

THE FORMATION OF LEGAL UNDERSTANDING OF SMOKING IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF GUS BAHA AND USTADZ ABDUL SOMAD

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the formation of legal understanding regarding smoking within the framework of Islamic education by analyzing the perspectives of two prominent Indonesian scholars, Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad. The legal interpretation of smoking in Islam remains a subject of scholarly debate, influenced by differing approaches to religious texts and contextual considerations. This research employs a qualitative method using discourse analysis to examine the sermons and public lectures of both scholars as disseminated through various digital platforms. The findings reveal that Gus Baha adopts a contextual, tolerant, and wisdom-oriented approach, emphasizing the importance of understanding social realities in interpreting Islamic rulings. In contrast, Ustadz Abdul Somad tends to employ a more textual and classical fiqh-based perspective, delivering his views in a direct and assertive manner. These differing methods of da'wah significantly shape public perceptions and legal understandings of smoking within the Muslim community. The study concludes that tailoring da'wah strategies to audience characteristics is crucial for the effective transmission of Islamic legal concepts, thereby facilitating broader acceptance and application of religious rulings in contemporary social contexts.

Keyword: Islamic education, smoking law, Gus Baha, Ustadz Abdul Somad, legal understanding

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pembentukan pemahaman hukum mengenai rokok dalam kerangka pendidikan Islam dengan menganalisis pandangan dua ulama terkemuka Indonesia, yaitu Gus Baha dan Ustadz Abdul Somad. Penafsiran hukum Islam terkait merokok masih menjadi perdebatan di kalangan ulama, yang dipengaruhi oleh perbedaan pendekatan terhadap teks-teks keagamaan serta pertimbangan konteks sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis wacana terhadap ceramah dan dakwah kedua tokoh yang disebarakan melalui berbagai platform digital. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Gus Baha cenderung menggunakan pendekatan yang kontekstual, toleran, dan penuh kebijaksanaan, dengan menekankan pentingnya memahami realitas sosial dalam menafsirkan hukum Islam. Sebaliknya, Ustadz Abdul Somad lebih menekankan pendekatan tekstual dan berlandaskan fiqh klasik, dengan penyampaian yang tegas dan langsung. Perbedaan metode dakwah ini berpengaruh signifikan terhadap cara masyarakat memahami dan merespons hukum merokok dalam Islam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi dakwah perlu disesuaikan dengan karakteristik audiens agar penyampaian konsep hukum Islam lebih efektif, serta dapat diterima dan diterapkan dengan lebih luas sesuai konteks sosial masa kini.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Islam, hukum merokok, Gus Baha, Ustadz Abdul Somad, pemahaman hukum

Introduction

Smoking is the act of inhaling smoke from a roll of tobacco wrapped in nipah leaves or paper that is lit and then drawn from the inside out through the body (W. Kurniawan, 2021). The nicotine contained in cigarettes can cause addiction in users, making it extremely difficult to quit (D. P. Sari & Khoirunnisa, 2024). Smoking poses a danger not only to active smokers but also to others who inhale cigarette smoke, known as passive smokers (Sekeronej, Saija, & Kailola, 2020). According to data from the World Health Organization, in 2019, more than 8 million people worldwide died annually due to tobacco-related causes. These deaths were primarily attributed to smoking (Almaidah et al., 2020). Smoking has numerous harmful effects on human health and causes harm not only to individual smokers but also to those around them (A. Kurniawan, Suroso, Sari, & Tjokro, 2023). Damage and various oral diseases such as periodontitis (gum infection), throat diseases like pharyngitis (throat infection) and laryngitis (inflammation of the voice box), bronchial diseases such as bronchitis (inflammation of the bronchi), and lung conditions such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are consequences of tobacco consumption (Gobel, Pamungkas, Abdurrasyid, & Sari, 2020).

Although cigarettes are not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an or Hadith, scholars use Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and health considerations to determine the ruling on smoking, ranging from *haram* (forbidden), *makruh* (discouraged), to *mubah* (permissible), depending on the health and environmental effects of smoking. According to Sheikh Mahmud Syaltut, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Egypt, the opinion that smoking is *makruh* or even *haram* is more reasonable and strongly grounded (Prasetya, 2020). Furthermore, many scholars classify smoking as a form of extravagance. This is not only because individuals purchase cigarettes in small quantities but also because tobacco companies invest heavily in producing a product that is widely considered harmful or, at best, lacking in benefit from a health standpoint. Most doctors—and even governments—have acknowledged the negative effects of smoking. Thus, even in the absence of explicit religious texts (Qur'anic verses or hadith) prohibiting smoking, the concept of *maqashid al-shari'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law) is sufficient to support its prohibition (Abidah, 2020).

Next is Gus Baha, whose full name is Bahauddin. His father's name is Nur Salim, making his complete name Bahauddin Nur Salim. This implies that Bahauddin is his given name, while Nur Salim is his father's name. It is common in Indonesia for individuals with single names to be listed in this format. For example, Maimoen becomes Maimoen Zubair, as his father's name was Zubair. Moreover, administrative requirements often necessitate a full name with more than one word (Musthofa, 2022). Gus Baha, or KH Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim, is a prominent Quranic scholar from Rembang. He is known for his relaxed yet profound preaching style, offering in-depth insights into Islamic jurisprudence grounded in traditional scholarship (Jamal, 2024). His lectures are often filled with meaningful humor, making religious messages more enjoyable and easier to understand. He also serves as the *Rais Syuriyah* of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU), demonstrating his significant influence within Indonesia's Islamic organizational structure.

Ustadz Abdul Somad has gained widespread popularity in recent years. Known for his deep knowledge of religion, especially in Hadith and fiqh, he is appreciated for delivering sermons in an engaging manner, often laced with humor that resonates with his audience. Ustadz Abdul Somad Batubara, Lc., D.E.S.A., Datuk Seri Ulama Setia Negara, was born in Silo Lama, Asahan, North Sumatra, on May 18, 1977 (Wikipedia, n.d.). He is an Indonesian preacher and Islamic scholar who frequently addresses religious issues, particularly in Hadith and Islamic jurisprudence. He also speaks on nationalism and various contemporary public debates. His da'wah,

broadcast widely on YouTube, is known for its clarity, directness, and scholarly depth. He lectures at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim (UIN Suska) in Riau (Ashari, 2023).

Both Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad are among the most popular Islamic scholars in Indonesia, each with a distinct preaching style. This section provides a comprehensive explanation of their respective da'wah characteristics, from delivery methods to content. Gus Baha is known for speaking in a calm and soft tone during sermons, which has earned him a reputation as a charismatic and gentle scholar (A'yuniyah & Utomo, 2022). Consequently, he is well-liked by a wide range of audiences, particularly due to his background as a traditional Islamic student (*santri*), whose humility and politeness are seen as appealing traits (Ronaydi & Zen, 2023). On the other hand, Ustadz Abdul Somad is well-versed in Hadith and fiqh and is able to respond effectively to various questions from his audience. His delivery is concise, clear, and often humorous, making him accessible and not boring. His da'wah consistently draws upon the Qur'an and Hadith (Syahputra & Santalia, 2023). Each of his sermons features strong rhetoric and lively humor. To make the content more digestible, he frequently uses anecdotes, jokes, or entertaining metaphors. His humor creates a more relaxed environment and helps capture the attention of people (especially younger audiences) who might not otherwise be interested in religious discourse.

The contrasting da'wah approaches of Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad enrich the diversity of Islamic preaching in Indonesia. Gus Baha's relaxed and reflective style and Ustadz Abdul Somad's assertive and traditionally rooted delivery both contribute significantly to shaping religious understanding within Indonesia's socio-cultural context. Their differing opinions on the ruling of smoking highlight the diversity of Islamic jurisprudential interpretation among Muslims. Although both scholars are Indonesian and have substantial influence, they take different stances on the legal status of smoking. This difference allows for healthy discourse and promotes better understanding of divergent Islamic views, particularly on *ijtihadiah* (interpretative) matters that lack clear-cut rulings from primary religious texts. It is essential to present a clearer understanding to the Indonesian Muslim community by examining both scholars' perspectives on smoking. By doing so, people can make wiser personal and social choices. These differences also demonstrate that Islam, as a *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation), embraces diverse interpretations as long as they are based on strong evidence and aimed at the well-being of humanity.

Method

In writing this article, the author employs the library research method as the primary approach for collecting data and information. This method involves the search for and compilation of relevant literature from various written references such as books, academic journals, research articles, official documents, and other scholarly sources that support the discussion and arguments presented in this article. Library research is a type of study that gathers data and information through available resources in libraries, including reference books, previous related research, articles, notes, and various journals relevant to the research topic (M. Sari & Asmendri, 2020).

Through the library research method, the author seeks to obtain a comprehensive understanding and a strong theoretical foundation regarding the topic discussed. This type of research focuses on exploring pre-existing information in the literature, resulting in verified references drawn from credible sources. In its application, the author does not merely collect and record information randomly but also conducts a critical analysis of the sources used to ensure that the information gathered is relevant and supports the main arguments or ideas conveyed in the article.

Findings and Discussion

Gus Baha's View on the Ruling of Smoking

Issues related to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) are often directed to KH Ahmad Bahauddin Nur Salim, widely known as Gus Baha. As a charismatic scholar and an expert in Qur'anic exegesis, it is natural that his opinions are often sought as authoritative references and informal *fatwas* on legal issues in Islam, including the question of smoking. One example is when Gus Baha addressed this topic in a discussion on a YouTube channel, where he recounted a personal experience being asked for a *fatwa* by an elderly village *kyai* (Islamic cleric). This *kyai* admitted that his only form of enjoyment after the night (*'Isha*) prayer was chatting and smoking with friends from his *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) days in a corner of the prayer hall (Sekolah Akhirat, n.d.).

The *kyai* reportedly said: "The only pleasure I have is smoking in the corner of the *mushalla*. In the morning I must obey my wife; I do my daily labor as best as I can. Smoking is my only form of joy, Gus. If you say it's *haram*, then I would have no

joy left in this world. I don't have much wealth. I am a village *kyai*, watching dangdut concerts wouldn't be proper." Gus Baha, recalling the situation, responded humorously yet kindly: "Well then, Mbah, for you smoking is *halal*." This story, shared among his audience, was met with laughter (Sekolah Akhirat, n.d.).

In another context, Gus Baha, the son of Kyai Nur Salim and caretaker of the Al-Qur'an Islamic boarding school in Kragan, Narukan, Rembang, Central Java, explained that scholars hold varying opinions about smoking, some prohibit it (*haram*), others deem it *makruh* (discouraged), and some even allow it (*mubah*). "Yes, smoking has harms, for your finances, and for your health. But some people who declare it *haram* go overboard, like saying cigarette smoke is 'Satan's urine.' That hadith is *maudhu'* (fabricated). We don't even know when Satan urinates!" he said with amusement. "That's just nonsense," he added. Gus Baha further noted that many respected scholars and senior clerics also smoked. "Mbah Mahrus Ali smoked, and so did many top-tier *ulama*," he stated (Satria, 2022).

Gus Baha emphasized that individuals like the elderly *kyai* should not be given a blanket *haram* ruling, especially because the legal status of smoking remains a subject of *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement). In such a case, considering the person's social and emotional condition, Gus Baha permitted it as a form of *rukhsah* (leniency). "Indeed, it's better than seeking enjoyment in dangdut concerts, which clearly involve more problematic elements," he argued (Sekolah Akhirat, n.d.).

He also reflected on the practical implications of smoking for people with limited financial means. For example, if someone only has Rp20,000 and spends it on cigarettes and coffee instead of essentials like rice, that behavior becomes unwise, not necessarily because cigarettes are *haram*, but because of poor prioritization (Satria, 2022).

In conclusion, the legal status of smoking in Islam remains a frequently debated topic within Indonesian Muslim society, often addressed to prominent scholars like Gus Baha. As a wise and humorous preacher, Gus Baha approaches the matter with contextual sensitivity and deep understanding. He emphasizes that smoking is a *khilafiyah* issue among scholars, and the ruling should depend on one's condition, intentions, and social context. In a notable case, he granted a personal concession to a rural *kyai* whose only source of joy was smoking, seeing this as a lesser harm compared to other available alternatives.

Gus Baha also critiques those who use weak or fabricated hadiths to support their arguments. According to him, what truly matters is evaluating the benefit (*maslahah*) and harm (*mafsadah*) on a case-by-case basis. In situations involving poverty, using limited resources to buy cigarettes rather than basic necessities is clearly inadvisable. Ultimately, Gus Baha encourages a non-judgmental, thoughtful approach to religious rulings, one that prioritizes wisdom, empathy, and relevance to the real-life circumstances of the believers (Satria, 2022).

Ustadz Abdul Somad's Perspective on the Islamic Ruling of Smoking

The issue of smoking in Islam has long been a topic of debate among scholars and Islamic organizations. Various opinions have emerged based on health considerations, scriptural evidence, and the social realities of the Muslim community. Ustadz Abdul Somad (commonly referred to as UAS) is one of Indonesia's most well-known Islamic preachers who frequently addresses this issue in a manner that is relatable and accessible to the general public. In one of his sermons, UAS outlined the ruling on smoking by referencing several authoritative fatwas issued by prominent Islamic bodies and scholars (Gunawan, 2020).

1. Views of Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian Ulema Council

Muhammadiyah, one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, issued a fatwa categorizing smoking as *haram* (forbidden). This ruling is based on medical research that demonstrates the severe health risks posed by smoking, as well as the Islamic principle that forbids any action that endangers oneself or others.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia or MUI) offered a more detailed stance. According to its fatwa:

- a. Smoking is *haram* for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, the elderly, children, and the sick, due to its clear and immediate harm to their health.
- b. Smoking is *makruh* (discouraged but not sinful) for healthy individuals, since the harms may not be immediate but still exist in the long term (Gunawan, 2020).

This nuanced position reflects a context-sensitive approach that considers both Islamic law and medical science.

2. Perspectives from International Scholars

A number of prominent international Islamic scholars have also weighed in on the ruling of smoking. Among them are:

- a. Sheikh Ali Gomaa, former Grand Mufti of Egypt, who declared smoking *haram* due to its predominantly harmful effects (Sr Events Production, 2019).

- b. Sheikh Abdul Aziz ibn Baz, former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, also classified smoking as *haram*, citing Islamic injunctions against consuming harmful substances and wasting wealth.
- c. However, some scholars consider smoking to be *makruh*, arguing that the Qur'an does not explicitly mention tobacco. As a result, scholarly *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) has led to differing opinions (*ikhtilaf*), with some declaring it forbidden and others merely discouraged (Sr Events Production, 2019).

3. Ustadz Abdul Somad's Interpretation and Analogy

In several of his public lectures, Ustadz Abdul Somad explains that the ruling on smoking largely depends on which scholarly opinion a person chooses to follow. He articulates the implications of each view using simple analogies to aid public understanding:

- a. If a person follows the opinion that smoking is *haram*, then he must treat it with the same seriousness as consuming pork, which is categorically forbidden in Islam.
- b. If one leans toward the opinion that smoking is *makruh*, then it is akin to eating something culturally distasteful, like *jengkol* (a pungent Indonesian fruit), not forbidden, but frowned upon by many (Haniya, 2023).

This flexible and humorous analogy typifies UAS's communicative approach. Rather than imposing a single legal opinion, he offers his audience the tools to understand and choose based on credible scholarly views. UAS's method encourages individual reflection while still upholding the values of Islamic jurisprudence.

A Comparative Perspective on the Islamic Ruling of Smoking According to Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad

Gus Baha approaches the issue of smoking not merely as a matter of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), but also through the lens of social reality and the daily lives of ordinary Muslims. He frequently emphasizes that the ruling on smoking is a matter of *khilafiyah* (scholarly disagreement) among Islamic scholars, with some declaring it *haram* (forbidden) and others considering it *makruh* (discouraged). One of the most notable illustrations of his flexible and empathetic approach is seen in his response to a rural *kyai* (religious teacher) who regarded smoking as his only source of relaxation after a long day of hard work. In this specific context, Gus Baha permitted smoking as a way to preserve the individual's mental comfort and emotional well-being (Santri 1926, n.d.).

Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS), on the other hand, shares both similarities and differences with Gus Baha in his approach to the Islamic ruling on smoking. UAS typically grounds his explanation in the authoritative fatwas of Islamic institutions and scholars, such as those from Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). He emphasizes the existence of two dominant legal perspectives on smoking: *haram* and *makruh*, and advises individuals to adhere to the opinion of the scholars they personally trust. UAS's approach is both didactic and analytical, often using relatable analogies to clarify complex religious concepts for the general public (Abdul Somad, 2023).

While UAS adopts a structured, juridical framework rooted in authoritative legal opinions and health-related evidence, Gus Baha's viewpoint is shaped more by humanistic and contextual considerations. He frequently reiterates that legal rulings should take into account the socio-economic conditions of the community, rather than rigidly adhering to textual sources that may not be fully authentic or applicable in modern contexts. For instance, Gus Baha humorously critiques certain *maudhu'* (fabricated) hadiths used to prohibit smoking, such as the one referring to cigarette smoke as "the urine of Satan." He argues that such dubious narrations should not form the basis of legal rulings, and that Islamic law should instead prioritize real-life consequences, both harms (*maḍarat*) and benefits (*maṣlaḥat*), in determining permissibility (Santri 1926, n.d.).

Another key difference lies in their mode of communication. UAS tends to deliver his views in a formal and didactic style, backed by scholarly citations and medical research. He often references principles in Islamic law that prohibit self-harm and harm to others, aligning his arguments with scientific studies highlighting the health hazards of smoking. Conversely, Gus Baha uses a relaxed, often humorous tone, making his lectures highly accessible and emotionally resonant, especially for those in rural or economically disadvantaged settings.

In essence, the contrast between these two scholars can be summarized in terms of methodology and audience orientation. UAS offers a more systematic, rule-based explanation suitable for audiences seeking clarity through established *fatwas* and textual evidence. In contrast, Gus Baha's perspective appeals to those who value compassion, context, and everyday lived experience in the interpretation of religious rulings. His emphasis on flexibility and empathy provides an alternative yet complementary understanding of Islamic jurisprudence.

While Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad differ in their interpretative approaches and delivery styles, both contribute valuable insights to the discourse on the permissibility of smoking in Islam. Their perspectives highlight the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Islamic legal reasoning, demonstrating that scholarly disagreement can serve to enrich public understanding rather than create confusion. By presenting both the legalistic and contextual aspects of the issue, these two scholars collectively offer the Muslim community a more holistic framework for navigating ethical choices in contemporary life.

This article reflects a nuanced exploration of the legal status of smoking in Islam, focusing on the differing perspectives of two prominent Indonesian Islamic scholars, Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad. Based on the previous discussions, it is evident that the legal ruling on smoking is a contemporary fiqh issue characterized by *khilafiyah*, legitimate differences of opinion among scholars. In this context, the author attempts to examine how these two charismatic scholars convey their views on the legal status of smoking through different yet complementary approaches.

From Gus Baha's perspective, a highly contextual, humane, and socio-culturally sensitive approach is apparent. He does not rigidly judge the ruling based solely on textual evidence but rather takes into account the real-life circumstances of the individual in question, including economic and psychological conditions. In certain cases, Gus Baha even grants *rukhsah* (leniency) based on *maslahah* (benefit) and *dharurah* (necessity). This approach illustrates the flexibility of Islamic law and its ability to adapt to the needs of the community, provided it remains within the framework of *maqasid al-shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law).

Conversely, Ustadz Abdul Somad adopts a more textual and normative approach, referencing official fatwas from Islamic institutions such as Muhammadiyah and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), as well as opinions from international scholars. He educates the public by explaining the two main views on the legal status of smoking (*haram* and *makruh*) and advises followers to adhere to the opinions of scholars they trust. UAS presents this in simple language with relatable analogies, comparing smoking to jengkol (a pungent food) and pork, making it easier for laypeople to understand.

The author finds that these two approaches represent diverse methodologies in understanding and conveying Islamic law. Gus Baha exemplifies *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* (deep comprehension of religion considering social context), while UAS represents

taqlid ma'rifi (following scholarly authority based on knowledge). These differences should not be seen as contradictory but as enriching the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Both perspectives also reflect the space for *ijtihad* in contemporary issues like smoking, which is not explicitly addressed in the Qur'an or authentic hadiths. Hence, the presence of *ikhtilaf* (disagreement) is natural and legitimate within Islamic scholarship.

In relation to the article's title, the controversy surrounding the legal ruling on smoking cannot be understood in a black-and-white manner. The views of Gus Baha and UAS illustrate that Muslims should not blame each other in the face of differing opinions but rather strive to understand these views wisely and with tolerance. In other words, this controversy serves as an educational tool for the community to learn how to appreciate diversity within Islam maturely.

Based on the study of the perspectives of Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad, the author concludes that the legal ruling on smoking in Islam cannot be generalized absolutely as either *haram* or *makruh* without considering social context, scriptural evidence, and individual circumstances. This article does not seek to judge which opinion is correct but aims to show that Islam allows for scholarly differences grounded in knowledge and compassion for the community. Therefore, the controversy over smoking law is not merely a legal matter but also a reflection of the dynamics of Islamic preaching and the scholars' approaches to guiding the community according to the needs of the times.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth review of the perspectives of two prominent Indonesian scholars, Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdul Somad, regarding the Islamic ruling on smoking. In Islamic teachings, there is no explicit evidence in the Qur'an or hadith that directly addresses the ruling on smoking. However, scholars use the *maqasid al-shari'ah* approach, which refers to the principles and objectives of Islamic law, and also consider the health impacts of smoking in determining its ruling.

Interestingly, these two figures have very different styles of preaching when conveying Islamic teachings. Gus Baha is known for his relaxed approach, filled with humor, and using simple language that is easy to understand by various audiences. Meanwhile, Ustadz Abdul Somad is more direct and assertive in delivering Islamic rulings, often supported by strong evidence and in-depth analysis.

This study provides insight that the character and approach of a scholar in preaching not only influence the way Islamic rulings are conveyed but also affect how the community understands and accepts those teachings. The difference in delivery styles shows that Islam allows room for various methods of preaching that align with the character of the community, making Islamic values easier to accept and apply in daily life.

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