
Media Violence: Islamic Communication Ethics in the Context of Terror and Intimidation Against Journalists

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Abstract. Violence against journalists is no longer individual in nature, but has become a structural mechanism embedded in the public communication system, where political, economic, and ideological interests compete to dominate media narratives. This research aims to comprehensively reveal the phenomenon of media violence against journalists in Indonesia through the dimension of communication ethics. Practices of violence, terror, and intimidation such as the symbolic pig's head terror and the withdrawal of press IDs (administrative) indicate that pressure on journalists is multidimensional and systemic, reflecting the imbalance of power relations and a crisis of public ethics. Using descriptive qualitative methods with data sources from AJI reports, news, and literature studies, this research analyzes the phenomenon using the theoretical framework of Jurgen Habermas and Islamic Communication Ethics. The results show that the intimidation violates Habermas's principle of communicative rationality and explicitly rejects the Islamic command to speak the truth (Qaulun Sadidan) and to respect dignity (Qaulun Kariman). Thus, this research concludes that the crisis of press freedom in Indonesia is a crisis of communication ethics, while also providing practical recommendations for the enforcement of moral values, professionalism, and social responsibility in order to create a safe and just public space.

Keywords: Islamic Communication Ethics, Media Violence, Journalism, Press Freedom, Tabayyun.

1. Introduction

In the digital era marked by information openness and accelerated communication flows, journalists in Indonesia face increasingly complex challenges. On one hand, press freedom has been legally guaranteed through Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, but on the other hand, practices of violence, terror, and intimidation against journalists continue to occur systematically and repeatedly. According to the annual report of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia in 2024, there were 73 recorded cases of violence against journalists, including murder, physical violence, intimidation, coverage bans, and digital attacks. The perpetrators of violence generally come from security forces, public officials, or private parties. This phenomenon indicates a serious regression in the implementation

of press freedom as well as violations of the principles of public communication ethics (Independent Journalists, 2024; Fauziah Ramdani, 2024).

Violence against journalists is not only physical but also includes psychological terror and digital attacks such as doxing, online persecution, and criminalization through 2 Undang-Undang ITE (Putra, 2025; Kholid Saifullah et al., 2025). One of the most striking examples is the incident of a pig's head sent to the Tempo office as a symbolic mockery against the media editorial. This action not only targets physical security but is also attached to efforts of psychological and symbolic intimidation against press freedom (Tempo.co, 2025).

Not long after, in a different room, another case emerged: a CNN Indonesia journalist who experienced the revocation of the Palace Coverage ID by the palace, although the ID was later returned without adequate public explanation (Detik.com, 2025).

These two cases—the sending of a pig's head as a symbol of terror and the administrative restriction of coverage access—emphasize that pressure on journalists is now occurring within an increasingly subtle and complex spectrum, surpassing conventional physical violence.

These phenomena indicate that violence against journalists is no longer individual but has become a structural mechanism embedded in the public communication system, where political, economic, and ideological interests compete to dominate the media narrative. In this context, the media is no longer merely a space for public communication but has transformed into an arena of information power that often places journalists as victims of symbolic domination when their journalistic work is deemed to threaten certain interests.

The phenomenon of violence against journalists is not only happening in Indonesia but has also become a global issue that is increasingly concerning. According to a UNESCO report in 2024, more than 60 journalists worldwide were killed during that year for carrying out their journalistic duties. This condition shows that mass media has now become a battlefield of symbolic conflict, where information is contested as a form of power, not merely as a means of public communication.

In such situations, communication ethics become a very fundamental aspect to assess how interactions between journalists, governments, corporations, and society are conducted with dignity (Setyowati & Pramukhtiko Suryo Kencono, 2024).

In Indonesia, this issue is exacerbated by the practice of media conglomeration and the penetration of economic-political power into the newsroom. The media is no longer fully independent but often functions as a tool for certain elite interests. As a result, the principles of objectivity, honesty, and social responsibility are increasingly eroded.

In fact, according to Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, ideal communication should take place in a public space free from domination and distortion. The principles of honesty (truth), justice (rightness), and sincerity must serve as guidelines in every communication process. However, in practice, these ethical communication values are often ignored, especially when power becomes the dominant factor in determining the direction of news coverage (Susanti et al., 2024).

From an Islamic perspective, communication is not only seen as a process of sharing information but also as a form of worship and moral responsibility governed by the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islamic communication ethics emphasize values such as *shidq* (honesty), *amanah* (responsibility), *qaulan ma'rufa* (speaking good words), and *tabayyun* (verifying information) as the foundation for interacting with others (Naufal, 2024).

These principles play a role in maintaining the appropriateness of messages and human dignity in every form of communication, both verbally and digitally. Islam prohibits the spreading of false news, slander, or hate speech that can damage social life. In journalism context, these values indicate that delivering news is not only a professional duty but also a trust that will be accountable before Allah (Silviana Dwi Pangesti et al., 2022). Thus, Islamic communication ethics becomes a moral guideline that helps journalists avoid manipulation and deviation of information. Furthermore, Islamic communication ethics places justice, truth, and public interest as the main objectives in disseminating information. A Muslim journalist is required to conduct critical investigations of news sources (*tabayyun*) and avoid announcing information that could undermine the dignity of individuals or groups (Muslimah, 2016; Naufal, 2024). This principle aligns with Allah's command in QS. Al-Hujurat: 6, which emphasizes the importance of verifying every piece of information before it is disseminated to prevent social harm. In this regard, Islamic communication rejects all forms of symbolic violence, provocation, and narrative domination that violate humanitarian values. Therefore, the application of Islamic communication ethics in the world of journalism not only strengthens media professionalism but also serves as a spiritual effort to uphold justice and truth in the public sphere, in accordance with the objectives of sharia (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) in realizing public welfare.

The phenomenon of media violence against journalists also has serious implications for the quality of democracy and the level of public trust in the media. When journalists are silenced through intimidation or criminalization, the media's function as a watchdog of democracy becomes paralyzed. The press loses its strategic role as a channel for public aspirations and a constructive social controller. This indicates that the crisis faced by the Indonesian journalism world is not only a matter of press freedom but also a crisis of communication ethics in managing power and social responsibility in the public sphere. Therefore, it is important to explore the phenomenon of media violence against journalists through the perspective of communication ethics to find conceptual solutions that can uphold moral values, professionalism, and social responsibility in journalistic practice. This study aims to examine how communication ethics principles can serve as normative instruments to prevent violence while creating a safer, more rational, and humane public space for journalists.

Based on this thinking, this research seeks to describe the forms and patterns of violence and intimidation experienced by journalists in Indonesia as a result of the imbalance of power relations and the weak legal protection for the journalism profession. In addition, this study analyzes how communication ethics plays a role as a moral and professional foundation in facing the phenomenon of media violence, especially in the context of interactions between journalists, the government, and society. This research also examines the application of communication ethics principles such as honesty, responsibility, and communicative rationality according to

Habermas's theory in journalistic practice to create a safe, just, and intimidation-free public space. Furthermore, this research assesses the extent to which acts of violence against journalists reflect a crisis of communication ethics in the modern Indonesian media system, as well as identifying preventive measures that can be taken through ethics education, media policy, and increased public awareness.

This research aims to comprehensively reveal the phenomenon of media violence against journalists in Indonesia, emphasizing the dimension of communication ethics as its analytical foundation. Through this approach, the research seeks to identify various forms of violence and intimidation experienced by journalists, whether in physical, verbal, or digital forms, which reflect the imbalance of power relations between the media, authorities, and political institutions. Furthermore, this research analyzes how the principles of communication ethics, such as honesty, responsibility, and communicative rationality as proposed by Jurgen Habermas, as well as the values of Islamic communication ethics, can serve as moral guidelines in journalistic practices that are integral and just. Thus, this research not only offers theoretical contributions to expanding the understanding of the relationship between communication ethics and press freedom but also provides ethical and practical recommendations for the media and society in building a public space free from violence, upholding humanitarian values, and strengthening the professionalism of journalists in the digital era.

2. Method

This research is qualitative with a descriptive approach. Sugiyono (2020:18) states that "Qualitative research methods are research methods based on post-positivist philosophy used to study objects in their natural conditions where the writer is the key instrument." Sugiyono (2020:206) defines the descriptive method as "a method used to analyze data by describing or depicting the data that has been collected as it is" (Sugiyono, 2020). The main data sources for this research include relevant scientific literature on the themes of communication ethics and press freedom, annual reports from the Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), real cases of violence against journalists reported by online media, and literature studies. Each data is systematically examined to trace patterns of violence, the actors involved, and the institutional responses that emerge. The researcher then categorizes the data based on thematic categories, such as forms of violence, motives, and violations of communication ethics.

The researcher uses the theory of Islamic communication ethics to explore the phenomenon of media violence in the context of terror and intimidation against journalists. Islamic communication ethics is a way of communicating that contains Islamic elements, directing humans towards the welfare of this world and the hereafter in the form of relationships between humans and God (Hablum Minallah), among humans (Hablum Minannas), and the universe as Allah SWT's caliph (Muslimah, 2016). Its main principle demands communicators, including journalists, to make justice, truth, and public welfare the orientation of information dissemination. This is realized through six principles of speech (Qaul) in Islam that must be adhered to:

1. Qaulan Sadidan (True/Honest) which means speaking based on facts and data that have been critically verified (tabayyun).
2. Qaulan Layyinan (Gentle) which means speaking with a calm attitude and tone, avoiding violence or provocation.

3. Qaulan Ma'rufan (Good) which means using polite language and not degrading the dignity of individuals or groups.
4. Qaulan Kariman (Noble) which means respecting the interlocutor.
5. Qaulan Balighan (Effective) is a message conveyed effectively and precisely targeted.
6. Qaulan Maisuran (Easy) is speaking concisely and providing ease.

3. Results and Discussion

Journalists as key figures in the media have the responsibility to gather facts, conduct research, and present information objectively and attractively to the public. However, in carrying out their social functions, they often face disagreements, pressures, and even threats from parties who feel aggrieved by news coverage deemed unfavorable. This makes the journalism profession a very risky profession, as it directly confronts various political, economic, and ideological interests that have the potential to suppress press freedom (Mumtazah, 2025).

According to the Annual Report of the Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) for 2024, there were 73 cases of violence against journalists and media reported in various regions of Indonesia. These cases include one case of murder, 19 cases of physical violence, 17 cases of terror and intimidation, eight cases of coverage prohibition, eight cases of threats, six cases of digital attacks, three cases of gender-based violence, three cases of police summons for clarification, two cases of legal lawsuits, five cases of equipment destruction and data deletion, and one case of self-censorship in the newsroom. Based on the categories, the majority of perpetrators of violence came from the police (19 cases), followed by the military (11 cases), citizens or mass organizations (11 cases), and several other parties such as public officials, companies, and government officials.

Entering the period from January to August 2025, AJI again recorded 60 cases of violence against journalists and media, including digital attacks on news sites and editorial social media accounts. Most of the perpetrators are suspected to come from military and police institutions. In addition to physical and digital violence, AJI also found practices of prohibition and restriction of coverage by authorities. For example, media are often asked to present "cool" and "peaceful" news when covering mass actions and are prohibited from live streaming at the scene. This practice clearly contradicts the principles of press freedom and the public's right to obtain accurate information.

The impact of these restrictions is very significant: the public ultimately seeks more information through social media, whose credibility is questionable. This increases the risk of misinformation and hoaxes among the public who do not have adequate media literacy. AJI considers practices such as coverage restrictions, prohibitions on live streaming, and intimidation against journalists as forms of silencing and intervention in journalistic work that contradicts Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press. Therefore, AJI emphasizes the need for law enforcement against perpetrators of violence, including involved officials, and encourages all parties to respect journalistic work as part of the pillars of democracy and human rights.

This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Rintan Puspitasari (2020) from the University of Indonesia, which states that patterns of violence against journalists in the digital era have expanded into the realms of cyber harassment and doxing, which is the dissemination of journalists' personal data online to intimidate those deemed critical of power (Sari, 2021). Such patterns of violence show that threats against journalists are now not only physical, but also works through digital systems, psychological pressure, and symbols of power. Thus, violence against journalists in Indonesia is multidimensional and systemic, encompassing physical, digital, symbolic, and structural violence, all of which are rooted in weak legal protection and the degradation of public communication ethics.

3.1. Case of Tempo: Terror of the Pig's Head as Symbolic Violence Against Journalists

The case of the pig's head terror sent to the Tempo editorial office on March 19, 2025, is concrete evidence that violence against journalists in Indonesia is no longer merely physical, but also symbolic and psychological. The package containing the pig's head wrapped in a styrofoam-lined cardboard box was addressed to Francisca Christy Rosana (Cica), a political desk journalist and host of the podcast Bocor Alus Politik. The package was received by the security unit at 4:15 PM WIB and was only opened by Cica along with her fellow journalist, Hussein Abri Yusuf, the following day. When the box was opened, a foul smell was detected, and the pig's head was seen with both ears cut off, without any sender's identity (Tempo.co, 2025).

The Editor-in-Chief of Tempo, Setri Yasra, suspects that this act is a terror attempt aimed at hindering journalistic work. He emphasized that press freedom is regulated under Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, thus any form of intimidation against journalists constitutes a violation of the media's constitutional rights. Setri asserted that "press freedom must not be terrorized, disturbed, and intimidated for any reason, as every media outlet performs its function in accordance with the law" (Tempo.co, 2025).

Semiotically, the pig's head has a deep symbolic meaning. The pig's head carries a very strong symbolic meaning as a symbol of filth and disgrace, so sending a pig's head to the editorial office is not only a physical threat but also a symbolic message containing elements of humiliation and deep moral intimidation. Semiotically, this act functions as non-verbal communication that utilizes the negative cultural meaning of pigs to instill fear and psychological pressure, thus violence is enacted through meaning and symbols, not direct weapons. This pig's head symbol is designed to demean and silence critical voices, especially in the context of press freedom, by targeting the identity and religious beliefs of the message recipient, thereby creating a strong social and cultural intimidation effect (Kompasiana.com, 2025).

According to Jurgen Habermas's theory of communication ethics, the public sphere is a space free from oppression where everyone is placed equally to engage in rational and open dialogue. However, sending a pig's head as a form of symbolic intimidation reflects a distortion of communication in the public sphere, as it chooses the path of symbolic violence that rejects Habermas's three claims of communication validity: truth, moral rightness, and sincerity. This act violates the principle of rational dialogue free from pressure, thus undermining the essence of ideal communication that leads to understanding and democratic agreement (Prasetyo, 2022).

The act of sending a pig's head as a form of symbolic violence can be explained through Pierre Bourdieu's concept, which emphasizes that symbolic violence is a subtle domination carried out through symbols and meanings without using direct physical violence. This symbolic violence works by concealing the practice of domination so that victims often do not realize it and tend to accept it as something normal, whereas it actually generates feelings of fear, shame, and inferiority in those who become targets. In the context of intimidation against journalists, symbols of humiliation such as a pig's head serve to subdue media independence and limit freedom of thought in the public sphere, which ultimately weakens the foundations of democracy and communication ethics (Apriyansyah, 2021; Putri, 2020; Chaniago & Arifin, 2023).

Furthermore, this case demonstrates a violation of communication ethics in journalistic practice. The principle of truth is disrupted because this symbolic message is not based on facts, but rather on emotional manipulation to silence criticism. The principle of social responsibility is also violated, as this action not only harms individuals but also undermines public trust in the media as a safe source of information. In a systemic context, this reflects a pattern of violence recorded by AJL, where psychological terror becomes a tool to maintain power dominance.

3.2. Case of CNN Indonesia: Revocation of Press ID as Administrative Intimidation Against Journalists

The case of the revocation of the press identity card (press ID) experienced by CNN Indonesia journalist, Diana Valencia, related to her question to President Prabowo Subianto regarding the Free Nutritious Food (MBG) program, is a form of violation of communication ethics in press freedom. This action is considered intimidation and a restriction of journalistic work protected by Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press (Kompas.com, 2025).

The Press Council and various media organizations condemned the actions of the Bureau of Press, Media, and Information of the Presidential Secretariat, which revoked the press ID without dialogue and rational reasons, as it creates a pressuring effect on other journalists and hinders the function of the press as an independent social control (Press Council, 2025).

According to Habermas in the theory of deliberative democracy and communicative action, the public sphere must be free from domination in order for rational and fair dialogue to occur among all parties. Intimidation such as the revocation of IDs contradicts Habermas's principles of communication validity, which include claims of truth, moral rightness, and sincerity, thus undermining the essence of democratic communication (Muttaqien & Ramdan, 2023).

The return of the press ID after public advocacy reaffirms the commitment to uphold press freedom and transparent communication ethics, respecting the professional dignity of journalists, and maintaining a public discourse space that is healthy, open, and free from symbolic domination pressure (Kompas.com, 2025). Thus, the implementation of communication ethics in press freedom must uphold the principles of openness, equality, and respect for the journalistic function as a pillar of deliberative democracy.

In the book "Communication Ethics" published in 2019, communication ethics is emphasized as a moral foundation and principle in interactions that must uphold

honesty, respect, and social responsibility (Niswaty et al., 2019). The case of the revocation of the press ID of CNN Indonesia journalists can be analyzed as a violation of communication ethics, as this action generates intimidation that undermines the principles of healthy and transparent dialogue between the government and the media as public communication institutions.

The unilateral revocation of ID without an open communication process and clear reasons reflects a violation of the principles of honesty and openness (transparency) which are the foundations of ethical communication. This also contradicts the respect for press freedom, which is a fundamental right in democracy. Ethical communication demands the existence of two-way communication that respects each other and does not use power to dominantly suppress the other party.

In addition, the book emphasizes that ethical communication must avoid actions that cause psychological or social harm to others. Both symbolic and administrative intimidation, such as the revocation of press IDs, have the potential to create negative psychological effects on journalists and undermine press independence as a pillar of democracy that serves to oversee power. The return of press IDs after public pressure and media advocacy demonstrates the importance of recognizing the principles of ethical communication, namely open dialogue and acknowledgment of the vital role of the press in a democratic society. Press freedom must be protected while prioritizing social responsibility so that the communication formed supports openness, justice, and social welfare.

3.3. Comparison of Cases and Implications of Islamic Communication Ethics

The case of sending a pig's head to the Tempo editorial office and the revocation of the press ID of CNN Indonesia journalists have similarities as forms of intimidation against press freedom but with different modes, namely symbolic psychological violence versus administrative intimidation. Both cases demonstrate violations of communication ethics that weaken the ideal democratic public space according to Jurgen Habermas, where open, rational, and egalitarian dialogue becomes the main foundation of communication.

In the Tempo case, symbolic violence using a pig's head signifies insult and moral intimidation that disrupts freedom of expression symbolically and culturally, while simultaneously causing deep psychological pressure on journalists as communicative subjects (Kompasiana.com, 2025). Meanwhile, in the CNN case, the revocation of the press ID is a form of administrative intimidation that restricts freedom to perform duties by undermining the legitimacy of journalistic work and presenting state dominance sentiment through formal mechanisms (Kompas.com, 2025).

From the perspective of Islamic communication ethics, both actions clearly violate the fundamental principles oriented towards the common good and respect for human dignity (Hablum Minannas), while also undermining honesty and openness in communication:

1. Violation of Truth and Clarification (Qaulun Sadidan and Tabayyun)

The intimidation carried out is not based on rational dialogue or facts, but rather on attempts at silencing. This violates the command to speak the truth (Qaulun Sadidan) and disregards the principle of critical clarification

(Tabayyun) that must be conducted before taking unilateral action. As explained in QS. Al-Ahzab (33) verse 70 regarding Qaulun Sadidan (Al-Qur'an, 2025):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿١٠١﴾

It means "O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice." And also as explained in QS. Al Hujurat (49) verse 6 regarding Tabayyun (The Qur'an, 2025):

It means "O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with a report, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance."

2. Violation of Respect for Dignity (Qaulun Kariman and Qaulun Layyinan)

The case of the pig's head terror is a form of symbolic violence that deliberately degrades the dignity of journalists, in contrast to the principle of noble speech (Qaulun Kariman). Intimidation in any form also violates the principle of gentleness (Qaulun Layyinan), which demands communication free from rudeness and psychological terror. Implicitly, these cases underscore the importance of enforcing Islamic communication ethics that uphold human dignity, transparency, and honest communication. Freedom of the press must be protected as a pillar of democracy so that the public space remains a healthy and inclusive dialogue arena, free from the pressures of symbolic or administrative domination.

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that the phenomenon of violence and intimidation against journalists in Indonesia in the digital era is multidimensional and systemic, encompassing a spectrum that goes beyond conventional physical violence, such as symbolic terror (the pig's head case at Tempo) and administrative intimidation (the case of the revocation of CNN Indonesia's press ID). These forms of violence reflect a significant power relation imbalance between the media/journalists and security forces and political institutions. This violence functions as a structural mechanism to silence criticism and intervene in press freedom protected by Law Number 40 of 1999. Furthermore, this study emphasizes that communication ethics plays a fundamental role as a normative instrument and moral foundation in facing this crisis. The acts of intimidation have proven to violate Jürgen Habermas's principle of communicative rationality, as they reject the validity claims of truth, rightness, and sincerity, thus undermining the essence of democratic dialogue. More deeply, from the perspective of Islamic Communication Ethics, this violence violates the values of welfare and human dignity (Hablum Minannas). The violations include neglecting the command to speak honestly and truthfully (Qaulun Sadidan) and to conduct critical clarification (Tabayyun), while also violating the principles of respect (Qaulun Kariman) and gentleness (Qaulun Layyinan) that reject all forms of psychological terror and symbolic humiliation. Thus, the crisis faced by Indonesian journalists is a crisis of public communication ethics that degrades professionalism and weakens the function of the press as a main pillar of democracy. Therefore, to build a safe, just, and intimidation-free public space, strengthening the professional integrity of journalists based on communication ethics universal and Islamic values. Ethical and practical recommendations include law enforcement against perpetrators of intimidation (especially officials), increasing public awareness of press rights, and strengthening

media commitment to uphold transparency, justice, and social responsibility as a spiritual and professional effort to maintain truth in the public sphere.

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