

Shariatization in Indonesia: A Comparative Analysis of Firanda Andirja's and Buya Yahya's Interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44

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ABSTRACT

*The idea to formalize Sharia law in Indonesia, a country characterized by its pluralism, remains the subject of ongoing debate. This discussion is fueled by diverse interpretations of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44. This article aims to analyze Firanda Andirja's interpretation as a Salafist preacher to confirm his textuality and compare it with Buya Yahya's interpretation as a non-Salafi preacher who has ties to the initiator of NKRI Bersyariah. Employing a qualitative approach alongside Norman Fairclough's discourse analysis theory, this study conducts a thorough examination of two YouTube videos that feature their interpretations. The findings indicate that their perspectives exhibit notable similarities in three main areas: both refrain from advocating for a movement to formalize Sharia, present negative portrayals of certain groups, and avoid declaring others as *kāfir* altogether. However, there are significant differences in how each party categorizes individuals who do not implement Sharia, as well as variations in their orientation to discourse production. Furthermore, this paper contends that Firanda's interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 cannot be seen as purely textual, as it involves a reconsideration of the meaning of *kāfir*. Therefore, Abdullah Saeed's categorization of Salafists as textualists and Quintan Wiktorowicz's claim that Salafists avoid using rationality need to be reappraised, since these two matters may be applicable and relevant at the macro level rather than the micro level.*

ABSTRAK

Ide formalisasi syariah di Indonesia, yang notabene merupakan sebuah negara pluralistik, terus diperdebatkan hingga hari ini. Hal ini berangkat dari beragam penafsiran terhadap QS. Al-Mā'idah 44. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menelaah penafsiran Firanda Andirja sebagai pendakwah salafi terhadap ayat tersebut untuk mengkonfirmasi tekstualitasnya dan membandingkannya dengan penafsiran Buya Yahya, sebagai pendakwah non-Salafi yang berhubungan dengan inisiator NKRI Bersyariah. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan teori analisis wacana Norman Fairclough, studi ini mengkaji secara mendalam dua video YouTube yang menampilkan penafsiran mereka. Temuan artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar penafsiran keduanya mirip, terlihat dari persetujuan mereka dalam tiga aspek: tidak adanya ajakan untuk membuat suatu gerakan untuk memformalkan syariah, sama-sama menghadirkan framing negatif terhadap pihak-pihak tertentu, dan sama-sama menghindari mengkafirkan orang lain secara total. Sementara itu, perbedaannya terletak pada bagaimana kedua pihak mengklasifikasi orang-orang yang tidak menerapkan syariah serta perbedaan orientasi keduanya dalam produksi wacana. Paper ini juga berargumen bahwa penafsiran Firanda terhadap QS. Al-Mā'idah 44 tidak murni tekstual karena adanya pertimbangan ulang makna *kāfir*. Oleh karena itu, kategorisasi Abdullah Saeed terhadap Salafi sebagai tekstualis dan klaim Quintan Wiktorowicz bahwa Salafi menghindari penggunaan rasionalitas perlu dinilai ulang.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Recently, in February 2025, a Defending Palestine Rally Action was organized in 22 regions across Indonesia. However, many people perceived this as a covert demonstration of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, indicated by the existence of HTI's special attributes. According to Muhammad Syauqillah, HTI frequently hijacks and instrumentalizes that communal issue, making it a venue to demonstrate and disseminate the ideology of *khilāfa*. In addition, issues related to the government, such as illegal sea fence (*pagar laut*), were also exploited. Via such issues, HTI launches its critique against the government and propagates the replacement of Pancasila as the state ideology and the transformation of the state form into an Islamic state.¹ If examined further, HTI's movement to formalize Sharia or Islamize the state is underlain by the ideological drive. It cites several postulates from the Quran or Hadith as the justification for the action. By referring to Surah Al-Mā'idah 44, for instance, HTI perceives that enforcing Sharia principles is mandatory and regards Allah's laws as the most valid legal system; thereby, using other laws is a big mistake. This verse also became a legitimation to assess every party that does not judge based on what Allah has revealed as an infidel (*kāfir*).²

In Islamic scholarship, such understanding is also echoed by other revivalist ulema, such as Sayyid Quṭb. Through his interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44, Quṭb invites Muslims to reactivate the divine legal system, delivering full authority to God by replacing human law with Sharia law to achieve an ideal world.³ He also states that there is no other word for those who do not have a desire to implement God's laws except *kāfir*, and it is intended generally for all umma.⁴ In this regard, Quṭb's interpretation cannot be regarded as only empty words since it has influenced and motivated those who want to impose Islamic ideology. John Esposito and Yvonne Haddad mentioned that Quṭb is a "godfather" to Muslim extremist movements and an inspiration for revivalists around the Muslim world, ranging from the rebels of Anwar Sadat, the followers of Osama bin Laden, and the members of Al Qaeda.⁵ Robert Manne even said that the intellectual root of Salafi Jihadist movements can be traced back to Quṭb's works.⁶

However, it is worth underscoring that other interpretations are also quite loose and contextual. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, presents some possible interpretations and asserts that the verse is specifically intended for *kuffār ahl al-kitāb*, not Muslims.⁷ Besides that, there is Al-Rāzī, who also exhibits many versions of interpretations and chooses what Ikrimah said. According to Ikrimah, the status of *kāfir* is only intended for those who verbally deny God's law and do not acknowledge it in their heart. Meanwhile, people who merely do not apply

¹ Annisa Febiola, "Gerak Terselubung HTI Masih Eksis, Walau Dilarang Sejak 2017," *Tempo*, February 6, 2025, <https://www.tempo.co/hukum/gerak-terselubung-hti-masih-eksis-walau-dilarang-sejak-2017-1203443>.

² Syaiful Arif, "Pandangan dan Perjuangan Ideologis Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) dalam Sistem Kenegaraan di Indonesia," *Aspirasi: Jurnal Masalah-masalah Sosial* 7, no. 1 (June 2016): 95, <https://doi.org/10.46807/aspirasi.v7i1.1282>.

³ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Syurūq, 2003), 2:895–96.

⁴ Quṭb, 2:898.

⁵ John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56; Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 67.

⁶ Robert Manne, "Sayyid Qutb: Father of Salafi Jihadism, Forerunner of the Islamic State," *ABC Religion & Ethics*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/sayyid-qutb-father-of-salafi-jihadism-forerunner-of-the-islamic-/10096380>.

⁷ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risāla, 1994), 3:102.

Sharia law but still believe it cannot be considered as *kāfir*.⁸ Al-Rāzī even categorizes the “extreme” interpretation model, as carried out by Sayyid Qutub, as a Kharijite interpretation, and it contradicts the majority.⁹

Notably, this contrast has been embedded in the contemporary Indonesian context, where several preachers prefer a strict interpretation, while others adopt a more accommodative one. The diverse interpretations of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 have turned it into an arena of contestation and debate on some political issues—such as the legitimacy of the ruler who does not implement Allah's laws and the status of the people—even among textualist preachers. It can be seen in the case of Nahdlatul Ulama, HTI, Ja'far Umar Thalib, and Badrussalam—the latter two are prominent Salafi preachers in Indonesia. NU, in this case, tends to avoid a strictly literal reading, thereby considering the context of the verse and presenting various possible interpretations.¹⁰ Meanwhile, HTI—as previously mentioned—adopts a strictly textual approach, which leads to the simplification of meaning, and, thus, perceives democracy as an incorrect system and condemns those who uphold national laws.¹¹

As for Ja'far Umar Thalib and Badrussalam, their stance is unique, as they present different interpretations from NU and HTI. Ja'far, on one hand, seems to be an idealist, maintaining a conclusion derived from the textual reading of such a verse by saying that rulers who do not uphold Allah's laws cannot be considered legitimate *ulī al-amr*. He even implicitly invites Muslims to make a movement and transformation in the Governmental system, saying that if Muslims have the ability to change or substitute those rulers, they should change them. However, on the other hand, he asserts that the label of *kāfir* cannot be automatically applied to them when they fail to implement Allah's laws.¹² Regarding Badrussalam, he argues, by citing the ulema, that the term *kufur* in the verse cannot be understood as the *khawārij* did, but it should be understood as *kufur dūna kufur*, a label of *kufur* that does not expel someone from Islam.¹³

From those descriptions, it can be inferred that Salafists offer a divergent outlook. While HTI proposes a purely textual interpretation and NU serves as its counterbalance, Salafists attempt to stand outside these two poles. Ja'far Umar Thalib and Badrussalam's statements indicate that there are elements of rationality in Salafists' understanding. This is evidenced by their prudence in labelling *kāfir* (in the sense of declaring someone as no longer a Muslim) for those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed, even though this matter is explicitly stated by the Qur'an. However, this nuance contradicts Quintan Wiktorowicz's statement,

⁸ Muḥammad al-Rāzī Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn ʿUmar, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghaib*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 12:7.

⁹ 'Umar, 12:6.

¹⁰ See Ahmad Muntaha, “Ragam Tafsir Surat Al-Maidah ayat 44 Kontra Ideologi Radikal (1),” NU Online, accessed September 9, 2025, <https://islam.nu.or.id/tafsir/ragam-tafsir-surat-al-maidah-ayat-44-kontra-ideologi-radikal-1-Qwo8C>; Ahmad Muntaha, “Ragam Tafsir Surat Al-Maidah Ayat 44 Kontra Ideologi Radikal (2),” NU Online, accessed September 9, 2025, <https://islam.nu.or.id/tafsir/ragam-tafsir-surat-al-maidah-ayat-44-kontra-ideologi-radikal-2-LCYFK>.

¹¹ Arif, “Pandangan dan Perjuangan Ideologis Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) dalam Sistem Kenegaraan di Indonesia,” 94–95.

¹² See Ulil Amri *Yang Memakai Hukum Selain Islam / Demokrasi Wajib Ditaati? Oleh Ust Ja'far Umar Thalib*, directed by Masjid Mujahidin TV, 2017, 06:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3yTXVATunc>; *Bagaimana Sikap Kita Kepada Pemimpin Yang Tidak Berhukum Syariat Islam? Oleh Ust Ja'far Umar Thalib*, directed by Masjid Mujahidin TV, 2017, 06:39, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S7P0bRTIUs>.

¹³ See *makna Kafir Dalam Surah Al Maidah 44*, directed by Jonggol Mengaji, n.d., accessed September 8, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/NsBwveACVJM>.

cited by Izza Rohman. Wiktorowicz states that Salafists have an orientation contrary to rationality,¹⁴ portraying them as the opposition to *ta'wīl* that was adopted by non-Salafist groups.¹⁵ Furthermore, this also seems to be in contrast with Abdullah Saeed's classification, since he categorizes Salafists as part of the textualists, while his definition of textualists does not fully capture the complexity of Salafi tradition.¹⁶ Consequently, this issue then raises a question of whether Salafists are truly pure textualists. In this regard, this article assumes that Salafists, under certain conditions, become more accommodating and compromising by aligning their understanding with the macro social context.

Accordingly, this research aims to examine another Salafist's interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 to confirm such an assumption and provide a clearer answer to that question. In this matter, the study will analyze the interpretation of Firanda Andirja, a prominent Salafist preacher. For comparison, Buya Yahya's interpretation, which represents a non-Salafist's point of view, will also be analyzed. It should be noted that Firanda is chosen because he explicitly prohibited demonstrations, movements, and revolutions against the government, although he is a Salafist figure.¹⁷ This is a unique thing compared to Ja'far Umar Talib, who advocates for an action, when possible, rather than directly taking a passive stance. Furthermore, another reason for choosing Firanda is that, based on our search on YouTube, he is the only prominent Salafist figure who has a lengthy video presenting the interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44, unlike his colleagues, like Khalid Basalamah and Yazid Jawas. Subsequently, regarding Buya Yahya, he is selected due to his close connection with Habib Rizieq Syihab. Buya Yahya does not blame Habib Rizieq Syihab's activism and even appreciates it.¹⁸ Therefore, even though he represents non-Salafists, who are presumed to be more flexible than Salafists in Islamic understandings, his closeness to Habib Rizieq Syihab is assumed to have influenced his interpretation.

¹⁴ Izza Rohman, "Salafi Tafsirs: Textualist and Authoritarian?," *Journal Of Qur'an And Hadith Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 20, 2012): 197–213, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v1i2.1324>; See also Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (May 2006): 210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500497004>.

¹⁵ The dispute between Salafists and non-Salafists is recorded in a contestation between Ibn Taimiyya, who is frequently cited by Salafists, and al-Razi regarding the authority of reason and revelation. In this matter, Ibn Taimiyya criticizes and rejects al-Razi's view that reason is the basis of the revelation, and thus should be prioritized when dealing with anthropomorphic verses through allegorical interpretation. According to Ibn Taimiyya, the connection between reason and revelation can not be understood in that way. They should go hand in hand, and neither should be favored, since the validity of reason is, in itself, confirmed by the revelation. See Choirul Ahmad, "An Unfortunate Refutation: Ibn Taymiyah on the Priority of Reason over Revelation," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 14, no. 1 (June 2024): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2024.14.1.1-20>.

¹⁶ According to Abdullah Saeed, there are three types of Qur'anic interpreters: textualists, semi-textualists, and contextualists. In this matter, he defines textualists as those who strictly follow the text in understanding the Qur'an, perceiving its meaning as something fixed and universal, and thus they neglect socio-historical context. This definition, even though it can be relevant to assess Salafists' interpretation of antropomorphic verses, does not align with Badrussalam and Ja'far Umar Talib's remarks above that still leave small space for rational consideration. For further explanation, see Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

¹⁷ See *hukum Mahasiwa Yang Berdemo !! Ustadz Firanda Andirja, Lc., M.A Hafidzahullah*, directed by Syifa tv, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RuEF0Bmq3IU>; *Pemerintah Sangat Dzolim, Bolehkah Demo Untuk Revolusi ? | Ustadz DR Firanda Andirja*, directed by Ummu Aisyah, 2019, 03:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqygUvwThwg>.

¹⁸ Karina M Ramadhani, "Habib Rizieq Shihab Jadi Sorotan Buya Yahya, Tak Disangka Ia Berani Jujur Kalau Sosok HRS Itu Orangnya....," accessed December 24, 2024, <https://www.tvonenews.com/religi/264653-habib-rizieq-shihab-jadi-sorotan-buya-yahya-tak-disangka-ia-berani-jujur-kalau-sosok-hrs-itu-orangnya?page=1>.

Previously, studies related to the interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 were frequently conducted. Munawir, in his article, *Tafsir Indonesia Tentang Penerapan Hukum Allah: Studi Pribumisasi Hamka terhadap QS. Al-Maidah: 44, 45, dan 47 dalam Tafsir Al-Azhar*, examined how HAMKA interprets three Qur'anic verses on the obligation to uphold Sharia law.¹⁹ Another research is an article written by Misbah Hudri under the title *Pembacaan Kontekstual Ayat "Berhukum dengan Hukum Allah" (Narasi Kontra NKRI Bersyariah)* that aimed to reinterpret three verses, which are Surah Al-Mā'idah 44, 45, and 47, by using Abdullah Saeed's contextual theory.²⁰ In addition, Asyhari also wrote an article titled *Ekstrimisme dalam Tafsir (Studi Penafsiran Sayyid Quṭb terhadap QS. Al-Mā'idah: 44-47 dalam Tafsir Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān)*. This article analyzed Sayyid Quṭb's interpretation and compared it with other scholars' interpretations of the same verses.²¹

Regarding Firanda Andirja's thoughts, several articles were also written. One of them is an article titled *Adil dalam Berpoligami Perspektif Firanda Andirja dan Pandangan Orientalis terhadap Poligami* by Mufadhilah and Muhtadin. This article analyzed the concept of polygamy in the orientalist's view and Firanda Andirja's rebuttal to it, as well as examined how Firanda Andirja interprets justice in polygamy.²² The second is an article from Nur Annisa and Idris that was intended to discover the characteristics of Firanda Andirja's Tafsir Juz 'Amma. The third is an article written by Bobi Yurisa with the title, *Analisis Penafsiran Firanda Andirja tentang Tauhid dan Tarbiyah*, which analyzed Firanda Andirja's interpretation in Tafsir Juz 'Amma regarding the verses of tauhid.²³

Meanwhile, in discussing Buya Yahya, Niken Setia Putri et al. observed Buya Yahya's perspective on religious moderation on his YouTube channel.²⁴ On the other hand, Oftaviani and Negoro wrote an article to answer three issues related to the show 'Buya Yahya Menjawab': viewer character, level of religious knowledge, and the influence of religious counseling.²⁵ Lastly, the article entitled *Analisis Tindak Tutur Buya Yahya dalam Interaksi Belajar Mengajar di Pesantren Al-Bahjah Cirebon* analyzed Buya Yahya's speech act when teaching his students.²⁶

Drawing on such a description, it is inferred that the Salafists' interpretation of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 is underdeveloped. Whereas, considering what has been presented above, a more

¹⁹ Munawir, "Penerapan Hukum Allah : Studi Pribumisasi HAMKA Terhadap QS. Al-Ma'idah: 44, 45, Dan 47 Dalam Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (May 4, 2019): 82–106, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v4i1.37>.

²⁰ Misbah Hudri, "Pembacaan Kontekstual Ayat 'Berhukum dengan Hukum Allah' (Narasi Kontra NKRI Bersyariah)," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 6, no. 2 (December 2020): 163–84, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v6i2.161>.

²¹ Asyhari, "Ekstrimisme Dalam Tafsir (Studi Penafsiran Sayyid Qutb Terhadap Q.S al Maidah: 44-47 Dalam Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Qur'an)," *El-Faqih Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (April 2020).

²² Hanifah Nadia Mufadhilah and Sabilul Muhtadin, "Adil Dalam Berpoligami Perspektif Firanda Andirja," *Al-Mabsut: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Sosial* 17, no. 2 (September 2023): 177–90, <https://doi.org/10.56997/almabsutjurnalstudiislamdansosial.v17i2.974>.

²³ Bobi Yurisa, "Analisis Penafsiran Firanda Andirja Tentang Tauhid Dan Tarbiyah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kewirausahaan* 12, no. 2 (April 2024): 592–603, <https://doi.org/10.47668/pkwu.v12i2.1218>.

²⁴ Niken Setia Putri et al., "Buya Yahya's View of Religious Moderation: Study of Youtube Content in Al-Bahjah TV Channel," *TATHO: International Journal of Islamic Thought and Sciences*, May 31, 2024, 97–112, <https://doi.org/10.70512/tatho.v1i2.27>.

²⁵ Sri Oftaviani and Noor Bakti Negoro, "Tingkat Pengetahuan Agama Penonton Tayangan Buya Yahya Menjawab pada Channel Youtube Al-Bahjah TV di Masa Pandemi COVID-19," *Jurnal Penyuluhan Agama (JPA)* 9, no. 2 (October 2022): 169–94, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jpa.v9i2.27295>.

²⁶ Syibli Maufur, "Analisis Tindak Tutur Buya Yahya Dalam Interaksi Belajar Mengajar Di Pesantren Al-Bahjah Cirebon," *Holistik Journal for Islamic Social Sciences* 14, no. 02 (2013): 79–105.

detailed examination of Salafists' tafsir is crucial, particularly to reassess the general perception that Salafists are purely textualists. Therefore, this article seeks to fill this gap by examining Firanda Andirja's interpretation and comparing it with Buya Yahya, who represents a non-Salafist figure. It is also worth noting that none of the existing studies specifically analyzes those two figures' understanding of that verse. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the field of *manhaj al-mufasssirîn* through a critical evaluation of Abdullah Saeed's and Quintan Wiktorowicz's classification of interpreters. Moreover, the use of a comparative analysis model enhances the significance of this study.

B. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach and focuses on analyzing the interpretation of Firanda Andirja and Buya Yahya on YouTube. The reason for examining the preachers who exist on YouTube is that it has been a contested space of religious authority in today's era. Salafists massively utilize it to establish their authority. Non-Salafists, on the other hand, do the same thing to maintain their authority by producing counter-narratives.²⁷ Before doing research, we conduct a preliminary search on YouTube to identify the relevant videos. To find such videos, we enter certain keywords—such as Firanda Andirja, Buya Yahya, and Al-Maidah 44—in the YouTube search bar. As a result, two videos were found and will become the objects of analysis. Firstly, regarding Firanda, it examines a YouTube video titled '*Tafsir Juz 6: Surat Al-Ma'idah #9 Ayat 41-45 – Ustadz Dr. Firanda Andirja, M.A.*', published on YouTube on October 18th, 2020.²⁸ As for Buya Yahya, it examines a video titled '*Islam Sebagai Rahmatan lil'alamîn | Buya Yahya | Al Qur'an (Al Maidah: 44-46) | 21 Maret 2017*', posted on YouTube on March 26th, 2017.²⁹

The two videos will then be analyzed by using Norman Fairclough's Discourse Analysis theory. This theory is used as an analytical tool to confirm this article's assumption, which was presented before. This is because Fairclough perceived a connection between the microtext and the broader social context, or, in another articulation, there is an interplay between discourse and social structure. Thus, the analysis should focus on examining how the language is shaped through social relations and certain social contexts.³⁰ Ultimately, this model of examination will answer whether preachers, who may be considered textualists or even contextualists, need to calibrate their level of idealism in order to reconcile with the general societal understanding.

In Fairclough's theory, there are three dimensions of analysis. The first is text analysis, which is an examination of its structure (words, sentences, semantics, etc). The second is the discourse practice dimension, where the researcher analyzes the process of text production. It observes the individual status or the background of discourse presenters, whether they are politicians, farmers, etc. In the context of tafsir studies, it observes Qur'anic interpreters' affiliation and inclination, whether they come from a traditionalist milieu or a progressive group. The third is the sociocultural practice dimension. In this part, the researcher needs to

²⁷ Lukman Hakim and Zainal Mukhlis, "Otoritas Agama di Ruang Siber: Fragmentasi dan Kontestasi," *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 13, no. 2 (October 2023): 130, <https://doi.org/10.15642/jik.2023.13.2.119-132>.

²⁸ *Tafsir Juz 6: Surat Al-Ma'idah #9 Ayat 41-45 - Ustadz Dr. Firanda Andirja, M.A.*, directed by Firanda Andirja, 2020, 52:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jylKn0xuLmo>.

²⁹ *Islam Sebagai Rahmatan Lil'alamîn | Buya Yahya | Al Qur'an (Al Maidah: 44-46) | 21 Maret 2017*, directed by Al-Bahjah TV, 2017, 01:39:57, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3E29_h3PSE.

³⁰ Eriyanto Eriyanto, *Analisis Wacana Pengantar Analisis Teks Media* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2017), 285–86.

reveal discourse presenters' relation with society, culture, or politics.³¹ By using this analysis framework, this paper will first rewrite the content of the videos. What is meant by rewriting the content is paraphrasing the original discourse into English, not a verbatim transcription, since the preachers gave their lecture in Bahasa Indonesia. Secondly, this paper examines the production of interpretation, including how it is articulated, why it is interpreted in a particular way, and what factors affect the interpretation. This second step is conducted by reflecting on the preachers' background and the context in which the videos were produced. Further, since this article is comparative research, it also elucidates the similarities and differences between the two.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Landscape of Shariatization in Indonesia

Syafiq Hasyim, citing Arskal Salim, explained that attempts to formalize Sharia—what is called Shariatization—have been undertaken since before Indonesia's independence until the reformation era after the fall of Soeharto's New Order regime. Various strategies, methods, and approaches were applied, ranging from criticizing nationalist leaders since they did not exhibit Islamic elements, as done by several Persis figures in the 1930s, establishing parties to voice Islamic notions, political approaches in parliament, armed struggle, and preaching to the people.³² Nevertheless, many resistances appeared, as disagreement and opposition over these efforts. They made the idea of total Shariatization and Islamisation never succeed.³³

The event of June 22, 1945, may be one clear example to describe this issue. It is a national event in which nationalists and Islamists gathered and compromised to formulate the state ideology. They resulted Jakarta Chapter, the forerunner of Pancasila, in which seven words '*dengan kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi para pemeluknya*' are inserted into the draft. However, ultimately, several figures rejected these words in the second meeting of BPUPKI, because it would cause a gap with other religions and customary law, as well as lead to religious fanaticism.³⁴

In fact, endeavors to Islamize the state and society had repeatedly gained momentum. Nevertheless, in this regard, the post-New Order era should be specifically regarded because attempts and actions of Islamisation had been increasingly massive. At that period, there was a kind of awareness that Islamisation held by the Soeharto regime was "pseudo-Islamisation". Such a perception then triggered many parties, including radical groups, which had existed long before the fall of Soeharto but remained dormant, to insist on a total Islamisation in every aspect of society and state.³⁵ This can be seen, for instance, in the formalization of Islamic penal law, as conducted in Aceh. In early October 2002, Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh announced that caning would be applied to Muslims who eat in public places during Ramadhan.³⁶ Another case is the massive campaign to establish the caliphate,³⁷ as

³¹ Eriyanto, 286–88.

³² Arskal Salim, *Challenging the Secular State: The Islamization of Law in Modern Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 48–50, <https://doi.org/10.21313/9780824861797>; Syafiq Hasyim, *The Shariatization of Indonesia: The Politics of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI)*, Middle East and Islamic Studies E-Books Online, Collection 2023, volume 52 (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2023), 16, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004534896>.

³³ Salim, *Challenging the Secular State*, 49.

³⁴ Salim, 64–65.

³⁵ Salim, 50.

³⁶ Salim, 159.

carried out by Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, which became the legal outfit in 2000.³⁸ Moreover, there was also a protest and resistance against the appointment of the president, since it was considered contrary to Sharia principles. This case occurred when President Megawati replaced Gus Dur. At that time, Laskar Jihad, led by Ja'far Umar Talib, claimed that Megawati's appointment was an act of sin because she was a woman, and thus demanded Hamzah Has, her vice president, to implement the Sharia.³⁹

The idea of Shariatization, once again, gained much attention in 2016, when Front Pembela Islam, one of the Islamic movement organizations led by Habib Rizieq Syihab, rearticulated it through the discourse of NKRI Bersyariah. This notion found its momentum in a demonstration titled 'Aksi Bela Islam' or 'Aksi 212' that occurred on the 2nd of December 2016 and was reinforced through the grand reunion of 'Aksi 212' in 2017.⁴⁰ In terms of motive, NKRI Bersyariah was driven by the belief that the government failed to realize social justice and prosperity, and, thus, the total implementation of Sharia should be conducted.⁴¹ Basically, the motive is quite similar to what drove the Islamisation in the early post-New Order era.⁴² Hence, NKRI bersyariah may be regarded as a mere repetition of an event that has frequently occurred throughout Indonesian history.

The notion of NKRI Bersyariah, in fact, had been introduced before 2016 to the public sphere through the work of Habib Rizieq Syihab entitled "*Wawasan Kebangsaan Menuju NKRI Bersyariah*". On the fourteenth anniversary of FPI in 2012, Rizieq Syihab gave a speech in front of many people to deliver his ideas as written in his work.⁴³ Even though this view is then regarded as an opposition and resistance against Pancasila, its supporters do not think so. According to Sadrak and Munabari, cited by Lubis, this notion was not perceived by its supporters as an antithesis against Pancasila as the state ideology. Instead, it was claimed as its companion to overcome all national issues, as well as a form of adaptation to certain socio-political circumstances in contemporary Indonesia.⁴⁴

Although the idea of Shariatization has been present since the inception of this state, 2016 should be viewed as one important moment when conducting research on the issue. Since then, discussions and debates on such a topic have grown massively, particularly on social media, where scholars, intellectuals, ulema from diverse backgrounds, and even lay people actively engage with the discourse. This is evidenced by numerous YouTube videos posted after 2016. By entering relevant keywords—"Tafsir" and "Al-Maidah 44"—and sorting the

³⁷ Salim, 50.

³⁸ Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman, "Insight: Is Hizbut Tahrir a Threat to Indonesia?," The Jakarta Post, accessed September 14, 2025, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2019/06/20/is-hizbut-tahrir-a-threat-to-indonesia.html>.

³⁹ Noorhaidi Hasan, "Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia" (PhD Thesis, University of Utrecht, 2005), 217.

⁴⁰ Denny JA, "NKRI Bersyariah Atau Ruang Publik Yang Manusiawi? (Seri Renungan Singkat Seputar Isu Pilpres 2019)," in *NKRI Bersyariah Atau Ruang Publik Yang Manusiawi? Tanggapan 21 Pakar Terhadap Gagasan Denny JA*, ed. Satrio Arismunandar (Cerah Budaya Indonesia, 2019), 1.

⁴¹ Tim Redaksi Harakatuna, "NKRI Bersyariah Dan Menegakkan Syariat Itu Mulia," *Harakatuna.Com*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.harakatuna.com/nkri-bersyariah-dan-menegakkan-syariat-itu-mulia.html>.

⁴² In addition to the so-called "pseudo-Islamisation", Salim mentioned that Muslims' views on the Government's inability to reduce crime also played a role in triggering actions of Islamisation because they perceived that Sharia is a solution. See Salim, *Challenging the Secular State*, 50.

⁴³ Ali Akhbar Abaib Mas Rabbani Lubis and Syaiful Bahri, "NKRI Bersyariah: Praktik Spasial, Representasi Ruang, Ruang Representasional," *Al-Daulah: Jurnal Hukum dan Perundangan Islam* 10, no. 2 (October 2020): 238, <https://doi.org/10.15642/ad.2020.10.2.222-250>.

⁴⁴ Lubis and Bahri, 225.

videos by upload date, this paper finds that more than 30 videos presenting Indonesian preachers examining Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 were uploaded after 2016. On the contrary, it identifies fewer than 10 videos that were made before 2016.

2. Profile of Firanda Andirja and Buya Yahya

Firanda Andirja was born in 1979 in Surabaya and moved to Sorong, Papua, one week after his birth. Firanda pursued an undergraduate degree in the Faculty of Engineering at Gadjah Mada University, majoring in chemical engineering. Unfortunately, Firanda did not finish his bachelor's education at Universitas Gadjah Mada and preferred to study Islam. His desire to deepen religious studies encouraged him to enter one of the Pesantren in Yogyakarta, named Jamilurrahman.

After 1,5 years of studying in pesantren, Firanda then enrolled in the entrance exam held by the Islamic University of Madinah and was accepted. Firanda pursued his education at that university, starting from undergraduate studies to the doctoral level. His bachelor's degree was in hadith studies. Firanda then spent four years finishing his master's study in the Faculty of Da'wa and Ushuluddin, majoring in Islamic theology. His thesis discussed Ibn Taimiyya's answers to the ambiguities presented by those who refuse the attributes of God. After that, Firanda completed his doctoral study in five years with a dissertation focusing on rebutting the preachers who frequently sound the idea of pluralism by using the postulates from the Qur'an and hadith.

Most of Firanda's lecturers are also spiritual teachers at the Nabawi mosque. Some of them were mentioned on his official website, such as Syaikh Abdul Muhsin Al-Abbad, Professor Dr. Syaikh Abdurozaq Al-Abbad, Prof. Dr Syaikh Ibrahim Ar-Ruhaily, and Prof. Dr Syaikh Sholih bin Abdil Aziz Sindi. Firanda also published several works discussing various Islamic issues, including theological debate, Islamic jurisprudence, morals, the *bid'ah* issue, and Qur'anic tafsir.⁴⁵ In Indonesian Islamic scholarship, Firanda is perceived as one of the prominent Salafist preachers, evidenced by the large number of followers on his social media platforms. On Instagram, for instance, he is followed by one million followers. He also has an official website and a private YouTube channel, which is subscribed to by 815 thousand people. In addition, he is reportedly engaged in a debate with Idrus Ramli, a well-known NU's *kyai*. On a YouTube channel, his debate was watched by 644 thousand viewers.⁴⁶ All these facts signify that Firanda is an influential figure with significant authority.

Meanwhile, Buya Yahya or Yahya Zainul Maarif was born in Blitar in 1973. From a young age, Buya Yahya has engaged with the *pesantren* world and religious education. It was noted that Buya Yahya studied in Darullughah Wadda'wah, one of the *pesantren* institutions in East Java, under the guidance of Habib Hasan bin Ahmad Baharun. After passing his *pesantren* education, Buya Yahya pursued undergraduate study at Al-Ahgaff University in Yemen. He met, studied, and engaged with many Hadrami scholars there, such as Habib Ali Masyhur, Habib Salim Asy-Syathiri, Syekh Fadhol Bafadhol, etc.

After completing his studies in Yemen, Buya Yahya engaged in da'wa activities and religious sermons. However, before he was permitted to provide religious lectures, he had

⁴⁵ "About - Firanda Andirja Official," Ustadz Firanda Andirja, accessed December 16, 2024, <https://firanda.com/about/>.

⁴⁶ See *Debat Full Wahabi vs Aswaja Ust Firanda vs Ust Idrus Ramli [Terbaru]*, directed by Shofiyah Channel, 2018, 02:16:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkCfDrQqUU>.

been asked to organize a *pesantren*. Today, Buya Yahya owns his *pesantren* named Al-Bahjah. In addition to organizing *pesantren* and preaching, Buya Yahya actively wrote and produced several works in Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic. Most of his works frequently examine the issue of Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Some of them are specially intended to answer the challenges faced by the ummah in the context of Indonesia.⁴⁷

Regarding his affiliation, there is no clear information indicating whether he is officially part of NU or Muhammadiyah. There are indeed some reports stating that he is a NU Garis lurus preacher—NU Garis Lurus or NUGL is a splinter group of Nahdlatul Ulama, established to counter preachers who are considered to be “liberalists”.⁴⁸ However, Buya Yahya had clarified this issue on his YouTube channel, saying that he would support every organization that upholds the pure teaching of KH. Hasyim Asyari (NU’s founding father), even though it is an organization outside of NU.⁴⁹ Apart from that, it is clear that Buya Yahya is the antithesis of Salafi preachers in some legal issues. It can be seen by comparing Khalid Basalamah’s opinion and his perspective on the law of celebrating birthdays and music. While Khalid considered those two matters as something prohibited (*haram*), Buya Yahya perceived them as permissible (*mubāḥ*).⁵⁰ Further, Buya Yahya is also regarded as an influential religious figure with significant authority. This is seen from his prominence on YouTube and Instagram—his YouTube channel, Al-Bahjah TV, and Instagram account are followed by approximately 5 million people.

3. Ideological Discourse in Firanda Andirja’s Interpretation

In his preaching video on YouTube, Firanda’s interpretation tends to neglect the specific historical context of the verse, which is intended for Jews. Firanda explains the context but states that al-Mā’idah 44 is also addressed to Muslims, considering this verse universal. He says:

.....وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are infidels/disbelievers. This verse is intended for the Jews initially, as it talks about the Jews. The Jews, who do not want to judge by the law of Torah and look for alternative laws, are *kāfir*. But, is it related to us (Muslims)? Ulema said, “Yes, those who imitate the Jews to this level (rejecting Allah’s law and looking for legal alternatives) are *kāfir*.” This verse is indeed for the Jews, but every provision that applies to the former ummah can be relevant for us if there is no abrogation. Thus, after this, Allah mentions *Qisās*. *Qisās* exists in Torah, and we (Muslims) apply this law to this day, even though there is a modification. However, the core is that the law of Torah is still relevant to us.

Afterward, Firanda outlined the consequences of those who refuse to employ God’s law. He says:

⁴⁷ “Profil Buya Yahya,” STAI Al-Bahjah, accessed December 16, 2024, <https://staialbahjah.ac.id/profil-pimpinan/>; “Profile,” Buya Yahya, accessed December 16, 2024, <https://buyayahya.org/profile>.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Alexander R. Arifianto, “Quo Vadis Civil Islam? Explaining Rising Islamism in Post-Reformasi Indonesia,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, August 27, 2018, <https://kyotoreview.org/issue-24/rising-islamism-in-post-reformasi-indonesia/>.

⁴⁹ See *Buya Yahya Dan NU Garis Lurus? - Buya Yahya Menjawab*, directed by Al-Bahjah TV, 2018, 11:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4QQvWqSxU0>.

⁵⁰ Y. Sonafist, “Configuration the Thought of Islamic Law Throught Social Media in Indonesia,” *International Journal of Law and Society (IJLS)* 1, no. 2 (August 2022): 129–31, <https://doi.org/10.59683/ijls.v1i2.21>.

What is the ruling of Judging by the laws outside what Allah has revealed? The ruling is small *shirk*, small *kufir*, *kufir aṣḡar*. What does it mean? Doing a major sin; but it does not expel someone from Islam. As for the second, it is big *kufir*, *kufir akbar*. It is a *kufir* that expels someone from Islam. Syekh 'Uthaimin explained that someone will become *kufir akbar* if behaving like the Jews. The Jews do not like the law of *rajm* (stoning) and look for an alternative law. They are not pleased with Allah's laws. (They said) "It seems that the stoning is not suitable since it only applies to the poor people, and the rich people are merely lashed, so let's establish a new law where we agree on it. How? We do not stone the fornicators, but their faces should be blackened, and then be put on a *ḥimār* to be paraded around the town, and be lashed. It is enough." Thus, when can someone be *kāfir akbar*? Syekh 'Uthaimin said, "When someone hates the Sharia. And, for instance, when someone feels that a law that he establishes is better or equal to Allah's laws, and he does not want the law from Allah, he makes his own laws and says that mine is equal to the Qur'an, he is *kāfir*."

The presentation above presents an interesting matter: Firanda does not employ a single terminology of *kāfir*. He says that an individual who neglects to apply God's laws may still be classified as a *kāfir*, yet this does not expel him from Islam. In his statement, Firanda indeed mentions two types of *kāfir*: 1) great *kāfir*, which causes people to leave Islam, and 2) small *kāfir*, which has no theological implication. Regarding great *kāfir*, this status is intended for those who hate Sharia law and formulate a new legal system opposing Sharia law and feel that their product is better than God. Conversely, if someone merely fails to perform the Sharia laws without having hatred for them, he will only fall into the second category. This distinction, ultimately, suggests that, according to Salafists, the term "*kāfir*" does not always mean apostate.

In such a case, Firanda associates his interpretation with Syekh 'Uthaimin. If we refer to his *fatāwā*, it is known that 'Uthaimin indeed clarifies the term "*kāfir*" in Surah Al-Mā'idah 44, stating that its actual meaning is *kufir dūna kufir* (a term akin to small *kufir*). To justify his opinion, 'Uthaimin cites Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation of that verse,⁵¹ in which Ibn 'Abbās once said—based on a *riwāya* in al-Ṭaḥāwī's *Sharḥ Mushkil al-Āthār*—that the definition of *kāfir* in such a verse is not the same as disbelieving Allah and the judgment day, meaning that anyone who does not judge by what Allah has revealed cannot automatically become *kāfir*.⁵² In this matter, it seems that Ibn 'Abbās's words became a crucial point of reference for Salafi-Wahhabi scholars in understanding that verse, evidenced by the massive use of his words in their works. In *Al-Tawḍīḥ 'an Tauḥīd al-Khalāq fī Jawāb Ahl al-'Irāq*—a work written by Sulaimān Ibn 'Abdillāh Ibn Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, a grandson of the founding father of Wahhabism—for instance, Ibn 'Abbās's remark has also been quoted to inform that the absence of Sharia implementation in a person's life, as long as he acknowledges its supremacy, will not lead him to disbelief.⁵³

In another research, Noorhaidi Hasan asserts that Salafists distinguished the concept of *kāfir* into *kāfir l'tiqādi* and *kāfir 'amalī*. While the first refers to infidelity that makes someone no longer Muslim, the second category serves as its opponent, meaning that a Muslim remains in the sphere of Islam, but he is sinful. Noorhaidi then outlines those who belong to the first

⁵¹ Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaimīn, *Fatāwā Nūr 'alā al-Darb* (Riyadh: Muassasa al-Shaikh Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaimīn al-Khairiyya, 1979), 1:356–57.

⁵² Abū Ja'far Aḥmad al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ Mushkil Al-Āthār* (Damascus: Dār al-Risāla al-'Ālamiyya, 2006), 2:317–18.

⁵³ Sulaimān Ibn 'Abdillāh Ibn Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Tawḍīḥ 'an Tauḥīd al-Khalāq Fī Jawāb Ahl al-'Irāq* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyiba, 1984), 141.

category. Generally, they are individuals who oppose or deny the Sharia, or perceive that man-made law is equal to Allah's laws.⁵⁴ Essentially, this concept of division is similar to what Firanda, 'Uthaimin, and Sulaimān Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb previously stated. However, despite the difference in naming, one insight that can be inferred is the Salafists' differentiation between the realm of faith and practice. Salafists perceive that shortcomings or imperfections in practicing Islam can not necessarily expel someone from Islam.

Afterward, Firanda seems to discredit other groups that proposed a new interpretation of ethical-legal verses. He says:

Or someone says that Allah's laws are unable, not permissible, or irrelevant to be applied in today's era. This is the word of liberalists. Ulema said that it is also part of *kufir*. Allah has sent down the rulings to be applicable all the time. Thus, we are not allowed to say that Allah's laws are not relevant. Hence, for those who feel that they can establish a new law, and hate the Sharia in their heart, saying that if Allah can create a law, then I can do a same thing, my laws are equal to Allah's laws or mine are better than Allah's laws, Allah's laws can not be implemented, and there are no Allah's laws anymore, they are *kāfir*. All of these are part of *kufir*.

In that statement, Firanda explicitly states that liberalists have made a criminal by saying that God's law is no longer relevant in today's world. This shows his refutation of the so-called "progressive way of interpreting the Qur'an". In addition, this indicates that Firanda has a different understanding of the concept of *ṣāliḥ li kulli zaman wa makān* (holy scripture and the laws contained within are always appropriate or relevant in every period and place) from progressive scholars. This is because, in Firanda's view, the language of the Qur'an, by its nature, has already been relevant for all times, and thus its meaning should not be modified to produce new rulings. In contrast, the progressive intellectuals understand such a maxim as an urge to keep renewing, modernizing, and contextualizing the Sharia.⁵⁵ In this way, this paper acknowledges Firanda's reasonableness in producing such a discourse, as his intellectual horizon has triggered him to play a role as a fundamentalist who resists the thought of liberalists.

Subsequently, Firanda states that declaring others as *kāfir* is not easy, even though he has previously explained a clear parameter regarding who can be considered a great *kāfir* and has the potential to leave Islam. He says,

Is someone who did these matters considered a *kāfir*? Obviously, we first need to uphold the *ḥujja*; we need to make it clear and eliminate the *shubha*. As a part of Ibn Taimiyya's words, "If someone still insists, then perhaps he may be judged as *kāfir* in a *ta'yīn* (precise or clear) way.

That remark can indicate his stance in the debate on labelling the government as *kāfir*. If Firanda refuses to rashly declare those considered to exceed the boundaries, which in this

⁵⁴ Hasan, "Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia," 148.

⁵⁵ It can be seen, for example, in Muḥammad Shaḥrūr's *Al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān*, where he says that the nature of prophetic *risāla* is to carry special characters of every era. As for the *risāla* of Prophet Muhammad, its special characters lie in its universality and relevance, since the Prophet Muhammad was sent as the last messenger, a prophet to all creatures, and a prophet who brings mercy. These characteristics enable us to view Sharia from the perspective of modernity, thereby allowing us to create new fundamentals, basis, and principles for the Sharia. See Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, *Al-Kitāb Wa al-Qur'ān Qirā'ah Mu'āṣira* (Damascus: Al-Ahālī, n.d.), 446.

case are liberalists, as *kāfir*, it is almost certain that he will oppose *takfir* movements against the government. This is confirmed by his statement on another YouTube video, where he states that declaring the government that does not uphold Allah's laws as unbelievers is not an easy matter. In this regard, Firanda provides the example of King Salman of Saudi Arabia. He says that if the king has upheld Sharia and subsequently replaces one point among a thousand rulings with a non-Islamic law, on purpose, due to a greater *maṣlaḥa* he believes in, he will not become *kāfir*. A ruler can fall into a genuine *kāfir* if he perceives that human-made laws are equal, or even better, than what Allah has revealed.⁵⁶

Another point that can also be drawn from Firanda's interpretation above is that he does not invite people to make a movement to overthrow the legitimate government in order to fully formalize Sharia in the state constitution. It is affirmed in his lecture, where he asserts that Muslims should not support a ruler who issues an unjust policy, but it does not mean that we are permitted to rebel against him.⁵⁷ Instead, what Firanda does is simply to advise Muslims not to fall into two *kāfir*, either a great *kāfir* or a small *kāfir*, while negatively framing liberal groups, encouraging his audience to avoid them. Hence, this paper argues that Firanda's interpretation of this verse cannot be considered extremely radical when compared to the two parties. The first is the revivalists who demand a total reformation, like Sayyid Quṭb's interpretation. Secondly, Firanda's view slightly contradicts his Salafi colleagues, who call for action if capable, such as Ja'far Umar Talib.

Seeing Firanda's contrast with Ja'far Umar Talib, it is necessary to highlight the intersection between them. In this regard, several issues need to be discussed: the issue of *takfir ulī al-amr*, how democracy is viewed, the issue of obeying a ruler, and the action to reform the government. Of these four, Firanda and Ja'far agree on two former points, in which the two perceive that those who fail to implement Allah's laws cannot be automatically regarded as *kāfir*—as previously presented—and consider that democracy is not an Islamic system. Meanwhile, the latter two matters are not agreed upon. First, in terms of obeying *ulī al-amr*, Firanda states that Muslims should adhere to the ruler, although he is elected through an un-Islamic method, such as a coup or democracy. This is because Muslims' obedience here strongly relies on the policies, not the method of enthronement. Thereby, if a ruler issues an oppressive policy, he does not need to be supported. On the other hand, Ja'far states that the loyalty or adherence to the ruler is relevant if he is chosen through the mechanism of *ahl ḥalli wa al-aqd*. In this matter, Muslim's obedience is absolutely unconditional, even though he is oppressive.⁵⁸ Second, regarding the action of reformation, it was described before that Firanda discourages the rebellion, while Ja'far suggests that it is permissible to change the political system if Muslims have the capability.

Drawing on those descriptions, this paper argues that classifying Firanda as a purist or a quietist Salafist—a term in one of Noorhaidi Hasan's articles, which is used to categorize

⁵⁶ See *Pemerintah Yang Tidak Berhukum Dengan Hukum Allah*. DR Firanda Andirja MA., directed by Tanya Jawab Islam, 2019, 02:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59KNRjLRF9k>.

⁵⁷ See *Apa Hukum Mentaati Pemerintah Hasil Demokrasi Dan Kudeta* - Ustadz Dr Firanda Andirja MA, directed by Seindah Sunnah, 2022, 07:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L-3oOR-qqs>.

⁵⁸ For Firanda, see *Apa Hukum Mentaati Pemerintah Hasil Demokrasi Dan Kudeta* - Ustadz Dr Firanda Andirja MA; For Ja'far, see Hasan, "Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia," 149-50.

Salafists⁵⁹—is no longer crucial. This is because it is clear that Firanda does not urge people to create a movement or voice the resistance against the government, and thus, he avoids political conflict. What is more important to be presented here is his desire to restore the spirit of Salafism, namely, theological purification. In this regard, what Firanda carried out is reasonable, considering the historical fact that some Salafists had previously engaged in political practice, notably opposing the president's appointment in 2001.

Lastly, this paper argues that Firanda's interpretation may be considered rigid, as demonstrated by his rejection of the so-called "progressive way of thinking." Nevertheless, his interpretation can not be regarded as entirely textual, even though he neglects the context. This is because his division of the term "*kāfir*" into small and great *kāfir* goes against textuality. This claim is supported by the definition of such a term in *mu'jams*, which primarily refers to "the opposition of the faith."⁶⁰ Further, if it is said that Firanda's interpretation stems from Ibn 'Abbās's view, this actually shows the existence of rationality in his approach, since he chooses one preferable opinion among various perspectives, in which the selection of a notion is not feasible if relying on the principle of textuality.⁶¹ Another supporting argument indicating that Firanda is not purely textualist in this understanding is al-Alūsī's clarification against the *khawārij*'s attempt to instrumentalize such a verse. In his tafsir, al-Alūsī explains that the *khawārij* exploit the literal meaning of this verse to disbelieve others. To respond to this misunderstanding, he then states that the literal meaning of the verse should be neglected, precisely to avoid *takfīr*.⁶² On this basis, Firanda, thus, is not a purely textualist, since he explicitly avoids *takfīr*, while such an avoidance arises from ignoring the textual meaning.

Accordingly, this paper reassesses Abdullah Saeed's classification of Salafists as textualists and Quintan Wiktorowicz's statement that Salafists avoid using rationality in understanding the scripture because they consider that the Qur'an is self-explanatory.⁶³ In this matter, Abdullah Saeed's classification and Quintan Wiktorowicz's statement can be applicable to view Salafists in a general manner, or in a macro context, particularly in relation to their perspective on anthropomorphism. However, such a classification and statement may be irrelevant when observing Salafists in a micro context, since they sometimes neglect the textual meaning, as previously discussed.

4. Ideological Discourse in Buya Yahya's Interpretation

In his preaching video, Buya Yahya initially presents a similar articulation to Firanda's, perceiving that this verse is universal. He says:

⁵⁹ In his article, Noorhaidi Hasan, by citing several scholars such as Quintan Wiktorowicz, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephane Lacroix, mentioned three factions of Salafists: Purists, Politicos, and Jihadists, or Quietists, Reformists, and Jihadists. In this matter, Purists or Quietists refer to a type of Salafists who merely focus on purifying Islam and reject political activism. See Noorhaidi Hasan, "Salafism in Indonesia: Transnational Islam, Violent Activism, and Cultural Resistance," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Barbara Watson Andaya, Routledge Handbooks (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 248.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 3897; Abū al-Ḥusain Aḥmad Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyis al-Lughā* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 5:191; Majma' al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya, *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Shurūq al-Dauliyya, 2004), 791.

⁶¹ According to Saeed, textualists are those who strictly follow the text. Hence, to categorize Firanda as a pure textualist, his sole reference in the interpretation should be the language of the Qur'an itself.

⁶² Abū al-Thanā' Maḥmūd Ibn 'Abdillāh al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Ma'ānī* (Beirut: Muassasa al-Risāla, 2010), 7:218.

⁶³ Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 210.

.....وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Those who undergo the laws that are different from or do not align with what Allah has revealed will become *kāfir*. In another verse فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ, فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ. There is disbelief (*kufr*), disobedience (*fisq*), and injustice (*zulm*). So, it is not only applicable to the Jews or Christians. Indeed, the Qur'an mentioned what happened in the past, but after the Qur'anic revelation, there are still many Muslims doing the same things. Those who sell their religion for their worldly interests, for their position, فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ, are part of the disbelievers who sell the religion. There are many models of people like this.

However, as reflected in that statement, Buya Yahya seems to be more comprehensive. He does not claim that the only status for those who do not apply God's law is *kāfir*. Instead, he mentions other classifications for them, *zālim* or *fāsiq*, depending on their condition. Subsequently, it is interesting that Buya Yahya, besides speaking about the issue of God's law implementation, discusses individuals who deny the Prophet and defend the insulters of the Prophet and the Qur'an, considering them as also *kāfir*. He says:

Those who implement the laws outside Allah's laws can not be generalized as unbelievers because Allah also stated in the Quran فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ, فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ. One time, they are called *kāfirūn*, momentarily, *zālimūn*, momentarily, *fāsiqūn*. The term *kāfirūn* is related to the foundational things or principles of creed. Changing, or even saying that there is God outside Allah, denying the Prophet, defending those who insult the Qur'an, all of these are part of *kāfirūn*. This includes defending those who insult the Prophet.

From his statement above, it can be implied that Buya Yahya distinguishes between fundamental principles and particular action, between belief and implementation. According to him, *kāfir* is only intended for those who violate foundational principles. Essentially, this is the same as what Firanda does, as previously presented. Yet, while Firanda only speaks about denying the supremacy of Allah's laws, Buya Yahya mentions other classifications, showing that this produced discourse is intended for a specific party in a specific moment.⁶⁴ Then, Buya Yahya expounded on this issue in another statement, giving a clearer articulation regarding those who can be labeled *kāfir*. He said:

But, if someone condescends to the Qur'an, insults the Prophet Muhammad, condescends to the Sharia, states that adultery and homosexuality are halal, the consequence will be different. He leaves his faith, becoming a *kāfir*, because he chooses his own way. In Islam, there is an indicator, which one is the area of *kufr*, the area of apostasy, and which one is not. A muslim can enter the area of apostasy when he denies the Prophet, insults the Prophet, or legalizes something that was clearly declared haram by the Qur'an or *mutawātir* hadith. For example, homosexuality is clearly haram. But if someone says that homosexuality is permissible, he directly enters the area of *kufr*. If someone commits adultery, he will not be considered a *kāfir*, but a *fāsiq*, unless he says that adultery is permissible, so he is *kāfir*.

Since Buya Yahya perceives *kāfir* as the consequence of repudiating core beliefs, the label of *kāfir*, in the legal aspect, is merely for those who arbitrarily change God's law by reversing from halal to haram or vice versa. Even so, this is only applicable for laws stated by the Qur'an or *mutawātir* hadith with clear articulation, not the disputed laws (*mukhtalaf fih*). As a result,

⁶⁴ This will be explained and discussed later on.

those who do not implement God's laws can only be considered *fāsiq*, not to the level of being *kāfir*. In this context, Buya Yahya differs from Firanda, who labels the same individuals as *kāfir ašgar*, not *fāsiq*. However, despite their shared designation and similar epistemological roots, which the two are derived from Ibn 'Abbās's remarks,⁶⁵ there is no clarification in both Buya Yahya and Firanda's tafsir on whether they are truly identical or have minor differences. This is because, if the two terms are considered one hundred percent identical, it will be confusing, as the Qur'an presents the term "*kāfir*" in Surah Al-Mā'idah 44, while it utilizes the term "*fāsiq*" in Surah Al-Mā'idah: 46.

Subsequently, Buya Yahya launches a criticism directed at the absence of Sharia implementation, although he does not categorize those who fail to implement God's laws as *kāfir*.

A muslim who makes somebody lose their tooth should take out their own tooth. If he hurts someone, he should be injured. The objective is to stop someone from misbehaving. If someone knows that his eyes will be removed, he will never be brave enough to remove others' eyes. There will be no thugs hitting people. However, because the Sharia is not enforced, many people do whatever they want. There are many oppressions and murders, because the price of a soul is cheap.

However, Islam also educates people to have a soft heart, patience, and be full of love. If there is someone who kills his brother, and then regrets it, and the victim's family subsequently forgives the killer, this will be an expiation for the victim. Since this is the business between fellow humans, the narrative is *zālimūn*. Thus, everyone who does not implement the laws that deal with fellow humans will be *zālimūn*, considered unjust. But, only be said *zālim*, not *kāfir*, as long as acknowledging that *qīṣāṣ* is Islamic Sharia law.

In addition to criticizing the absence of total implementation of sharia, his interpretation above indicates that Buya Yahya wants to present the compassionate aspect of Islam. Through his explanation of *Qīṣāṣ*, Buya Yahya demonstrates that the legal system of Islam is not as strict as it seems. There was an aspect of humanity behind the rules, showing that law enforcement is sometimes revoked because there is compassion beyond it. Buya Yahya's interpretation implies that Islam regards compassion and law execution equally, providing equal appreciation to both. Moreover, Buya Yahya responds to the movements that declared resistance to the government because it is considered *kāfir* due to the absence of Sharia implementation. He said:

As an example, our rulers. They can not be said to be *kāfir*. We are different from some people who directly label *kāfir* to the government because it does not implement the Sharia. No, it is not like that. Most of them are believers; they just do not realize the Sharia, but still acknowledge that *qīṣāṣ* is the best ruling. Why do they not realize? It cannot be implemented. However, they still believe that Islamic rulings are more correct and better. If they subsequently do not realize, they will not be considered *kāfir*, but only stated *zālim* since they do not uphold justice among societies. Someone can be said to be a *kāfir* when he states that the *qīṣāṣ* is incorrect law. If someone still believes that *qīṣāṣ* is the best one, but he can not directly implement it when entering a certain system that makes him unable to do anything, or he wants to make a gradual change, he will not be a *kāfir*.

⁶⁵ Al-Suyūṭī also presents a *riwāya* from Ibn 'Abbās, in which he says that those who merely do not implement Allah's laws, yet still acknowledge them, can only be said *fāsiq* or *zālim*, not *kāfir*. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr Fī al-Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2011), 3:87.

By presenting this statement, Buya Yahya reinforces his position, which is not an enemy of the government. Buya Yahya's prohibition of considering *kafir* to the state officials signifies his holistic and deep understanding of the Indonesian context. He was aware that the current governmental system does not allow for the complete implementation of God's laws. Additionally, his words above imply that Buya Yahya urges not to disrupt the government and create chaos that can lead to social disorder. Buya Yahya then provides a more detailed explanation regarding this issue by mentioning the classification of Sharia law, showing where our domain should be. He said:

The law that is related to the ruler is the law of *imāma*. Please remember, there are three types of law: the law of *imāma*, the law of *qaḍā*, and the law of *fard*. The authority to uphold the law of *imāma* only belongs to the leader and his deputy. Meanwhile, the law of *qaḍā* is intended for transaction matters, marriage, etc. This type of law is not the leader's domain, but it belongs to the *qāḍī* (jurist) in every region. As for the law of *fard*, it is the private law that does not have any relation with others, no relation with the *qāḍī*, no relation with the government. This type of law includes prayer affairs, fasting affairs, and what should be done in our private homes. Therefore, do not talk too much about what is not your domain!

Enforcing the Sharia, for instance, but his wife is *gundulan* (local language; unknown meaning). How can it happen? Now, enforce the Sharia in your own homes. If there are people who pray improperly, but they shout *Allāhu Akbar* to uphold Sharia, what kind of Sharia do you uphold? In your home, you are the president, your wife is the minister, and you still cannot uphold it. Therefore, there are the law of *imāma*, the law of *qaḍā*, and the law of *fard*, or the private law. So, uphold the latter first, and then you may deal with other people's affairs; you can not be *zālim*, you need to be just. Regarding the law of *imāma*, we support, help, suggest, and try to enforce. What the ulema did was to ask nicely, not to do whatever we want.

It can be understood that Buya Yahya perceives certain movements striving to uphold God's laws, establish *khilāfa*, and reform the state as unnecessary, considering this matter outside the territory of ordinary people. Buya Yahya emphasizes that people should enforce Sharia in their homes, prioritizing their family, instead of participating in demonstrations against the government. This statement also serves as a social critique for those who claim to uphold Sharia, yet neglect their family. Nevertheless, even though Buya Yahya tends not to support movements aiming to formalize Sharia and Islamize the state, it is worth noting that Buya Yahya also drew attention to the government that does not care about Sharia. He said:

Then, how if an Imam does not care about the Sharia, or even aids brutality? This issue becomes the subject of discussion among the ulema. Should we conduct a *jihād* if the rulers truly harm the ummah and desecrate the religion? Thus, the ulema here explained, we are allowed if we have adequate capability. But remember! Everything should be done in a beautiful manner, and alhamdulillah, our ulema are clever.

His statement above is a supposition, showing that even if the Indonesian government does not violate the Sharia, it has the potential to desecrate the Sharia. Buya Yahya seems to present a solution for when the government ignores Sharia, explaining what should be done if it happens. In his presentation, Buya Yahya highlights the authority of the ulama, emphasizing that the movement should not come from the grassroots without the legitimation of the ulama. At a glance, this statement is similar to what Ja'far Umar Talib expresses: creating a reformation if capable. Yet, it cannot be understood that Buya Yahya is an extremist. This is

because, in addition to previously criticizing reform movements, he implies that such an action is carried out if the umma is under threat, not merely due to the absence of complete realization of Sharia by the rulers. Moreover, Buya Yahya also mentions that it should be done in a proper and ethical manner.

Afterward, Buya Yahya once again emphasizes peace over action, highlighting the importance of avoiding *takfir* that can cause disruption. This point is elaborated in his statement below:

The relation of the obedience (*fiṣq*) is with private matters. Private sins are *fiṣq*. If you leave prayer, or you do not implement Sharia in your own home, or you get drunk, you are still considered Muslim, but a *fāsiq*. Be careful, these are great sins. However, if the relation is with the others, it will be said *zālim* فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ, and if it has touched the matters of faith and creed, it will be said *kāfir* فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ.

Therefore, we need to straighten out some people who act on behalf of Islam. They merely cite Qur'anic verses وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ, and directly judge the president as *kāfir*, the regent as *kāfir*, these people as *kāfir*. How is it so good? A regent may be the one who considers that the Sharia is the best law, so we cannot easily judge a certain person as an unbeliever. We also cannot judge the president who does not implement the Sharia as a *kāfir*, since he is probably the president who believes that the Sharia is the most correct, but he can not realize it. Hereby, judging the others as *kāfir* is not an easy matter, so please be careful!

The discourse in Buya Yahya's interpretation is somewhat complicated. Buya Yahya states that Sharia enforcement is needed, but starts from the family sphere, not by generating a people movement. In this regard, this paper argues that such an understanding may be influenced by his reflection on what happened during the New Order era. Historically speaking, in that period, the Muslim people were depoliticized, meaning that the regime suppressed Muslim politics. At that time, Muslim activism was directed primarily toward the social and cultural domain.⁶⁶ This experience may have been embedded in the minds of many Muslim scholars, and thus, it affects the way they view the domain of Sharia, as presented by Buya Yahya.

Furthermore, Buya Yahya's interpretation seems to compromise various aspects. On one side, he holds traditional views by preserving the fundamental principles. He perceives that the legal terms clearly stated in the Qur'an and hadith, such as *Qīṣāṣ*, cannot be contextualized. On the other hand, Buya Yahya seeks to reflect his understanding of Sharia in the Indonesian context, where the Islamic system is not formally adopted and political activities of Muslims in particular times were once restricted. This synthesis gives rise to a view: a total belief in God's laws, explicitly manifested in the sacred text, is mandatory, while their realization is varied, depending on the domain. Additionally, the absence of ideal Sharia implementation does not cause someone to become *kāfir*. Accordingly, if a ruler fails to implement the Sharia, he cannot be easily labeled as a disbeliever, and, thus, a movement to totally reform the government is not necessary. Drawing on this, if we refer to Mohammed Ayooob's classification of Muslim's political stance, Buya Yahya may be categorized as a

⁶⁶ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 59.

traditionalist, since he tends to maintain the status quo, evidenced by the lack of any initiative to realize an ideal Islamic state that fully implements Sharia.⁶⁷

In addition to outlining the issue of Shariatization, Buya Yahya also drew attention to those who insult the Qur'an and the Prophet. Seeing the context, the video of Buya Yahya was posted in 2017, when an incident of Qur'an defamation by the former Governor of Jakarta, Ahok, occurred. Such an incident stimulated a huge demonstration in late 2016, demanding a prison sentence for Ahok.⁶⁸ At that time, the idea of NKRI Bersyariah also emerged, as previously mentioned. Thus, it is reasonable to say that the discourse established by Buya Yahya tends to be a response to the 2016 incident. However, due to inadequate information about his affiliation, this paper can only assert that Buya Yahya has a different view regarding the idea of Islamizing the state, even though he is frequently considered close to the initiator of such a movement.

D. CONCLUSION

Even though Firanda Andirja and Buya Yahya come from different traditions, their interpretations of Surah Al-Mā'idah 44 are largely similar. This is evident in their agreement on several aspects. Firstly, neither Firanda nor Buya Yahya calls for the movement to rebel against the government in order to formalize Sharia totally in Indonesia's legal system. Secondly, in two interpretations, there is a negative framing intended for certain parties: for liberalists in Firanda's interpretation, and for those who arrogantly claim to uphold Sharia outside their domain, as well as the insulters of the Qur'an in Buya Yahya's interpretation. Thirdly, they agree that declaring those who do not implement Sharia law as *kāfir* is something difficult and can not be done arbitrarily. Meanwhile, the difference this paper identifies is their labelling of Muslims who fail to uphold Sharia, while still acknowledging its supremacy. In this matter, while Firanda classifies them as *kāfir aṣḥgar* (small/minor *kāfir*), Buya Yahya regards them as *fāsiq* or *zālim*. Moreover, this paper finds that Firanda's interpretation is not purely textual due to his distinction between *kāfir akbar* and *kāfir aṣḥgar*. However, such a division is not intended to engage with the societal context in which the discourse is produced; instead, it represents an attempt to restore the Salafists' spirit, namely, theological purification. Conversely, Buya Yahya's interpretation shows an effort to address the emerging issues of his context. Ultimately, this paper challenges Abdullah Saeed's categorization of Salafists as textualists and Quintan Wiktorowicz's claim that Salafists avoid using rationality, arguing that these two matters can be applicable and relevant at the macro level rather than the micro level.

⁶⁷ The reason for referring to Mohammed Ayoob's work to assess Buya Yahya's political stance is the generality of the classification offered. As for Firanda, it is necessary to cite Noorhaidi Hasan or Wiktorowicz, as their classification is specifically intended for assessing Salafists. In his book, Ayoob presents two types of Muslims in dealing with political activism. Firstly, he mentioned modern Islamists who have a desire to re-create the "golden age of Islam" and perceive that political energies need to be utilized to achieve that goal. Secondly, he mentioned traditionalists who view that the "golden age" is a specific context in the seventh-century Madina, and thus it can not be recreated in the present or future. This latter model prefers to reconcile itself with imperfect political reality, including unjust rulers. See Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*, Reprinted (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 3–4.

⁶⁸ "Sidang Al Maidah: Dua tahun penjara untuk Ahok, langsung ditahan," *BBC News Indonesia*, n.d., accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-39853373>.

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