

Koran Burnings in Scandinavia Free Speech and Hate Speech Dilemma



Social Media Roundup

September 12, 2023

In 2023, an unprecedented number of rallies and demonstrations including the burning of the Holy Koran broke out in Scandinavia, namely Sweden and Denmark. These demonstrations sparked lively discussions and debates. Following is an analysis of social media posts and the timeline of the events.

Timeline

On 21 January 2023, Danish right-wing politician Rasmus Paludan burned a copy of Koran in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm, drawing widespread reactions. The Swedish authorities had given him an official permission to do it. The event happened amid tension between Turkey and Sweden over the latter's NATO membership. On 22 January, protests were held against his actions, torching the Swedish flag in front of the Swedish Consulate in Turkey. In response, a sign reading "We do not share that book burning idiot's view" appeared on the window of the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul.



Figure 1: Picture of the sign appeared on the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul
(Source: [VOBLYA/Telegram](#))

On 23 January 2023, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Sweden should not expect Turkey's support for its NATO membership after a protest near the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm. The same day, Edwin Wagenveld, far-right Dutch politician, and leader of the anti-Islam group Pegida in Netherlands tore up a copy of Koran in The Hague.

Then, Rasmus Paludan burned another copy of the Koran again in front of a mosque in Copenhagen, Denmark.



Figure 2: Rasmus Paludan in Copenhagen (Source: [VOBLYA/Telegram](#))

The action caused widespread outrage. Demonstrations in defense of the Koran were held in [Jordan](#) and [the UK](#).

Rasmus Paludan then posted a video in which he responded to the insults of Swedish-Chechen wrestler Khamzat Chivaev, who condemned the Koran burning. This time, Paludan threatened to burn Koran again in front of the doors of the Russian Embassy.



Figure 3: Rasmus Paludan replies to the insults of Khamzat Chimaev in a video, threatening to burn a copy of Koran in front of the Russian embassy (Source: [Arthur Morgan/X](#))

Rasmus Paludan then posted a video of him burning the Koran in front of the Russian Embassy, saying that he was doing it because of the wrestler Khamzat Chimaev, as well as because of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov (Chechnya is a republic of Russia with predominant Muslim population).

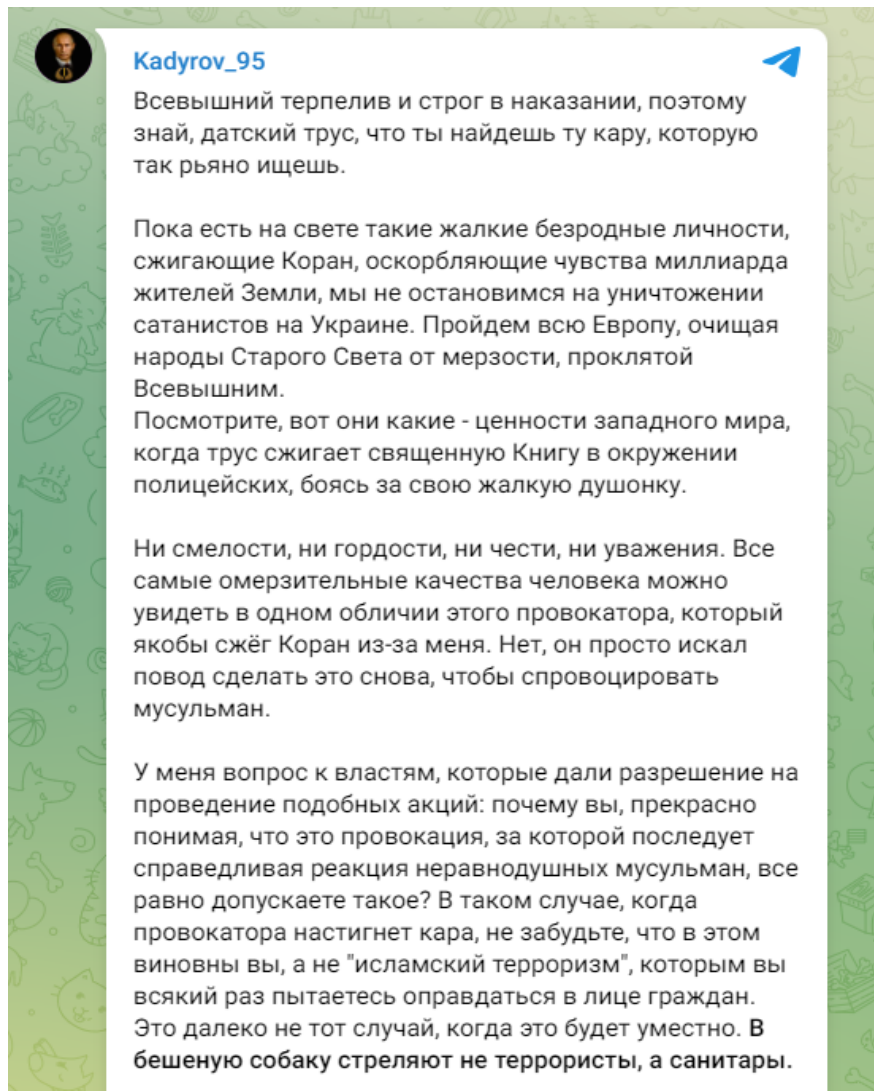


Figure 3: Screenshot of Ramzan Kadyrov's Telegram channel post commenting on Rasmus Paludan's burning of Koran (Source: [Kadyrov_95/Telegram](#))

Ramzan Kadyrov [reacted](#) to this event by saying “...while there are such ruthless individuals in the world who burn the Koran and insult the feelings of more than a billion inhabitants of the Earth, we will not stop at the destruction of Satanists in Ukraine. [...] We will go through all of Europe, cleansing the peoples of the Old World from abomination.” He also stated that the politician would be punished, and the authorities who allowed the action would be to blame. Kadyrov spoke metaphorically about the consequences of this act that it was not the terrorists who were shooting at the rabid dog, but the orderlies. He called Rasmus a “religious terrorist who needs to be cleared from the Earth”.

Reactions

Amy Mek, the member of the RAIR organization, which proclaims its goal to [defeat the threat from Islamic supremacists, radical leftists and their allies](#), posted:



Figure 4: One of the top tweets reacting to Rasmus Paludan's action
(Source: [Amy Mek/X](#))

Among the replies that support her point of view, there are those that claim that the author misunderstood the meaning of the scripture as well as points of view supporting the author and calling for an action.

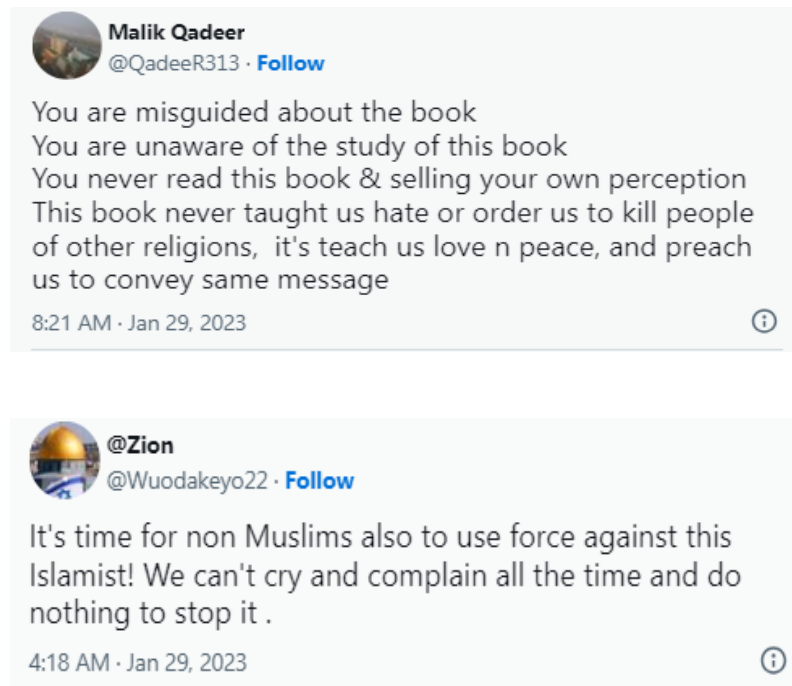


Figure 5: replies to user "Amy Mek"'s post on X

In early February, actions in support of the Koran and against Sweden were held in several countries.



MuslimMirror.com
@MuslimMirror

Muslims reciting verses from #HolyQuran in front of Swiss Embassy in London. A unique way to protest against the burning of Holy Quran in front of Turkish Embassy in Sweden. #RasmusPaludan



5:10 AM · Feb 1, 2023 · 9,924 Views



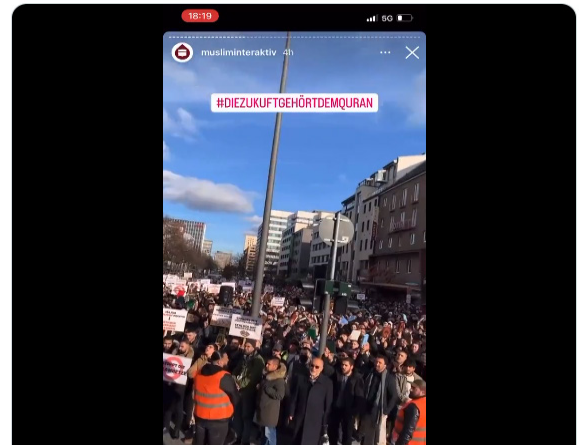
Amy Mek
@AmyMek

Islamic Germany

In a show of force, thousands of Sharia-Adherent Muslims tied to radical Jihadi groups demonstrated against the Quran burning in Sweden

Muslims waved Qurans while shouting the Islamic War Cry - Allahu Akbar, & threatening Germany

Read: rairfoundation.com/thousands-of-r...



Imran Khurshid
@chimrankhurshid

Desecration of #Quran in #Sweden was condemned in Dublin today.



Pakistan Embassy Ireland and 2 others

4:30 PM · Feb 6, 2023 · 1,338 Views

Figures 6,7,8: X posts on several rallies held in response to Koran burnings
(Source: X)

Geeta Mohan گیتا موہن
@Geeta_Mohan

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan leader on #PakEconomicCrisis and Turkey-Sweden #Quran controversy 🙄:
'Hold Quraan in Right Hand & Atom Bomb suitcase in Left Hand...go to Sweden... Tell them we have come here to protect Quran...All the boons/blessings of this world will come to you'



12:09 AM · Feb 4, 2023 · 13.9K Views

Muhammad hanzala
@Time4Caliphate

Hizbut Tahrir organized a stand to denounce the burning of Quran in Sweden

منذر عبدالله @monzerabdullah1 · Feb 5

مباشر من كوينهاجن

ينظم حزب التحرير وقفة استنكارا لما ترعاه السلطات السويدية والدنماركية من حرق للمصحف.



1:23 PM · Feb 5, 2023 · 1,178 Views

Figures 9,10: X posts on reactions to Koran burnings
(Source: X)

[Indonesia](#) and [Pakistan](#) were among the countries who strongly condemned the burnings.

Thus, the first wave of Koran burnings began with the initiative of the far-right Stram Kurs (Hard Line) party, namely its leader Rasmus Paludan. He takes an extremely hostile stance towards Islam. During his career, he was repeatedly of Nazism and racism. In addition, he has been performing such rallies since 2019, which also caused unrest in Sweden and Denmark. However, the events of 2023 allegedly have a different motivation behind them. Rasmus was accused of having links with Russia, which sought to prevent Sweden from joining NATO. According to 'The Insider', [the campaign with the burning of the Koran was paid for by journalist Chang Frik](#), who was previously associated with a Russian state-funded channel 'RT'. 'The Insider' also stated that [far-right parties around the world may be sponsored by the Russian regime](#). In addition, "TV4" revealed [Paludan's connection with the Wagner Group of Russia](#), which he denied.

Social Media Discussion

Social media reactions to Rasmus Paludan's act varied from neutral to extreme. Following is an analysis of the reactions.

The first opinion shared by users is a neutral position that is expressed in bad feelings about Sweden. However, this narrative doesn't impose any specific actions or inclining towards any of the sides of the conflict. This group is the smallest in this case.



[deleted] commented on [post](#)



I feel bad for the many swedes that didn't want this and knew it was a bad idea. They were shouted down for being racist, Islamaphobic, etc. Now they have to watch their country and culture be destroyed. That's sad.

↑ 288 upvotes ← 42 replies

Figure 11: Post on Reddit expressing sympathy towards Sweden ([Source](#))

The second group is expressed by two positions: users undermining the concept of democracy in Sweden, stating that no decision-making power is given to the people and neutral reaction or opinions provided in favor of Muslim community. It's expressed by the statement that Koran burnings do not cause a violent reaction. These posts consist of condemnation of the burning of a holy book as an incorrect and unprogressive way of expressing one's opinion. Such statements do not contain direct aggression or threats.



[deleted] commented on [post](#)



You're implying the people had any say in this lmao. The propaganda machine decided they would let in migrants and did everything in their power to sway the politically uninformed and emotionally charged. Same things happening in America right now and all over the west

↑ 30 upvotes ← 0 replies



Mikey-thechamp-Brian commented on [post](#)



He burned it to prove that muslims would react violently apparently, so they did a great job at proving him wrong.

↑ 172 upvotes ← 7 replies

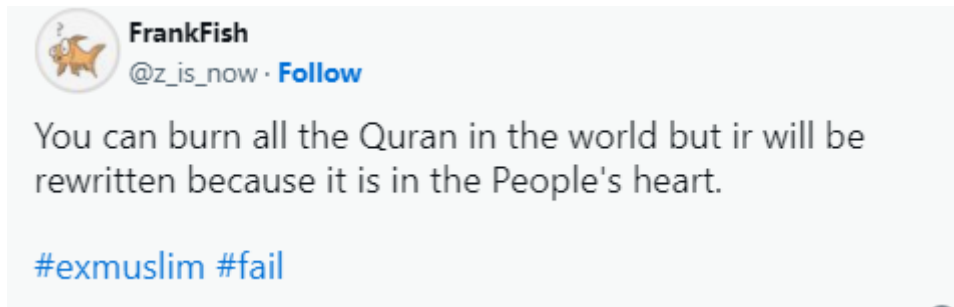


ahmetasm commented on [post](#)



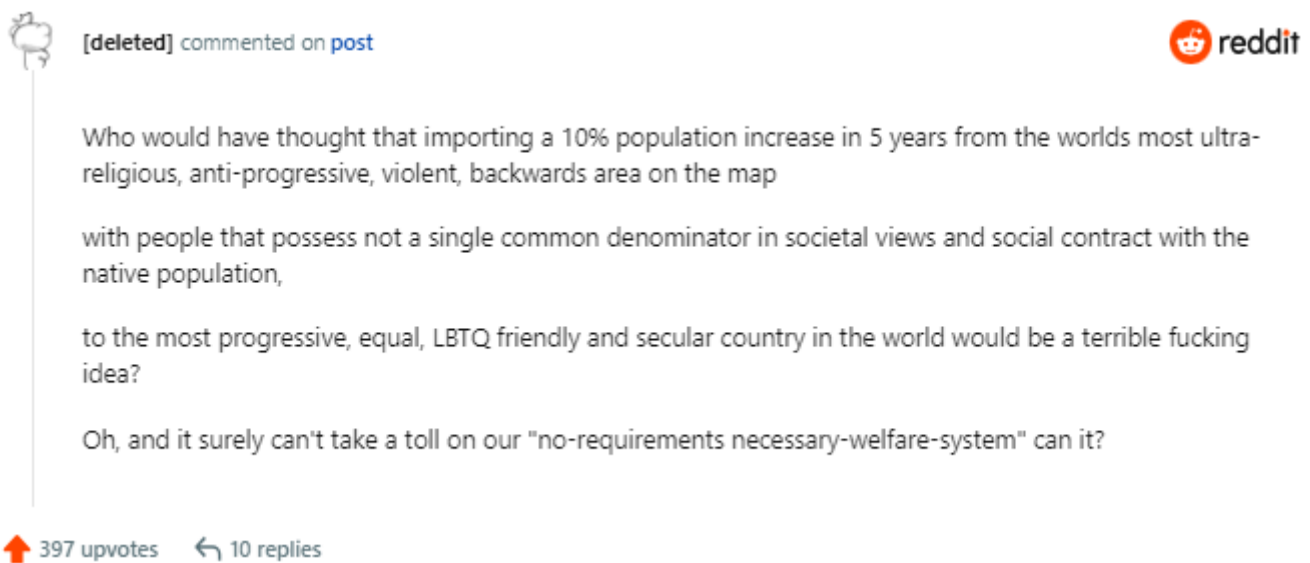
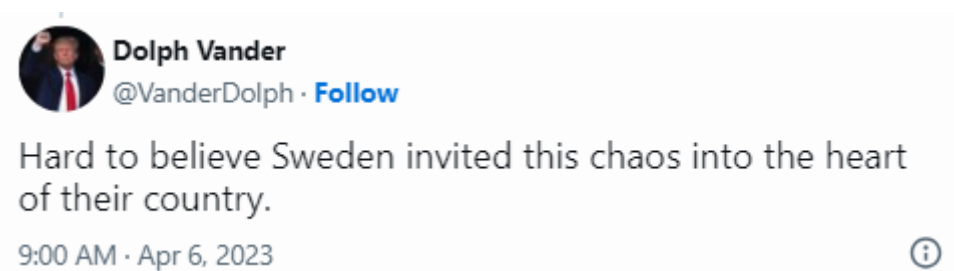
I just don't understand the extremists. It's like they came from dark ages. I don't know how they can be this backwards. I'm a Muslim and the religion I know definitely says these people will go to hell. But then the world starts to see the Islam as a backwards ideology and I get accused of being backwards. As a modern person living in a modern country this shit should not happen. A lot of my friends left Islam because they were seen as extremists the moment they mention it.

↑ 1 upvote ← 1 reply



Figures 12, 13, 14, 15: Posts on Reddit and X expressing an opinion on Koran burnings (Source: [Reddit](#), [X](#))

Next narrative is that Sweden knew what it was doing when it brought migrants, so it should have expected the conflict of civilizations in the first place. The distinguishing feature of this rhetoric is that it does not contain explicit hatred towards migrants, but nevertheless seeks to prove that Western and Islamic values are incompatible.



Figures 16, 17: Posts on Reddit and X expressing discontent with Swedish immigration policy. (Source: [Dolph Vander/X](#), [Reddit](#))

The next trend in discussion is a discourse that actively uses mocking and black humor to convey Islamophobic remarks.



mango_alternativo commented on post



Swedistan is almost complete



TheHancock commented on post



Bro, draw a stick figure with a smiley face and label it "muhammad" and assassins will come kill your whole family!

37 upvotes 1 reply



Aziz
@az295100 · Follow

We should do this on 9/11 on the exact time the plane hit the towers. It should be an international burn Koran day!

6:54 PM · Apr 15, 2023



Vinod D Raddi
@vinoims · Follow

What ever Terrorists/islamists do is right.. Their Sharia law

12:44 PM · Feb 1, 2023



Figures 18, 19: Posts on Reddit and X demonstrating Islamophobic comments on the issue. (Source: [Reddit](#), [X](#))

Another position that fits into the defined level of hate speech scale is anti-migrants rhetoric which also is reflected into the Koran burnings discussion. However, this level is filled with intolerance and explicit expressions.



Figure 20: User of Reddit explicitly expressing an opinion about demographic change in Sweden (Source: [Nissepelle/Reddit](#))

The analysis of the discourse helped identifying couple of emerging trends. Among them – new slang addressing the recent issues, for example “[get Charlie Hebdo-ed](#)” and “[to Life of Brian](#)” referencing the bringing up religious topics movie.

Discussing Paludan’s motivation, users were more inclined to the following versions: [he does it for the sake of attention](#), [he wants to provoke the Islamic community](#), [he does it so that NATO does not accept Sweden](#).

The mood changed after Kalla Fakta (Cold Facts)’s [publication](#) of his ties to Russia, however, according to users, they [were not surprised](#).

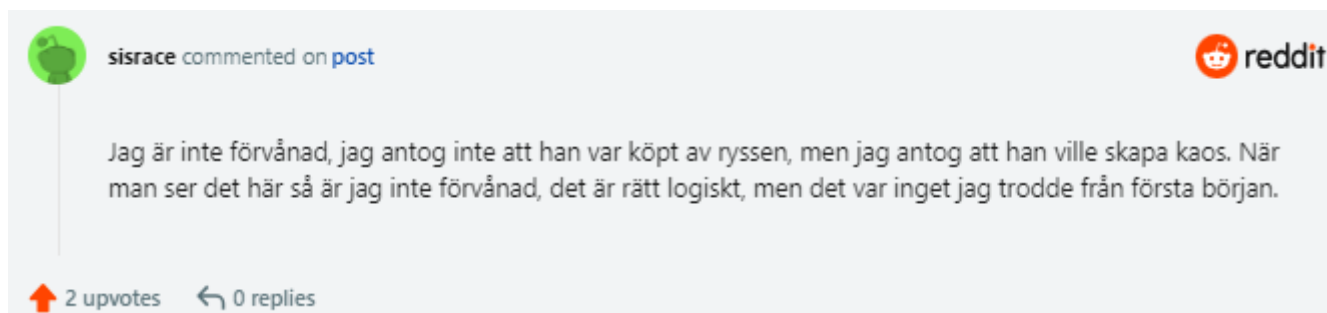


Figure 21: Comment at [Reddit discussion](#) saying: “I’m not surprised, I didn’t assume he was bought by the Russians, but I assumed he wanted to create chaos. When you see this, I’m not surprised, it’s quite logical, but it wasn’t something I thought from the beginning.”

It is worth noting, taking into account possible Russian impact, on May 25, [the Koran was burned in front of the mosque in Russia](#). It was done by a person, who for many years supported Russian government and the course of pro-state propaganda, as indicated on his pages in social networks. He was convicted and sent to Chechnya. The defendant himself claims that he did it on the order of Ukraine.

Thus, the burning of the Koran by Rasmus Paludan caused a wave of condemnation in society within Sweden, throughout Scandinavia, as well as in a number of Muslim countries. At the same time, his actions also found words of support among social network users who expressed themselves both for and against the burning of the Koran. Moreover, their position depended not only on their personal attitude towards Islam. However, the discussion took on a completely different level when the Koran burnings continued in June and were committed by a different person. Late June, Salwan Momika, an immigrant from Iraq, set fire to a Quran in the center of Stockholm.

If Rasmus Paludan pursued political goals and his actions were explained by the views and ideology of the party, then the motivation of Salwan Momika is explained by different reasons. Momika sought to protest against the covenants and rules of Islam, which he finds incorrect.

Another significant difference in their actions is the language of their conduct, and hence the audience to which the action is directed. Initially, Paludan produced Islamophobic videos in Swedish, he also used English when the events began to gain international resonance. Momika has a TikTok account, and on August 15, he created a [channel](#) in the Telegram app. Both resources are maintained by him mainly in Arabic. The description of his Telegram channel says: “Fighting Islam, spreading awareness, freedom, science, peace, and

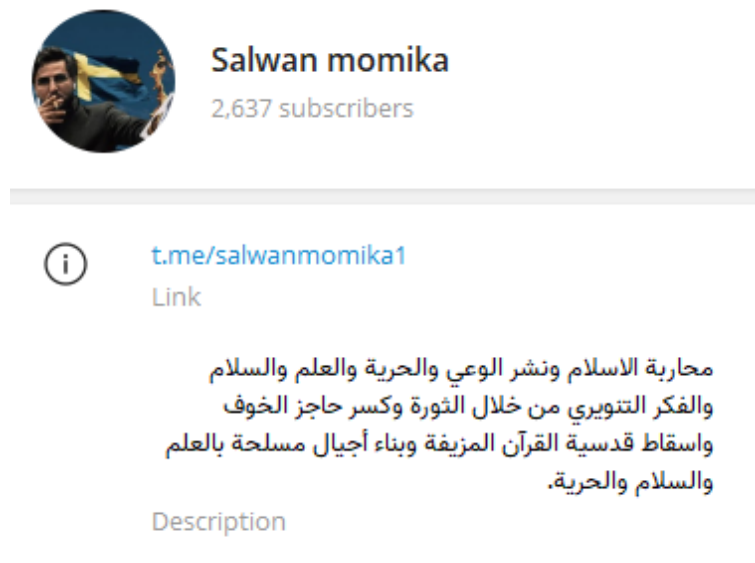


Figure 22: Screenshot of Salwan Momika's Telegram channel description

In this Telegram channel, he expresses disapproval of the precepts of Islam and tries to expose their irrationality. He also announces planned demonstrations and asks the subscribers to support him financially.

Salwan momika

أحبتني جميعكم تعلمون الضغوطات التي أتعرض لها من داخل السويد خصوصاً بعدما قامت شركة تيكنتوك بطلب من الامن السويدي بغلق خاصية الهدايا من حساباتي على التيكنتوك والذي كان مصدر للدعم لي وسد تكاليف المظاهرات وهذه الخطوة ماهي الا محاولة كسر لجناحي وضرب مسيرتنا وإيقافها لذلك لم يبقى أمامي سوى وسيلة واحدة لتقديم الدعم وهي من خلال حسابي على البايبال لذلك سأترك لكم رابط حسابي لكل من يرغب بتقديم الدعم لأن لدينا مظاهرات بمدن مختلفة في السويد مايقارب عشرون مظاهرة وهذه تحتاج دعمكم لسد تكاليف الرحلات لمدن متعددة وبعيدة لذلك أرجوا من الجميع الدعم قدر المستطاع فتذكر دائماً أن دعمك لي يجعلني أقوى . وشكرا لكم مقدماً

رابط حسابي على البايبال :

Figure 23: Salwan Momika's post in Arabic saying: "Therefore, there is only one way left for me to provide support, which is through my account on PayPal, so I will leave you a link to my account for everyone who wants to provide support, because we have demonstrations in different cities in Sweden, about 20 demonstrations, and these need your support to cover the costs of trips to multiple cities and far away, so I ask everyone to support. Always remember that your support makes me stronger. Thank you in advance. [Here is] My PayPal account link"

Salwan momika

Ett meddelande från Salwan momika till de berörda: Stoppa din press på mig, och om du försöker pressa mig mer kommer jag att skicka in hundratals förfrågningar om att bränna Koranen. Försök inte spela med professionella spelare.

Salwan momika



1201 12:53 PM

5 comments

Figure 24: Salwan Momika's post in Swedish saying: "A message from Salwan momika to those concerned: Stop your pressure on me, and if you try to pressure me more, I will submit hundreds of requests to burn the Quran. Do not try to play with professional players."



Figure 25: Salwan Momika's post saying: "Urgent.. Swedish security bargains with us a little while ago. Protection in exchange for stopping the burning of the Koran, I will not stop and I do not want to protect you in return for restricting my freedom, as freedom is higher than life and what is in it. Salwan Momika."

From the discussion that takes place in the comments, one can see that the audience is mainly Arabic-speaking, with both pro-Islamic and opposing views:

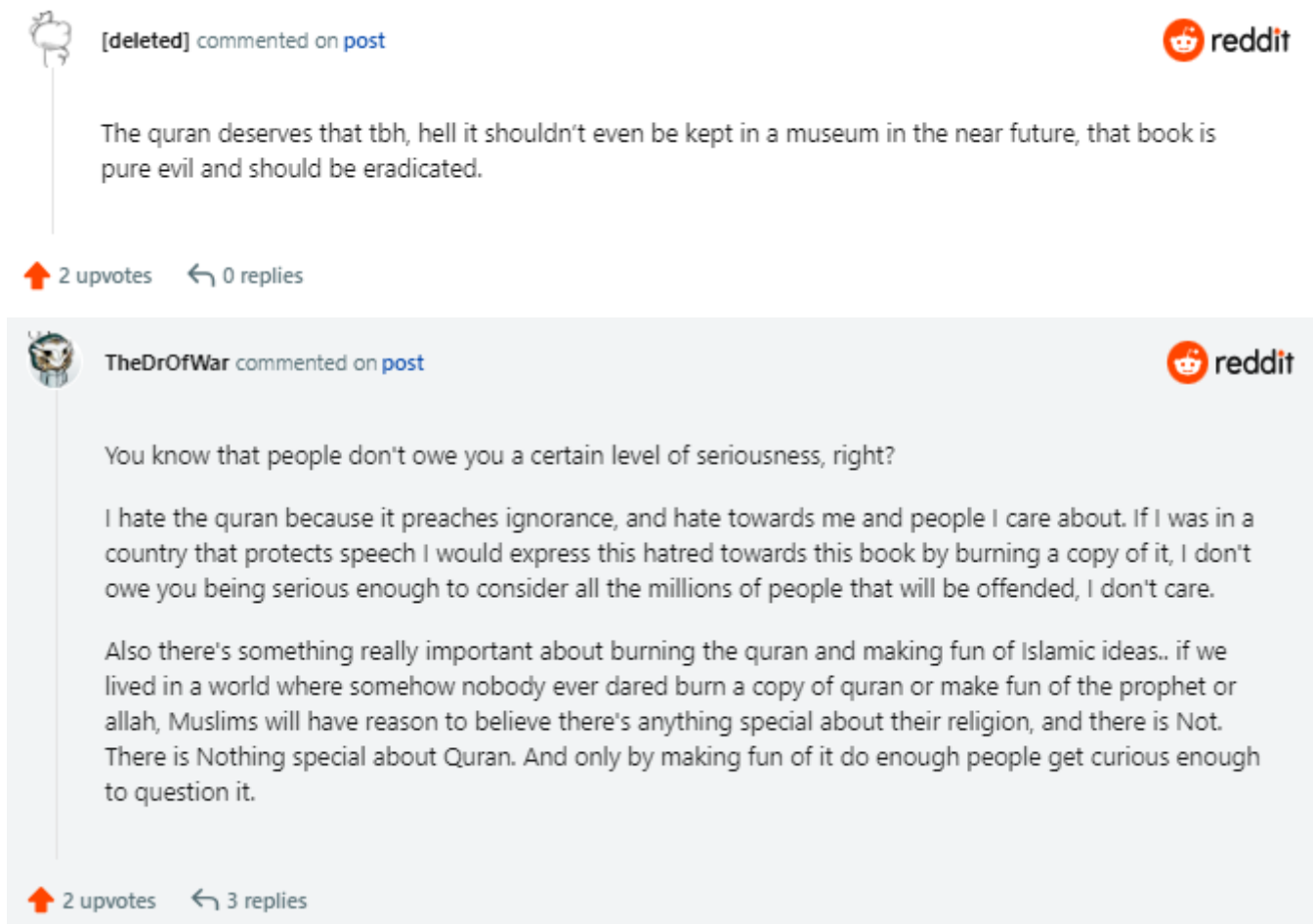


Comments under [Irag's request of Salwan's extradition post](#) express mainly support and concern, however, comment by Abdullah Abdulkareem translates as "Your day is approaching".

Figure 26: Comments by Salwan Momika's Telegram channel subscribers

Salwan Momika has been organizing Koran burning events several times since June. WNM team tracked how the rhetoric of users changed during this time, taking into account the discourse during the winter and spring events organized by Rasmus Paludan. Users were divided into those who supported Salwan's act, those who stayed neutral and those who openly condemned the burning of a religious book.

Support for Momika's actions is expressed in following posts:



Figures 27, 28: Comments on Reddit expressing approval of Momika's actions
(Source: [Reddit](#))

Neutral ideas:

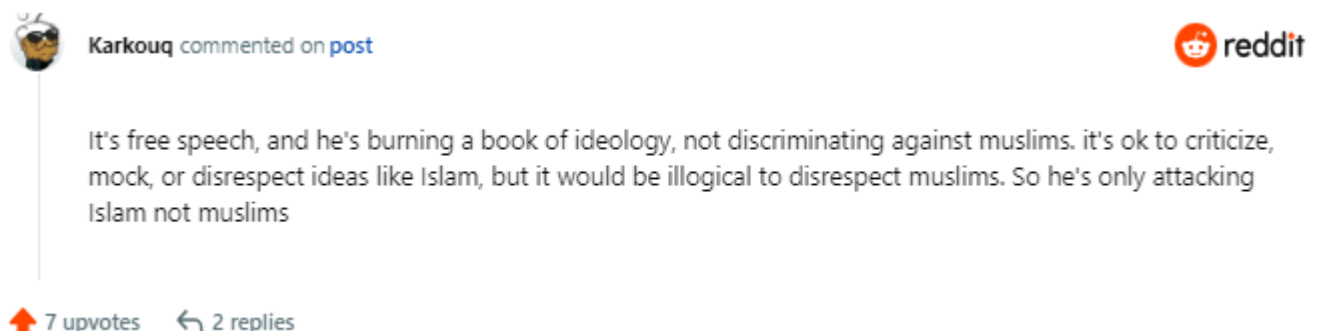


Figure 29: Reddit user's post expressing opinion about free speech aspect of the demonstration (Source: [Karkouq/Reddit](#))

Burning of Quran is a hate speech:



Figure 30: Post on Reddit expressing an opposite opinion on free speech
(Source: [idkwhyimadethis29701/Reddit](#))

Swedish resource Flashback, which is presented as a largest forum for freedom of speech, opinions and independent thinking also offers a heated discussion on the issue. However, the main subjects discussed are tax payments to police for protection of such activities, condemnation of immigration policy including some Islamophobic comments and concerns about terrorist attacks.

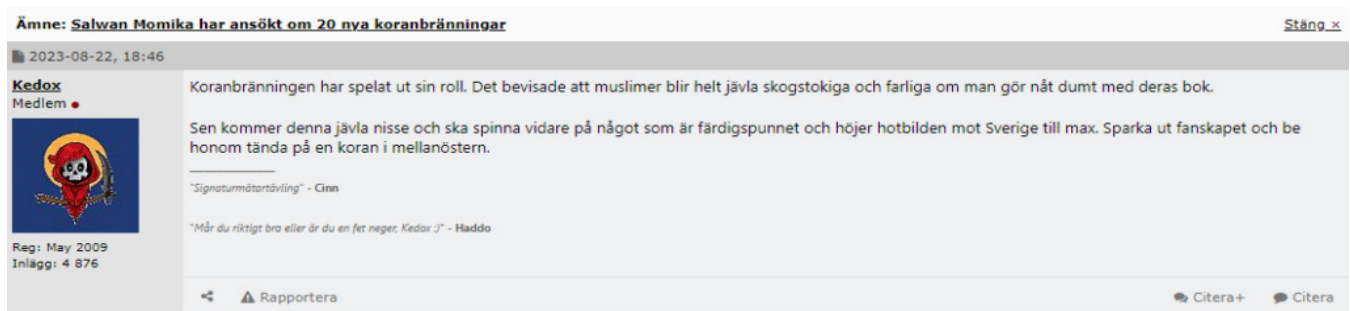


Figure 31: A comment on Flashback saying: "The Koran burning has served its purpose. It proved that Muslims go completely crazy and dangerous if you do something stupid with their book. Then this guy comes along and wants to continue with something that's already been done, raising the threat level against Sweden to the maximum. Kick this bastard out and tell him to burn a Koran in the Middle East."

(Source: [Kedox/Flashback](#))

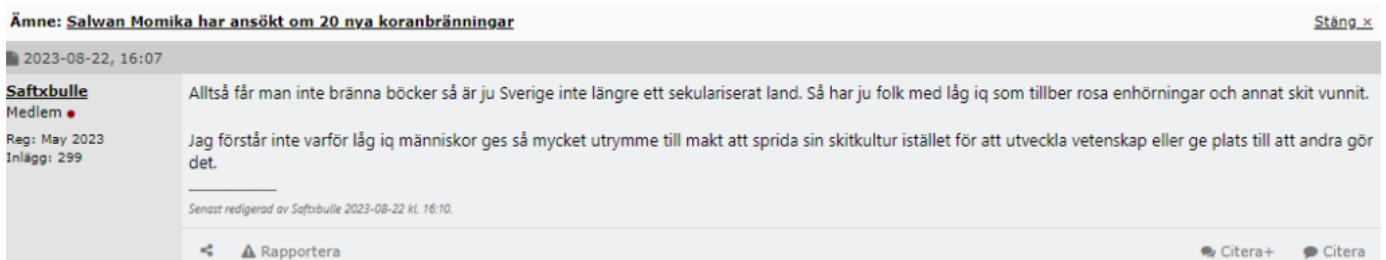


Figure 32: A comment on Flashback saying: "So, if you can't burn books, Sweden is no longer a secularized country. It's like people with low IQs who worship pink unicorns and other crap have won. I don't understand why people with low IQs are given so much room to spread their crappy culture instead of developing science or giving space for others to do so."

(Source: [Saftxbulle/Flashback](#))



Figure 33: Flashback user replies to: “Even before he started, most people with more than two cooperating brain cells knew that the global reaction would be like this. There’s no need for anyone to try to convince repeatedly. The book is more than a religion. This pathetic chaos leads NOWHERE except terrorist attacks against Sweden and the absence of NATO membership. That’s primarily what it’s about, and nothing else. Let’s call a spade a spade. Freedom of speech is not a given. With freedom comes responsibility.” with “It seems to lead somewhere. It highlights the kind of animals and barbarians we have in the country. Unfortunately, it seems that Swedes hate freedom, and more than half are in favor of a ban on these actions.”

(Source: [gg1337/Flashback](#))



Figure 34: Flashback user expresses support to Koran burnings: “It’s great that he’s going to burn it 20 more times. I hope more people are inspired and start burning it too. Maybe Rasmus Paludan will return next spring when it’s an election year. Islam is crap and should be removed from Sweden. The Koran should be banned. What is in the Koran incites hatred against ethnic groups. Islam is not a religion but a comprehensive and all-encompassing ism and ideology, at least as much, and one must be allowed to protest against it and show all their disgust for it.”

It cannot be banned because then I want to burn pictures of Muhammad and Allah instead. I want to throw the Koran in a trash can, I want to stomp on it, I want to put it on a grill. It is impossible to prevent in a supposed democracy showing disapproval and disgust for Islam, the Koran, Muhammad, and more. There are endless possibilities, and to stop this, one must establish a very strict dictatorship, which those who advocate for mass immigration, population replacement, and Islam apparently want. You can introduce Sharia laws if you want to stop this list of possibilities to criticize, mock, and show disgust for Islam, the Koran, and Muhammad. But that's what you want, so why not do it right away and show your true faces as traitors to the country? Of course, you should be able to criticize and mock the ideology of Islam; opposing that is the same as if you were to forbid the same left-wing scum from criticizing the Sweden Democrats and immigration critics. It's exactly the same thing."
(Source: [Krimkoll/Flashback](#))

As for international reaction, Salwan's actions caused an even greater wave of negative reactions from the Muslim communities and leaders of countries around the world.



Figure 35: Muslim women ask Police to stop Koran burnings claiming that the freedom of speech threatens the security of Muslims
(Source: [Christian/X](#))



“We will finish in Ukraine and then go further.” An increasingly chubby Ramzan Kadyrov promises to target countries that insult the Quran.



1.4K upvotes [Comment](#) [Copy link](#)

Figure 36: Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov calling to “go” to the countries that insult Koran after Russian success in Ukraine (Source: [UkraineWarVideoReport/Reddit](#))



Figure 37: Russian pro-state journalist Abbas Djuma commenting on Salwan Momika’s actions: “This man is possessed by a demon. I truly feel sorry for him. But his entire country is also possessed, having essentially declared war on Islam and Muslims. A war that Sweden will certainly lose” (Source: [Abbas Djuma/Telegram](#))

Storming of the Swedish Embassy in Iraq:

Figure 38: Telegram post saying “Outraged Muslims storm the Swedish embassy in Iraq. This happened against the background of the burning of the Koran the day before in Stockholm by an immigrant from Iraq. The process was accompanied by the full support of the country’s authorities”
(Source: [VOBLYA/Telegram](#))

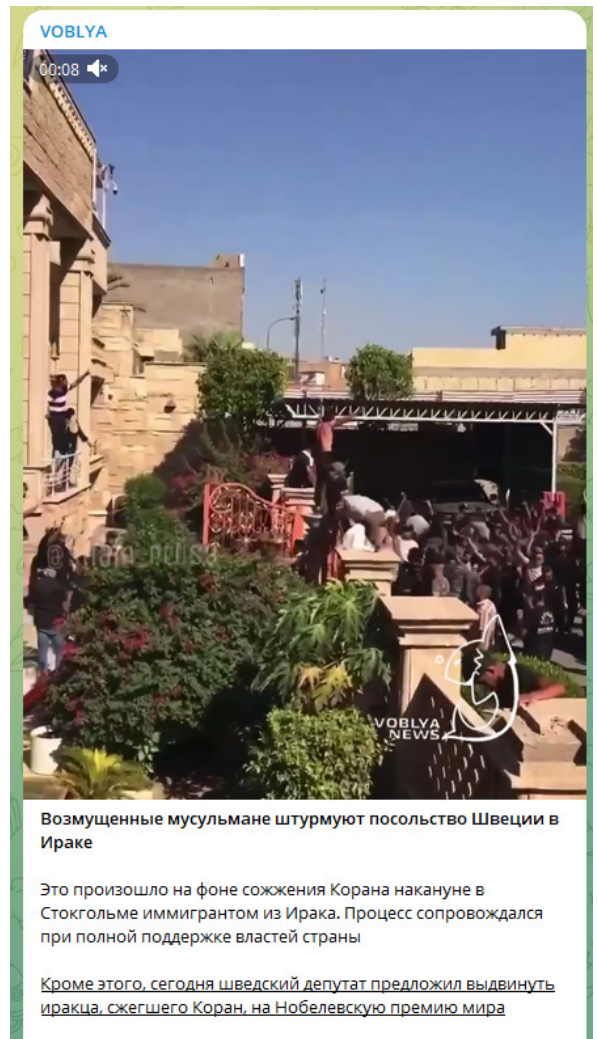


Figure 39: Telegram post saying: “In Sweden they burn the Koran; in Pakistan, in response, they paint “toilets” in the color of the Swedish flag”
(Source: [VOBLYA/Telegram](#))



Figure 40: Billboards depicting Russian president Vladimir Putin as a “guardian and protector of religion” in Lebanon (Source: [NEXTA Live/ Telegram](#))

Thus, the burning of the Koran this year became another milestone in anti-Islamic rhetoric. The actions and demonstrations caused both important social and political resonance and consequences. For example, it is known that Sweden has raised the level of terrorist threat in the country, [citing threats by such groups as Hezbollah, al Shabaab and al-Qa’ida](#).

Moreover, It is not surprising that Russia, which does not benefit from Sweden’s entry into NATO, is also trying to use the situation to its advantage. However, its attempts are limited only to propaganda efforts to win favor and support among the global Muslim community. There is a popular version that Russia ordered the first burnings of the Koran by Rasmus Paludan. However, direct evidence of this connection was not found. Also against this hypothesis works the fact that Rasmus Paludan and his party adhered to anti-Islamist and anti-immigrant views long before the issue of confrontation with Turkey over Sweden’s membership in NATO became relevant. So Rasmus might have his own motivation to perform such acts.

As follows from open discussions, the Islamophobic actions of both Rasmus Paludan and Salwan Momika naturally were met with both support and disapproval from the general public. However, one can also observe how the motivation and opinions of users have changed, as well as their expression of hatred towards the problem under discussion. It was after Salwan’s demonstrations that the problem assumed such a huge international scale, causing such a violent reaction. This may have been influenced by the background of the demonstrator (an Iraqi refugee who [may be involved in the activity of Iranian militia](#)) or the fact that he is actively requesting financial support for his actions. It is also widely believed that Momika may be doing this to gain Swedish protection or even [citizenship](#) and not to oppose and expose the harm of Islam as he’s been stating.

World News Monitors is an intelligence outlet that navigates the open-source environment providing actionable intelligence solutions.

Learn more at worldnewsmonitors.com

