

Why Palestine Matters in Indonesia: Religion, Humanitarianism, and the Formation of Public Opinion among Indonesian Muslims

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65815/9p5kbm03>

Submitted: 21-11-2025

Revised: 22-02-2026, 08-04-2026

Accepted: 10-05-2026

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Abstract

The Palestinian issue has maintained strong visibility within Indonesian Muslim society despite its geographical distance from Indonesia. Public solidarity is expressed through religious sermons, demonstrations, humanitarian fundraising, social media campaigns, and consumer activism. This article examines the social factors contributing to the persistence of Palestine as an important issue within Indonesian Muslim public opinion. Using qualitative sociological analysis, the study explores the interaction between religious identity, humanitarian values, historical narratives, media exposure, and political discourse. The article argues that Indonesian support for Palestine cannot be explained solely through religious solidarity. Humanitarian concern, perceptions of international injustice, Indonesian foreign policy traditions, and digital media also contribute significantly to public engagement. The study proposes a multidimensional framework for understanding Palestine-related public opinion in Indonesia. Particular attention is given to younger Muslim populations whose political participation increasingly occurs through digital platforms. The article concludes that Palestine functions as a significant transnational issue through which Indonesian Muslims negotiate religious identity, humanitarian values, national foreign policy, and contemporary global politics.

[Isu Palestina tetap memiliki visibilitas yang kuat dalam masyarakat Muslim Indonesia meskipun letak geografisnya jauh dari Indonesia. Solidaritas publik diekspresikan melalui khotbah agama, demonstrasi, penggalangan dana kemanusiaan, kampanye media sosial, dan aktivisme konsumen. Artikel ini mengkaji faktor-faktor sosial yang berkontribusi pada keberlanjutan isu Palestina sebagai isu penting dalam opini publik Muslim Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan analisis sosiologis kualitatif, studi ini mengeksplorasi interaksi antara identitas agama, nilai-nilai kemanusiaan, narasi sejarah, paparan media, dan wacana politik. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa dukungan Indonesia terhadap Palestina tidak dapat dijelaskan hanya melalui solidaritas

agama. Kepedulian kemanusiaan, persepsi ketidakadilan internasional, tradisi kebijakan luar negeri Indonesia, dan media digital juga berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap keterlibatan publik. Studi ini mengusulkan kerangka kerja multidimensional untuk memahami opini publik terkait Palestina di Indonesia. Perhatian khusus diberikan kepada populasi Muslim muda yang partisipasi politiknya semakin banyak terjadi melalui platform digital. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa Palestina berfungsi sebagai isu transnasional yang signifikan di mana Muslim Indonesia menegosiasikan identitas agama, nilai-nilai kemanusiaan, kebijakan luar negeri nasional, dan politik global kontemporer.]

Keywords: Palestine, Indonesian Muslims, public opinion, religion, humanitarianism

Introduction

The persistence of Palestine as an important issue in Indonesian public discourse presents a sociological and political phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained by geographical proximity or direct national interest. Indonesia is located thousands of kilometres from Palestine, yet Palestinian developments repeatedly generate demonstrations, religious sermons, fundraising campaigns, consumer boycotts, online activism, and political discussion. The intensity of these responses suggests that Palestine has acquired a symbolic meaning within Indonesian society that exceeds the conventional boundaries of foreign policy. For many Indonesian Muslims, the issue is simultaneously interpreted through religious identity, humanitarian concern, anti-colonial memory, and perceptions of global injustice. Recent research confirms that public solidarity intensified substantially following the escalation of violence in Gaza after October 2023, while also showing that Muslim communities remain the principal organizational actors behind many solidarity initiatives (Aswar and Munzilin 2025).

The religious dimension is particularly significant because Palestine has become embedded within a broader moral vocabulary concerning justice, oppression, solidarity, and the protection of civilians. Nevertheless, interpreting Indonesian support for Palestine exclusively as an expression of Islamic identity would overlook important historical and political foundations. Indonesia's position developed within a postcolonial foreign-policy tradition that associated national independence with opposition to colonial domination and support for the self-determination of oppressed peoples. Historical scholarship demonstrates that Islamic actors already contributed to Indonesia's external relations during the revolutionary period, although the institutional role of Islam subsequently became more limited within formal foreign-policy structures (Fogg 2015). This historical trajectory helps explain why Palestine can simultaneously function as a religious

concern and as a national foreign-policy issue without being reducible to either category.

Previous studies have examined different components of this phenomenon. Research on Indonesian Islamic organizations has emphasized their humanitarian assistance, political advocacy, and capacity to mobilize religious communities around Palestine (Andriansyah 2024; Saputra, Ismail, and Salam 2025). Other studies have examined the emergence of digital activism, particularly among younger Indonesians, demonstrating how social media enables decentralized forms of solidarity that combine information sharing, fundraising, hashtags, boycotts, and political expression (Kusuma et al. 2025; Andriansyah 2025). Research on public responses to the Gaza war has further suggested that solidarity is sustained by networks of religious organizations, activists, and ordinary citizens rather than by state institutions alone (Aswar and Munzilin 2025).

Despite these contributions, the existing literature tends to examine religion, humanitarianism, digital activism, and foreign policy as relatively separate dimensions. This creates an analytical gap because public opinion concerning Palestine is produced precisely through the interaction of these dimensions. Religious narratives can give moral meaning to humanitarian suffering; humanitarian campaigns can transform moral identification into material action; digital platforms can amplify both; and public mobilization can reinforce the legitimacy of Indonesia's established diplomatic position. The central argument of this article is therefore that Palestine matters in Indonesia because it operates as a multidimensional symbolic issue through which religious identity, humanitarian ethics, historical memory, media practices, and political participation intersect. Understanding this intersection provides a more adequate explanation of the durability of Indonesian Muslim solidarity.

The article addresses this problem through qualitative sociological analysis of relevant scholarly literature concerning Indonesian Muslim identity, religious authority, humanitarianism, digital activism, public opinion, and Indonesia's foreign-policy orientation toward Palestine. Rather than treating solidarity as a single ideological phenomenon, the analysis examines how different forms of meaning and action reinforce one another. The article argues that Palestine functions as a transnational moral issue whose significance is continuously reproduced through institutions, communities, media technologies, and individual participation. This approach also makes it possible to distinguish between symbolic solidarity, humanitarian action, political mobilization, and foreign-policy influence rather than assuming that all expressions of support have identical motivations or consequences.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

The first theoretical dimension concerns religion as a source of political meaning. Religion should not be treated merely as a private belief system detached from

political behavior. Fox argues that religion can influence international politics by shaping the worldview of political constituencies, legitimizing political action, and creating transnational networks that cross territorial boundaries (Fox 2001). This perspective is particularly relevant to Indonesia because Muslim organizations, religious leaders, and communities have historically operated simultaneously within domestic society and transnational networks. The Palestinian issue therefore becomes intelligible as an object of political concern because it can be interpreted through religious concepts of justice and solidarity while remaining compatible with broader humanitarian and international-law narratives.

The second dimension is the concept of the public sphere. The Indonesian public sphere has experienced substantial transformation following democratization and the expansion of digital communication. Religious discourse increasingly circulates beyond mosques, schools, and formal organizational structures and enters social media environments in which institutional authority competes with individual influencers, activists, and networked communities. Akmaliah (2020) demonstrates that new media has created both opportunities and challenges for established Islamic organizations because religious authority is increasingly contested in digital spaces. Similar findings emerge from studies of Indonesian digital religion, which show that social media produces hybrid environments in which online and offline religious practices interact rather than simply replacing one another (Rohmawati, Zulkifli, and Hakiem 2024).

The third theoretical dimension concerns connective action and affective publics. Bennett and Segerberg's concept of connective action explains how digital technologies allow individuals to participate in collective political activity without necessarily joining formal organizations (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). This is especially useful for understanding Palestine-related activism because individuals can express solidarity through reposting information, using hashtags, donating money, joining boycotts, or producing visual content without belonging to a particular political organization. Papacharissi's concept of affective publics adds that digitally mediated political communities are frequently organized through emotion, storytelling, and shared affect rather than through conventional organizational membership (Papacharissi 2016). Palestine therefore provides an especially powerful object of digital mobilization because humanitarian images, religious narratives, and stories of civilian suffering can generate emotional identification across geographically dispersed communities.

The fourth dimension concerns Islamic civil society and humanitarianism. Indonesian Islamic organizations possess institutional infrastructures capable of transforming religious sentiment into organized social action. Zakat institutions and Islamic philanthropic organizations have long provided social services in health, education, disaster relief, and poverty alleviation, creating organizational capacities that can also be directed toward international humanitarian crises (Muhtada 2013). Recent research indicates that Indonesian Islamic organizations have mobilized humanitarian resources for Palestine through fundraising, medical assistance,

advocacy, and organizational partnerships (Andriansyah 2024). Humanitarianism thus constitutes an important mechanism through which Palestine becomes connected to everyday religious practice. The transition from sympathy to donation, volunteering, advocacy, or consumer action demonstrates that solidarity can become institutionalized rather than remaining solely symbolic.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest that public opinion should be understood as an outcome of interaction rather than as a pre-existing attitude. Religious identity provides moral interpretation; historical memory provides political context; civil-society organizations provide institutional capacity; digital media provides communication infrastructure; and affective engagement provides motivational energy. The resulting public discourse is neither entirely controlled by religious institutions nor spontaneously generated by individuals. It emerges through an ecosystem in which formal organizations, informal networks, media platforms, religious authorities, and ordinary citizens continuously shape one another. This framework provides the analytical basis for examining why Palestine retains exceptional visibility within Indonesian Muslim public discourse.

Methods

This study employs qualitative sociological research based on interpretive analysis of secondary sources. The method is appropriate because the objective is not to measure the percentage of Indonesian Muslims supporting Palestine but to explain the social processes through which Palestine acquires meaning and remains politically salient. The analysis focuses on peer-reviewed journal articles published no later than 2025, particularly studies addressing Indonesian Muslim identity, Islamic organizations, digital religion, social media activism, humanitarianism, public opinion, and Indonesia's foreign policy. Recent studies specifically addressing Palestine were used to identify empirical developments after the escalation of the Gaza conflict in 2023.

The sources were analyzed thematically rather than summarized individually. Four analytical categories guided interpretation: religious meaning, humanitarian mobilization, digital-mediated participation, and political-public influence. The categories were treated as interconnected rather than independent variables. For example, a digital boycott campaign was examined not merely as online activism but as an interaction between religious authority, consumer behavior, humanitarian sentiment, and political communication. Similarly, humanitarian fundraising was analyzed as both an institutional practice and a mechanism through which moral identification becomes material action.

The analysis also applies interpretive triangulation by comparing studies with different disciplinary orientations. Historical and foreign-policy literature was compared with sociological research on Muslim identity and civil society, while communication studies were used to interpret digital mobilization. This approach reduces the risk of explaining Palestine solidarity exclusively through a religious or

political lens. The study does not claim to provide statistically representative measurements of Indonesian public opinion. Its contribution instead lies in developing an analytical explanation of the social mechanisms through which Palestine becomes embedded within Indonesian Muslim public discourse.

Results and Discussion

A. Religion, Historical Memory, and the Moralization of the Palestinian Issue

Palestine's importance among Indonesian Muslims is partly rooted in religious identification, but religious identification alone does not explain its durability. The Palestinian question is repeatedly incorporated into Islamic narratives concerning justice, oppression, protection of the vulnerable, and solidarity among believers. Recent scholarship explicitly identifies Palestine as a symbol through which Indonesian Muslim narratives connect faith with resistance and justice (Rahmadani and Mubiina 2025). The significance of this process is that religious narratives do not simply transmit information about Palestine; they provide a moral framework through which distant political events become personally meaningful. A conflict occurring outside Indonesia can therefore be interpreted as a matter of ethical responsibility. Religion transforms geographical distance into moral proximity, allowing Indonesian Muslims to understand Palestinian suffering through a vocabulary already familiar within religious education, sermons, charitable practice, and community life.

Yet the religious explanation becomes insufficient when examined against Indonesia's historical political identity. Indonesian support for Palestine predates contemporary Islamist mobilization and has been associated with anti-colonialism and the country's commitment to national self-determination. Fogg's historical analysis demonstrates that Islamic networks contributed to Indonesia's diplomatic engagement with the Arab world during the revolutionary period, illustrating that religion and anti-colonial diplomacy have historically interacted rather than developed in separate spheres (Fogg 2015). The contemporary meaning of Palestine therefore emerges from the convergence of two narratives: an Islamic narrative of solidarity with an oppressed Muslim population and a national narrative of opposition to colonial domination. This combination is politically powerful because it permits different groups to support Palestine without necessarily sharing the same theological or ideological motivations.

The interaction between religion and nationalism also explains why Palestine can become a broad public issue rather than remaining confined to explicitly religious organizations. Indonesia's foreign-policy tradition has consistently framed Palestinian self-determination as compatible with principles of independence, sovereignty, and international justice. Recent scholarship confirms that the country's support has remained relatively consistent across political administrations and is connected to anti-colonial principles as well as the constitutional orientation of Indonesian foreign policy (Aswar and Widyrianto 2025). Consequently, Muslim

solidarity with Palestine is strengthened by an existing national political narrative. Religious identification provides emotional and moral intensity, while national history supplies political legitimacy. Their interaction makes Palestine unusually resilient as an issue within Indonesian public opinion.

The moralization of Palestine nevertheless carries an important analytical tension. When a political conflict becomes strongly associated with religious identity, the risk arises that humanitarian concern may be interpreted through an exclusively communal lens. Research on interfaith responses to Palestine in Indonesia demonstrates that solidarity can also be articulated through human rights and humanitarian principles that cross religious boundaries (Baidhowi, Novita, and Arifin 2025). This suggests that religious identity should not be understood as the endpoint of solidarity but as one of several interpretive resources. The strongest form of public engagement emerges when religious concern is translated into universal principles such as civilian protection, opposition to collective punishment, humanitarian assistance, and self-determination. Such translation allows Palestine to remain a Muslim concern while simultaneously becoming a broader human-rights issue.

B. From Religious Sentiment to Humanitarian Action

The persistence of Palestine in Indonesian Muslim public opinion is also explained by the existence of institutional mechanisms capable of converting moral concern into concrete action. Islamic organizations and philanthropic institutions provide an organizational bridge between religious sentiment and humanitarian assistance. Research on Indonesian Islamic philanthropy shows that zakat organizations have developed substantial capacity to provide social services and disaster assistance, thereby creating institutional habits of organized giving (Muhtada 2013). These capacities become particularly relevant when international crises generate strong emotional responses. Palestine can therefore be transformed from an abstract geopolitical concern into a practical humanitarian obligation through donations, medical missions, educational assistance, food distribution, and public campaigns.

Recent evidence demonstrates that humanitarian assistance has been a significant dimension of Indonesian Islamic organizational engagement with Palestine. Andriansyah (2024) notes that major Islamic organizations had supported Palestinian humanitarian needs before the escalation of the Gaza war in October 2023, indicating that solidarity is not simply a temporary response to media attention. The institutional continuity is important because it shows that public opinion is reproduced through organizational memory. Organizations preserve narratives, maintain fundraising networks, mobilize volunteers, and communicate humanitarian priorities over time. Consequently, every new escalation can reactivate an existing infrastructure of solidarity rather than requiring a new movement to emerge from nothing.

The humanitarian dimension also changes the meaning of political participation. Donation is often treated as separate from politics because it appears to address immediate human suffering rather than political structures. In the Palestinian context, however, humanitarian action can become politically meaningful because it communicates an interpretation of responsibility and injustice. Indonesian Islamic NGOs have increasingly combined charitable activities with advocacy, public education, and political communication (Saputra, Ismail, and Salam 2025). This transformation suggests that humanitarianism should not be conceptualized as politically neutral. Providing aid can affirm Palestinian agency, highlight civilian suffering, demand humanitarian access, or pressure governments to adopt stronger diplomatic positions. The boundary between humanitarian and political engagement is therefore porous.

This institutionalization also introduces an accountability challenge. Strong religious trust can facilitate rapid fundraising, but it can simultaneously make donors vulnerable to misinformation, exaggerated claims, or poorly monitored campaigns. Humanitarian solidarity becomes socially sustainable only when trust is supported by transparency concerning fundraising, beneficiaries, distribution mechanisms, and organizational governance. The transformation of Islamic philanthropy toward more professional and hybrid humanitarian models illustrates this challenge: institutions must reconcile religious motivations with contemporary humanitarian principles and organizational accountability (Hidayat, Fauzia, and Kailani 2024). The significance of Palestine in Indonesian public opinion therefore depends not only on the intensity of solidarity but also on the credibility of institutions that convert solidarity into action.

C. Digital Media and the Transformation of Muslim Solidarity

Digital media has fundamentally changed the way Indonesian Muslims encounter and respond to the Palestinian issue. Previously, international conflicts reached Indonesian audiences largely through television, newspapers, religious organizations, and formal political communication. Social media has disrupted this hierarchy by enabling individuals to encounter images, testimonies, commentary, and calls for action directly. Studies of Indonesian digital religion show that social media has become a hybrid space where religious practice, identity formation, and political communication overlap (Rohmawati, Zulkifli, and Hakiem 2024). Palestine is particularly compatible with this environment because its representation frequently involves emotionally powerful visual narratives that can be rapidly circulated and personalized.

This process is particularly important among younger Muslims. Research on Indonesian Muslim youth indicates that social media provides an increasingly significant environment for expressing religious identity and negotiating political meanings (Zahri, Lubis, and Ahrom 2021). The importance of youth does not mean that younger users are necessarily more ideological than older generations. Rather, their modes of participation differ. They can engage through reposting, short-form

videos, hashtags, memes, donation links, digital petitions, boycott campaigns, and personal narratives. These activities lower the organizational threshold for participation. Bennett and Segerberg's connective-action framework is therefore useful because participation does not require individuals to become members of formal organizations; personalized digital action can itself become part of a larger collective process (Bennett and Segerberg 2012).

Recent research directly concerning Palestine demonstrates this transformation. Indonesian youth have used digital platforms for advocacy, crowdfunding, hashtag activism, and coordination among student and community networks (Andriansyah 2025). Other research identifies TikTok as an alternative political-discursive space where younger Indonesians encounter Palestine-related information and participate in advocacy outside traditional media institutions (Nur Hadi 2025). The significance of these developments is not simply that more people can communicate. Digital platforms change the structure of participation itself by allowing individuals to move rapidly between information consumption, emotional expression, fundraising, political advocacy, and collective action.

The digitalization of solidarity, however, does not automatically produce informed public opinion. Religious and political content circulates within an environment characterized by algorithmic amplification, selective exposure, misinformation, and emotional polarization. Research on the Indonesian digital public sphere has demonstrated that religious discourse online can generate both deliberative engagement and misinformation (Al-Zaman and Alimi 2021). This problem is especially significant for Palestine because rapidly developing conflict environments contain large volumes of unverifiable images, manipulated content, recycled material, and politically motivated narratives. The democratic potential of digital solidarity therefore depends on media literacy. Without verification practices, the expansion of participation can increase the speed of misinformation as effectively as it increases the speed of humanitarian awareness.

Digital activism should consequently be understood as neither inherently transformative nor merely performative. The distinction between “slacktivism” and meaningful political participation is too simplistic because symbolic digital actions can function as entry points into deeper engagement. Recent research on Indonesian digital activism suggests that social media can facilitate political participation while its actual effects remain context-dependent (Kurniawan, Arham, and Muluk 2025). In the Palestine context, reposting a message may appear politically insignificant, yet repeated exposure can normalize an issue, direct users toward humanitarian organizations, encourage donations, or facilitate participation in offline demonstrations. The analytical question should therefore be whether digital participation creates pathways toward sustained civic engagement rather than whether each individual online action is independently consequential.

D. Public Opinion, Civil Society, and the Political Meaning of Solidarity

The cumulative effect of religious interpretation, humanitarian institutions, and digital communication is the formation of a public environment in which Palestine becomes difficult for political institutions to ignore. Public opinion does not operate as a direct command to government, but it creates political incentives and normative constraints. Research on Indonesian grassroots solidarity indicates that protests, petitions, religious mobilization, and advocacy campaigns can contribute to sustaining Palestine within foreign-policy discourse (Sofea and Fawzy 2024). This does not mean that Indonesian foreign policy is determined by public opinion. Rather, it suggests that state policy and societal expectations interact in a mutually reinforcing process.

The relationship is particularly visible because Indonesia's official position and public sentiment have generally moved in the same direction. This convergence gives Palestinian solidarity a distinctive political character. In many international issues, governments may confront substantial domestic disagreement when attempting to pursue a particular foreign-policy position. Palestine is different because humanitarian, religious, and anti-colonial narratives have created broad legitimacy for continued support. Research on Indonesia's Muslim majority identifies religious teaching, political ideology, and Islamic organizational influence as important factors in sustaining mobilization (Prakoso and Haryanto 2024). At the same time, the convergence between state policy and societal sentiment should not be mistaken for complete social consensus.

Indonesian Muslim society is internally diverse, and the meaning of Palestine varies across organizations, generations, ideological orientations, and social classes. Some actors emphasize Islamic solidarity, others prioritize international law and civilian protection, while others focus on anti-colonialism, humanitarian assistance, or Indonesian diplomatic responsibility. Digital platforms intensify this plurality by allowing competing interpretations to circulate simultaneously. Research on religious authority in Indonesia shows that social media has fragmented the production of religious legitimacy, weakening the exclusive authority of established institutions (Hannan and Mursyidi 2023). Consequently, the formation of Palestine-related public opinion is better understood as a process of contestation than as a simple transmission of a unified religious position.

This contestation does not necessarily weaken solidarity. On the contrary, different motivations can converge around a common object. A Muslim activist may interpret Palestine through Islamic solidarity; a human-rights advocate may focus on civilian protection; a nationalist may emphasize anti-colonial principles; and a humanitarian actor may concentrate on emergency assistance. These motivations are not identical, but they can produce overlapping forms of action. The concept of affective publics is useful here because collective political identities can form around shared emotional orientations even when participants do not possess identical ideological commitments (Papacharissi 2016). Palestine therefore

becomes a “boundary object” of Indonesian public discourse: different communities attach different meanings to it while still participating in a recognizable field of solidarity.

The political significance of this phenomenon ultimately lies in its capacity to connect domestic civic participation with international politics. Indonesian citizens who donate, boycott, demonstrate, post information, organize discussions, or participate in religious campaigns are not merely reacting to a distant conflict. They are participating in the construction of Indonesia's interpretation of global justice. Recent scholarship on the Indonesian public response to the Gaza war similarly finds that solidarity has become a significant social-movement phenomenon, although its organization remains fragmented and predominantly concentrated within Muslim communities (Aswar and Munzilin 2025). The challenge for Indonesian civil society is therefore not simply to sustain attention but to transform solidarity into informed, accountable, and inclusive civic participation.

Conclusion

Palestine matters in Indonesia because it has acquired a multidimensional meaning that cannot be reduced to religious solidarity alone. The Palestinian issue intersects with Islamic moral narratives, Indonesia's anti-colonial historical memory, humanitarian ethics, civil-society institutions, digital communication, and foreign-policy traditions. Religion provides a powerful interpretive framework through which distant suffering becomes morally proximate, while Indonesia's historical commitment to self-determination provides a broader national vocabulary for supporting Palestinian rights. Humanitarian organizations then provide institutional mechanisms through which moral concern becomes material assistance, while digital platforms allow individuals to participate without requiring membership in formal organizations. These dimensions reinforce one another and explain why Palestine remains highly visible within Indonesian Muslim public discourse across different political and social contexts.

The analysis also demonstrates that contemporary solidarity is increasingly networked and participatory. Younger Indonesians can encounter Palestinian narratives through social media, reinterpret them through religious and humanitarian values, and convert them into donations, boycotts, advocacy, or public discussion. This transformation broadens participation but simultaneously creates risks of misinformation, polarization, symbolic activism without sustained engagement, and fragmented authority. The appropriate response is therefore not to dismiss digital solidarity as superficial but to strengthen the conditions under which participation becomes informed and accountable. Religious institutions, humanitarian organizations, educational institutions, media actors, and civil-society networks have an important role in developing verification practices and civic literacy.

Ultimately, Palestine functions in Indonesia as a transnational issue through which Indonesian Muslims negotiate the relationship between faith, humanity, national identity, and global politics. Its importance lies not simply in the number of demonstrations or donations generated at particular moments but in the durable social infrastructure that continually reproduces concern for Palestine. Indonesian solidarity becomes most meaningful when religious commitment is connected to universal human dignity, humanitarian accountability, critical information practices, and peaceful civic participation. Such an approach enables Palestine to remain an important concern within Indonesian public opinion without reducing the complexity of either the Palestinian question or Indonesian Muslim society.

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Acknowledgment

None

Funding Information

None

Conflicting Interest Statement

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

Publishing Ethical and Originality Statement

All authors declared that this work is original and has never been published in any form and in any media, nor is it under consideration for publication in any journal, and all sources cited in this work refer to the basic standards of scientific citation.

Generative AI Statement

N/A