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CONTESTED RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF QUR'ANIC ETHICS: ANALYSIS OF THE PETER YOUNGREN CONTROVERSY IN PALU

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis kontestasi wacana keagamaan dalam polemik penolakan kegiatan yang menghadirkan Peter Youngren di Kota Palu dan merumuskan prinsip keterbukaan kritis dalam perspektif etika Al-Qur'an. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis dokumen atas pemberitaan, opini, dan pernyataan publik yang diterbitkan pada Januari 2025, dipadukan dengan analisis tematik serta hermeneutika filosofis. Hasil analisis mengidentifikasi tiga orientasi wacana: perlindungan akidah, kebebasan ekspresi keagamaan, dan pemeliharaan kerukunan melalui mediasi. Perbedaan pernyataan mengenai sasaran kegiatan memperlihatkan pentingnya transparansi dan verifikasi informasi, tetapi tidak dapat langsung dijadikan bukti pemaksaan atau pelanggaran. Pembacaan etika Al-Qur'an terhadap prinsip nonpemaksaan, keadilan, penghormatan atas keragaman, dan dialog diperkuat dengan perbandingan tafsir primer. Penelitian ini mengembangkan keterbukaan kritis sebagai kerangka evaluatif yang menghubungkan integritas teologis, tanggung jawab etis-komunikatif, dan keadilan publik melalui lima kriteria: verifikasi, kesukarelaan, transparansi, resiprositas, dan proporsionalitas. Kontribusinya adalah membedakan keberatan teologis yang sah dari tuntutan pembatasan hak yang memerlukan dasar hukum dan bukti memadai. Kesimpulan dibatasi pada wacana yang terdokumentasi dan tidak mewakili seluruh pandangan masyarakat Palu.

Kata kunci: *Etika Al-Qur'an; kebebasan beragama; Peter Youngren; keterbukaan kritis.*

Abstract

This study examines contested religious discourses surrounding opposition to an event featuring Peter Youngren in Palu, Indonesia, and develops the notion of critical openness within Qur'anic ethics. A qualitative document-analysis approach was applied to news reports, opinion pieces, and documented public statements published in January 2025, integrating thematic analysis with philosophical hermeneutics. The

analysis identifies three orientations: protection of religious faith, freedom of religious expression, and the pursuit of harmony through mediation. Divergent statements concerning the event's intended audience underline the importance of transparency and verification, but cannot in themselves establish coercion or wrongdoing. Drawing on Qur'anic principles of non-coercion, justice, respect for diversity, and ethical dialogue, supported by readings of primary exegetical sources, the study develops critical openness as an evaluative framework. It integrates theological integrity, ethical-communicative responsibility, and public justice through five criteria: verification, voluntariness, transparency, reciprocity, and proportionality. The contribution lies in distinguishing legitimate theological objections from restrictions on others' rights, which require sufficient evidence and lawful justification. The findings concern documented public discourse and do not represent the views of all Palu residents.

Keywords: *Qur'anic ethics; religious freedom; Peter Youngren; critical openness.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity is a social reality inseparable from Indonesian society. The presence of different religious communities within a shared social space creates opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and solidarity, but it may also give rise to tensions when one group's expression of faith is perceived as threatening another group's religious identity. These issues become more complex when religious differences are understood not merely as theological matters but also in relation to religious freedom, access to public space, and the preservation of social harmony. In Central Sulawesi, the history of communal conflict in Poso demonstrates the complex historical and social dimensions of interreligious relations. Amanah Nurish's research identifies connections among Muslim-Christian conflict, the development of religious movements, prejudice, and the construction of social perceptions in the dynamics of interreligious relations in Central Sulawesi.[1] Accordingly, religious differences in a plural society need to be understood in terms of the relationship among theological convictions, social experiences, and the principles of justice governing communal life.

[1] Amanah Nurish, "Muslim-Christian Conflict and the Rise of Laskar Jihad: Tracing Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi–Indonesia," *QIJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 479–516, https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v10i2.8776.

These issues gained empirical significance in the controversy surrounding the planned participation of Peter Youngren, the Canadian founder of World Impact Ministries, in the Friendship Festival scheduled for January 30 to February 2, 2025, in Palu. Several community groups affiliated with the Central Sulawesi Muslim Alliance and the Central Sulawesi Muslim Forum opposed Youngren's presence and called for the event to be canceled. One protest took place outside the Aston Hotel in Palu on January 29, 2025. According to ANTARA's reporting, the protesters stated that their objections were not directed at Christianity itself or Christian worship but at an individual and event they believed could potentially disrupt interreligious relations.[2] Statements from the Central Sulawesi Muslim Forum reported by SultengTerkini also expressed concern that an event promoted as an open festival might involve Muslims in healing activities connected to the organizers' religious beliefs.[3] Nevertheless, such concerns must be treated as claims and perceptions of the opposing groups, not as evidence that coercion or violations of religious freedom actually occurred.

Peter Youngren, by contrast, offered a different account of the event. In a statement reported by ANTARA on January 30, 2025, Youngren maintained that the Friendship Festival was open to everyone regardless of religious identity and that attendance was a matter of individual choice.[4] The Central Sulawesi Provincial Government had previously authorized the use of Gelora Bumi Kaktus as the festival venue through its Youth and Sports Office.[5] These differing statements reveal two competing frameworks of

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[2] Badruz, "Umat Islam Sulteng Geruduk Hotel Aston Palu Tolak Peter Youngren," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 29, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/338782/umat-islam-sulteng-geruduk-hotel-aston-palu-tolak-peter-youngren.

[3] Redaksi SultengTerkini, "FUI Sulteng Tolak Keras Kedatangan Peter Youngren di Palu," *SultengTerkini*, January 23, 2025, https://sultengterkini.id/2025/01/23/fui-sulteng-tolak-keras-kedatangan-peter-youngren-di-palu/.

[4] Fauzi, "Peter Youngren Siap Sambut Siapa Saja di Festival Persahabatan Palu," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 30, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/338790/peter-youngren-siap-sambut-siapa-saja-di-festival-persahabatan-palu.

[5] Fauzi, "Pemprov-Sulteng Berikan Izin Festival Persahabatan di GBK Palu," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 25, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/338474/pemprov-sulteng-berikan-izin-festival-persahabatan-di-gbk-palu.

argumentation. The opposing groups emphasized the importance of protecting Islamic faith, exercising caution toward religious activities perceived as potentially generating tension, and maintaining harmony. The organizers, conversely, emphasized the event's openness, individual freedom, and the right to express religious beliefs in public. This contestation is significant because both sides invoked harmony to justify their positions while assigning different priorities to freedom and the protection of religious identity.

This phenomenon suggests that debates over religious pluralism cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between tolerant and intolerant groups. The more fundamental issue is how a religious community can maintain its theological convictions without disregarding other communities' rights to practice and express their faith. In this context, the Qur'an offers a key source for philosophical reflection on the relationship between steadfastness in faith and social openness. Qur'an 2:256 affirms the principle of non-coercion in religion; Qur'an 5:48 acknowledges the diversity of ways of life and calls upon humanity to compete in good deeds; and Qur'an 60:8 provides a basis for treating those who do not fight Muslims with kindness and justice. At the same time, Qur'an 109:1–6 affirms the boundaries between differing beliefs and theological identities. Together, these verses raise a hermeneutical and philosophical question: how can the affirmation of religious truth be maintained while situated within social relations founded on freedom, justice, and respect for others?

In the philosophy of religion, the relationship between plurality and pluralism has attracted considerable attention. Diana L. Eck explains that pluralism does not simply mean diversity, passive tolerance, or theological relativism; rather, it entails active engagement among communities that continue to uphold their religious commitments.[6] This perspective indicates that the coexistence of different religions in one society does not automatically produce pluralistic social relations. John Hick, meanwhile, examines the rationality of religious belief in the face of traditions advancing different truth claims.[7] These debates demonstrate that pluralism has both an epistemological

[6] The Pluralism Project, "About: What Is Pluralism?," Harvard University, accessed October 12, 2026, https://pluralism.org/about.

[7] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and the Rationality of Religious Belief," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (1993): 242–249, https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil199310218.

dimension concerning truth claims and an ethical dimension concerning relations among religious adherents. Yet philosophical disputes about religious truth do not, by themselves, resolve the question of the legitimate limits of theological objections to other religions' expressions in public space.

A number of Qur'anic studies have made important contributions to understanding the connections among tolerance, pluralism, and interreligious life. Muhamad Ridho Dinata analyzes religious tolerance in the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' thematic Qur'anic commentary, highlighting the importance of institutional interpretation in shaping understandings of interreligious relations.[8] Azhari Andi and Ezi Fadilla examine religious pluralism in the light of Qur'anic guidance, emphasizing harmonious coexistence, peace, and respect for differences in belief.[9] Kamarusdiana, meanwhile, regards education for pluralism as a means of developing tolerance and strengthening social relations in a multireligious society.[10] These three studies contribute to a normative understanding of tolerance, but their principal focus is not a philosophical assessment of the legitimacy of restricting religious freedom in a concrete social controversy.

Other studies demonstrate that Qur'anic interpretations of pluralism are neither uniform nor detached from their intellectual contexts. Through an examination of Qur'an 5:48, Mun'im Sirry identifies differences between classical exegetical traditions and contemporary Muslim thought in addressing the relationship between Islam and religious pluralism.[11] Comparing the interpretations of M. Quraish Shihab and Muhammad Asad, Ulfah Nur Azizah shows that verses concerning human diversity can be understood as grounds

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[8] Muhamad Ridho Dinata, "Konsep Toleransi Beragama dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Karya Tim Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 13, no. 1 (2012): 85–108, https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v13i1.723.

[9] Azhari Andi dan Ezi Fadilla, "Menyikapi Pluralisme Agama Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 17, no. 1 (2016): 39–52, https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v17i1.1277

[10] Kamarusdiana, "Al-Qur'an dan Relasi Antar Umat Beragama: Diskursus tentang Pendidikan Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia," *SALAM: Jurnal Sosial dan Budaya Syar-i* 5, no. 3 (2018): 241–254, https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v5i3.9811.

[11] Mun'im Sirry, "'Compete with One Another in Good Works': Exegesis of Qur'an Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 20, no. 4 (2009): 423–438, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410903194886.

for recognizing difference and the equal dignity of human beings.[12] Achmad Yafik Mursyid, Muhammad Dzilfikri Al-Baihaqi, and Alvy Ra'isatul Murtafi'ah further demonstrate that official state interpretations of interreligious relations cannot be separated from political dynamics, the construction of exegetical authority, and the social contexts in which interpretations are produced.[13] These studies provide a valuable foundation for understanding pluralism as both a hermeneutical and a socio-political issue. Their central concerns, however, differ from evaluating competing arguments about protecting faith and permitting religious expression in a dispute over a religious event in public space.

The preceding literature suggests at least two broad approaches to religious pluralism from an Islamic perspective. The first is a normative-hermeneutical approach that emphasizes interpretations of Qur'anic verses about tolerance, diversity, and interreligious relations. The second is a socio-historical approach that explains the dynamics of interreligious relations through conflict, group identity, prejudice, and the construction of religious discourse. Both make important academic contributions, but an unresolved question arises when normative principles and social experience must be considered together to assess the legitimacy of objections to particular religious activities. Thus, the issue requiring further explanation is not merely whether Islam acknowledges religious plurality, but how religious arguments should be assessed rationally and ethically when they bear upon the rights and freedoms of followers of other religions.

Unlike previous studies, this research takes the controversy over opposition to Peter Youngren in Palu as its material object in order to examine the relationship between theological argumentation, religious freedom, and ethics in public life. It does not seek to adjudicate the truth of contested religious doctrines or classify particular groups as tolerant or intolerant. Its

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[12] Ulfah Nur Azizah, "Multikulturalisme dalam Al-Qur'an: Studi Penafsiran Quraish Shihab dan Muhammad Asad," *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 6, no. 2 (2020): 78–93, https://doi.org/10.15408/ushuluna.v6i2.29987.

[13] Achmad Yafik Mursyid, Muhammad Dzilfikri Al-Baihaqi, and Alvy Ra'isatul Murtafi'ah, "Politics and Pluralism: Analyzing State Official Tafsir and Interfaith Discourse in Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 25, no. 1 (2024): 57–75, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.5379.

distinctive contribution lies in critically reconstructing the arguments of the different parties and evaluating them through Islamic philosophy, Qur'anic exegesis, and theories of liberty. Within this framework, pluralism is examined through three interconnected dimensions: a theological dimension concerning the right to maintain one's faith; an ethical dimension governing interpersonal relations through justice and respect for dignity; and a juridical dimension concerning the legal grounds and legitimacy of restrictions on rights. This approach makes it possible to distinguish conceptual opposition to a religious doctrine from actions that restrict the religious expression of its adherents.

This distinction also finds support in the philosophy of liberty. Through his concepts of negative and positive liberty, Isaiah Berlin shows that freedom can be discussed in terms of both freedom from others' interference and an individual's capacity to determine the course of their own life.[14] Yet liberty in a plural society cannot be separated from questions of justice and equality of rights. In Indonesia, Articles 28E and 29 of the 1945 Constitution provide constitutional protection for religious freedom, while Article 28J establishes principles governing limitations on the exercise of rights. Indonesia has also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights through Law No. 12 of 2005.[15] In General Comment No. 22, the United Nations Human Rights Committee distinguishes the internal freedom to hold a belief, which is not subject to restriction, from the external manifestation of religion, which may be restricted only under stringent legal conditions, for legitimate purposes, and where proportionately necessary.[16] This framework helps distinguish theological disagreement, as an aspect of freedom of belief, from restrictions on religious activities that require separate legal and ethical justification.

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[14] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," dalam *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–172.

[15] Republik Indonesia, *1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*, Articles 28E, 28J, and 29; Republik Indonesia, *Law No. 12 of 2005 on the Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, https://jdih.kemenkeu.go.id/dok/uu-12-tahun-2005/view.

[16] United Nations Human Rights Committee, *CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion)*, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (1993), especially paragraphs 3–4, https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1993/13375.

In light of the empirical evidence and the literature discussed above, this study identifies three interrelated research gaps. Empirically, the studies reviewed have not specifically reconstructed and jointly assessed the arguments advanced by the parties to the Peter Youngren controversy in Palu. Conceptually, a more operational distinction is needed among religious plurality, social pluralism, theological truth claims, and the legitimacy of restrictions on religious freedom. Philosophically, an evaluative framework is needed to explain when objections to religious activities constitute legitimate theological criticism and when they risk becoming unjustifiable restrictions on rights. These gaps matter because recognition of pluralism must not deprive communities of the right to maintain their beliefs, just as protecting religious faith does not automatically legitimize restricting other communities' social and religious rights.

To address these gaps, the study proposes developing the concept of critical openness as a framework of Qur'anic public ethics connecting theological steadfastness with respect for religious freedom. The concept is premised on the view that openness toward the existence of other religions does not require eliminating doctrinal differences or relativizing religious truth claims. Rather, critical openness treats differences in belief as a reality to be managed through voluntariness, non-coercion, equality of rights, transparency, and proportionality. Theologically, it allows each community to maintain and articulate its convictions. Ethically, it requires respect for freedom of conscience and prohibits coercion, manipulation, and discrimination. Juridically, it maintains that restrictions on religious activities must have a lawful basis and objectively assessable justification. Unlike Diana L. Eck's dialogical pluralism, which stresses active engagement, and Isaiah Berlin's typology of liberty, the proposed contribution lies in operationally connecting these three dimensions to distinguish theological disagreement, objections requiring clarification, and restrictions on rights requiring legal legitimacy. The framework is evaluated through five principles: verification, voluntariness, transparency, reciprocity, and proportionality. Thus, critical openness is advanced as a conceptual construction that must be tested through dialogue with theories of pluralism, theories of liberty, and Qur'anic exegesis, rather than as a concept whose novelty is assumed from the outset.

Against this background, the study aims to analyze the structure of religious argumentation surrounding opposition to Peter Youngren in Palu, particularly concerning the protection of faith, religious freedom, and social harmony; to examine philosophically the relationship between interpretations of Qur'anic verses about religious freedom, steadfastness in belief, and interreligious relations and the principles of justice and respect for rights in public space; and to formulate a conceptual framework of critical openness as an ethical basis for distinguishing defensible theological objections from restrictions on religious freedom lacking adequate legitimacy. In pursuing these aims, the study seeks to contribute to contemporary Islamic philosophy, particularly by bringing normative Qur'anic interpretation, theories of pluralism, and issues of religious freedom into conversation in the context of multireligious societies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using qualitative document analysis to examine the structure of religious argumentation in the controversy over opposition to Peter Youngren in Palu. Its material objects are documented news reports, opinion pieces, and public statements, while its formal object is the quality of these arguments from the perspective of Qur'anic ethics. This method was selected because the available evidence primarily consists of public-communication documents, rather than observational records or social-media community interactions. Bowen describes document analysis as the systematic examination and interpretation of written sources to develop an understanding of a social phenomenon.[17]

The primary research corpus is limited to eight news and opinion documents cited in the article and published between January 13 and 30, 2025: reporting on the Central Sulawesi Interreligious Harmony Forum's proposal to regulate the event; statements by the Alliance to Protect Faith; opposition from the Central Sulawesi Muslim Forum; news of authorization to use Gelora Bumi Kaktus; Jakob Wendesten's clarification; Hajrin Kaso's opinion article; reporting on the protest at the Aston Hotel; and Peter Youngren's statement.

[17] Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," Qualitative Research Journal 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027.

Documents were purposively selected if their dates and sources were traceable, they contained relevant actors' statements or positions, and they directly addressed the protection of faith, religious freedom, or arrangements for the event. Secondary sources included scholarly studies, Qur'anic exegeses, and legal documents. The units of analysis were statements and arguments recorded in these documents; social-media users' comments and behavior were not treated as primary data.[18]

The analysis proceeded through four stages. First, sources were identified; the origins and publication contexts of documents were examined; and dates, publishers, speakers, and main statements were recorded. Second, thematic coding grouped arguments into protection of faith, freedom of religious expression, and mediation for harmony, while also attending to differences in statements about the event's intended audience. Third, a hermeneutical reading examined Qur'anic principles concerning non-coercion (Qur'an 2:256), justice (Qur'an 5:8), respect for diversity (Qur'an 49:13), good relations between groups (Qur'an 60:8), dialogue (Qur'an 16:125), and information verification (Qur'an 49:6). Interpretations were compared contextually using Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik, and the classical exegeses of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī. Fourth, a critical-philosophical synthesis assessed the coherence of the arguments in relation to freedom of conscience, justice, non-coercion, and the legitimacy of restrictions on rights.

The trustworthiness of the analysis was supported by triangulation across documents and speakers' perspectives, comparison of primary exegetical sources, and an audit trail linking source statements to the researcher's assessments. Findings were distinguished at three levels: reported facts about events, the claims or concerns of particular parties, and normative evaluation based on Qur'anic ethics. The study did not directly verify events in the field, measure the opinions of all Palu residents, or claim to conduct netnography. Accordingly, objections to the nature of the event and the organizers' assertions of voluntariness were analyzed as arguments requiring independent substantiation before they could form the basis for factual or legal conclusions.

[18]Hani Morgan, “Conducting a Qualitative Document Analysis,” The Qualitative Report 27, no. 1 (2022): 64–77, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contested Religious Discourses in the Peter Youngren Controversy in Palu

The controversy over opposition to Peter Youngren's participation in the Friendship Festival in Palu in January 2025 reveals competing arguments concerning the protection of faith, religious freedom, and the preservation of social harmony. A reading of eight news reports, opinion pieces, and documented public statements published that month identifies three discursive orientations: protection of faith, freedom of religious expression, and the maintenance of harmony through arrangements governing the event. These orientations emerged from interpretive coding of the documentary corpus, not from measuring the frequency of public responses or directly observing social-media interactions.

The first orientation is the discourse of protecting faith, articulated by community groups opposing the Friendship Festival. In an ANTARA report published on January 17, 2025, the Alliance to Protect Faith (Aliansi Jaga Aqidah) objected to an event featuring Peter Youngren as its keynote speaker. The protest coordinator, Ari Fachri, expressed concern that the event could disturb interreligious harmony and potentially influence Muslims' religious convictions.[19] These concerns were further articulated in a protest by the Muslim Alliance and Muslim Forum of Central Sulawesi on January 29, 2025. At the protest, representatives of the opposing groups stressed that their objections targeted the individual and the perceived nature of the event, rather than Christianity as a whole.[20]

Arguments centered on protecting faith also appear in an opinion article by Hajrin Kaso published online on January 27, 2025. The article links objections to the Friendship Festival to issues of religious propagation, healing

[19] Badruz, "Aliansi Jaga Aqidah Tolak Pelaksanaan Festival Persahabatan di Palu," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 17, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/337798/aliansi-jaga-aqidah-tolak-pelaksanaan-festival-persahabatan-di-palu.

[20] Badruz, "Umat Islam Sulteng Geruduk Hotel Aston Palu Tolak Peter Youngren," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 29, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/338782/umat-islam-sulteng-geruduk-hotel-aston-palu-tolak-peter-youngren.

activities, and legal provisions concerning interreligious relations.[21] From a discourse-analytical perspective, it demonstrates how theological concerns may be framed as ethical and juridical demands. These arguments, however, must still be distinguished from factual proof regarding how the event was conducted. A claim that an activity could potentially involve religious propagation contrary to applicable rules does not, by itself, establish that a violation occurred. This preliminary finding thus indicates a tendency for theological concerns to develop into arguments for restricting activities in public space.

The second orientation is the discourse of freedom of religious expression advanced by the organizers. As reported by ANTARA on January 30, 2025, Peter Youngren explained that the Friendship Festival was open to everyone and that attendance was a matter of individual choice.[22] This argument places individual freedom at the center of the event's legitimacy. From this perspective, openness means allowing everyone to attend or decline to attend without coercion. The organizers also emphasized friendship, love, and peaceful relations as the event's goals. Their discourse contrasts with the opposing groups' greater emphasis on the potential risks posed by the event to religious identity and the stability of social relations.

Notably, online documentation reveals differences in the organizers' own formulations of the event's intended audience. On January 27, 2025, ANTARA reported Jakob Wendesten's apology for statements in a video that some parties considered offensive. In his clarification, Jakob said that the event was intended for Christians within their own community. Peter Youngren, however, stated on January 30, 2025, that the event was open to everyone.[23] Statements made at different times by different speakers cannot

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[21] Hajrin Kaso, "Kenapa Wajib Tolak Kedatangan Pendeta Peter Youngren?," *TrustSulteng*, January 27, 2025, https://trustsulteng.com/index.php/2025/01/27/kenapa-wajib-tolak-kedatangan-pendeta-peter-youngren/.

[22] Fauzi, "Peter Youngren Siap Sambut Siapa Saja di Festival Persahabatan Palu," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 30, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/338790/peter-youngren-siap-sambut-siapa-saja-di-festival-persahabatan-palu.

[23] Fauzi, "Jakob Minta Maaf Soal Video tentang Festival Persahabatan," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 27, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/338546/jakob-minta-maaf-soal-video-tentang-festival-persahabatan.

automatically be taken as evidence of manipulation or dishonesty. Analytically, however, the discrepancy illustrates the importance of clear communication concerning the intended participants, the nature of the event, and openness of access. Ambiguous information can increase the likelihood of divergent interpretations within society.

The third orientation is the discourse of mediation and event management advanced by several community leaders and interreligious harmony institutions. The Central Sulawesi Interreligious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, FKUB), for example, suggested holding the event at a venue where arrangements could be more closely managed. According to ANTARA, the forum's chair, Zainal Abidin, proposed an alternative location considered more suitable for orderly management of the gathering.[24] This position is not identical either to demands for cancellation or to the unrestricted holding of the event without modification. Rather, it attempts to reconcile the exercise of religious rights with the need to manage social relations.

These three orientations reveal that the meaning of harmony varies according to the actors' positions. For the opposing groups, harmony may be preserved by preventing activities perceived as posing risks to the community's faith. For the organizers, harmony is realized by allowing religious communities to hold events attended voluntarily. For those proposing mediation, harmony requires communication and arrangements that take local social conditions into account. The differences indicate that the disagreement concerns not only whether an event should be accepted or rejected, but also how different actors define threats, freedom, and social responsibility.

Several findings can be situated within the history of interreligious relations in Central Sulawesi. Amanah Nurish demonstrates connections among experiences of Muslim-Christian conflict, the construction of prejudice, religious movements, and social representations within the region's

[24] Fauzi, "FKUB-Sulteng Minta Festival Persahabatan Palu Dilaksanakan Tertutup," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 13, 2025, https://sulteng.antaranews.com/berita/337382/fkub-sulteng-minta-festival-persahabatan-palu-dilaksanakan-tertutup.

interreligious dynamics.[25] Nurish's findings do not prove that opposition to Peter Youngren was motivated by memories of past conflict. Nonetheless, the study offers relevant historical context for understanding why the freedom to express religious beliefs may acquire heightened social sensitivity.

Overall, the document analysis suggests that contested religious discourses in the Peter Youngren case revolve around differing interpretations of the event's purpose, the legitimacy of religious expression, and the limits of protecting faith. Comparison of the sources shows that the notion of harmony supports divergent positions: preventing perceived risks for the opposing groups, freedom to attend for the organizers, and adjustments to arrangements for the FKUB. These findings require the researcher to distinguish reported facts from actors' claims and ethical assessments. Because the corpus consists of published documents, the results should not be interpreted as a comprehensive account of interactions or the opinions of Palu residents.

Religious Freedom and the Protection of Faith from the Perspective of Qur'anic Ethics

Competing arguments in the Peter Youngren controversy raise a philosophical issue concerning the relationship between religious freedom and the protection of religious convictions. Qur'anic ethics provides a normative framework for understanding this issue, one that considers not only the truth of theological positions but also how people treat others when confronted with differences in belief. Through his semantic study of ethical concepts in the Qur'an, Toshihiko Izutsu demonstrates that Qur'anic moral terms form a network of meanings connecting faith, responsibility, and human conduct.[26] This perspective matters because religious attitudes should be evaluated not only by fidelity to doctrine but also by the ethical quality of actions arising from those convictions.

The first relevant principle is freedom of conscience, as affirmed in Qur'an 2:256. The phrase lā ikrāha fī al-dīn states that there is no compulsion

[25] Amanah Nurish, "Muslim-Christian Conflict and the Rise of Laskar Jihad: Tracing Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi–Indonesia," *QIJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 479–516, https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v10i2.8776.

[26] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

in religion. Philosophically, this principle suggests that belief cannot be reduced to outward compliance produced by external pressure. Faith entails awareness, understanding, and personal acceptance of what an individual holds to be true. In M. Quraish Shihab's reading, as discussed in research on religious freedom in Tafsir Al-Mishbah, rejection of coercion is a central aspect of the relationship between conviction and human will.[27]

A reading of primary exegetical sources demonstrates that this verse has a historical context and a contested interpretive history. Commenting on lā ikrāha fī al-dīn, al-Ṭabarī records accounts of Anṣār families who wished to compel their children to abandon previously held beliefs, while also noting differing views about the verse's scope of application. The prohibition of coercion must therefore be read with attention to the historical accounts and diversity of interpretations, rather than deployed as a slogan that automatically resolves every modern issue of religious rights. In the Palu controversy, the relevant ethical implication is the need to substantiate specific acts of coercion before justifying accusations or restrictions on activities.[28]

Nevertheless, the principle of non-coercion has not been understood uniformly throughout Islamic intellectual history. Natalia Laskowska identifies differences among Indonesian and Malaysian Muslim thinkers concerning the scope of religious freedom, including debates over the right to change one's religion and the relationship between religious teaching and socio-political authority.[29] This diversity shows that interpreting Qur'an 2:256 requires contextual reading and more substantial argumentation. The principle of freedom cannot be invoked simplistically without considering the history of interpretation, relations of power, and the distinction between inward freedom and the public manifestation of belief.

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[27] Kuswantoro dan Imam Alfi, "Kebebasan Beragama Menurut Tafsir Al-Misbah Al-Quran Surat Al-Baqarah Ayat 256," *Al-Idaroh: Media Pemikiran Manajemen Dakwah* 2, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/10.53888/alidaroh.v2i2.543; M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), commentary on Qur'an al-Baqarah [2]: 256.

[28]Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān, commentary on Qur'an al-Baqarah [2]:256, https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura2-aya256.html.

[29] Natalia Laskowska, "Contemporary Indonesian and Malaysian Interpretations of 'No Compulsion in Religion'," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 44, no. 129 (2016): 249–261, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2015.1129161.

The second principle is justice toward people who hold different religious beliefs. Qur'an 5:8 instructs believers not to allow hostility toward a group to lead them into injustice. Qur'an 60:8, meanwhile, provides a basis for kindness and justice toward those who do not engage in hostility or expel others on religious grounds. Both verses carry the philosophical implication that moral judgments of individuals or groups should not be based solely on religious identity. Their actions, the consequences of those actions, and their treatment of other people's rights must also inform ethical evaluation.

Al-Ṭabarī's reading of Qur'an 5:8 emphasizes the obligation to act justly toward both those one favors and those one dislikes, so that hostility does not distort judgment. In commenting on Qur'an 60:8, al-Qurṭubī discusses differing interpretations of the verse's scope but also records views maintaining the injunction to treat those who do not fight Muslims with kindness and justice. This comparison shows that an ethic of justice does not erase differences in faith; rather, it requires treatment that is not determined solely by group identity. In Peter Youngren's case, this standard applies reciprocally to the organizers, opposing groups, and public officials.[30]

In the Peter Youngren controversy, justice requires that the event be evaluated on the basis of the nature of its activities and verifiable evidence. Concerns about possible misuse of healing activities or religious propagation may justify requests for clarification, monitoring, or investigation in accordance with applicable rules. Such concerns, however, are insufficient to conclude that a violation actually occurred. Conversely, the organizers' assurances of openness and voluntariness should not be accepted without examining actual practices. An ethic of justice requires the same standard of evidence for every party, whether opponents or organizers.

The third principle is respect for diversity. Qur'an 49:13 situates human diversity within the principle of mutual acquaintance (ta'āruf), while Qur'an 5:48 connects differences among communities with the command to compete in good deeds. Mun'im Sirry demonstrates that Qur'an 5:48 occupies an important place in contemporary Muslim debates on pluralism because it

[30]Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmi‘ al-Bayān, commentary on Qur'an al-Mā’idah [5]:8, https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura5-aya8.html; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, Al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān, commentary on Qur'an al-Mumtaḥanah [60]:8, https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura60-aya8.html.

opens up discussion of the relationship between religious differences and moral action.[31] Yet the verse does not automatically settle debates about the equal truth of all religions. Recognition of diversity in social relations must be distinguished from conclusions regarding the theological status of particular doctrines.

This distinction becomes even more important when Qur'an 109:1–6 is read alongside verses concerning freedom and justice. The surah affirms differences in religious worship and rejects compromise on core matters of faith. Yet recognition of theological differences need not entail the denial of other people's social rights. Within Qur'anic ethics, steadfastness in belief and respect for the presence of other religions can be understood as distinct but mutually compatible responsibilities. Firmness in faith concerns the integrity of conviction, whereas respect for the rights of others concerns justice in communal life.

In al-Ṭabarī's interpretation, Qur'an 109:6 affirms the distinction between the Prophet's religious identity and commitments to worship and those of the people addressed. Such affirmation of theological boundaries cannot be treated directly as a normative justification for denying others' civil rights. Comparative interpretation is necessary here: firm religious commitment is considered alongside the principle of justice in Qur'an 5:8 and the injunction to act kindly in Qur'an 60:8, so that differences of belief do not automatically justify coercion or discrimination.[32]

From this perspective, protecting Islamic faith can involve education, explanation of doctrine, deeper religious understanding, and reasoned criticism of views regarded as contrary to Islamic teachings. Such practices are ethically distinct from coercion or interference with other people's rights without adequate grounds. Likewise, other religious communities may peacefully communicate their teachings, provided that they respect freedom of conscience and avoid manipulation, pressure, or the exploitation of

[31] Mun'im Sirry, "'Compete with One Another in Good Works': Exegesis of Qur'an Verse 5.48 and Contemporary Muslim Discourses on Religious Pluralism," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 20, no. 4 (2009): 423–438, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410903194886.

[32] Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-Bayān, commentary on Qur'an al-Kāfirūn [109]:6, https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura109-aya6.html.

vulnerability. Freedom and the protection of faith should therefore be understood reciprocally, rather than as opposing goals in which one party's freedom can only be secured by denying another party's rights.

This analysis yields the philosophical proposition that the limits of religious pluralism are determined less by differences in doctrinal content than by how these differences are expressed and handled in social relations. Rejection of a particular belief may remain legitimate in the theological sphere, but actions toward its adherents must conform to the principles of justice. Conversely, the freedom to articulate religious beliefs must be distinguished from coercive or manipulative practices. This distinction provides a foundation for Qur'anic ethics that preserves theological conviction without legitimizing restrictions on rights based solely on prejudice.

Ethics of Public Communication: Tabayyun, Justice, and Interreligious Dialogue

Contested religious discourse concerns not only the substance of arguments but also how they are communicated. In digital environments, statements can be detached from their original contexts, circulated through multiple channels, and interpreted by users with different experiences and religious identities. An analysis grounded in Qur'anic ethics must therefore address communicative responsibility, the substantiation of information, and respect for those holding different views.

The principle of tabayyun in Qur'an 49:6 provides an ethical basis for verifying information before adopting positions or taking actions that may harm others. Although the verse has a specific historical context, its emphasis on caution in handling information can inform reflection on digital communication ethics. Circulating unverified information, quoting statements out of context, and drawing conclusions from insufficient sources are ethical concerns because they may produce disproportionate social perceptions.

The Peter Youngren controversy illustrates the importance of examining the context of communication. Reporting on Jakob Wendesten's video statement and his subsequent apology indicates interpretive problems surrounding terminology considered offensive to certain groups. Jakob's clarification on January 27, 2025, included an apology for language associated with radicalism and an acknowledgment that earlier references to support from

several organizations needed clarification.[33] This incident suggests that inaccurate or imprecise communication can intensify religious tensions, while clarification can serve as one mechanism for reducing misunderstandings.

From the perspective of Qur'anic ethics, the issue can be examined through Qur'an 49:11, which prohibits insults and derogatory labels. This principle does not eliminate the freedom to criticize beliefs or conduct, but it requires a distinction between reasoned criticism and labeling that attacks an individual or group's identity. Terms such as 'intolerant' or 'radical' carry serious social consequences and therefore require adequate definition, context, and supporting evidence. Criticism of a specific event should not automatically be expanded into negative judgments about an entire religious community associated with its organizers.

A similar principle can be derived from Qur'an 6:108, which prohibits insulting the objects of worship of others because doing so may provoke reciprocal insults. The verse suggests that communication ethics concerns not only speakers' intentions but also the possible social consequences of expression. In digital public spaces, this principle is relevant to evaluating the use of religious symbols, provocative language, and arguments that may exacerbate hostility between groups. Freedom to criticize does not entail freedom to insult, just as the right to defend one's religion does not entail the right to disparage the beliefs of others.

In addition to verification and the prohibition of insults, Qur'anic ethics emphasizes dialogue. Qur'an 16:125 sets out principles for religious communication through wisdom, good counsel, and debate conducted in the best manner. Qur'an 29:46 likewise establishes a basis for respectful argumentation with the People of the Book, while acknowledging the context and exceptions stated in the verse. Together, these verses support an ethic of dialogue that does not require uniformity of belief but encourages rational argument, respect for others, and a willingness to explain reasons openly.

[33] Fauzi, "Jakob Minta Maaf Soal Video tentang Festival Persahabatan," *ANTARA News Sulteng*, January 27, 2025.

In the Peter Youngren controversy, these principles can be applied by distinguishing three forms of communication. First, theological criticism of teachings or the nature of an event, expressed through arguments open to scrutiny. Second, requests for clarification concerning the intended audience, methods of communicating messages, and the relationship between social activities and religious messages. Third, labels or accusations lacking adequate evidence. The first two may form part of legitimate dialogue and social scrutiny, whereas the third may raise ethical concerns when it undermines dignity or harms particular parties.

At the philosophical level, the connection between tabayyun and dialogue shows that responsibility in digital communication has both epistemological and moral dimensions. The epistemological dimension concerns how claims are formed, verified, and justified. The moral dimension concerns responsibility for the social consequences of communicating those claims. The two are inseparable because inaccurate information may lead to unjust actions, while moral prejudices may influence how individuals select and interpret information.

Qur'anic ethics thus offers a framework for evaluating documented religious discourses through information verification, fairness in assessing others, the prohibition of insults, and dialogue respectful of human dignity. In the case corpus, divergent statements about the intended audience and subsequent clarifications provide material for examining the importance of accuracy and context; they are not direct evidence of manipulation. Document analysis makes it possible to reconstruct the actors' positions and the limits of their justifications, while research into public reception and online interaction would require a different design.

Constructing Critical Openness as a Framework of Qur'anic Ethics in Public Space

The analysis of the Peter Youngren controversy and the principles of Qur'anic ethics demonstrates the need for a conceptual framework capable of distinguishing theological commitment, communicative responsibility, and justice in public life. This study proposes critical openness as a normative framework for understanding the relationship between steadfastness in belief and respect for religious freedom. The concept neither calls for the erasure of

doctrinal differences nor accepts the assumption that doctrinal differences automatically justify social exclusion.

Theoretically, this proposal has affinities with Diana L. Eck's understanding of pluralism as engagement among communities with different commitments of faith. For Eck, pluralism does not amount to relativism or merely the coexistence of numerous religions, but requires active engagement and dialogue.[34] This approach is valuable because it enables communities to maintain their theological identities without foreclosing social relations with others. In the context of digital religious controversies, however, recognition of the importance of dialogue still needs criteria for evaluating communicative actions, the legitimacy of theological objections, and restrictions on religious expression.

This is where critical openness seeks to contribute. Openness means recognizing the existence of others and their right to express beliefs peacefully. Its critical dimension indicates that such recognition does not remove the right to question, evaluate, and criticize religious arguments or practices considered problematic. Criticism must nevertheless be based on verifiable reasons and communicated with due regard for the freedom and dignity of those being criticized. More precisely, unlike dialogical pluralism, which emphasizes active engagement, critical openness functions as an evaluative instrument distinguishing (a) freedom to uphold doctrine; (b) objections to how an event is organized; and (c) restrictions on rights that can be justified only when legal requirements, evidentiary standards, and proportionality are satisfied.

Critical openness is developed through three interrelated dimensions. The first is theological integrity: every community's right to maintain its identity, doctrines, and beliefs. From an Islamic perspective, this dimension is relevant to Qur'an 109:1–6, which emphasizes differences in worship and faith. Theological integrity does not require acknowledging that all religious doctrines make equally true claims. Yet it must not be interpreted as legitimizing the denial of other people's rights in social life.

[34] The Pluralism Project, "About: What Is Pluralism?," Harvard University, accessed October 12, 2026, https://pluralism.org/about.

The second dimension is ethical-communicative responsibility, linking freedom of speech to the duties to verify information, avoid insults, and respect human dignity. This dimension is developed through the relationship among Qur'an 49:6, 49:11, 5:8, and 16:125. In a digital society, ethical-communicative responsibility requires that religious arguments be evaluated not only by their conformity to group identity but also by the quality of their reasons, the accuracy of information, and their treatment of differing views. Individuals may firmly reject a doctrine, but such rejection must still be expressed in a morally accountable manner.

The third dimension is justice in public space: recognition that the exercise of religious freedom and measures restricting it must be assessed according to standards applied equally to all. This principle relates to Qur'an 60:8 and 5:8, which require just conduct. Under Indonesian law, Articles 28E and 29 of the 1945 Constitution protect religious freedom, while Article 28J regulates the conditions under which rights may be restricted. A similar principle appears in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which distinguishes freedom to hold beliefs from manifestations of religion that may be restricted in certain circumstances on lawful and legitimate grounds.[35] Restrictions therefore cannot be based merely on theological disagreement; they require a justification open to examination.

On the basis of these three dimensions, critical openness can be developed into an evaluative framework using five considerations. First, verification: ensuring that claims concerning religious activities are supported by information that can be checked. Second, voluntariness: assessing whether individuals take part in religious activities without coercion or manipulation. Third, transparency: assessing the clarity of an event's aims, intended participants, and methods of communicating its message. Fourth, reciprocity: examining whether a community respects the rights of others to the same extent that it demands respect for its own rights. Fifth, proportionality:

[35] Republik Indonesia, *1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*, Articles 28E, 28J, and 29; Republik Indonesia, *Law No. 12 of 2005 on the Ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*; United Nations Human Rights Committee, *CCPR General Comment No. 22: Article 18 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion)*, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (1993)

ensuring that any necessary restrictions have a legitimate basis and do not exceed what is required to achieve their protective purpose.

Applying the framework to the Peter Youngren controversy involves examining two major lines of argument. With respect to the opposing groups, critical openness recognizes the legitimacy of theological objections, education aimed at protecting faith, and criticism of activities regarded as inconsistent with Islamic beliefs. If such objections become demands to restrict an event, however, additional justification is required in the form of evidence of conduct that actually violates rights, legal provisions, or the principle of non-coercion. Speculative concerns do not carry the same weight as established facts of violation.

With respect to the organizers, critical openness recognizes their right to practice and communicate religious teachings peacefully. Such recognition does not, however, remove their responsibility to explain the nature of the event, respect participants' freedom, and avoid methods that could constitute coercion or exploitation. In this case, differing statements about the event's intended audience underscore the importance of transparency. Clear communication is necessary not only to foster public acceptance but also as part of the ethical responsibility involved in organizing religious activities.

Critical openness also provides room to resolve disputes through dialogue and mediation. The Central Sulawesi FKUB's proposal to regulate the event's location suggests possible responses other than unconditional cancellation or holding the event without adjustment. Nevertheless, such arrangements must still be assessed in terms of their legal basis and their implications for equality of rights. Mediation should not merely accommodate social pressure; it must result in a resolution respecting the rights of all parties.

From the standpoint of Islamic philosophy, the contribution of critical openness lies in connecting integrity of belief, the quality of knowledge, moral responsibility, and public justice. These four elements are not treated as mutually exclusive principles. Firmness in faith calls for clarity of argument, while justice toward others requires restraint of prejudice. Freedom of expression entails communicative responsibility, and the preservation of harmony cannot be separated from the protection of equal rights.

Critical openness is thus proposed as a Qur'anic ethical framework that allows communities to preserve their religious identity while recognizing others' freedom of conscience and public rights. The novelty to be examined does not consist in discovering entirely new moral principles, since freedom, justice, and dialogue already have established histories in Islamic traditions and studies of pluralism. Rather, the contribution lies in integrating these principles into an analytical framework for evaluating religious arguments in conflicts over public space, particularly when theological claims are constructed and exchanged through digital communication.

In synthesis, the ethical quality of religious discourse cannot be determined solely by the strength of the religious identity being defended or the breadth of the freedom being claimed. It must be assessed in relation to the accuracy of information, freedom of conscience, treatment of others, and fairness in the use of public space. Critical openness clarifies the evaluative process by distinguishing theological arguments, factual claims about an event, and juridical grounds for imposing restrictions. This framework results from a philosophical synthesis of documentary sources; it is not yet a behavioral model tested among social-media users. Its application to broader social practices may therefore be investigated in future research.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that opposition to Peter Youngren's presence in Palu reflects contested religious discourses concerning the protection of faith, religious freedom, and the preservation of social harmony. An analysis of news coverage and public statements identifies three orientations: defending theological identity, upholding freedom of religious expression, and pursuing mediation to maintain stable interreligious relations. These differences indicate that religious disputes arise not only from doctrinal disagreement but also from competing understandings of freedom, perceived threats to belief, and the legitimacy of using public space.

From the perspective of Qur'anic ethics, religious freedom, justice, tabayyun, respect for diversity, and the ethics of dialogue provide normative foundations for responsibly managing differences in belief. Theological steadfastness need not contradict social openness, just as freedom of religious expression cannot be separated from the duty to respect others' rights and

dignity. Criticism of religious doctrines may therefore be legitimate when supported by reasoned argument and when it does not become coercion, discrimination, or unjustified restrictions on rights. Likewise, religious activities must uphold voluntariness, transparency, and social responsibility.

The study's conceptual contribution is the formulation of critical openness as a framework of Qur'anic ethics integrating theological integrity, ethical-communicative responsibility, and justice in public space. The framework is operationalized through five criteria—verification, voluntariness, transparency, reciprocity, and proportionality—to distinguish legitimate theological criticism from demands to restrict religious activities that require legal justification and sufficient evidence. Unlike approaches to pluralism centered on dialogical engagement, this contribution focuses on criteria for evaluating arguments in concrete conflicts. The study is limited by its reliance on eight news and opinion documents, which neither represent the full range of community experiences nor directly establish how the event was conducted. Future studies using interviews, observation, or research on digital communication could evaluate the application of these criteria beyond the documentary corpus.

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