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Local Islamic Traditions as Informal Public Diplomacy: Indonesian Muslim Narratives on the Gaza Conflict (2023–2025)

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ABSTRACT

The Gaza conflict (2023–2025) has generated diverse responses among Indonesian Muslims, shaped by religious commitments, cultural identities, and transnational solidarity. This study examines how Indonesian Muslim actors construct and contest narratives concerning Gaza and how local Islamic traditions shape public responses. Using a qualitative documentary approach, it analyzes academic publications, policy documents, public statements, news reports, and materials from Islamic organizations through qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. The results reveal three interconnected dimensions: the articulation of religious solidarity with Palestinians, the translation of solidarity into humanitarian and collective action, and the negotiation of religious identity in domestic and international contexts. The study conceptualizes local Islamic traditions as potential spaces for informal public diplomacy, while distinguishing domestic solidarity from activities that demonstrably reach international audiences. It contributes to discussions of religion and public diplomacy beyond state-centered approaches and highlights the need to recognize differences among Muslim actors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The war in Gaza since October 2023 has generated widespread public responses across national and religious boundaries. In Indonesia, expressions of solidarity with Palestinians have taken various forms, including public demonstrations, humanitarian initiatives, religious advocacy, consumer boycotts, and digital campaigns. These responses reflect not only political positions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict but also the ways in which religious commitments, moral interpretations, and collective identities shape public engagement with international crises. Research on Indonesia's response to the Gaza war has examined public solidarity and the political opportunities available to social movements (Aswar & Munzilin, 2025), while other studies have explored the relationship between religious authority, Fatwa No. 83 of 2023 of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI), and digital activism (Alfarisi et al., 2024). These developments provide a basis for examining how international conflict narratives are interpreted and translated into forms of local religious and social action.

Islam and local culture have long interacted in shaping the diversity of Muslim life in Indonesia. Religious beliefs and practices are expressed through communal gatherings, sermons, charitable activities, collective prayers, and community-based traditions. Such practices can provide social settings in which international events acquire local meanings and become connected to existing religious values and collective responsibilities. In the context of Gaza, however, these expressions should not be assumed to represent a single, uniform Indonesian Muslim position. Different organizations, religious authorities, community groups, and individual participants may frame solidarity through different combinations of religious obligation, humanitarian concern, political interpretation, and cultural identity. The analytical task is therefore to examine how particular actors construct and communicate their interpretations rather than to treat Indonesian Muslims as a homogeneous community.

This issue also raises questions about the relationship between public diplomacy and social actors beyond the state. Public diplomacy is commonly associated with communication and engagement intended to shape how foreign publics understand a country, its society, or its policies. Yet religious organizations, community networks, and civil-society actors may also communicate political and moral narratives across borders. Recent scholarship has examined religion as a resource in international relations and the use of religious soft power in foreign policy (Bettiza & Henne, 2023; Mamedov & Jackson, 2025; Mandaville, 2023). These studies demonstrate the relevance of religion to international influence, but state-oriented strategies of religious soft power should be distinguished from grassroots religious practices. Local religious expressions do not automatically constitute public diplomacy. They become relevant to an informal public diplomacy perspective when their messages are communicated beyond domestic audiences, circulate through transnational networks, or contribute to how international audiences encounter and interpret Indonesia's religious and cultural identities.

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Recent studies provide important but distinct perspectives on Indonesian Muslim responses to Palestine. Alfarisi et al. (2024), for example, examine the relationship between MUI's fatwa, digital activism, and expressions of global Muslim solidarity. Aswar and Munzilin (2025) investigate Indonesian public solidarity with Palestine through the perspective of political opportunity structures. Other research on the boycott movement has examined the role of religious authority and public responses to MUI Fatwa No. 83 of 2023 (Mustofa & Alfikri, 2025). Taken together, this literature establishes that solidarity with Palestine is shaped by religious discourse, public mobilization, and digital communication. However, these studies do not necessarily explain how locally embedded Islamic cultural practices interact with the construction and contestation of Gaza-related narratives, or under what circumstances these practices may be understood as informal public diplomacy. This distinction defines the specific analytical problem addressed in the present study; it does not imply that local culture or transnational solidarity has been entirely overlooked in previous scholarship.

This study draws on three complementary perspectives: public diplomacy, constructivism, and transnational solidarity. Public diplomacy provides a basis for understanding how communication and engagement can shape the perceptions of foreign publics, extending beyond official state-to-state interactions to include cultural communication and non-state actors (Cull, 2008; Lee & Melissen, 2011). In this regard, religious institutions and community networks may serve as channels through which moral positions, cultural identities, and humanitarian concerns are communicated beyond national borders. However, religious activities should not automatically be regarded as public diplomacy. As discussions of religious soft power demonstrate, the international significance of religion depends on how religious resources are mobilized and communicated within broader political and social contexts (Mandaville, 2023; Ozturk, 2023; Ziv, 2024). Accordingly, this study uses the term informal public diplomacy to refer to non-state religious or cultural communication that demonstrates outward-facing engagement, transnational circulation, or communication with international audiences. This distinction makes it possible to differentiate domestic expressions of religious solidarity from activities that have a demonstrable international communication dimension.

Constructivism and transnational solidarity further explain how local religious and cultural practices shape the interpretation of, and responses to, the Gaza conflict. From a constructivist perspective, political meanings, identities, and interests are socially constructed through shared ideas and interaction rather than determined solely by material conditions (Wendt, 1992). This perspective helps examine how Indonesian Muslim actors frame the conflict through religious values, moral judgments, and collective identities, while recognizing that their interpretations and responses may differ. Meanwhile, transnational solidarity refers to expressions of identification, concern, and support that connect individuals and groups across national boundaries (García Agustín & Jørgensen,

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2021; Gould, 2007). In the context of this study, solidarity is examined through its articulation in religious and cultural narratives, its translation into humanitarian or collective action, and the extent to which it involves demonstrable cross-border connections. Taken together, these perspectives provide an analytical basis for examining how local Islamic cultural expressions mediate the construction of narratives about Gaza, articulate solidarity with Palestinians, and potentially communicate understandings of Indonesian Muslim identity to audiences beyond Indonesia.

The novelty of this study lies in bringing together three dimensions that are often examined separately: local Islamic cultural expressions, the construction and contestation of narratives about the Gaza conflict, and informal public diplomacy. Rather than treating religious and cultural practices as evidence of public diplomacy in themselves, the study examines how such practices may mediate the interpretation of Gaza-related events, give local meaning to transnational solidarity, and communicate particular understandings of Indonesian Muslim identity. It also distinguishes domestic mobilization from demonstrable transnational communication, thereby avoiding the assumption that every act of solidarity automatically produces international influence or improves Indonesia's image abroad.

Accordingly, this article examines Indonesian Muslim responses to the Gaza conflict during 2023–2025. It first explores how Indonesian Muslim actors construct and contest narratives about the conflict through religious and cultural expressions. It then analyzes how local Islamic cultural practices shape the articulation of transnational solidarity with Palestinians. Finally, it considers the conditions under which these practices can be interpreted as forms of informal public diplomacy, as well as the limits of this interpretation.

By addressing these issues, the study contributes to discussions of religion, culture, and public diplomacy by connecting local practices to the interpretation of an international conflict. It also offers a more qualified understanding of informal public diplomacy by distinguishing the domestic expression of religious solidarity from practices that communicate narratives across national borders.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative documentary research approach to examine Indonesian Muslim narratives concerning the Gaza conflict and to explore how local Islamic cultural expressions relate to transnational solidarity and informal public diplomacy. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings, representations, and religious and cultural narratives in public discourse rather than measuring statistical relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research relied on secondary documentary materials, including academic publications, policy documents, online news reports, public statements, religious sermons, and publications produced by Islamic organizations in Indonesia. These materials were

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examined to understand how the Gaza conflict is interpreted through religious and cultural perspectives and how expressions of solidarity are articulated in public communication.

Document selection followed a purposive approach, prioritizing materials relevant to the research questions. To be included, a document needed to address the Gaza conflict or Indonesian Muslim responses to it, contain substantive information relevant to religious or cultural narratives, solidarity, humanitarian action, or public communication, and provide identifiable source information and publication dates. Duplicate materials, documents unrelated to the research questions, and items lacking sufficient information for reliable interpretation were excluded. The source categories and selection criteria were used to establish a relevant documentary corpus rather than to claim statistical representativeness of Indonesian Muslim opinion.

The documentary materials were organized into four categories: academic publications, policy documents, organizational statements, and news reports. The initial documentary inventory identified 12 academic publications, 2 policy documents, 3 organizational statements, and 5 news reports, resulting in a corpus of 22 documents, as summarized in Table 1. Academic publications provide the scholarly context for understanding public diplomacy, religious soft power, transnational solidarity, and Indonesian Muslim responses to international issues. Policy documents provide information on formal religious and institutional positions, while organizational statements illustrate how Islamic organizations articulate their positions on the Gaza conflict. News reports provide contextual information on public activities, humanitarian initiatives, and expressions of solidarity.

Table 1. Composition of the Documentary Corpus

No.	Type of document	Number of documents
1	Academic publications	12
2	Policy documents	2
3	Organizational statements	3
4	News reports	5
	Total	22

Documents were identified and retrieved through academic search platforms, including Google Scholar, as well as official websites of relevant institutions and Islamic organizations, including the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. News reports were obtained from relevant online news sources. The collection focused on materials published or released between 2023 and 2025, while selected earlier academic publications were included to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as “Gaza conflict,” “Palestine,” “Indonesian Muslims,” “Islamic solidarity,” “religious activism,” “public diplomacy,” and “transnational solidarity.” Documents were selected based on their relevance to the research questions, their

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connection to Indonesian Muslim responses to the Gaza conflict, and the availability of sufficient information for qualitative analysis.

The analysis proceeded through a sequence of qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis, source comparison, and theoretical interpretation. First, the selected documents were read to identify material relevant to the research questions. Qualitative content analysis, following Schreier (2012), was used to organize the materials into analytical categories concerning religious and cultural narratives, the construction and contestation of meanings about Gaza, transnational solidarity, humanitarian or collective action, and public diplomacy. These categories were informed by the study's research questions and theoretical framework. The analysis involved identifying relevant passages, comparing recurring themes across documents, and examining differences in the ways actors interpreted the conflict. The categories served as analytical guides rather than predetermined findings; interpretations were retained only where they were supported by the documentary evidence.

Following content analysis, discourse analysis was used to examine how narratives were constructed and situated within their communicative and social contexts. This study adopts Fairclough's (1992, 1995) critical discourse analysis framework, which connects textual features with discursive practice and broader social practice. At the textual level, the analysis considers vocabulary, evaluative language, moral claims, and representations of relevant actors. At the level of discursive practice, it examines the production and circulation of documents and their apparent or stated audiences. At the level of social practice, it interprets the narratives in relation to the religious, cultural, and political contexts of Indonesian Muslim responses to Gaza. This approach enables the study to investigate how particular interpretations are articulated and circulated without presuming that all actors share the same position. Narrative contestation is identified only when the documents provide evidence of competing interpretations, disagreements, or contrasting evaluations. Claims about communication across national borders or engagement with foreign publics are likewise made only where supported by the source material.

To strengthen the credibility of the interpretation, the study compared relevant themes across different document types and issuing actors. This process of source triangulation involved examining whether a particular interpretation was supported by independent materials, identifying differences between sources, and considering the institutional positions and communicative purposes of the documents. Multiple publications reproducing the same original statement were not automatically treated as independent confirmation. The resulting patterns were then interpreted through a constructivist perspective, which emphasizes the role of socially shared meanings, identities, and norms in shaping political understanding and action (Wendt, 1992). This perspective guided the examination of how religious values and local cultural contexts informed interpretations of the Gaza conflict and expressions of solidarity. The analysis

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also distinguished domestic expressions of solidarity from evidence of transnational communication or engagement with international audiences. Accordingly, religious and cultural activities were not automatically classified as public diplomacy; their relevance to informal public diplomacy depended on whether the documents demonstrated outward-facing communication, cross-border circulation, or engagement with foreign publics.

The study is limited by the scope and traceability of the documentary materials available for analysis. Its findings are intended to explain patterns in the selected documents rather than to represent all Indonesian Muslim communities or establish measurable effects on foreign public opinion. Because the research relies on documentary sources, its conclusions about the communication and diplomatic significance of local Islamic cultural practices remain contingent on the evidence contained in those sources. The study does not involve interviews or direct interaction with human participants, and its analysis is confined to publicly accessible materials relevant to the research questions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islam, Local Culture, and the Construction of Narratives on the Gaza Conflict in Indonesia

The relationship between Islam, religious institutions, and local social practices provides an important context for understanding Indonesian Muslim responses to the Gaza conflict. However, Indonesian Islam should not be treated as a homogeneous tradition that produces uniform responses to international events. Muslim organizations and communities differ in their institutional orientations and approaches to political and humanitarian engagement. Menchik (2016), for example, demonstrates that religious life in Indonesia is shaped by historically developed communal and institutional arrangements. This perspective is relevant to the present study because responses to Gaza are articulated through different forms of religious expression, institutional communication, and humanitarian engagement.

An important example is the press statement issued by the Central Board of Muhammadiyah on 11 October 2023, entitled "*Perang Israel dan Palestina, Muhammadiyah Keluarkan Tujuh Poin Pernyataan Sikap.*" Signed by Muhammadiyah Chairman Haedar Nashir and Secretary General Abdul Mu'ti, the statement contains seven points addressing the escalation of the Israel–Palestine conflict (Muhammadiyah, 2023). Among other things, Muhammadiyah expressed concern over civilian casualties, called on the United Nations Security Council to pursue political and diplomatic measures to end the fighting and facilitate negotiations, and urged the Indonesian government to strengthen its efforts through the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and other channels. The statement also called on Indonesian Muslims to pray for victims of the conflict and expressed Muhammadiyah's readiness to provide humanitarian assistance and volunteers, particularly for affected children and women. These points demonstrate that Muhammadiyah's response combined religious appeals,

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humanitarian concern, and support for political and diplomatic action. From a constructivist perspective, the statement illustrates how an international conflict is interpreted through the organization's moral commitments and institutional identity. Its response was not limited to religious expressions of sympathy but also articulated expectations concerning international institutions and Indonesian foreign policy.

The relationship between religious expression and humanitarian action is further illustrated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' national event, "*Untaian Doa dan Puisi untuk Palestina*," held in Jakarta on 2 January 2024 as part of the commemoration of the Ministry's 78th anniversary. According to the Ministry's official report, children representing six religions offered prayers for Palestine, followed by poetry readings by Indonesian poets. The event also included the symbolic presentation of humanitarian assistance amounting to approximately IDR 44.9 billion, collected from Ministry employees and the Dharma Wanita Persatuan organization, and distributed through LAZISNU and LAZISMU (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). Indonesian government representatives and the Palestinian Ambassador to Indonesia, Zuhair Al Shun, attended the event. These details show that the expression of solidarity extended beyond a single religious community: the event combined interreligious prayer, cultural expression through poetry, and organized humanitarian assistance. It therefore provides evidence of how concern for Palestinians was communicated through religious, cultural, and institutional activities within Indonesian society. The participation of the Palestinian Ambassador also indicates the presence of an international representative at the event, although it does not by itself establish a measurable diplomatic impact or a change in foreign public perceptions.

A further example is the joint statement issued by the MUI and several Islamic organizations on 18 July 2024, following a Palestine Dialogue organized by MUI's Commission for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation. The seven-point statement addressed the Indonesian government's role in supporting Palestinian independence and called for continued political and diplomatic efforts. It also urged the government and Indonesian society to boycott Israeli products and companies considered affiliated with support for Israeli aggression, encouraged humanitarian operations in Palestine, and called for stronger coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, MUI, and Islamic organizations in pursuing what the statement described as "total diplomacy" (Majelis Ulama Indonesia [MUI], 2024). This document illustrates how religious organizations articulated solidarity through a combination of religious, political, economic, and humanitarian demands. Unlike expressions of solidarity confined to prayer or charitable assistance, the joint statement explicitly addressed government policy, international alliances, and diplomatic engagement. From the perspective of transnational solidarity, it demonstrates how domestic religious organizations connected their institutional positions with the broader political objective of Palestinian independence.

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Taken together, the three documents reveal different but related forms of narrative construction concerning the Gaza conflict. Muhammadiyah's statement connected humanitarian concern with calls for international diplomatic action and assistance to civilians. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' event combined interreligious prayer, poetry, and organized humanitarian contributions. The MUI joint statement articulated a collective organizational position that included advocacy, economic measures, humanitarian operations, and diplomatic coordination. These examples demonstrate that Indonesian responses were expressed through multiple institutional and social channels rather than through a single, uniform narrative. They also show that religious and cultural expressions can be connected to practical humanitarian initiatives and political advocacy. In this respect, the findings complement Menchik's (2016) discussion of the institutional diversity of Indonesian Islam by illustrating how religious organizations and public institutions articulate responses to an international humanitarian crisis.

Digital communication provides an additional context for understanding the circulation of religious narratives and solidarity. Nisa (2018), in her study of the One Day One Juz movement, demonstrates how digital platforms facilitate the organization of collective Islamic practices and digitally mediated religious participation in Indonesia. Although her research does not examine the Gaza conflict, it helps explain the broader relationship between religious commitment, collective identity, and digital communication. More directly, Alfarisi et al. (2024) examine the relationship between religious rulings, social media, and digital activism in the mobilization of Muslim solidarity for Palestine. These studies provide useful context for understanding how religious authority and digital communication may support collective mobilization. Nevertheless, the three institutional documents discussed above do not provide sufficient evidence to establish the reach, audience reception, or cross-border circulation of specific digital messages. Therefore, digital activism is treated here as a relevant dimension of the wider literature rather than as an empirical finding established by these three documents.

The findings also clarify the distinction between domestic solidarity and informal public diplomacy. The Muhammadiyah and MUI statements demonstrate that Indonesian Islamic organizations addressed an international conflict through institutional communication and explicitly referred to international institutions, government policy, and diplomatic cooperation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' event, meanwhile, included the participation of the Palestinian Ambassador and the presentation of humanitarian assistance. These examples establish that some domestic expressions of solidarity were connected to international actors and issues. However, references to international institutions or the presence of a foreign representative do not automatically demonstrate an effort to influence foreign publics. As Cull (2008) and Lee and Melissen (2011) explain, public diplomacy involves communication and engagement with foreign audiences. Accordingly, the documents provide evidence of institutional advocacy, humanitarian engagement, and international orientation, but further evidence would be

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required to establish their effects on foreign public perceptions or their contribution to Indonesia's international image.

Previous research offers a useful comparative context for these findings. Alfarisi et al. (2024) highlight the relationship between religious authority, social media, and digital activism in the articulation of Muslim solidarity for Palestine. Aswar and Munzilin (2025) examine Indonesian public responses to the Gaza war through the perspective of political opportunity structures. The present analysis complements these studies by focusing on specific institutional documents and a documented public event through which religious, cultural, and humanitarian narratives were articulated. The materials examined do not provide a basis for comparing responses across different Indonesian regions or for generalizing about all Muslim communities. Rather, they demonstrate how particular organizations and public institutions connected religious and humanitarian commitments with advocacy and collective action concerning Palestine. Overall, the findings show that religious and cultural expressions provide important channels through which Indonesian actors construct narratives about Gaza and articulate solidarity with Palestinians, while the extent to which these expressions constitute informal public diplomacy depends on demonstrable communication and engagement beyond domestic audiences.

Local Islamic Traditions, Transnational Muslim Solidarity, and Public Diplomacy

Documentary evidence from 2023–2025 demonstrates that Indonesian Muslim responses to the Gaza conflict combined religious expressions of solidarity, humanitarian assistance, and public appeals directed at domestic and state audiences. These responses should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that all local Islamic traditions automatically produce transnational solidarity or public diplomacy. Rather, the documents reveal several distinct mechanisms through which religious organizations and community institutions connected concern for Palestinians with collective prayer, humanitarian action, and political communication.

An early example appears in Muhammadiyah's official statement on the Israel–Palestine war, issued on 11 October 2023. The statement called for an end to hostilities, urged the Indonesian government to strengthen diplomatic efforts through the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and encouraged Muslims to pray for victims of the war. It also expressed Muhammadiyah's readiness to coordinate humanitarian assistance and deploy volunteers to help affected civilians, particularly women and children (Muhammadiyah, 2023). The statement is significant because it links religious solidarity with both humanitarian action and formal diplomatic channels. Prayer functions as a religious expression of concern, while the calls for diplomatic engagement and humanitarian coordination extend the response beyond devotional activity. The document therefore illustrates how a major Indonesian Muslim organization articulated solidarity through several complementary forms of action. It does not, by itself, establish that these activities changed international perceptions of Indonesia, but it provides

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evidence of how religious organizational communication connected domestic Muslim audiences with a conflict beyond Indonesia's borders.

The relationship between religious practice and humanitarian mobilization is also visible in a report published by the Aceh Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs on 2 January 2024. The report documented a prayer and poetry event for Palestine conducted nationally through in-person and online participation. Staff of the regional office joined the activity after congregational Maghrib prayers, while donations for Gaza were presented on behalf of the Ministry's employees and the *Dharma Wanita Persatuan* organization. The report stated that the Ministry channeled approximately IDR 44.8 billion in assistance to Palestine through LAZISNU and LAZISMU (Kantor Wilayah Kementerian Agama Provinsi Aceh, 2024). This case provides concrete evidence of the connection between collective religious expression and institutionalized humanitarian assistance. It also shows that a locally situated government institution participated in a nationally coordinated initiative that combined prayer, poetry, and charitable contributions. However, the evidence should be interpreted carefully: the report documents participation by the Aceh office in a national activity, rather than demonstrating that a specifically Acehnese tradition such as *zikir akbar* was organized for Gaza. It therefore supports an argument about the institutional and religious organization of solidarity in Aceh, but not the broader claim that distinctive Acehnese traditions were systematically transformed into instruments of transnational diplomacy.

A more explicitly political articulation of solidarity emerged in the joint statement issued by MUI and Islamic organizations on 18 July 2024. Following a dialogue on Indonesia's policies and role in achieving peace in Palestine, the participating organizations called for continued Indonesian support for Palestinian independence, humanitarian assistance, and stronger international cooperation. The statement also urged coordination between the Indonesian foreign and defense ministries and Islamic organizations through what it termed "*diplomasi total*" (MUI, 2024). This wording is analytically important because it frames Islamic organizations not merely as providers of religious guidance or charitable assistance, but as potential partners in a wider diplomatic effort. The statement also demonstrates that religious solidarity can be articulated through the language of foreign policy and international cooperation. Nevertheless, a public call for partnership with the government is not equivalent to proof that the organizations conducted public diplomacy successfully. The document establishes their stated intention to contribute to diplomatic efforts; evidence of subsequent engagement with foreign publics or changes in international perceptions would require additional sources.

These documentary examples also help distinguish different dimensions of transnational Muslim solidarity. Muhammadiyah's statement combined religious appeals, humanitarian assistance, and calls for international diplomatic action. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' report documented collective prayer alongside the transfer of donations through established Islamic charitable organizations. MUI's joint statement, meanwhile,

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explicitly connected religious organizational advocacy with the Indonesian government's diplomatic efforts. Together, the documents show that solidarity was not expressed through a single practice or institutional channel. Instead, it was articulated through a combination of religious observance, humanitarian mobilization, organizational statements, and pòlitical advocacy. This pattern is consistent with the argument that solidarity movements may operate across multiple arenas, although the documents do not establish that these activities formed a fully integrated national movement.

This interpretation can be compared with Alfarisi et al. (2024), whose study examines the relationship between fatwas, social media, and digital activism in mobilizing Muslim solidarity for Palestine. Their research directs attention to the circulation of religious messages through digital communication, whereas the documents examined here also demonstrate the importance of organizational statements, collective religious activities, and formal humanitarian channels. The comparison extends the discussion by showing that public expressions of solidarity can involve both digitally mediated communication and institutional practices. It also highlights a limitation: official statements and institutional reports document organizational positions and reported activities, but they do not necessarily reveal how individual participants interpreted these messages, how widely they circulated, or what effects they produced among audiences.

The distinction between solidarity and public diplomacy is particularly important in interpreting these cases. Public diplomacy generally concerns communication and engagement directed toward foreign publics, while humanitarian assistance and domestic religious mobilization may take place without such an outward-facing communicative objective. The Muhammadiyah statement and MUI's joint statement refer to international institutions, foreign policy, and cooperation beyond Indonesia. These references establish an international orientation, but they do not by themselves demonstrate that the statements were designed to persuade foreign publics. Similarly, the Aceh report documents a religious and humanitarian initiative, but its publication by a regional government office does not establish its reception outside Indonesia. The documents are therefore best understood as evidence of religiously informed transnational solidarity and potential contributions to informal public diplomacy, rather than conclusive evidence of diplomatic impact.

The evidence shows that local religious institutions and Islamic organizations provided important settings for articulating solidarity with Palestinians through prayer, charitable assistance, public statements, and calls for international cooperation. The cases also demonstrate that the relationship between religious solidarity and public diplomacy is conditional rather than automatic. Religious and humanitarian activities become relevant to an analysis of informal public diplomacy when documentary evidence establishes an outward-facing communicative purpose, engagement with foreign publics, or circulation across national borders. This distinction allows the study to recognize the

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international orientation of Indonesian Muslim solidarity without overstating its demonstrated diplomatic effects.

Contestation of Global Conflict Narratives among Indonesian Muslims

The contestation of global conflict narratives among Indonesian Muslims became particularly visible following the escalation of the Gaza war in October 2023. Rather than producing a single, unified interpretation, the conflict generated overlapping and sometimes competing narratives concerning religious solidarity, humanitarian responsibility, economic action, political advocacy, and the appropriate means of supporting Palestinians. These differences can be examined through public statements, organizational positions, and digital discussions. Prakoso and Haryanto (2024), for example, examine how religious teachings, political ideologies, and Islamic organizations shape Indonesian mobilization for Palestine. Their study provides a basis for understanding the Palestinian cause as a point at which religious identity and political engagement intersect. However, the existence of shared support for Palestinian rights does not mean that Indonesian Muslims necessarily agree on the methods, priorities, or political implications of that support.

One documented example of this contestation concerns MUI Fatwa No. 83 of 2023 on support for the Palestinian struggle, including its position on supporting products associated with Israel. The fatwa became a reference point for public discussion and boycott-related activism, but its interpretation also generated disagreement. Mustofa and Alfikri (2025) examine 20 highly engaged Instagram posts and approximately 2,500 comments from November 2023. They identify three broad patterns of response: support for the fatwa based on religious and humanitarian solidarity, concern about the potential economic consequences of boycotts for workers and small traders, and more neutral responses questioning the clarity of the fatwa. These findings provide direct evidence that public responses were not uniform. The debate concerned not only whether Indonesians should support Palestinians, but also how religious solidarity should be translated into consumer behavior and how the potential consequences of collective action should be evaluated.

This case also illustrates how religious authority is negotiated in digital public discourse. A fatwa issued by a national religious institution may provide an authoritative normative position, but its practical interpretation takes place among users with different economic circumstances, information sources, and political priorities. As Mustofa and Alfikri (2025) show, ambiguity concerning the identification of products associated with Israel contributed to differences in interpretation. Digital discussion therefore became a space in which religious guidance was circulated, debated, and translated into calls for action. This finding complicates an understanding of religious authority as a one-directional process in which an institutional statement automatically produces uniform public compliance. Instead, the relationship between religious authority and public

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behavior is mediated by public interpretation, social interaction, and the practical consequences attributed to the proposed action.

Digital activism surrounding Palestine provides a second example of competing approaches to public communication. Amrullah et al. (2024) examine *Julid Fi Sabilillah*, an Indonesian netizen initiative on Instagram that emerged in response to the Gaza war. Their study describes the movement as a form of cyber activism intended to counter pro-Israel narratives and increase attention to Palestinian suffering. However, the authors also document confrontational tactics, including hostile comments and attacks directed at social media accounts associated with Israel's supporters. This case demonstrates that digital solidarity can combine humanitarian objectives with antagonistic forms of communication. Although participants may understand such practices as resistance to narratives they regard as unjust, these tactics raise questions about the boundaries between political advocacy, counter-narrative production, online harassment, and responsible public communication. The example therefore challenges the assumption that solidarity with Palestine necessarily takes peaceful or deliberative forms.

The contrast between humanitarian advocacy and confrontational digital activism is analytically significant. Humanitarian campaigns may seek to mobilize donations, disseminate information about civilian suffering, or encourage diplomatic action, whereas confrontational online campaigns may prioritize challenging opposing narratives and exerting pressure on their proponents. These approaches can share an underlying commitment to Palestinian rights while differing in their communication strategies and understandings of legitimate action. The findings of Amrullah et al. (2024) are therefore useful for qualifying the assumption that Indonesian Muslim responses to global conflicts are predominantly peaceful or uniformly moderate. Their study does not establish that confrontational digital activism represents Indonesian Muslims as a whole; rather, it demonstrates that such practices form one identifiable strand within the broader landscape of online solidarity.

These disagreements also have implications for the relationship between domestic discourse and Indonesia's international engagement. Religious organizations, activists, and individual social media users can contribute to public discussion about Palestine, but their actions should not automatically be classified as public diplomacy. Digital messages may circulate beyond national borders, yet cross-border circulation alone does not demonstrate that a campaign was deliberately directed at foreign publics or that it influenced international perceptions. Similarly, a boycott campaign primarily intended to change domestic consumer behavior is not necessarily an instance of public diplomacy. To establish a diplomatic dimension, the analysis must identify evidence of outward-facing communication, engagement with foreign audiences, or deliberate efforts to shape perceptions beyond Indonesia.

Taken together, the evidence from the MUI fatwa debate, *Julid Fi Sabilillah*, and broader public mobilization shows that Indonesian Muslim responses to Gaza involve

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both common commitments and substantive disagreements. The principal areas of contestation concern how religious authority should be interpreted, how solidarity should be translated into action, what communication strategies are considered legitimate, and how humanitarian objectives relate to economic and political consequences. These findings extend the discussion beyond a binary distinction between moderate and conservative Muslims. They instead demonstrate that contestation can occur among actors who share concern for Palestinians but differ over the means, risks, and public consequences of expressing that concern. The international significance of these narratives depends in turn on whether their communication extends beyond domestic mobilization and engages foreign publics in demonstrable ways.

Indonesia's Moderate Islamic Identity and Its Implications for Global Humanitarian Discourse

Indonesia's moderate Islamic identity has been promoted as a potential resource for international engagement (Naim & Mokodenseho, 2023), but its significance needs to be assessed through the relationship between identity, communication, and diplomatic practice rather than assumed from Indonesia's Muslim-majority status. Hoesterey (2023) examines how the idea of Indonesia as a model of moderate Islam has been developed through public diplomacy initiatives involving state institutions and Muslim civil society. His analysis demonstrates that "moderate Islam" is not simply a description of Indonesian religious life; it is also an identity that political and religious actors have sought to communicate internationally. This distinction is important for the present study because the international significance of Indonesian Muslim responses to Gaza depends not only on the humanitarian values they express, but also on how these values are communicated, to whom, and with what intended purpose.

The role of non-state actors in promoting this identity is particularly relevant. Nubowo (2023) examines how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have mobilized their organizational resources and international networks to promote Indonesian Islam through dialogue, cooperation, humanitarian engagement, and institutional partnerships. His analysis identifies shared interests in presenting Indonesian Islam as tolerant and open both domestically and internationally, while also recognizing challenges to these efforts. This research provides a useful framework for understanding why major Islamic organizations may become participants in soft power diplomacy. Nevertheless, their international activities should not be interpreted as evidence that all Indonesian Muslim communities share the same understanding of moderation or that the international image being promoted is uniformly accepted by foreign audiences.

These cases help clarify the relationship between moderate Islamic identity and public diplomacy. The concept of moderation can provide a vocabulary through which Indonesian actors communicate commitments to humanitarian assistance, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution. Yet the diplomatic relevance of these values depends on their translation into identifiable forms of communication and engagement. A statement

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addressed primarily to domestic Muslims may strengthen internal solidarity without necessarily constituting public diplomacy. By contrast, a religious organization's deliberate engagement with foreign communities, international institutions, or overseas audiences may provide stronger evidence of an outward-facing diplomatic role. Accordingly, the international significance of Indonesian Muslim humanitarian initiatives should be evaluated through their documented audiences, communication strategies, partnerships, and reception rather than inferred from their religious or cultural origins alone.

The Gaza conflict also demonstrates why the international projection of moderate Islam should not be treated as an uncomplicated or universally accepted national image. Indonesian Islamic organizations may share a commitment to Palestinian independence while differing in their preferred strategies, forms of political advocacy, and interpretations of legitimate action. As discussed in the preceding subsection, public responses have included humanitarian mobilization, religious appeals, boycott advocacy, and confrontational forms of digital activism. These differences complicate any assumption that Indonesian Muslim solidarity invariably communicates moderation or peaceful coexistence. They also show that the international presentation of Indonesian Islam must be understood alongside internal debates over religious authority, political action, and the appropriate means of expressing solidarity.

The implications for global humanitarian discourse are therefore conditional. Indonesian Islamic organizations can contribute to international discussion by linking religious ethics with humanitarian action, advocating diplomatic solutions, and engaging in cross-border cooperation. Hoesterey's (2023) analysis of Indonesia's moderate Islamic identity and Nubowo's (2023) study of NU and Muhammadiyah's soft power activities help explain the strategic importance of these initiatives. The documentary statements concerning Gaza illustrate how such commitments are articulated in a concrete international crisis. Taken together, these sources suggest that moderate Islamic identity can provide a framework for international engagement, but its diplomatic significance depends on the practices through which it is communicated and the responses it generates. This qualification prevents the analysis from equating the projection of a moderate identity with demonstrated soft power or measurable changes in international perceptions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Indonesian Muslim actors construct and contest narratives concerning the Gaza conflict, how local Islamic cultural practices relate to transnational solidarity, and under what conditions these practices can be understood as forms of informal public diplomacy. The analysis indicates that narratives concerning Gaza are articulated through religious and humanitarian appeals, organizational statements, calls for assistance, and digital activism. However, these narratives are not uniform. Differences emerge over the interpretation of religious authority, the appropriate

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forms of solidarity, the use of boycotts and digital activism, and the relationship between humanitarian concerns and political action.

The findings also suggest that local Islamic traditions provide social and religious contexts through which solidarity can be expressed, but their significance must be established through evidence concerning particular practices and actors. The documentary materials examined in this study illustrate how Indonesian Muslim organizations connect religious commitments with humanitarian assistance and diplomatic appeals. Nevertheless, the evidence does not establish that all Indonesian Muslim communities respond in similar ways or that local religious practices necessarily produce transnational influence.

Regarding public diplomacy, the study concludes that religious and cultural expressions should not automatically be classified as diplomatic activities. Their relevance to informal public diplomacy depends on whether they involve outward-facing communication, engagement with foreign publics, or documented circulation across national borders. The public statements and organizational initiatives examined here demonstrate international orientations and calls for cooperation, but they do not independently establish changes in foreign public opinion or measurable diplomatic outcomes.

The study's theoretical contribution lies in bringing local Islamic cultural practices into discussions of transnational solidarity and informal public diplomacy while distinguishing domestic humanitarian mobilization from communication directed toward international audiences. Practically, the analysis suggests that Islamic organizations and public institutions should consider the intended audiences, communication strategies, and coordination of religiously informed humanitarian initiatives when seeking to extend their reach beyond domestic constituencies. These implications should be understood as analytical and practical propositions rather than evidence of demonstrated diplomatic effectiveness.

The study is limited by its reliance on documentary materials and publicly available statements, which cannot fully establish how participants interpret these activities or how foreign audiences receive them. Future research could address these limitations through interviews, fieldwork, audience-reception studies, and comparative research across Muslim communities in Southeast Asia. Such approaches would help determine more precisely when locally grounded religious solidarity develops into sustained transnational engagement and whether that engagement influences international perceptions.

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the interpretation of the findings and reviewed and edited the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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