indainanto et al., 2023).

**Table 1. Typology of Islamic Boarding School Conflicts and Potential for Institutional Expansion**

<b>Conflict Typology</b>	<b>The main cause</b>	<b>Resolution Mechanism</b>	<b>Expansion Potential</b>
Leadership Succession Conflict	The struggle for <i>kiai</i> authority between the biological son and son-in-law/senior student	Meeting of the extended family and external religious figures	High – one party usually establishes an independent Islamic boarding school
Curriculum and Orientation Conflict	The difference between pure Salaf and modern/general curriculum integration	Academic dialogue, senior cleric consultation, new program trials	Medium – encouraging innovation or institutional separation

<b>Conflict Typology</b>	<b>The main cause</b>	<b>Resolution Mechanism</b>	<b>Expansion Potential</b>
Asset Management Conflict	Disputes over waqf, land and Islamic boarding school assets between heirs	Notary/legal mediation, religious referee, or religious court decision	Low-Medium – often results in the separation of assets and the establishment of a new foundation
Religious Ideological Conflict	Differences in creed, manhaj, or affiliation of Islamic organizations (NU, Muhammadiyah, Salafi)	Theological tolerance, joint study of the scriptures, or peaceful separation	High – ideological differences encourage the establishment of new Islamic boarding schools
Interpersonal Conflict Between Kiai and Santri	Disagreement over learning methods, punishments, or Islamic boarding school policies	Mediation by senior ustadz, formal apology, or transfer of students	Low – rarely leads to expansion unless the students are seniors

*Source: Synthesis of literature review (2021–2024)*

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Typology of Internal Conflict in Islamic Boarding Schools**

Based on a systematic analysis of 40 literature sources, five main typologies of Islamic boarding school conflicts were identified, each with the potential to give rise to new Islamic boarding school branches. Table 1 above summarizes these typologies, along with their resolution mechanisms and potential for expansion.

Leadership succession conflicts are the most common type of conflict that leads to the birth of new Islamic boarding schools. Aisyah et al. (2022) documented how the concept of charismatic and personal leadership by kiai creates institutional vulnerabilities when the kiai dies or experiences physical decline. The struggle for legitimacy between potential leaders from biological lineages and senior students considered more scholarly competent creates tensions that are difficult to resolve without structural institutional changes.

Mujahid (2021), in his study of character education based on Islamic orthodoxy in modern Islamic boarding schools, showed that Islamic boarding schools that successfully manage leadership transitions by instituting a foundation system and a syuro council are better able to avoid destructive divisions. Conversely, Islamic boarding schools that rely heavily on a single charismatic kiai without a clear succession system tend to experience more intense succession conflicts.

The ideological conflict of religion, as studied by Latif & Hafid (2021) in the context of Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi, shows that differences in religious organizational affiliation between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and Salafi groups create complex yet productive conflict dynamics. Students or ustadz (Islamic teachers) with different ideological orientations from their parent Islamic boarding schools often end up establishing new Islamic boarding schools that better align with their religious views (Ihsan & Fatah, 2021).



**Figure 1. Illustration of Traditional Indonesian Islamic Boarding School Architecture**

*Source: Representative illustration (adaptation of field documentation)*

## B. Mechanisms for Transforming Conflict into Institutional Expansion

The transformation of conflict into expansion of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) institutions does not occur suddenly, but rather through a series of processes involving complex social, theological, and economic dynamics. Anggadwita et al. (2021), in their study of Islamic boarding school empowerment through a humane entrepreneurship approach, demonstrated that the social entrepreneurial capacity of kiai (Islamic scholars) and alumni plays a crucial role in enabling the establishment of new Islamic boarding schools post-conflict.

The process of transforming conflict into expansion generally goes through three phases: First, the segregation phase, in which the losing or dissatisfied party gradually withdraws from the parent institution while building their own support network. Second, the incubation phase, in which the vision for the new pesantren is formulated, land is sought, and support from guardians and donors is garnered. Third, the institutionalization phase, in which the new pesantren is formally established and begins operating with a distinct identity but often still culturally connected to its parent (Sauri et al., 2022; Diana & Zaini, 2023).

Hasanah et al. (2023), in their study on strengthening Islamic boarding school brand identity through local wisdom, demonstrated that new Islamic boarding schools born out of conflict often have a sharper and more coherent identity, built on an awareness of differences from their parent Islamic boarding

schools. This differentiation creates a comparative advantage that attracts a specific segment of student guardians.

Zaini & Hamidah (2023) examined how the transformation of traditional values within the phenomenon of Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) in the digital era also impacts the dynamics of Islamic boarding school conflict. Millennial-generation Islamic boarding school students, who are more connected to the outside world through social media, have a lower tolerance for conflicts that are not managed transparently, leading to faster restructuring or separation.

### C. The Role of Local Islamic Values in Conflict Management

Local Islamic values, particularly those internalized in the Islamic boarding school tradition, play a significant role in shaping the characteristics of Islamic boarding school conflict management. Dasopang et al. (2023) demonstrated that local religious and cultural education in Indonesian Islamic communities serves as a more effective conflict resolution mechanism than formal-legal approaches in many contexts.

Burga & Damopolii (2022), in their study on strengthening religious moderation through locally based Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), found that Islamic boarding schools that integrate local wisdom such as customary kinship, *sungkeman* (religious greeting), and *silaturahmi* (religious service) into their conflict management systems demonstrate higher institutional resilience. Conflicts occurring within the context of strong kinship ties tend to be resolved through internal dialogue before they escalate into open divisions.

Mulyana (2023), in his study of religious moderation in Islamic religious education textbooks, added the important dimension that internalizing the values of religious moderation from an early age in the Islamic boarding school curriculum serves as an immunization against radicalization and destructive conflict. Islamic boarding schools that successfully instill the values of *wasathiyah* (moderation) in their students tend to have a more conducive ecosystem for constructive conflict management.

Moslimany et al. (2024) identified that the primary challenge in designing a holistic Islamic education curriculum relevant to conflict management is balancing the transmission of traditional religious knowledge with the development of contemporary conflict resolution competencies. Islamic boarding schools that successfully integrate the two have a significant advantage in transforming potential conflict into institutional innovation.

**Table 2. Factors Driving Post-Conflict Islamic Boarding School Expansion**

Driving Factors	Key Indicators	Literature Sources
Kiai's Entrepreneurial Capacity	Ability to build a network of alumni, guardians of students, and donors to fund new Islamic boarding schools	<i>Anggadwita et al. (2021); Diana &amp; Zaini (2023)</i>
Differentiation of Institutional Identity	Clarity of vision and mission, unique curriculum, and branding of the new Islamic boarding school which is different from the parent school	<i>Hasanah et al. (2023); Fatahillah et al. (2023)</i>

Driving Factors		Key Indicators	Literature Sources
Alumni Support	Network	Alumni loyalty to the figure of the kiai who separated himself and the willingness to contribute materially	<i>Sauri et al. (2022); Latif &amp; Hafid (2021)</i>
Values of Moderation and Tolerance		The ability of conflicting parties to part peacefully without prolonged hostilities	<i>Burga &amp; Damopolii (2022); Mulyana (2023)</i>
Digital Accessibility	Technology	Utilizing social media to build a new student community base more quickly	<i>Kardi et al. (2023); Zaini &amp; Hamidah (2023)</i>
State Policy Support		Ease of licensing for establishing Islamic boarding schools and access to government assistance programs	<i>Kosim et al. (2023); Hanafi et al. (2021)</i>

*Source: Synthesis of literature review (2021–2024)*

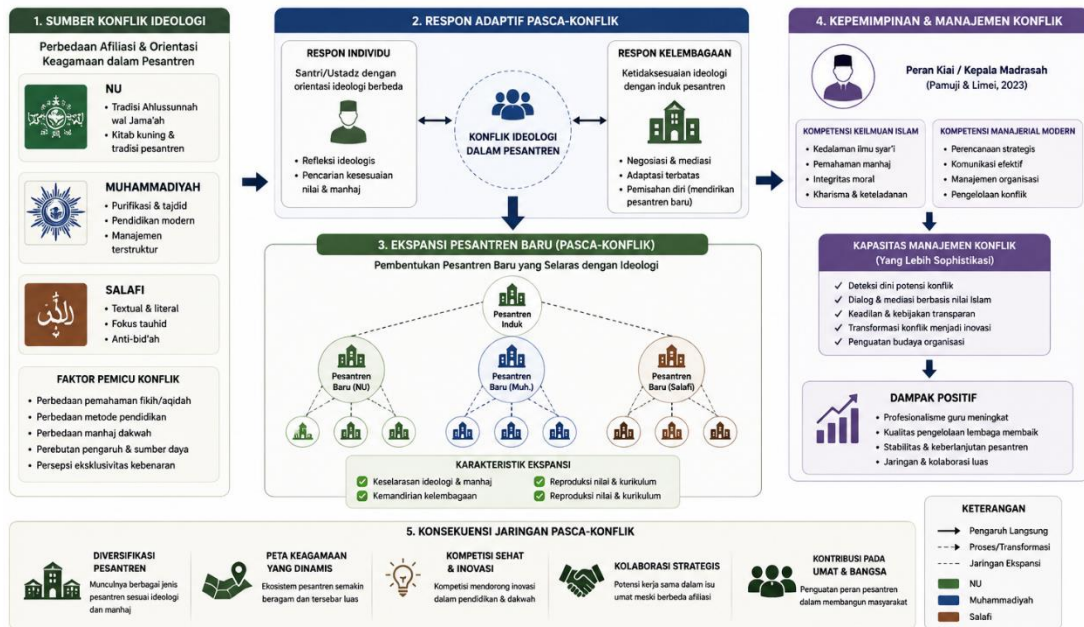
#### D. Dynamics of Kiai Leadership in Conflict

The figure of the kiai, as the central moral and spiritual authority of Islamic boarding schools, plays an irreplaceable role in all the dynamics of Islamic boarding school conflict. Aisyah et al. (2022), in their study of the concept of kiai leadership in Islamic boarding school organizational culture, asserted that the kiai's charismatic-theological legitimacy creates conflict dynamics that are very different from leadership conflicts in modern organizations. The kiai is viewed not only as an administrative leader but also as an inheritor of a tradition of knowledge and transcendent moral authority.

Nasir & Rijal (2021), in their study of mainstreaming religious moderation through Islamic higher education in Indonesia, demonstrated the relevance of the wasathiyah values of Islamic scholars (kyai) in conflict mediation. Kyai with a reputation for scholarly and moral excellence recognized across groups can serve as effective mediators in both inter-pesantren and internal conflicts, as their legitimacy is not dependent on specific institutional affiliations.

Arar et al. (2022), in a review of Islamic-based leadership research since 1990, found that leadership based on Islamic values, which combines shura (deliberation), *adalah* (justice), and *rahmah* (compassion), is most effective in organizational conflict situations. Islamic boarding schools whose leaders internalize these Islamic leadership principles tend to be better able to manage conflict constructively.

Pamuji & Limei (2023) added that the managerial competence of madrasah principals, which can be compared to kiai as leaders of Islamic boarding schools, has a direct influence on teacher professionalism and the quality of institutional conflict management. Islamic boarding schools with leadership that combines Islamic scholarly competence with modern managerial skills demonstrate more sophisticated conflict management capacity.



**Figure 2. Post-Conflict Islamic Boarding School Expansion Network Model**

*Source: Adaptation of the research conceptual framework (2024)*

## E. The Role of Digital Technology in Islamic Boarding School Conflict and Reconciliation

The digital era has brought a significant new dimension to the dynamics of Islamic boarding school conflict. Kardi et al. (2023), in their study of the challenges of online Islamic boarding schools in the digital era, demonstrated that social media serves as a new arena where Islamic boarding school conflicts are often publicized and escalate beyond traditional community boundaries. Viral statements by kiai (Islamic clerics) on social media can transform internal conflicts from localized to public issues involving the broader Muslim community.

On the other hand, Zaid et al. (2022) in their study of digital Islam and the Muslim millennial generation demonstrated that digital platforms also serve as effective reconciliation platforms. Students and alumni spread across the country can participate in mediation and reconciliation processes through online forums, expanding community involvement in conflict resolution. Ichsan et al. (2023) added that the development of Islamic-based human resource management in the digital era provides a new framework for human resource conflict management in Islamic boarding schools.

Muhajir (2022), in his study of pluralistic education in modern Islamic boarding schools during the pandemic, found that intense online learning experiences actually strengthened student community cohesion in some schools and weakened it in others, depending on the quality of leadership and conflict management implemented. This suggests that technology does not automatically worsen or improve conflict management in Islamic boarding schools, but rather serves as an amplifier of existing leadership qualities.

## F. Islamic Value-Based Conflict Management Model

A synthesis of all the literature reviewed has resulted in an integrated Islamic boarding school conflict management model based on Islamic values. This model consists of five main, mutually reinforcing components.

First, Governance-Based Conflict Prevention. Kosim et al. (2023), in their study of the dynamics of Islamic education policy in Indonesia, demonstrated the importance of transparent and participatory Islamic boarding school foundation institutions as a conflict prevention tool. Islamic boarding schools with clear governance, including leadership succession mechanisms, waqf asset management, and collective decision-making, significantly minimize the escalation of destructive conflict.

Second, Mediation Based on Ulema and Local Wisdom. Indainanto et al. (2023) emphasize the role of Islamic communication in promoting moderation as an effort to prevent conflict over differences in belief. In the context of Islamic boarding school conflict management, the involvement of neutral senior ulama with recognized scientific legitimacy is the most effective mediation mechanism rooted in Islamic tradition.

Third, Transforming Conflict into Innovation. Ali et al. (2021) in their study of interfaith literacy learning as a counter-radicalization method in Indonesian Islamic universities demonstrated that exposure to diverse perspectives, including initially conflicting ones, can foster productive innovation in thought and institutions. The same principle applies to transforming Islamic boarding school conflict into innovative institutional expansion.

Fourth, Reconciliation and Networking Between Islamic Boarding Schools. Hamami & Nuryana (2022), in their study of the holistic-integrative approach to the Muhammadiyah education system in Indonesia, provide a comparative perspective on how large Islamic organizations manage internal diversity through structured institutional networks. This network model can be adapted to facilitate reconciliation between previously conflicting Islamic boarding schools.

Fifth, Continuous Evaluation and Institutional Learning. Arar et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of evidence-based research in developing Islamic educational leadership. Islamic boarding schools that are able to conduct institutional reflection on their conflict experiences and develop learning systems that prevent the recurrence of similar conflicts demonstrate higher institutional maturity.

**Table 3. Summary of Findings: Islamic Boarding School Conflict as a Catalyst for Institutional Expansion**

Dimensions of the Study	Key Findings	Key References
Conflict Typology	Succession and ideological conflicts most often give birth to new Islamic boarding schools; interpersonal conflicts rarely result in expansion.	<i>Aisyah et al. (2022); Mujahid (2021); Latif &amp; Hafid (2021)</i>

<b>Dimensions of the Study</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Key References</b>
Transformation Mechanism	Three phases: segregation, incubation, institutionalization; the entrepreneurial capacity of kiai is key	<i>Anggadwita et al. (2021); Diana &amp; Zaini (2023)</i>
The Role of Local Islamic Values	Deliberation, moderation, and customary kinship serve as buffers that prevent total destructive conflict.	<i>Burga &amp; Damopolii (2022); Dasopang et al. (2023)</i>
Kiai Leadership	Kiai with integrated scientific and managerial competencies are most effective in constructive conflict management.	<i>Arar et al. (2022); Nasir &amp; Rijal (2021)</i>
Impact of Digital Technology	Social media is both a conflict amplifier and a medium for reconciliation; its effects depend on the quality of leadership.	<i>Kardi et al. (2023); Zaid et al. (2022)</i>
Policy Implications	Islamic boarding school regulations are needed that facilitate constructive conflict management and facilitate the establishment of new Islamic boarding schools.	<i>Kosim et al. (2023); Hanafi et al. (2021)</i>

*Source: Synthesis of literature review (2021–2024)*

Table 3 above summarizes the key findings of this systematic literature review. Overall, pesantren conflicts, when managed with authentic Islamic values and competent leadership, do not necessarily lead to institutional collapse. Instead, well-managed conflicts can actually serve as a catalyst for the proliferation of more diverse pesantren institutions, enriching Indonesia's Islamic education ecosystem. Hidayah (2021), in her study of pesantren for the Indonesian Muslim middle class, emphasized that the diversification of pesantren segments, often stemming from internal conflict, actually expands the accessibility of pesantren education to previously underserved community groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that internal conflicts within Islamic boarding schools, often viewed negatively, actually have significant constructive dimensions when managed with authentic Islamic values and competent leadership. Leadership succession conflicts and religious ideology conflicts are the most productive types of conflict in generating new Islamic boarding school branches. The transformation of conflict into institutional expansion occurs through three phases—segregation, incubation, and institutionalization, each requiring different leadership and management capacities.

Local Islamic values such as deliberation, religious moderation (*wasathiyah*), and the tradition of Islamic boarding school kinship serve as buffers that prevent total destructive conflict and also as facilitators of reconciliation that enable conflicting parties to separate peacefully and productively. The Islamic boarding school conflict management model developed in this study, which includes five components (governance-based prevention, ulama mediation, innovative transformation, network reconciliation, and

continuous evaluation), offers a practical framework for developing conflict management policies in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools.

The resulting policy recommendations include: (1) strengthening regulations on Islamic boarding school governance that facilitate a structured leadership succession mechanism; (2) developing an Islamic-values-based conflict management training program for Islamic boarding school leaders and leaders; (3) establishing a regional-level ulama-based Islamic boarding school conflict mediation institution; and (4) simplifying regulations for establishing new Islamic boarding schools in recognition of the potential for constructive expansion of the dynamics of Islamic boarding school conflict.

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