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Aestheticizing Coexistence: Public Perceptions of The Istiqlal-Cathedral Tunnel on Social Media

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Abstract

Although Indonesia is known for its religious diversity, numerous incidents of intolerance reveal that symbols and practices of tolerance have yet to be deeply rooted in the country's social fabric. the Terowongan Silaturahmi in this context, a connecting passage between the Istiqlal Mosque and the Jakarta Cathedral—stands out as a rare spatial phenomenon symbolizing interfaith harmony in an urban landscape. This study aims to examine the aesthetic and architectural dimensions of the tunnel and analyze public perceptions of it as a representation of pluralist values. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach supported by digital quantitative analysis, the study integrates architectural interpretation, literature review, and sentiment classification of 2,003 comments from 5 videos on the YouTube page using the IndoBERT model and *word cloud* visualization. The findings reveal that the tunnel is broadly perceived as a positive symbol of tolerance and national identity, though some resistance emerges from conservative groups. Therefore, the Terowongan Silaturahmi exemplifies how architecture can function as a medium for dialogue and social education on interfaith coexistence within Indonesia's public spaces.

[Meskipun Indonesia dikenal sebagai negara dengan keragaman agama yang tinggi, berbagai insiden intoleransi menunjukkan bahwa simbol dan praktik toleransi belum sepenuhnya mengakar dalam ruang sosial masyarakat. Keberadaan terowongan silaturahmi dalam konteks ini yang menghubungkan Masjid Istiqlal dan Gereja Katedral Jakarta menjadi fenomena spasial yang menarik untuk ditelaah sebagai simbol toleransi lintas agama yang jarang dijumpai dalam lanskap perkotaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dimensi estetika dan arsitektural ruang tersebut serta mengungkap persepsi masyarakat terhadapnya sebagai representasi nilai pluralisme. Metode yang digunakan yaitu pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif dengan dukungan kuantitatif digital, melalui analisis arsitektural, kajian literatur, serta klasifikasi sentimen terhadap 2.003 komentar dari 5 video pada laman YouTube menggunakan model IndoBERT dan visualisasi *wordcloud*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ruang tersebut secara simbolik diterima positif oleh masyarakat sebagai ekspresi toleransi dan kebangsaan, meskipun terdapat resistensi dari kelompok konservatif. Oleh karena itu, Terowongan Silaturahmi menjadi bukti bahwa arsitektur dapat berfungsi sebagai media dialog dan edukasi sosial lintas agama dalam ruang publik Indonesia.]

Keywords: religious tolerance; religious architecture; public space; friendship tunnel; pluralism

Introduction

Although Indonesia is widely recognized for its religious and cultural pluralism, instances of intolerance continue to pervade its

socio-religious landscape. In recent years, violent acts carried out in the name of religion—such as the attack on Santa Lidwina Church in Yogyakarta and the bombings of three churches in Surabaya—have underscored the fragility of tolerance in public discourse and practice.¹ In addition, ongoing disputes and resistance toward the construction of non-majority houses of worship in several regions highlight the extent to which religious spaces often become flashpoints for polarization.² This phenomenon reflects a more profound paradox within Indonesia's sociopolitical fabric: a nation that ideologically embraces pluralism yet faces entrenched interfaith tensions. Within this context, Jakarta's Istiqlal–Cathedral Friendship Tunnel emerges as both a spatial anomaly and a symbol of hope.³ The project constitutes a rare instance of state-supported interfaith architecture—a formally constructed, spatially integrated site of religious coexistence embedded in the urban fabric.

Research on religious public spaces and interfaith tolerance in Indonesia has drawn significant interdisciplinary interest. Aryanti and Achmadi in 2024⁴ highlight that the Istiqlal Mosque was envisioned not merely as a site of Islamic worship but as a national reconciliation symbol embedded within Sukarno's post-independence vision of Indonesian unity.⁵ Pujalte and Navarra in 2017 conceptualize the Istiqlal–Cathedral area as a *sacred landscape*, illustrating interfaith interconnectedness through religious open spaces' aesthetic and functional dimensions.⁶ Similarly, Nuriz and Awang in 2018

¹ Muhammad Saifullah Rohman, "Negotiating The Space For Peace: Interreligious Tolerance And Harmony in Practice," *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 8, no. 2 (December 28, 2018): 132–44, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jissh.v8i2.67>.

² Jenny L. Small and Nicholas A. Bowman, "Religious Affiliation and College Student Development: A Literature Review and Synthesis," *Religion & Education* 39, no. 1 (January 2012): 64–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2012.648586>.

³ Friendship Tunnel is a free translation of the tunnel's name, which refers to the "Terowongan Silaturahmi" in Jakarta, which is the object of study in this research.

⁴ Tutin Aryanti and Amanda Achmadi, "Framing and Visualising Nationhood: Istiqlal Mosque and the Interiority of the Independence Square, Jakarta," *Interiority* 7, no. 2 (July 30, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.7454/in.v7i2.375>.

⁵ Sukarno was the first president of the Republic of Indonesia.

⁶ MM Pujalte and N Navarra, "Places of Faith: A Reflection on Landscape of Manila Cathedral Plaza de Roma and Istiqlal Mosque Sacred Grounds of Jakarta," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 91 (October 2017): 012027, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/91/1/012027>.

underscore the need to translate ideological pluralism into spatial practices and everyday social interactions, particularly through the role of education and state institutions.⁷

Nevertheless, few studies have positioned spatial symbols such as the Friendship Tunnel as central objects in analyzing contemporary and digital expressions of interfaith tolerance. Intan in 2023 offers the framework of “principled pluralism” as an alternative to secularism within religious public spaces yet does not explicitly address architectural artifacts that materialize this concept.⁸ Meanwhile, Satriabhawana and Fakhri and Anisa in 2024 focus on the sustainability and aesthetic dimensions of the Istiqlal Mosque but do not examine the interfaith connectivity fostered through the presence of the linking tunnel.⁹ This study aims to fill this scholarly gap by proposing an interdisciplinary approach integrating architecture, spatial theory, and digital media analysis to understand how the public engages with symbolic representations of tolerance within the contemporary urban religious landscape.

This study examines how the Friendship Tunnel's architectural symbol—connecting the Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral Church in Jakarta—is perceived by the public as a representation of interfaith tolerance in public space. The research focuses on two key dimensions: the aesthetic and spatial design aspects as articulations of pluralistic values and public responses captured through social media comments as expressions of collective perception toward this interfaith space. Employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates spatial analysis, theories of space production, and quantitative methods such as sentiment analysis and word cloud visualization, the study addresses

⁷ M. Adib Fuadi Nuriz and Jaffary Awang, “The Post of Pluralism: Religious Pluralism in the Practical Areas of Indonesia,” *KALIMAH* 16, no. 2 (September 1, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v16i2.2868>.

⁸ Benyamin F. Intan, “Religious Pluralism, Public Religion, and Principled Pluralism in Indonesia,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 40, no. 4 (October 6, 2023): 334–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788231206020>.

⁹ M T Satriabhawana, “Sustainable Architecture Implementation of Mosque in Indonesia (Case Study: Mosque Istiqlal, Jakarta),” *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 1404, no. 1 (October 1, 2024): 012016, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1404/1/012016>. and Reza Mushthafa Fakhri and Anisa Anisa, “Kajian Konsep Arsitektur Kubisme Pada Bangunan Ibadah: Masjid Istiqlal,” *PURWARUPA Jurnal Arsitektur* 8, no. 1 (March 31, 2024): 45, <https://doi.org/10.24853/purwarupa.8.1.45-52>.

two central research questions: How do people interpret religious public space as a symbol of tolerance within the sociocultural context of contemporary Indonesia? Moreover, to what extent can spaces like the Friendship Tunnel function as symbolic and educational mediums to foster interreligious harmony—representationally and in practice?

This study operates on the assumption that religious public spaces are not ideologically neutral; instead, they carry symbolic, ideological, and affective meanings that both shape and are shaped by social practices. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's space theory, space is understood as a social product—constructed through the interplay of power relations, symbolic representations, and sensory experiences. Within this framework, the Friendship Tunnel is not merely a physical connector between two houses of worship but a representational space that articulates tolerance, reconciliation, and pluralism in spatial form. The central argument advanced is that religious architecture can function as an active educational agent, shaping collective consciousness around the values of diversity. In this context, public perceptions of the Friendship Tunnel—both supportive and oppositional—reflect the ideological dynamics in post-reform Indonesia, where tolerance symbols are increasingly contested within an open and digitalized public sphere.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach complemented by digital quantitative analysis. It considers the symbolic nature of the object of study and its close relationship with public perception within digital spaces.¹⁰ The study adopts an interdisciplinary framework that integrates architectural studies, cultural analysis, and social media data analytics.¹¹ The primary focus is to explore how the spatial symbol of the Friendship Tunnel is interpreted both in terms of architectural aesthetics and as a site of

¹⁰ Keith N. Hampton, "Studying the Digital: Directions and Challenges for Digital Methods," *Annual Review of Sociology* 43, no. 1 (July 31, 2017): 167–88, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053505>.

¹¹ Zhanara Zhanatovna Turganbayeva, Natalia Lvovna Seitakhmetova, and Shynar Bidakhmetova, "Institutionalization of Peace And Justice in Yassawi Sufi Identity: A Value Context for Postnormal Times," *Journal of Lifestyle and SDGs Review* 5, no. 1 (November 19, 2024): e02827, <https://doi.org/10.47172/2965-730X.SDGsReview.v5.n01.pe02827>.

public response to interfaith tolerance within contemporary Indonesian society. Furthermore, this research is exploratory and critical, aiming to unpack the socio-religious dynamics embedded in a uniquely constructed public religious space that remains rare within Indonesia's urban landscape.¹²

The data for this study consist of two main categories. Primary data were collected from public comments on five YouTube videos posted by national news channels (CNN Indonesia, KompasTV, VIVA.co.id, and Kumparan),¹³ The Friendship Tunnel is featured thematically as a symbol of interfaith tolerance. Secondary data include academic literature from Scopus-indexed articles, national journals, architectural documentation, and credible online news sources. Public comments were gathered using web scraping techniques, resulting in a dataset comprising 2,003 entries. Visual documents, including site plans and spatial design layouts, were obtained from official government documentation and verified media sources. A purposive sampling method was employed to select comments based on their relevance and representativeness in reflecting public opinion toward the space.

To analyze the data, this study employs thematic analysis of architectural features and visual narratives alongside sentiment analysis using IndoBERT to classify public responses into positive, negative, and neutral categories. The sentiment analysis is supplemented with word cloud visualizations to capture the frequency and association of key terms appearing in public comments. This process used the Google Colab platform and Python-based natural language processing (NLP) libraries. An interpretive analysis was also employed to relate empirical findings to theoretical frameworks, including Lefebvre's theory of space, Bhikhu Parekh's concept of pluralism, and the aesthetics of

¹² Franklin Hutabarat, "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society," *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3, no. 6 (November 18, 2023): 6–13, <https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2023.3.6.125>.

¹³ See: Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal-Katedral, Jembatan Toleransi Antar Umat, Kumparan., and Menjajal Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal Katedral, CNN Indonesia., and Masjid Istiqlal Bakal Punya "Terowongan Silaturahmi" ke Katedral, VIVA.CO.ID., and Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal-Katedral, Jokowi: Agar Dua Agama Tak Berseberangan, KOMPASTV., and Pembangunan Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal-Katedral, CNN Indonesia.

religious architecture. The combination of qualitative-interpretive and quantitative-digital methods enables a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic meanings of space and the accompanying layers of public perception.

Results

Islamic Tolerance as a Civilizational Foundation

Tolerance in Islam is a universal value deeply rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. The verse "*There is no compulsion in religion*" (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah 2:256) affirms Islam's respect for freedom of belief. Similarly, *Surah Al-Mumtahanah* (60:8) emphasizes the importance of kindness and justice toward non-Muslims who do not show hostility toward Muslims.¹⁴ The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further reinforced this ethic in the Hadith: "*A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe,*" reflecting a normative basis for peaceful and respectful interpersonal relations.¹⁵ Zahara et al. support this interpretation, emphasizing the necessity of reinterpreting Islamic teachings to sustain the relevance of tolerance in pluralistic societies.¹⁶ Nafisi (2018) also asserts that while Islamic doctrine upholds theological certainty, it simultaneously provides space for social and religious diversity.¹⁷ The Prophet's leadership in Medina, particularly through the Charter of Medina, is a historical precedent for harmonious coexistence within a multi-religious socio-political framework.¹⁸

One of the most contested and frequently misunderstood issues in discussions of Islamic tolerance is the concept of *jihad*. Often misinterpreted as synonymous with violence, *jihad* in Islamic thought encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings—ranging from spiritual

¹⁴ Alfian Nawaziru Zahara, Umi Sumbulah, and Fauzan Zenrif, "Islamic Tolerance in Qur'an and Hadith: Implications for Educational Institutions," *Khazanah Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 3 (2024): 219–30, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15575/kpi.v6i3.43181>.

¹⁵ See: Zahara, Sumbulah, and Zenrif.

¹⁶ Zahara, Sumbulah, and Zenrif.

¹⁷ Shadi Nafisi, "Tolerance in Islam," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (November 22, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5145>.

¹⁸ Muhammad Hifdil Islam, "Tolerance Limitation in Facing Religious Diversity Based On The Teaching of Islam," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 1 (February 7, 2020): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v3i1.483>.

struggle to self-defense.¹⁹ Importantly, offensive jihad is only permitted under specific conditions and is not a justification for imposing belief. In Shi'a theology, as noted by Nafisi (2018), offensive jihad is considered impermissible in the absence of the infallible Imam (*Imam Ma'sūm*).²⁰ Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between *jihad* as a theological construct and ideological violence perpetrated by extremist groups. In this regard, education plays a vital role in correcting misconceptions about *jihad* and Islamic tolerance, as examined by Kuswaya and Ali (2021) and Zahara et al. (2024) through interpretive frameworks of the Qur'an and Hadith.²¹

Islamic educational institutions play a strategic role in internalizing the values of tolerance through curriculum design, school culture, and exemplary leadership.²² Research by Zahara et al. underscores the importance of an integrative pedagogical approach that combines faith, knowledge, and humanism to cultivate a tolerant generation.²³ Bakar and Yunus (2023) reinforce this view by emphasizing that religious moderation in education must bridge textual understanding with contextual interpretation.²⁴ Similarly, Ghazali (2016) and Toyibah et al. (2025) find that pesantren and multicultural-based schools can foster a culture of tolerance through humanistic and inclusive learning practices.²⁵ Therefore, education is not merely a

¹⁹ Nafisi, "Tolerance in Islam."

²⁰ Nafisi.

²¹ Adang Kuswaya and Muhammad Ali, "The Concept of Peace in the Qur'an: A Socio-Thematic Analysis of Muslims' Contestation in Salatiga, Indonesia," *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 9, no. 1 (July 29, 2021): 73, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v9i1.10483>, and Zahara, Sumbulah, and Zenrif, "Islamic Tolerance in Qur'an and Hadith: Implications for Educational Institutions."

²² Munawar Rahmat, Endis Firdaus, and M. Wildan Yahya, "Creating Religious Tolerance through Quran-Based Learning Model for Religious Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (December 31, 2019): 175–88, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v5i2.6467>.

²³ Zahara, Sumbulah, and Zenrif, "Islamic Tolerance in Qur'an and Hadith: Implications for Educational Institutions."

²⁴ Abu Bakar and M Yunus, "Religious Moderation Phenomenon In Indonesia: The Role of Kh. M. Hasyim As'ari Principles of Thought," *Cogito (2066-7094)* 15, no. 1 (2023).

²⁵ Adeng Muchtar Ghazali, "The Concept of Tolerance in Islamic Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 1 (March 8, 2016): 81–97, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v1i1.619>, and Dzuriyatun Toyibah et al., "Being Tolerant in Diaspora: Indonesian Islamic Religiosity, Islamism, and Attitude Towards Other Groups Among Indonesian

medium for knowledge transmission but also a vehicle for value transformation—one that must be deliberately designed to nurture mutual respect and interfaith dialogue.

Beyond its scriptural foundations, local cultural contexts profoundly shape the practice of tolerance in Islam. A study by Sodikin and Umroh in Kaloran, Central Java, demonstrates that Indigenous values such as *sing penting Brayan* (prioritizing communal harmony) and *agama aging aji* (religion as the essence of honor) reinforce the notion of tolerance as a form of social harmony.²⁶ In this community, religion is a personal spiritual garment (*ageman*) that should not be imposed on others. This allows religious belief to coexist with cultural traditions in the creation of peaceful public spaces. Here, religion is practiced in a personal and contextualized manner rather than through doctrinal coercion. The study affirms that the cultural contextualization of religion serves as an effective strategy for cultivating community-based tolerance.²⁷ Thus, Islam in Indonesia cannot be separated from its sociocultural dimensions, which significantly shape the interpretation of religious texts and practices.

Nonetheless, applying tolerance in Islam does not entail the dissolution of doctrinal boundaries or abandoning core *sharī'a* principles. Islam upholds the preservation of religious identity (*'aqīdah*) and its legal frameworks while simultaneously recognizing other faiths' existence and granting their adherents complete freedom of worship.²⁸ Within this framework, tolerance is understood as the recognition and respect for the existence of others without necessitating agreement with their beliefs or practices. By positioning tolerance as a central principle, Islam fosters peaceful social order and lays the foundation for a civilization open to knowledge, culture, and

Community in Australia,” *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal* 8, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.25217/0020258564000>.

²⁶ Ali Sodikin and Roehana Rofaidatun Umroh, “Towards an Interreligious Fiqh: A Study of the Culture-Based Religious Tolerance in the Kaloran Community, Central Java, Indonesia,” *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61, no. 1 (January 21, 2024): 159–80, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2023.611.159-180>.

²⁷ Sodikin and Umroh., Toyibah et al., “Being Tolerant in Diaspora: Indonesian Islamic Religiosity, Islamism, and Attitude Towards Other Groups Among Indonesian Community in Australia.” and Kuswaya and Ali, “The Concept of Peace in the Qur'an: A Socio-Thematic Analysis of Muslims' Contestation in Salatiga, Indonesia.”

²⁸ Sodikin and Umroh, “Towards an Interreligious Fiqh: A Study of the Culture-Based Religious Tolerance in the Kaloran Community, Central Java, Indonesia.”

humanity.²⁹ Historically, classical Islamic civilization achieved remarkable advancements in science, philosophy, and the arts—flourishing within multicultural societies across the Middle East.³⁰ Islam's central strength as a global civilization is its capacity for coexistence, dialogue, and interfaith cooperation.³¹ Thus, tolerance is not merely a moral virtue but an epistemological and sociological foundation for Islamic civilization's historical vitality and future potential.

From the above discussion, it becomes evident that Islam promotes the concept of *rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*—universal mercy—emphasizing that the presence of Muslims should bring blessings and peace to all of humanity.³² This understanding is rooted in Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions, and the interpretations of contemporary Muslim scholars. However, tolerance must be contextualized within the challenges of the modern era and the distinctiveness of local cultures. Islamic education plays a central role in this process, as advocated by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who frames education as a medium for liberation, fraternity, and justice.³³ The implementation of tolerance also demands a willingness to reinterpret religious teachings through inclusive approaches, as thinkers such as Amin Abdullah and Quraish Shihab proposed.³⁴ Thus, the concept of tolerance in Islam is normative, practical, and contextually grounded.

²⁹ Kamaruddin Hasan and Hamdan Juhannis, "Religious Education and Moderation: A Bibliometric Analysis," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2292885>.

³⁰ Durdona Madaminova, "Development Characteristics of The Middle East in The Context of Global Change," *Journal of Social Research in Uzbekistan* 02, no. 02 (May 1, 2022): 34–42, <https://doi.org/10.37547/supsci-jsru-02-02-05>.

³¹ Mehak Batool, Bushra Akram, and Hoor ul Ain, "Demographics and Religious Tolerance Among Youth: Moderating Role of Education," *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research* 39, no. 1 (March 29, 2024): 53–74, <https://doi.org/10.33824/PJPR.2024.39.1.04>.

³² Islam, "Tolerance Limitation In Facing Religious Diversity Based On The Teaching Of Islam."

³³ Tedi Supriyadi et al., "A Decade of Literature Roadmap on Religious Tolerance Education: A Bibliometric Study Using the Scopus Database," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 23, no. 6 (June 30, 2024): 152–70, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.6.7>.

³⁴ Zahara, Sumbulah, and Zenrif, "Islamic Tolerance in Qur'an and Hadith: Implications for Educational Institutions."

The Catholic Ethic of Tolerance: Charity Amid Diversity

The ethic of tolerance in Catholic teaching is grounded in the principle of universal love, manifested through respect for the inherent dignity of every human being as created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). Foundational Church documents such as *Nostra Aetate* from the Second Vatican Council affirm the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.³⁵ The Church acknowledges truth in other faiths and calls upon Catholics to foster peaceful relationships with all people. This principle is internalized in Catholic education, where inclusivity and openness are taught as integral to a humanistic evangelizing mission—not as instruments of coercive conversion.³⁶ Research by Franken (2017) shows that Catholic education that actively integrates interreligious dialogue enhances ethical sensitivity and reduces prejudice in pluralistic societies.³⁷ This ethic of tolerance is also expressed within the global Catholic community, as evidenced by pastoral approaches to marginalized groups such as transgender individuals, as discussed by Adhiambo (2019) and Wright-Maley et al. (2016) in the contexts of Catholic outreach in Kenya and Canada.³⁸

The Catholic Church views tolerance as an active and moral undertaking, not merely a passive acceptance of difference. Catholic tolerance is rooted in Jesus' teachings in the Gospels, particularly the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). This ethic is embodied in Catholic social teaching, which promotes social justice, peace, and reconciliation.³⁹ In religious pluralism, tolerance

³⁵ Amos Yong, "Many Tongues, Many Buddhisms in a Pluralistic World," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 43, no. 2 (June 5, 2016): 357–76, <https://doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.43.2.2016.357-376>.

³⁶ Yong.

³⁷ Leni Franken, "Coping with Diversity in Religious Education: An Overview," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 38, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 105–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2016.1270504>.

³⁸ Jacinta Mary Adhiambo, "Catholic Schools in Kenya: History, Achievements and Challenges," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 11, no. 2 (July 3, 2019): 159–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2019.1641049>, and Cory Wright-Maley et al., "Considering Perspectives on Transgender Inclusion in Canadian Catholic Elementary Schools: Perspectives, Challenges, and Opportunities," *The Journal of Social Studies Research* 40, no. 3 (July 1, 2016): 187–204, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2015.12.001>.

³⁹ Franken, "Coping with Diversity in Religious Education: An Overview."

does not imply the dilution of Catholic identity; rather, it affirms that identity while fully respecting the dignity and presence of others.⁴⁰ Turner (2001) highlights the importance of balancing doctrinal conviction with social openness in multicultural societies, particularly within medical ethics, where interfaith perspectives often intersect.⁴¹ Thus, tolerance constitutes an integral element of Catholic ethics in responding to contemporary challenges such as globalization and increasing religious diversity.

In Indonesia, Catholic tolerance values are evident in interfaith practices across various communities. Amos Yong (2016) highlights how Catholic churches in Asia, including Indonesia, have developed educational and community engagement strategies grounded in justice, the common good, and interfaith dialogue.⁴² Within Catholic minority communities, tolerance functions as a means of social survival and a pathway to integration. This is reflected in Catholics' active participation in interreligious forums and social initiatives involving diverse religious groups.⁴³ Such practices align with Pope Francis's teachings, which emphasize the *culture of encounter* as a path toward peace and social harmony.⁴⁴ The Catholic Church in Indonesia has also been proactive in addressing intolerance issues through multicultural education and cultivating moderation values within Catholic schools.

Historically, the Catholic Church has also been criticized for its doctrinal exclusivism. However, post-Second Vatican Council theological developments have brought about significant transformations in how the Church approaches people of other faiths.⁴⁵ The article *Religious Affiliation and College Student Development* (2012) found that Catholic education contributes positively to the formation of tolerant character among university students, particularly

⁴⁰ Adhiambo, "Catholic Schools in Kenya: History, Achievements and Challenges."

⁴¹ Leigh Turner, "Medical Ethics in a Multicultural Society," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 94, no. 11 (November 1, 2001): 592–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/014107680109401114>.

⁴² Yong, "Many Tongues, Many Buddhisms in a Pluralistic World."

⁴³ Yong.

⁴⁴ Wright-Maley et al., "Considering Perspectives on Transgender Inclusion in Canadian Catholic Elementary Schools: Perspectives, Challenges, and Opportunities."

⁴⁵ Yong, "Many Tongues, Many Buddhisms in a Pluralistic World."

in fostering interfaith empathy and openness to moral diversity.⁴⁶ It suggests that Catholic education can cultivate inclusive individuals when grounded in reflective spirituality and social engagement. In this context, Catholic ethics rejects moral relativism while affirming the dignity of all human beings regardless of belief, maintaining a personal commitment to the truth of one's faith.⁴⁷

Catholic ethics of tolerance is inseparable from a praxis of service that respects personal autonomy and universal human values. In the context of organ donation and bioethics, a study by Robson et al. (2010) illustrates how the Catholic principle of "human dignity" can align with cross-religious humanitarian values—provided it is framed within a shared ethical foundation and the principle of subsidiarity.⁴⁸ It demonstrates that Catholic ethics can adapt to modern bioethical challenges without compromising faith identity.⁴⁹ In pluralistic societies, Catholic tolerance goes beyond mere acceptance of difference; it entails a deep appreciation for the value and dignity of every human being as a creation of God.⁵⁰ It reinforces the Church's role as a moral agent in fostering peace and bridging divisions in an increasingly polarized world.

⁴⁶ Small and Bowman, "Religious Affiliation and College Student Development: A Literature Review and Synthesis."

⁴⁷ Margarita Galat and Stephen Guzon, "A Critical Review of Moral Relativism, Universalism/Absolutism and the Teaching of the Catholic Church on Catholic Morality," *Divine Word International Journal of Management and Humanities (DWIJMH)* (ISSN: 2980-4817) 1, no. 1 (December 1, 2022): 102–11, <https://doi.org/10.62025/dwijnh.v1i1.9>.

⁴⁸ Noor Zurani Md Haris Robson, Azad Hassan Razack, and Norman Dublin, "Review Paper: Organ Transplants: Ethical, Social, and Religious Issues in a Multicultural Society," *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health* 22, no. 3 (July 10, 2010): 271–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1010539509357446>.

⁴⁹ Turner, "Medical Ethics in a Multicultural Society."

⁵⁰ Nur Amali Ibrahim, "Homophobic Muslims: Emerging Trends in Multireligious Singapore," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 4 (October 27, 2016): 955–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417516000499>.

The Aesthetic and Spatial Architecture of the Istiqlal–Cathedral Interface

Figure 1. The Friendship Tunnel between Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral Church



Source: <https://pu.go.id/berita/bangun-ikon-kebhinekaan-progres-terowongan-silaturahmi-masjid-istiqlal-gereja-katedral-capai-2089>

Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral Church of Jakarta are not merely two monumental structures standing side by side in the heart of the capital—they are two *architectural subjects* that silently engage in dialogue, shaping an urban landscape imbued with meaning. In Henri Lefebvre’s 1991 conception, space is neither a neutral nor a technical outcome of construction; it is a social product shaped by power relations, symbolic meanings, and cultural practices.⁵¹ When applied to the spatial relationship between Istiqlal and the Cathedral, the Friendship Tunnel emerges as a physical connector and as a spatial articulation of interfaith dialogue. This space becomes a concrete expression of *representational space*—a lived and imagined environment animated by values such as tolerance, peace, and

⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre, “The Production of Space (1991),” in *The People, Place, and Space Reader* (Routledge, 2014), 289–93.

fraternity. Through Lefebvre's lens, the relationship between these two houses of worship gives rise to an "urban body" that resists religious segregation through an aesthetics of coexistence.⁵² In this context, a rhetorical and profoundly symbolic question arises: "*If Istiqlal and the Cathedral were given life, who is to say they would not fall in love?*" This question touches not only the humanistic core but also invites us to imagine that architecture, too, possesses affectivity and that from opposition can emerge affection between distinct identities.

Furthermore, Bhikhu Parekh's theory of pluralism offers a philosophical foundation for interpreting the Friendship Tunnel as a pluralistic public space. According to Parekh in 2001, genuine pluralism does not merely tolerate difference. It actively cultivates a space where diverse identities can engage, learn from one another, and enrich each other without compromising their distinctiveness.⁵³ Within this framework, the spatial proximity between Istiqlal and the Cathedral is not a threat to either faith but rather an expression of mutual trust in universal values such as love, mercy, and justice. The tunnel thus emerges as a symbol of the "in-between space"—an *interstitial space*—that bridges not only two buildings but two belief systems, two historical trajectories, and two communities often presumed to be in dialogue impasse. This perspective reinforces the idea that aesthetics in architecture is not limited to visual beauty but also conveys moral values and the ethics of coexistence. Like the *House of One* project in Berlin, as examined in *Architectures of Tolerance* (2023), multifaith architecture acquires meaning only when socially inhabited and interpreted by its users.⁵⁴ Materials and design mark the beginning; meaning grows through lived experience, perception, and shared narratives layered upon it.

The aesthetic dimension of the Istiqlal–Cathedral space can be observed through the dialectic between traditionality and modernity. Istiqlal, with its monumental modernist design, evokes the grandeur of postcolonial Indonesian Islam through bold lines and expansive open

⁵² Lefebvre.

⁵³ B. Parekh, "Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory," *Ethnicities* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 109–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879680100100112>.

⁵⁴ Marian Burchardt and Johanna Haering, "Architectures of Tolerance," in *Interreligious Encounters in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2023), 97–118, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003228448-7>.

spaces.⁵⁵ In contrast, with its European neo-Gothic style, the Cathedral conveys contemplative serenity through towering stained-glass windows.⁵⁶ As Antonakaki in 2007 notes, light in religious architecture functions not merely as a utilitarian element but as a “transcendental agent” that animates sacred spaces as mediums of spiritual experience.⁵⁷ In this context, the filtered light through Istiqlal’s lattices and the shadows dancing along the Cathedral’s corridors both generate spatial experiences that—despite stylistic differences—equally evoke the divine. Hiçsönmezler et al. in 2023 further argue that spatial aesthetic perception is deeply shaped by one’s religious tradition and spirituality, where modernity may be seen as beautiful to some yet alien to others.⁵⁸ These two houses of worship, with contrasting yet coexisting architectural vocabularies, convey a shared message: that there is no singular form of religious beauty but rather a pluralism of spiritual expressions embedded within an inclusive urban landscape.

The Friendship Tunnel subtly yet powerfully reinforces the aesthetic message of tolerance. The tunnel is not adorned with lavish ornamentation; its simplicity embodies a *narrative connector*—a symbol of the acknowledgment that a single faith must not monopolize public space in a plural society but must function as a *shared sacred space*.⁵⁹ In the Indonesian context, this vision aligns closely with the national philosophy of *Pancasila* and the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). A study by Junaeny et al. in 2024 on the architectural acculturation of the Cheng Hoo Mosque demonstrates that when religious symbols are framed through intercultural design, they

⁵⁵ Aryanti and Achmadi, “Framing and Visualising Nationhood: Istiqlal Mosque and the Interiority of the Independence Square, Jakarta.”

⁵⁶ Shania Cantika, Erlina Novianti, and Silviana Amanda Aurelia, “Gaya Arsitektur Neo Gotik Pada Gereja Katedral Jakarta,” *Jurnal Dimensi DKV: Seni Rupa Dan Desain* 9, no. 1 (2024): 113–28.

⁵⁷ Theodora Antonakaki, “Lighting and Spatial Structure in Religious Architecture: A Comparative Study of a Byzantine Church and an Early Ottoman Mosque in the City of Thessaloniki,” in *Proceedings of the 6th International Space Syntax Symposium*, vol. 57, 2007, 1–14.

⁵⁸ İlke Hiçsönmezler, Arzu Cilasun Kunduracı, and Fatma İpek Ek, “The Perception of Spatial Atmosphere in Traditional and Modern Mosques in Aesthetic Context,” *Tasarım + Kuram* 19, no. 38 (March 27, 2023): 16–39, <https://doi.org/10.59215/tasarimkuram.2023.370>.

⁵⁹ Aryanti and Achmadi, “Framing and Visualising Nationhood: Istiqlal Mosque and the Interiority of the Independence Square, Jakarta.”

gain broader acceptance as representations of peace and openness.⁶⁰ The Friendship Tunnel thus serves not merely as an architectural connector but as a visual and emotional pedagogical space—educating the public that coexistence does not require erasing identity but rather weaving diverse identities together in a mutually respectful spatial fabric.⁶¹ Architecture becomes a “silent preacher” that advocates for recognizing differences in this context.

Ultimately, as Emily Pott in 2024 emphasized in her study on mosque aesthetics, religious architecture possesses the capacity to transform not only space but also the consciousness of those who encounter it.⁶² Through sensory experience—seeing, touching, walking, reflecting—visitors do not merely “use” sacred space; they are, in turn, shaped by its presence.⁶³ In the context of Istiqlal, the Cathedral, and the space between them, we are not speaking of aesthetics in a narrow sense but of how space can serve as an agent of reconciliation, a site of learning, and a locus of encounter. Thus, when members of the public half-jokingly remark, “If Istiqlal and the Cathedral were given life, who is to say they would not fall in love?”, it is not merely humor—it is a reflection of the idea that spatial beauty can unite even the most distinct entities, provided they are given room to know one another.

Discussion

Social and Cultural Impacts and Community Perceptions

This study employs a social media-based data analysis approach to understand public responses to the presence of the Friendship Tunnel connecting Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral Church in Jakarta. Data

⁶⁰ Arini Junaeny et al., “Menelaah Sikap Toleransi dalam Akulturasi Suku dan Agama pada Arsitektur Masjid Muhammad Cheng Hoo,” *Bambutu* 6, no. 1 (May 30, 2024): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.53744/bambutu.v6i1.85>.

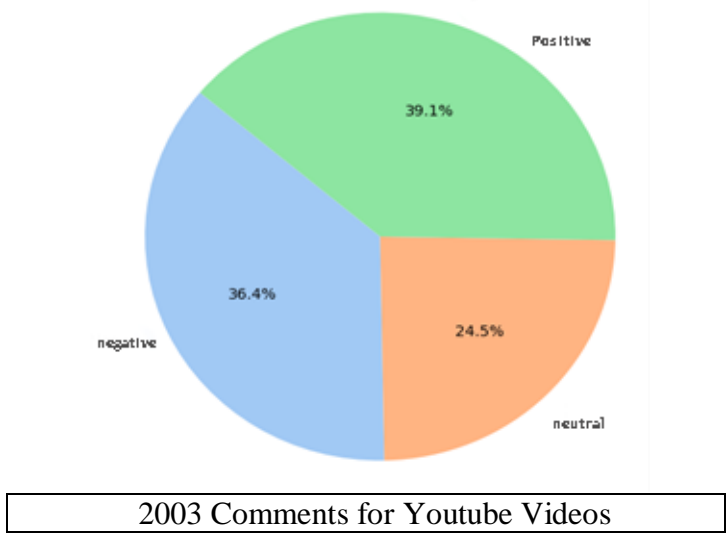
⁶¹ Ş. Ebru Okuyucu, “Evaluation of Spatial Fictions, Design Concepts, Aesthetic Quests of Traditional, Modern Mosques from Past to Present and the Analysis of Mosque Samples,” *Civil Engineering and Architecture* 4, no. 2 (April 2016): 54–66, <https://doi.org/10.13189/cea.2016.040203>.

⁶² Emily Pott, “The Aesthetics of the Mosque and Its Objects,” in *Mosque* (London: Routledge, 2024), 95–106, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003401001-11>.

⁶³ Samira Ashari and Amin Maleka, “A Survey of Nasir Al-Molk Mosque in Shiraz Based on the Aesthetics of Islamic Art,” *Eidos* 15, no. 21 (January 17, 2023): 59–71, <https://doi.org/10.29019/eidos.v15i21.1020>.

were collected from five YouTube videos uploaded by national news channels such as CNN Indonesia, Kompas TV, Kumparan, and VIVA.co.id, all explicitly featuring narratives on interreligious tolerance through this project.⁶⁴ Two thousand three (2003) unique comments were gathered and subsequently analyzed using an IndoBERT-based sentiment classification model. These data serve not only as a representation of public perception but also as a discursive reflection of how society interprets architectural space as a social symbol. It reinforces the discussion in the previous section—that religious space, as theorized by Lefebvre and Parekh,⁶⁵ is inseparable from the social practices and systems of meaning embedded within it. Accordingly, public responses to the Friendship Tunnel provide a critical indicator of how religious public space can foster dialogue and reinforce interfaith tolerance.

Figure 2. Proportion of Public Sentiment towards Friendship Tunnel



⁶⁴ See: Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal-Katedral, Jembatan Toleransi Antar Umat, Kumparan., and Menjajal Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal Katedral, CNN Indonesia., and Masjid Istiqlal Bakal Punya “Terowongan Silaturahmi” ke Katedral, VIVA.CO.ID., and Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal-Katedral, Jokowi: Agar Dua Agama Tak Berseberangan, KOMPASTV., and Pembangunan Terowongan Silaturahmi Istiqlal-Katedral, CNN Indonesia.

⁶⁵ Lefebvre, “The Production of Space (1991).” and Parekh, “Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory.”

Description	Perscentage
Positive comment	39,14% (784)
Neutral comment	24,46% (490)
Negative comment	36,40% (729)

Source: Sentiment analysis using IndoBERT via Google Colab

Sentiment analysis of 2,003 comments from five YouTube videos revealed that public responses were distributed across three main categories: 39.14% positive, 36.40% negative, and 24.46% neutral, as visualized in Figure 2. The slightly dominant positive responses reflect a sense of optimism and emotional attachment toward the project, which is widely viewed as a symbol of interfaith reconciliation and a strengthening of national identity rooted in tolerance. Expressions such as “may this be an example for the world” and “moved to see this in Indonesia” frequently appeared, highlighting admiration for what is perceived as a reflection of the Indonesian spirit. Conversely, negative comments exhibited resistance rooted in conservative narratives that suspect the project of compromising religious doctrine or advancing a syncretic agenda—illustrated by phrases like “do not mix religions” and “a hidden political agenda.” Neutral comments focused on technical issues such as budget, parking access, or design features. These findings suggest that individuals' ideological orientations and religious affiliations significantly shape public acceptance of tolerance symbols like the Friendship Tunnel.⁶⁶

Figure 3. Word cloud of public comments on YouTube related to the Friendship Tunnel



⁶⁶ Rahmat, Firdaus, and Yahya, “Creating Religious Tolerance through Quran-Based Learning Model for Religious Education.”



Source: Analysis using IndoBERT via Google Colab

The word cloud visualization of positive comments reinforces the prior sentiment findings, with the dominant appearance of terms such as “tolerance,” “proud,” “create,” “peace,” and “hopefully.” These keywords reflect the public’s perception of the Friendship Tunnel as a symbol of interreligious harmony and national unity. Phrases like “proud to be an Indonesian” and “hopefully the world follows this example” reveal a strong sense of emotional engagement. The tunnel is not merely understood as an infrastructural project but as a spatial articulation of *Pancasila* values. It affirms Bhikhu Parekh’s assertion that pluralism must be realized through spaces of meaningful interaction that foster mutual enrichment.⁶⁷ As such, the tunnel’s presence represents a concrete manifestation of *representational space*—a site where spiritual experience intersects with social aspiration.⁶⁸ Therefore, religious architecture in the public sphere fulfills not only a physical function but also serves as a medium for social education and a symbolic arena for interfaith encounters.

Although positive responses were substantial, the word cloud visualization of negative comments reveals a contrasting narrative. Terms such as “don’t,” “shirk,” “agenda,” “religion,” and “kadrun” frequently appear, indicating that a segment of the public views this symbol of moderation with suspicion. Negative commentary is often rooted in fears of religious amalgamation—perceived within conservative frameworks as a threat to doctrinal purity. Political undertones also emerge in several comments, linking the project to image-building strategies or perceived hegemonic state agendas. As Lefebvre posits, space serves as a site of contested meaning, and in this

⁶⁷ Parekh, “Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory.”

⁶⁸ Hiçsönmezler, Cilasun Kunduracı, and Ek, “The Perception of Spatial Atmosphere in Traditional and Modern Mosques in Aesthetic Context.”

context, the Friendship Tunnel becomes a focal point of symbolic conflict between religious pluralism and exclusivism.⁶⁹ This polarization is critical to acknowledge, as it underscores the reality that while architecture may be designed to unify, the public's interpretation of it can vary significantly—shaped by one's social background, education, and religious affiliation.

Meanwhile, the word cloud visualization of neutral comments indicates a public focus on the technical and functional aspects of the project. Words such as “parking,” “road,” “access,” and “cost” suggest that a portion of social media users are disengaged from ideological or theological discourse, instead evaluating the project based on its public utility. It is noteworthy, as it demonstrates that perceptions of tolerance-related symbols do not always emerge within explicitly religious frameworks but also through citizens' everyday experiences with urban infrastructure. In this context, the Friendship Tunnel is viewed as a facility that facilitates mobility and enhances logistical connectivity between two key urban landmarks. While these responses may lack overt value-laden language, they nonetheless reflect a form of passive acceptance—signaling social legitimacy for the project. Through Lefebvre's framework, this can be interpreted as a *practical space of use*, in which a space originally constructed with ideological intent begins to integrate into the fabric of daily urban life.⁷⁰

Quantitative and visual analyses of public responses indicate that the Friendship Tunnel has transcended its physical function as a religious infrastructure and evolved into a symbolic discourse on tolerance and pluralism in Indonesia.⁷¹ The predominance of positive comments reflects a collective aspiration for this space to embody the values of *Pancasila* and interfaith harmony. However, the emergence of negative opinions reveals that public space is inherently dynamic and interpretative; as Henri Lefebvre asserts, every space is a site of contested meaning.⁷² The tunnel thus serves as a point of convergence between inclusive ideals and conservative anxieties. Meanwhile, neutral comments focusing on technical aspects demonstrate how

⁶⁹ Lefebvre, “The Production of Space (1991).”

⁷⁰ Lefebvre.

⁷¹ Aryanti and Achmadi, “Framing and Visualising Nationhood: Istiqlal Mosque and the Interiority of the Independence Square, Jakarta.”

⁷² Lefebvre, “The Production of Space (1991).”

symbolic spaces can also integrate into the practical needs of urban citizens. In this regard, the Friendship Tunnel exemplifies how architecture can educate the public through symbolic presence and social interaction.⁷³ Nevertheless, the tolerance it aims to represent requires sustained discursive engagement to prevent its meaning from being diluted or distorted amid social fragmentation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Friendship Tunnel between Istiqlal Mosque and the Cathedral Church is not merely a physical connector but a spatial symbol of interfaith dialogue embedded within the social imagination of Indonesian society. Architectural and aesthetic analyses reveal that the tunnel's design embodies values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, as understood through the theoretical frameworks of Henri Lefebvre and Bhikhu Parekh's pluralism. Sentiment analysis of 2,003 YouTube comments further shows that the majority of the public perceives the tunnel positively—as a representation of religious harmony and Indonesian identity—despite the persistence of ideological resistance from conservative groups. These findings affirm that religious public space can serve a strategic role in articulating national identity by simultaneously expressing universal and localized values.

This study contributes to advancing interdisciplinary research at the intersection of architecture, religious studies, and public communication by positioning religious public space as a field for articulating values of tolerance. Rather than focusing solely on the physical form of space, this study discusses how space is socially inhabited and emotionally interpreted by the public. By integrating architectural aesthetics, spatial production theory, and IndoBERT-based social media data analysis, this article offers an alternative methodology for interpreting the symbolism of religious spaces in the digital era. Moreover, the synthetic approach that bridges Islamic and Catholic values enriches the discourse on religious coexistence in Indonesia, which has often been treated in siloed disciplinary frameworks. As such, this article presents a comprehensive analytical

⁷³ Toyibah et al., “Being Tolerant in Diaspora: Indonesian Islamic Religiosity, Islamism, and Attitude Towards Other Groups Among Indonesian Community in Australia.”

model for understanding spaces of tolerance as dynamic, multidimensional, and socially lived phenomena.

The primary strength of this study lies in its ability to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods, along with the use of up-to-date empirical data from social media to capture public perception dynamics directly. Word cloud visualization and sentiment classification offer real-time insight into how religious public spaces are received within digital platforms. However, certain limitations remain, particularly regarding data representativeness: YouTube comments do not fully reflect the diverse spectrum of public opinion across social classes, geographic regions, and educational backgrounds. Furthermore, this study does not include direct user experience through field observation or in-depth interviews, thus relying heavily on secondary interpretations of spatial meaning. Therefore, the findings should be understood as a partial reflection of public perception within the digital sphere rather than a comprehensive generalization of broader societal attitudes.

Future research is encouraged to broaden the methodological scope by incorporating ethnographic approaches, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews with field users, to understand better how the Friendship Tunnel is used and interpreted in everyday practice. Comparative studies could also be conducted on other interfaith religious spaces in major Indonesian cities to examine how tolerance symbols are constructed within varying sociocultural contexts. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration with social psychology and urban studies could deepen insights into how spatial aesthetics influence interfaith perception and behavior. Further research is also needed to trace the long-term impact of such spaces on public policy, multicultural education, and social reconciliation—particularly amid the growing polarization of identity politics.

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