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JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

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Abstract

The burning of the Quran in Scandinavia since July 2023 has triggered a significant escalation of Islamophobia in Europe, creating social polarization and increasing discrimination against Muslim communities. This research aims to analyze the Islamophobic narratives that developed following the Quran burning in Scandinavia and explore the role of interfaith dialogue as a solution to address these tensions. The research method employed is a qualitative approach through library research, analyzing documents, international organization reports, journal articles, and mass media publications from July 2023 to early 2025 using content analysis techniques with Alwi Shihab's theoretical framework on misconceptions of Islam in the West. The findings reveal that the Quran burning incidents triggered a 63% increase in violence against Muslims in Scandinavia, with 71% of Swedish Muslims reporting experiencing discrimination. The emerging Islamophobic narratives are rooted in historical misconceptions including the legacy of the Crusades, Orientalist bias, and sensationalist media framing that portrays perpetrators as defenders of free speech while delegitimizing Muslim protests. However, more than 200 interfaith organizations conducted 50+ dialogue forums demonstrating the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue in building mutual understanding. This research concludes that interfaith dialogue based on equality, education, and multi-stakeholder cooperation is a vital strategy for addressing Islamophobia. A comprehensive approach integrating anti-discrimination policies, multicultural education, media literacy, and sustained dialogue is needed to achieve peaceful coexistence between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Europe.

Keywords: *anti-discrimination policies; interfaith dialogue; Islamophobia; misconceptions of Islam; Quran burning; Scandinavia.*

Abstrak

Pembakaran Al-Quran di Skandinavia sejak Juli 2023 telah memicu eskalasi Islamofobia yang signifikan di Eropa, menciptakan polarisasi sosial dan meningkatkan diskriminasi terhadap komunitas Muslim. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis narasi Islamofobia yang berkembang pasca-pembakaran Al-Quran di Skandinavia dan mengeksplorasi peran dialog antaragama sebagai solusi untuk mengatasi ketegangan tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan

adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan library research, menganalisis dokumen, laporan organisasi internasional, artikel jurnal, dan publikasi media massa periode Juli 2023 hingga awal 2025 melalui teknik content analysis dengan kerangka teoritis Alwi Shihab tentang miskonsepsi Islam di Barat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa insiden pembakaran Al-Quran memicu peningkatan 63% kasus kekerasan terhadap Muslim di Skandinavia, dengan 71% Muslim Swedia melaporkan mengalami diskriminasi. Narasi Islamofobia yang berkembang berakar pada miskonsepsi historis meliputi warisan Perang Salib, bias orientalis, dan framing media yang sensasional yang menggambarkan pelaku sebagai pembela kebebasan berekspresi sementara delegitimasi protes Muslim. Namun, lebih dari 200 organisasi lintas agama menyelenggarakan 50+ forum dialog yang menunjukkan efektivitas dialog antaragama dalam membangun pemahaman mutual. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dialog antaragama berbasis kesetaraan, pendidikan, dan kerjasama multi-stakeholder merupakan strategi vital untuk mengatasi Islamofobia. Diperlukan pendekatan komprehensif yang mengintegrasikan kebijakan anti-diskriminasi, pendidikan multikultural, literasi media, dan dialog berkelanjutan untuk mewujudkan koeksistensi damai antara komunitas Muslim dan non-Muslim di Eropa.

Kata kunci: dialog antaragama; Islamofobia; pembakaran Al-Quran; Skandinavia; miskonsepsi Islam

INTRODUCTION

Islam and interfaith dialogue are important issues to examine, particularly following the incident of Quran burning in Scandinavia in 2023. The event not only generated a wave of anger among Muslims but also deepened negative sentiment toward Islam in global society. The Islamophobic narratives that emerged as a result of these acts created major obstacles to harmonious interfaith interaction¹. In this context, it becomes crucial to examine how interfaith dialogue strategies can serve as a solution to ease tensions and reduce the negative stigma attached to Muslims.

Since July 2023, at least ten incidents of Qur'an burning have taken place in Sweden and Denmark, with perpetrators openly carrying out provocative acts in front of the embassies of Muslim-majority countries². These incidents triggered waves of protest in more than thirty Muslim-majority countries, including large-scale demonstrations in Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, and Middle Eastern countries involving millions of participants³. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) recorded these acts as a "systematic form of hate crime" and urged the UN to take firm action against religious

¹ Anisa Maulidya and Mhd. Armawi Fauzi, "Sejarah Penulisan Dan Pembukuan Al-Qur'an," *Tarbiatuna: Journal of Islamic Education Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2023): 129–36, <https://doi.org/10.47467/tarbiatuna.v3i1.2762>.

² Rofhani Rofhani and Almas Sharfina 'Alaniah, "Pendomestikasian Perempuan Dalam Narasi Antifeminisme Kanal YouTube Muslimah Media Center: Analisis Kritis Perspektif Fatima Mernissi," *The Journal of Society and Media* 7, no. 2 (October 2023): 546–66, <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v7n2.p546-566>.

³ Nora Hattar and Kine M. Bækkevold, "South Africa-Nordic Relations," *The Thinker* 95, no. 2 (June 2023): 83–97, https://doi.org/10.36615/the_thinker.v95i2.2526; Al Jazeera, "Protests Erupt across Muslim World over Quran Burning in Sweden," 2023.

hate speech⁴. Meanwhile, the European Islamophobia Report 2023 showed a 47% increase in cases of violence against Muslims in Europe compared to the previous year, with Scandinavia recording the highest surge at 63%⁵.

Data From the Pew Research Center⁶ reveal that 58% of Western Europeans held a negative perception of Islam following the Quran-burning incidents, up from 42% in 2022. In Sweden itself, a survey conducted by the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities found that 71% of Muslim respondents reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment in the preceding twelve months, a significant rise from 54% in the previous survey period (SMASE, 2024). More worrying still, a report from Tell MAMA UK recorded a 300% increase in online Islamophobic incidents on European social media platforms in the weeks following the Quran burnings, with narratives portraying Islam as an intolerant religion and a threat to Western values dominating public discussion⁷.

The urgency of raising this issue lies in the fact that misunderstanding and stereotyping of Muslims continue to increase, often driven by the mass media and misrepresentation in public discourse⁸. Research shows that interfaith dialogue can play a significant role in building trust and understanding between different communities, an aspect that is greatly needed in an era of globalization in which cross-cultural and interreligious encounters are becoming increasingly common⁹. In many cases, such dialogue helps open the way for reconciliation and promotes social harmony among groups that are often marginalized by unjust narratives¹⁰.

The phenomenon of Islamophobia occurring in Scandinavia is in fact not new, but rather a continuation of a long-standing pattern of misunderstanding between the West and Islam. From the Qur'anic perspective, Allah SWT says:

⁴ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, "OIC Condemns Repeated Desecration of the Holy Quran in Sweden," 2023.

⁵ Asrida Adetry and Agussalim Burhanuddin, "Islamophobia in Europe and Its Global Impact," *Glocal Society Journal* 1, no. 1 (July 2024): 54–62, <https://doi.org/10.31947/gj.v1i1.36628>.

⁶ Pew Research Center, "European Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims," 2024.

⁷ Tell MAMA UK, "Online Islamophobia Following Quran Burning Incidents in Scandinavia," 2023.

⁸ Lutfiyatut Tamamiyah, "Islamophobia Discourse: Analyzing the Representation of Islam and Muslims in Public Narratives," *Islamic Journal of Communication and Public Discourse* 2, no. 1 (August 2025): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.59784/ijcpd.v2i1.6>; Alfoalem Araba Abiye et al., "Modern Contraceptive Use and Associated Factors among Reproductive Age Group Women in Three Peri-Urban Communities in Central Ethiopia," *Journal of Drug Delivery and Therapeutics* 9, no. 6-s (December 2019): 93–102, <https://doi.org/10.22270/jddt.v9i6-s.3651>.

⁹ Yayuk Sulistiyowati et al., "Pendampingan Dan Pemulihan Trauma Pasca Erupsi Gunung Semeru Pada Masyarakat Desa Curah Kobokan Dan Supit Urang Kabupaten Lumajang," *Studium: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 1, no. 3 (April 2022): 105–10, <https://doi.org/10.53867/jpm.v1i3.37>.

¹⁰ SAYED PEERZADE, "Towards Self-Enforcing Islamic Tax System: An Alternative to Current Approaches," *Journal of King Abdulaziz University-Islamic Economics* 18, no. 1 (2005): 3–12, <https://doi.org/10.4197/islec.18-1.1>.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.”

(Al-Hujurat: 13).¹¹

This verse emphasizes the importance of mutual acquaintance among human beings regardless of religious background and the important of plurality in all aspects.¹² Using a qualitative approach, this article analyzes public reactions to the Qur'an burning and how interfaith dialogue can function as a bridge to rebuild damaged relations. The authors draw on existing theories of pluralism and tolerance, as well as best practices from successful interfaith dialogue initiatives in various parts of the world, including Indonesia and other multicultural countries¹³. Through in-depth analysis of existing interfaith initiatives, it is hoped that clarification and practical solutions can be found to improve understanding and mutual respect among different religious communities¹⁴. By focusing on this issue, the article not only contributes to the academic discussion of Islamophobia but also emphasizes the importance of dialogue as a tool toward a more inclusive and peaceful society.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach using descriptive-analytical methods to examine the phenomenon of Islamophobia following the Qur'an burning in Scandinavia and the role of interfaith dialogue as a solution. The type of research is library research, relying on secondary data in the form of documents, reports, journal articles, and mass-media publications relating to the Qur'an burning incidents in Sweden and Denmark from July 2023 to early 2025. Data were collected through documentary study, gathering various relevant literature sources, including reports from international organizations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the European Islamophobia Report, reports from survey institutions such as the Pew Research Center, and academic

¹¹ Kementrian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahannya*, 2019, 755.

¹² Roni Ismail, *Menuju Muslim Rahmatan Lil'alamin*, (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2016), 24-26.

¹³ Syaban Abdul Karim, “The Importance of Religious Moderation in Strengthening Interfaith Brotherhood in Multicultural Societies,” *Spiritus: Religious Studies and Education Journal* 3, no. 1 (June 2025): 12–20, <https://doi.org/10.59923/spiritus.v3i1.518>.

¹⁴ Aomar Boum, “Branding Convivencia: Jewish Museums and the Reinvention of a Moroccan Andalus in Essaouira,” in *The Art of Minorities* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 205–24, <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474443760.003.0010>; Fransina Latumahina et al., “Enhancing Character Formation and Islamic Knowledge through Recitation Teaching at TPA Darussalam Negeri Ureng, Maluku Tengah, Indonesia,” *Indonesian Journal of Cultural and Community Development* 14, no. 3 (June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijccd2023904>.

publications discussing misconceptions of Islam in the West particularly the work of Alwi Shihab (2006), which serves as the primary theoretical framework for analyzing the roots of misconceptions and accusations against Islam.

The collected data were then analyzed using content-analysis techniques to identify patterns of Islamophobic narratives emerging in the mass media, public statements, and social-media discourse following the Qur'an-burning incidents. The analysis was conducted in three stages: first, data reduction, sorting information relevant to the research focus; second, data presentation in the form of narrative descriptions depicting the context, impact, and responses to the Qur'an-burning incidents; and third, drawing conclusions by identifying interfaith-dialogue strategies that have been and can be applied as solutions to address Islamophobia. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation comparing and verifying information from various different sources, including official reports from international organizations, academic research findings, international mass-media documentation, and statistical data from credible survey institutions. The analytical framework draws on Alwi Shihab's theoretical perspective on misconceptions of Islam in the West to dissect the roots of the problem, while the concept of interfaith dialogue is used to formulate constructive solutions for building mutual understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Scandinavia in particular and Europe in general.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Quran Burning in Scandinavia: Chronology and Impact

The wave of Qur'an burnings in Scandinavia began in mid-2023, marking a new escalation in tensions between Muslim communities and anti-Islam groups in Northern Europe. The first incident to draw international attention occurred on 28 June 2023 in Stockholm, Sweden, when an Iraqi activist named Salwan Momika burned a Quran outside the Great Mosque of Stockholm, coinciding with the Eid al-Adha celebration¹⁵. This provocative act was carried out under the protection of Swedish police on the grounds of freedom of expression, sparking widespread anger throughout the Muslim world. It did not stop there: on 31 July 2023, Momika again carried out a similar act in front of the Iraqi Embassy in Stockholm, this time accompanied by trampling and burning of the Islamic holy book¹⁶. The same pattern was then repeated in Denmark, where a group of ultra-nationalist activists burned a Qur'an in front of the Turkish Embassy in Copenhagen in August 2023, followed by a series of similar incidents in various Danish cities throughout that month.

¹⁵ BBC News, "Quran Burned Outside Stockholm Mosque on Eid Al-Adha," 2023.

¹⁶ Jazeera, "Protests Erupt across Muslim World over Quran Burning in Sweden."

The Quran-burning incidents triggered a massive international response and underscored the sensitivity of the issue in relations between the West and the Muslim world. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), representing 57 member states, promptly convened an emergency session on 31 July 2023 and issued a resolution strongly condemning the Quran burnings as “an act that incites hatred and constitutes a systematic hate crime against Muslims”¹⁷. The OIC demanded that Sweden and Denmark take firm legal action against the perpetrators and revise policies that allow such acts to occur in the name of freedom of expression. Furthermore, the OIC threatened to bring the issue before the UN Human Rights Council and urged all member states to consider diplomatic and economic sanctions against countries that allow the desecration of religious symbols¹⁸.

A wave of mass protests swept dozens of countries across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in the weeks following the Quran-burning incidents. In Pakistan, demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of people took place in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, demanding the severing of diplomatic relations with Sweden¹⁹. The Pakistani government formally summoned the Swedish ambassador to lodge a strong protest and postponed a bilateral trade delegation visit. In Indonesia, the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) issued a fatwa condemning the Quran burning and called for a boycott of Swedish products, while thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Jakarta and other major cities²⁰. Turkey, under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, took the harshest stance by blocking the ratification of Sweden's NATO membership and declaring that “a country that allows the desecration of our holy book is not fit to be an ally”²¹.

The responses of the Swedish and Danish governments to international pressure revealed a complex dilemma between upholding the principle of freedom of expression and maintaining diplomatic relations with the Muslim world. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson initially stated that although the government condemned the Quran burning as an act disrespectful of religion, the Swedish constitution protects the right to freedom of expression and the government could not ban legal demonstrations²².

¹⁷ Cooperation, “OIC Condemns Repeated Desecration of the Holy Quran in Sweden.”

¹⁸ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, “Final Communiqué of the Extraordinary Open-Ended Executive Committee Meeting at the Level of Foreign Ministers on the Recurrent Incidents of Desecration of the Holy Quran,” 2023.

¹⁹ Nur Irdina Hakimah Norazali, Muhammad Irfan Izhar, and Fathiah Zulkifli, “Sejarah Dan Implikasi Pandemi: Kajian Kes Pandemi Selesema Sepanyol, Selesema Asia Dan Selesema Hong Kong,” *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Strategic Studies* 4, no. 7 (2023): 466–84, <https://doi.org/10.47548/ijistra.2023.74>.

²⁰ Tempo, “MUI Keluarkan Fatwa Haram Pembakaran Al-Quran Di Swedia, Serukan Boikot Produk,” 2023.

²¹ News, “Quran Burned Outside Stockholm Mosque on Eid Al-Adha.”

²² The Guardian, “Sweden PM Condemns Quran Burning but Says It Is Legal,” 2023.

However, as diplomatic pressure and the threat of economic losses mounted, the Swedish government began exploring the possibility of revising legislation to grant police the authority to deny permits for demonstrations that could threaten national security. Denmark moved more quickly, proposing a bill in September 2023 banning the public burning of holy scriptures, on the grounds that such acts could endanger Denmark's national security and international relations²³. This legal debate reflects a fundamental tension within Western liberal democracies between individual freedoms and the need to respect religious sensitivities in an increasingly interconnected global society.

The most direct and painful impact of the Quran-burning incidents was felt by the Muslim communities living in Scandinavia, who experienced a dramatic increase in various forms of discrimination and violence. The European Islamophobia Report 2023 annual report revealed that Scandinavia recorded a 63% surge in cases of violence against Muslims compared to 2022, the highest increase in all of Europe²⁴. In Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SMASF) conducted a comprehensive survey of the Muslim community at the end of 2023 and found that 71% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment in the previous twelve months, a sharp rise from 54% in the previous survey period²⁵. The most frequently reported forms of discrimination included verbal harassment in public spaces (43%), discrimination in job recruitment processes (31%), unfair treatment in public services (28%), and intimidation of Muslim children at school (24%).

The Qur'an-burning incidents affected not only the Muslim community but also created broader social and political polarization within Scandinavian society. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in early 2024 revealed that 58% of Western Europeans, including in Scandinavia, held a negative perception of Islam following the Quran-burning incidents, up from 42% in 2022²⁶. More worrying still, polarization in attitudes toward Islam sharpened further: while 32% of respondents expressed a more negative view of Islam, 18% instead became more sympathetic toward Muslims as a reaction to what they perceived as Islamophobia and intolerance²⁷. This pattern shows that the incidents did not produce a consensus but instead deepened the divide between different segments of society.

²³ Politico, "Denmark to Ban Quran Burnings," 2023.

²⁴ Göran Larsson, Iselin Frydenlund, and Torkel Brekke, "Burning Affair," *Temenos - Nordic Journal for the Study of Religion* 60, no. 1 (June 2024): 5–26, <https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.137982>

²⁵ Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities, "Discrimination and Hate against Muslims in Sweden: Annual Report 2023-2024," 2023.

²⁶ Center, "European Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims."

²⁷ Center.

The Roots of Misconceptions about Islam in the West: Alwi Shihab's Perspective

Misconceptions about Islam in the West have a number of complex roots, often stemming from a lack of proper understanding and education regarding Islamic teachings, as well as the media's tendency to favor sensationalism over factual information. One thinker who examines this issue in depth is Alwi Shihab, who emphasizes the importance of dialogue and education in overcoming the various negative stereotypes about Islam circulating in society at large²⁸.

In his view, Shihab shows that these misconceptions are often caused by several factors. First, the inability of individuals and communities in the West to access accurate information about Islam and its teachings. This contributes to the emergence of harmful stereotypes, such as linking Islam with violence and terrorism²⁹. Unbalanced dissemination of information and the existence of Islamophobic narratives can spread fear and hatred toward Muslims, further worsening interfaith relations. Second, Shihab highlights the important role of the media in shaping public perceptions of Islam. Media coverage that is often sensational and inaccurate creates a distorted picture of this religion. For example, when perpetrators of violence who claim to be Muslim receive massive coverage, this diverts attention away from Muslim communities that contribute positively to society³⁰. Thus, to counterbalance this negative narrative, proactive efforts in education and dialogue are needed, in which those who better understand Islamic teachings can play a role in disseminating fair and balanced information³¹.

Third, Alwi Shihab also underscores the need to understand the broader historical and social context that shapes attitudes and views toward Islam. He shows that negative reactions to Islam in the West are often inseparable from historical tensions between the Western and Eastern worlds, including colonialism and past political interventions³². These conditions reinforce existing stigmas and pose a major challenge to the formation of healthy interfaith dialogue.

Shihab also identifies a number of specific accusations that consistently appear in Western discourse about Islam, reflecting the various layers of misconception discussed

²⁸ Alwi Shihab, *Examining Islam in the West: Addressing Accusation and Correcting Misconception* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2006), 68.

²⁹ Naheed Razia, "ISLAM AND THE IMAGE OF MUSLIMS IN WESTERN MEDIA: REALITY OR BIAS," *Journal of Religion & Society (JRS)* 03, no. 01 (2025): 295–305.

³⁰ Nurchasanah and Abdul Basit, "Membangun Citra Muslim: Representasi Dan Persepsi Masyarakat Muslim Dalam Media Massa," *Jurnal Media Informatika (JUMIN)* 6, no. 3 (2025): 2048–55.

³¹ Hamluddin, "Relasi Islamophobia Dan Media Massa Dalam Pembentukan Sikap Masyarakat Terhadap Islam Di Indonesia," *The Journal of Religion and Communication Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2024), <https://doi.org/10.61511/jorcs.v1i1.2024.537>.

³² Trirahayu Puji Hastuti, "RESOLUSI KONFLIK DUNIA ISLAM DIPLOMASI POLITIK DALAM ISLAM DAN RELEVANSINYA DENGAN HUBUNGAN INTERNASIONAL," *SUARGA: Studi Keberagamaan Dan Keberagaman* 2, no. 1 (2023): 26–38.

above³³. The accusation that Islam is a “religion of the sword” spread through violence and military conquest is one of the most persistent stereotypes, even though objective historical analysis shows that the expansion of Islam was no more violent than the expansion of other religions or empires throughout history, and that many regions became Muslim through peaceful processes of trade and intellectual persuasion. The accusation that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with modern democracy and human rights is likewise criticized by Shihab as a generalization that ignores the diversity of interpretation and political practice within the Muslim world, as well as the fact that many Muslim-majority countries have adopted democratic systems.

Overall, Alwi Shihab’s approach emphasizes the importance of dismantling misconceptions through transparent information and constructive dialogue as effective steps in easing tensions and improving mutual understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the West. Shihab not only identifies the problem but also offers solutions grounded in dialogical and educational principles: first, the need for systematic efforts to provide Western society with access to accurate, comprehensive, and contextual sources of information about Islam that can counterbalance the sensationalist and distorted narratives dominating mainstream media; second, the importance of active involvement by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in producing objective and balanced knowledge about Islam that can serve as a reference for the wider public; and third, the need for genuine and sustained interfaith dialogue, in which Muslim and non-Muslim communities can meet in a safe space to share experiences, clarify misunderstandings, and find common ground in universal human values³⁴.

In the context of the Qur’an burning incidents in Scandinavia, Shihab’s analytical framework offers a highly relevant lens for understanding how these incidents are manifestations of long-standing historical misconceptions, and how the response to them must involve not only treating the symptoms (such as anti-hate-crime legislation) but also addressing the roots of the problem through an epistemological transformation in the way Western society understands and represents Islam. Only through a comprehensive approach integrating educational, dialogical, and transformative dimensions can misconceptions about Islam be effectively overcome, and a more just, respectful, and peaceful relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the West be achieved.

³³ Shihab, *Examining Islam in the West: Addressing Accusation and Correcting Misconception*.

³⁴ Shihab.

Islamophobic Narratives after the Quran Burning

The Qur'an burning incidents in Scandinavia reignited pre-existing Islamophobic narratives, provoking emotional reactions and reinforcing negative stereotypes about Muslims. These incidents were captured by the media, which often reinforced unjust views of Islam and created an atmosphere of hatred and fear in society³⁵. In the aftermath of the burnings, Islamophobia emerged not only as a social phenomenon but also as part of broader state policy, often grounded in deep-seated Orientalist representations of Muslims³⁶. The media played an important role in shaping the narrative that emerged after the Qur'an burnings. Many media reports were unbalanced and sensationalist, emphasizing acts harmful to Muslims rather than showing the peaceful reactions of Muslim communities that rejected violence. In many cases, the media prioritized narratives of conflict over constructive interfaith dialogue, reinforcing the division between "us" and "them"³⁷. As a result, the public exposed to such information tended to view Muslims in a negative light, often associating them with extremism and violence.

The media also played a significant role in shaping and disseminating Islamophobic narratives. News coverage often emphasized separatist actions rather than demonstrating that the majority of Muslims reject violence and uphold values of peace³⁸. When the Qur'an burning incidents were covered, many media reports made the emotional and dramatic context their central material, reinforcing negative views of Islam and its adherents. For example, these reports often presented an unbalanced picture, one that shaped public perceptions of Islam through such representations³⁹. Content analysis revealed that social media platforms such as X (Twitter) frequently became arenas where hatred and Islamophobia were widely disseminated⁴⁰. Users easily shared anti-Islam views, posted harmful and provocative comments, and further stoked hatred toward Muslims. Research findings show a tendency to misrepresent Islamic teachings and reduce Muslims to a single, broader negative stereotype⁴¹.

³⁵ Eman Tariq and Awaiz Asif, "Islamophobia or the Freedom of Expression? Exploring the Coverage of Quran Burning Incidents in International Media," *Journal of Peace, Development and Communication* 08, no. 02 (2024): 442–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36968/JPDC-V08-I02-06>.

³⁶ Tamamiyah, "Islamophobia Discourse: Analyzing the Representation of Islam and Muslims in Public Narratives."

³⁷ Mustafa TEMEL, "News Frames as Islamophobic Narratives: Radicalized Concepts," *Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6, no. 2 (December 2023): 40–56, <https://doi.org/10.47951/mediad.1378091>.

³⁸ Jelang Ramadhan et al., "Media and Islamophobia in Europe: A Literature-Based Analysis of Reports 2015–2023," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (May 2025): 584, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050584>.

³⁹ TEMEL, "News Frames as Islamophobic Narratives: Radicalized Concepts."

⁴⁰ Burak Somuncu, "Legitimizing Mediated Islamophobic Actions: Example 'X,'" *Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi* 7, no. 1 (June 2024): 29–46, <https://doi.org/10.47951/mediad.1389899>.

⁴¹ Fatin Nur Athirah Yusof et al., "Trend Penyebaran Islamfobia Di Media Sosial," *Jurnal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kotemporari* 24, no. 3 (2023): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.37231/jimk.2023.24.3.893>.

Following the Quran burnings, various reactions emerged from the Muslim community, ranging from peaceful protests to educational initiatives aimed at raising public awareness of the true teachings of Islam. In many countries, Muslim organizations not only expressed anger at the incidents but also used the occasion to educate the public about the richness and peacefulness of Islamic teachings⁴².

Social dialogue became very important in this context. Many communities around the world attempted to hold interfaith dialogue events, emphasizing shared values to counterbalance the negative narrative that had been constructed⁴³. However, there were significant challenges in disseminating accurate information amid political and social interests that distort common understanding⁴⁴. The isolation and lack of understanding developing in the West regarding Islam also indicate that Islamophobic narratives have deep roots. As various studies suggest, these patterns of hatred are often shaped by the enduring history between West and East, and their stakes within the media industry⁴⁵. Negative stereotypes about Islam arise from various historical processes involving colonialism and unjust media portrayals⁴⁶.

Islamophobia affects not only relations between Muslims and non-Muslims but also public policy and social integration. The resurgence of acts such as Qur'an burning creates an atmosphere in which the standing of Muslims is under threat, raising the risk of further conflict in multi-religious societies⁴⁷. Overall, the Islamophobic narrative that emerged after the Qur'an burnings is a manifestation of various interrelated factors, from media representation to social response. To counter this tide of hatred, educational practices and interfaith dialogue need to be emphasized, in the hope of building better understanding and easing social tensions in diverse societies.

⁴² Fachri Syauqii, "Islamofobia Dan Turkofobia Di Eropa: Studi Kasus Pembakaran Al-Quran Oleh Rasmus Paludan," *Islam & Contemporary Issues* 3, no. 2 (October 2023): 65–69, <https://doi.org/10.57251/ici.v3i2.1127>.

⁴³ Ratna Dewi Cahyaningtyas and Aprilia Etika Wardani, "Interfaith Dialogue In The Post-Truth Era : A Critical Study Of The Narrative Of Tolerance On Social Media," *Journal: Humaniora Dan Ilmu Sosial* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–16.

⁴⁴ Umar Yadi Idris, "Media Sosial Dan Transformasi Komunikasi Politik," *Politea; Jurnal Kajian Politik Islam* 8, no. 2 (2025): 49–71.

⁴⁵ Nikmah Suryandari and Syamsul Arifin, "Islamophobia and Media Framing in West Media," *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 29, no. 1 (June 2021): 27–45, <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v29i1.3793>.

⁴⁶ Razia, "ISLAM AND THE IMAGE OF MUSLIMS IN WESTERN MEDIA: REALITY OR BIAS."

⁴⁷ Rini Ramadhani et al., "Analisis Islamofobia Terhadap Integrasi Muslim Di Negara Minoritas Islam," *Millatuna: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 01 (January 2025): 91–102, <https://doi.org/10.33752/mjsi.v2i01.8225>.

Interfaith Dialogue as a Solution

Interfaith dialogue functions as a bridge connecting adherents of different religions to share understanding, build cooperation, and reduce tensions among them. In the context following the Quran burnings, interfaith dialogue is important not only for easing tensions that have arisen, but also as a key element in building greater awareness and knowledge between Muslim and non-Muslim communities⁴⁸.

A number of factors indicate that interfaith dialogue can play an effective role in promoting tolerance and preventing radicalization. The development of interfaith dialogue must involve inclusive and participatory strategies. According to research, successful interfaith initiatives include the establishment of dialogue forums, educational programs that encourage open discussion, and social activities involving various communities⁴⁹. In Indonesia, where diversity is an integral part of national identity, interfaith dialogue has been carried out by involving religious leaders, community organizations, and the public sector to create moments of shared learning⁵⁰.

The involvement of religious leaders in dialogue is very important. Through active engagement, these leaders can help reinforce messages of peace and tolerance embedded within their religious teachings. In other words, they serve as bridges between believers and the wider community⁵¹. Research shows that the role of interfaith dialogue in reducing prejudice and enhancing cooperation among adherents of different religions should be prioritized and carried out on a sustained basis.

Education about religious teachings and universal humanitarian values is part of what makes interfaith dialogue effective. Through education that promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all religions, existing stigma toward Muslims can gradually be eliminated. For this reason, interfaith education in both formal and non-formal educational institutions is important for cultivating tolerance among the younger generation⁵². Collaborative projects between religious communities also benefit society

⁴⁸ Sahri and Himad Ali, "The Role Of Interfaith Dialogue In Enhancing Global Peacebuilding," *MUNIF: International Journal of Religion Moderation* 1, no. 1 (June 2025): 20–37, <https://doi.org/10.71305/munif.v1i1.443>.

⁴⁹ Shahla Shahreen, "Interfaith Dialogue to Counter Radicalization in Bangladesh: An Approach to Move from Extremism to Pluralism," *Social Science Review* 40, no. 1 (October 2023): 165–84, <https://doi.org/10.3329/ssr.v40i1.69082>.

⁵⁰ Azwar Amar Ma'ruf, "Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Mitigating Religious Conflicts in Indonesia," *JLAST (Journal of Law and Social Transformation)* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1–7, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62527/jlast.2.1.7>.

⁵¹ Nurul Malahayati, "Peran Tokoh Agama Dalam Mempertahankan Toleransi Antarumat Beragama," *Komunika: Journal of Communication Science and Islamic Dakwah* 8, no. 2 (December 2024): 45–58, <https://doi.org/10.32832/komunika.v8i2.17821>.

⁵² Tomi Apra Santosa et al., "The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Promoting Tolerance and Interfaith Dialogue," *RIGGS: Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Business* 4, no. 3 (August 2025): 4162–67, <https://doi.org/10.31004/riggs.v4i3.2578>.

more broadly. In this context, voluntary activities carried out by various communities can create sites of interaction where individuals from different backgrounds can learn from and work with one another for the common good⁵³. In this way, a positive public discourse can be built, reducing tensions and creating a sense of mutual trust among adherents of different religions.

The role of government in promoting interfaith dialogue is very important. Policies that support diversity and protect religious rights are steps that need to be realized. For instance, the development of government-promoted interfaith forums can serve as platforms for communities to discuss sensitive issues and find shared solutions⁵⁴. In addition, strengthening laws on religious freedom and facilitating programs that encourage inter-community collaboration will help create an environment conducive to dialogue⁵⁵.

Policy Framework and Institutional Interfaith Dialogue Practice after the Incidents

Beyond the cross-community interfaith dialogue initiatives described above, the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue after the Quran burnings in Scandinavia also depends heavily on the extent to which such initiatives are incorporated into formal policy frameworks at the supranational and national levels. Through its Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025, the European Union established the position of the European Commission Coordinator on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred, tasked specifically with serving as the primary point of contact between the Muslim community, EU institutions, member states, and civil society in developing policy responses to Islamophobia⁵⁶. Marion Lalisie, who holds this position, has been actively coordinating across institutions, including organizing the first coordination meeting with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 14–15 March 2024 to mark the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Earlier, on 29 November 2023, a number of EU member-state ambassadors and special envoys signed a joint statement warning of rising Islamophobia in the region and urging national

⁵³ Septiani and Fajri Ahmad, “Komunikasi Lintas Agama Dalam Menciptakan Kerukunan Bermasyarakat Di Kelurahan Air Jamban,” *J-KI: Jurnal Komunikasi Islam* 5, no. 2 (December 2024): 383–92, <https://doi.org/10.53429/j-kis.v5i2.1124>

⁵⁴ Muhammad Arafat and Anisah Budiwati, “PERBANDINGAN KEBIJAKAN TOLERANSI BERAGAMA DI INDONESIA DAN MALAYSIA: PELAJARAN DARI PENGALAMAN MULTIKULTURAL,” *Journal of Religious Policy* 3, no. 2 (December 2024): 159–88, <https://doi.org/10.31330/repo.v3i2.91>.

⁵⁵ Mar’ie Muhammad Falah Akbar, “Legal Protection for Tolerance and Freedom Among Religious People in Indonesia,” *Contemporary Issues on Interfaith Law and Society* 1, no. 1 (January 2022): 39–58, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ciils.v1i1.56712>.

⁵⁶ Tim Pres dan Informasi Delegasi untuk PBB di New York, “EU Statement–UN General Assembly: International Day to Combat Islamophobia,” www.eeas.europa.eu, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-un-general-assembly-international-day-combat-islamophobia_en.

authorities not to relax their efforts to guarantee the safety of Muslim communities⁵⁷. These steps mark an important shift from ad hoc, crisis-based responses toward sustained institutional mechanisms for addressing Islamophobia in Europe.

Nevertheless, recent data indicate that this institutional framework has not yet been fully able to curb the escalation of structural Islamophobia. A report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights titled "Being Muslim in the EU," released in October 2024 and based on a survey of nearly 10,000 Muslim respondents in 13 EU member states, found that almost half of respondents (47%) reported having experienced racial discrimination in the past five years, a sharp increase from 39% in the previous 2016 survey⁵⁸. Within the twelve months preceding the survey, discrimination rates even jumped from 25% to 35%. Discrimination was most pronounced in the labor and housing markets: nearly two in five respondents (39%) reported having experienced racial discrimination while seeking employment, while Muslim women who wear religious clothing such as the hijab faced markedly higher rates of discrimination than those who do not (45% versus 31%), and two in five Muslims in the EU (41%) worked in positions genuinely below their level of educational qualification⁵⁹. These findings are relevant to the post Qur'an burning context because the survey period directly overlaps with the wave of Qur'an desecration incidents in Sweden and Denmark, indicating that the interfaith dialogue forums widely held after the incidents have not yet significantly reduced the pace of structural discrimination experienced by Muslim communities in employment and housing.

This gap between the proliferation of dialogue forums and the persistence of structural discrimination in fact confirms the theoretical framework of Alwi Shihab discussed earlier: dialogue and education are indeed a necessary but not sufficient condition for overcoming misconceptions and hatred toward Islam⁶⁰. Without accompanying structural policy reform, interfaith dialogue risks becoming a symbolic activity that fails to address the roots of institutional discrimination. Recognizing this, the European Commission has also funded the development of a comprehensive legal framework to combat anti-Muslim hatred, drafted by a European network of legal experts in gender equality and

⁵⁷ F. (Eds.) Bayraklı, E., & Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2023* (Austria: Leopold Weiss Institute, 2024), <https://islamophobiareport.com/islamophobiareport-2023.pdf>.

⁵⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental, *Being Muslim In The EU: Experiences of Muslims* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024).

⁵⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental.

⁶⁰ Rodon Pedrasón Dkk, "Islamophobia as a Religious-Based Horizontal Conflict and Its Resolution," *Otoritas : Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 13, no. 1 (2023): 125–140, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26618/ojip.v13i1.9414>.

non-discrimination and published in early 2025, as a complement to civil-society-based dialogue initiatives⁶¹.

Developments in law enforcement have further reinforced the argument that interfaith dialogue needs to be accompanied by clear legal consequences for perpetrators of religiously based hate speech. In August 2024, Swedish prosecutors formally charged Salwan Momika and Salwan Najem with the criminal offense of “agitation against an ethnic or national group” in connection with the series of Quran-burning acts they carried out throughout 2023, while right-wing activist Rasmus Paludan was likewise charged in a similar case related to the 2022 Qur`an-burning incident in Malmö⁶². In response to this series of incidents, the UN Human Rights Council also adopted a resolution on hatred and religiously based hate speech, although the United States and the European Union abstained, citing concerns over the protection of freedom of expression. These developments show that legal processes, although slow and fraught with controversy over the limits of free expression, are beginning to move in tandem with interfaith dialogue initiatives, signaling that addressing Islamophobia after the Qur`an burnings requires a mutually reinforcing combination of persuasive-dialogical and legal-punitive approaches.

In addition to government-level initiatives, pressure from civil society has also helped push forward more comprehensive policies. The European Network Against Racism, the largest anti-racism network in Europe, has consistently called on EU member states to develop dedicated national strategies to combat Islamophobia, as a derivative of the EU policy framework ensuring that member states genuinely take concrete steps to protect the rights of Muslim communities⁶³. Such advocacy is important because, as shown by the findings above, the implementation gap between EU-level policy and realities on the ground at the member-state level remains significant, making the role of civil society a crucial element in an effective interfaith-dialogue ecosystem.

Another dimension that needs attention in interfaith-dialogue strategy after the Qur`an burnings is the engagement of young people through digital spaces, given that, as discussed earlier, social media platforms such as X have become one of the primary arenas for the spread of Islamophobic narratives. Research by Siti Mazidah Mohamad (2024) on the readiness of educated young Muslims to engage in interfaith dialogue found that youth digital engagement through the production of popular-culture content, podcasts, and cross-religious online interaction has the potential to reduce misrepresentation and

⁶¹ András Kádár, *The Legal Framework to Combat Anti-Muslim Hate in the European Union* (Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 2024).

⁶² “Sweden Charges Two Men over 2023 Quran Burnings,” Al-Jazeera, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/28/sweden-charges-men-over-2023-quran-burnings-condemned-by-muslim-countries>.

⁶³ “Islamofobia,” ENAR: European Network Against Racism, n.d., <https://www.enar-eu.org/about/islamophobia/>.

advance social justice, while also complementing conventional dialogue forums, which tend to be formal and limited in reach⁶⁴. These findings are relevant to the Scandinavian context after the Quran burnings, given that both Muslim and non-Muslim youth in the region consume most of their information about the incidents through social media rather than formal face to face dialogue forums. Interfaith dialogue strategy going forward therefore needs to expand its scope into the digital domain not only relying on the conventional dialogue forums initiated by the more than 200 interfaith organizations mentioned above, but also designing digital interventions capable of reaching young audiences directly on the platforms where Islamophobic narratives circulate most widely.

Interfaith dialogue practice after the Qur'an burnings in Scandinavia and Europe more broadly thus develops along two complementary tracks: an informal track based on civil-society and religious-leader initiatives, as described in the previous section, and a formal-institutional track involving coordination among the EU, the Council of Europe, and national governments. Long-term success in easing Islamophobia after the Qur'an burning incidents depends heavily on synergy between these two tracks dialogue that builds trust at the grassroots level needs to be reinforced by legally binding anti-discrimination policy, consistent data-monitoring systems such as those conducted by the FRA, and sustained institutional accountability mechanisms, rather than merely symbolic post-crisis responses.

The findings in this section reaffirm this study's central argument that interfaith dialogue, as demonstrated by the more than 200 interfaith organizations that held dozens of dialogue forums after the Quran burnings, has indeed proven effective in creating spaces of encounter and mutual understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Scandinavia and Europe more broadly. Nevertheless, recent institutional data from the FRA, developments in legal proceedings in Sweden and Denmark, and sustained advocacy from civil-society networks such as ENAR show that dialogue alone is not sufficient to reverse the rising trend of structural discrimination experienced by Muslim communities. Islamophobia after the Quran burnings must therefore be understood and addressed as a multidimensional problem requiring synergy between grassroots trust-based dialogue, legally binding anti-discrimination policy at the national and supranational levels, consistent law enforcement against perpetrators of hate speech, and the expansion of dialogue into the digital domain where young people consume most of their information and form their perceptions of Islam.

⁶⁴ Siti Mazidah Mohamad, "Training in Interfaith Dialogue Needed among Educated Youths in Brunei," *ISEAS: Yusof Ishak Institute*, no. 76 (2024): 1–8, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/category/media/page/416/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/page/5/>.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically, the findings of this study show that an approach separating the handling of Islamophobia into a purely cultural-dialogue domain on the one hand and a structural-policy domain on the other is no longer adequate for explaining the dynamics of religiously based hatred in contemporary European society. The framework of historical misconception formulated by Alwi Shihab needs to be expanded to include institutional and digital dimensions as variables that also shape the resilience of prejudice, meaning that future studies of Islamophobia must read this phenomenon as an issue that moves simultaneously across personal, media, and state domains, rather than as a merely static historical legacy.

Practically, the ongoing social conditions following the Quran-burning incidents demand that stakeholders from religious institutions and policymakers to digital-platform operators no longer treat interfaith dialogue as a standalone program. Dialogue forums need to be designed so that they are directly interwoven with mechanisms for monitoring structural discrimination and with binding law enforcement, so that the achievements of dialogue at the grassroots level of trust can be translated into real change in access to employment, public services, and media representation for Muslim communities in Europe, rather than remaining merely a symbolic post-crisis response.

This study still leaves a number of gaps that have not been fully addressed and may be considered for future research, including field research that directly measures the impact of digital dialogue interventions on changes in young people's attitudes, given that this aspect is only briefly touched upon in this article. New avenues for analysis are also open in comparative studies of how Islamophobia is addressed in Scandinavia versus other European regions with different legal configurations and Muslim demographics, as well as long-term evaluations of the effectiveness of the still relatively new EU policy framework. Such studies are important so that interfaith-dialogue strategies continue to be updated in line with the changing social and technological landscape that will shape relations between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the future.

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