



Archipel

Études interdisciplinaires sur le monde insulindien

111 | 2026

Archipel 111/2026

Effective Fatwas and Shariatization in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/archipel/10169>

DOI: 10.4000/16fx3

ISSN: 2104-3655

Publisher

Association Archipel

Printed version

Date of publication: June 10, 2026

Number of pages: 213-239

ISBN: 978-2-910513-99-3

ISSN: 0044-8613

Electronic reference

Syafiq Hasyim, "Effective Fatwas and Shariatization in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore", *Archipel* [Online], 111 | 2026, Online since 02 June 2026, connection on 30 June 2026. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/archipel/10169>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/16fx3>



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Effective Fatwas and Shariatisation in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

The emergence of nation-states in post-colonial Southeast Asia has often been interpreted as a sign of waning enthusiasm among Muslims for political Islam. Historians such as Siddique, Hussain, A.H. Johns, Merle Calvin Ricklefs, Azyumardi Azra, and Michael Laffan argue that the formation of modern nation-states systematically marginalised political Islam from the public sphere, reflecting a broader decline in the relevance of Islamic formalism in the region.¹ However, scholars including K.S. Nathan, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Sri Kumar, and Robert Hefner have highlighted a growing aspiration among Southeast Asian Muslims to reassert sharia in recent decades.² This revival has been pejoratively described as the “Talibanisation” or “creeping shariatisation” of Southeast Asia.³ In Indonesia, this trend is manifested in a conservative shift, marked by an increasing inclination towards Islamic values in both political orientation and everyday lifestyle,⁴ as well as the gradual integration of sharia into national legal frameworks.

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1. Ibrahim et al. 1985; Johns 1985; Ricklefs 2009; Azra 2004; Laffan 2003.

2. Nathan and Kamali 2005; Hefner 2009; Kumar and Siddique 2008, p. 24.

3. Turner 2011, p. 156; Singh 2007.

4. Van Bruinessen 2013; Sebastian et al. 2021.

Despite the apparent sidelining of political Islam by post-colonial governments, the role of fatwas remains largely intact and continues to hold significance. While political Islam is often dismissed—sometimes characterised as “medieval rubbish,” an expression Michael Laffan borrows from Snouck Hurgronje⁵—fatwas have persisted as essential instruments of religious guidance. They are not only consulted for ritual observance but also shape Muslim engagement in legal, political, economic, and social spheres. Thus, the Muslim community continues to regard fatwas as vital sources of religious authority, regardless of whether the governing political structure aligns with political Islam or embraces a secular framework. The issuance of fatwas, deeply rooted in Islamic tradition, maintains its relevance across diverse nations. This is true whether they are governed by sharia-based systems such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, or adopt more democratic and secular models like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.⁶

This article argues that the institutionalisation of fatwas has become a significant force driving the process of shariatisation in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The growing presence of fatwas within legal and public domains in these countries transforms shariatisation into what may be described as a “common sight,” particularly in the realms of halal certification, Islamic finance, and public perceptions of religious propriety (*proper Islam*).

This trend is evident not only in Muslim-majority states but also in countries where Muslims constitute a minority. Importantly, the incorporation of fatwas into national legal frameworks does not necessitate the adoption of a political Islam model; rather, it can emerge organically within secular and non-theocratic states.

This phenomenon, referred to here as “effective fatwas,”⁷ challenges the prevailing assumption that secular nation-states necessarily marginalise Islamic legal traditions. By examining the institutional architecture behind fatwa-making in these three national contexts, the article seeks to illustrate how effective fatwas contribute to shariatisation by serving as a conduit between religious doctrine and modern state governance.

The study focuses on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore as key case studies in which fatwas have played an instrumental role in driving shariatisation. Indonesia presents the largest case, with a predominantly Muslim population and a secular political system that nonetheless shows

5. Laffan 2003, p. 93; Hurgronje 1915.

6. Saat 2018a; Saat 2018b; Vogel 2011; Musa and Tan 2017.

7. “A fatwa does not become socially meaningful merely by being issued; it becomes effective only when it is accepted, invoked, and acted upon within a given social context.” (Masud, Messick & Powers, eds., 1996). Masud (2013) also emphasizes that the authority of the mufti is not sufficient in itself and that the real effectiveness of a fatwa depends on social, political, and institutional conditions.

increasing accommodation of sharia in public life. Malaysia, Southeast Asia's second-largest Muslim-majority country, formally recognises Islam as the religion of the federation, while its legal and political systems largely operate outside a formal sharia framework. Singapore, despite having a Muslim minority, shares historical and cultural ties with Malaysia and, as a secular state, selectively accommodates sharia in certain aspects of Muslim life.

This article builds on a growing body of research that documents the expanding integration of fatwas into national legal frameworks in these countries.⁸ The emerging scholarship demonstrates that shariatisation is actively taking place, shaped by fatwas and institutional mechanisms, despite significant variations in theological orientation and political structure. Moreover, the article explores how the nation-state model in each context interacts with the process of shariatisation through the institutionalisation of fatwas. Central to this inquiry is the concept of "effective fatwas," which is examined through its definition, manifestation, and legal influence at both national and local levels. The analysis is grounded in case studies of fatwa-producing bodies in each country: the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) in Indonesia, the National Fatwa Council (NFC) in Malaysia, and the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) in Singapore. By doing so, the study underscores how fatwas have become powerful instruments in shaping legal norms and public policies, especially in areas such as Islamic banking, halal certification, and other sharia-compliant practices.

Nation-State and Fatwa-Making

In Indonesia, the framework of the modern nation-state has not diminished the role or influence of fatwas. Established in 1975 with the endorsement of the Suharto regime, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) has evolved into a highly influential institution, comprising 491 district branches and 33 provincial offices. Although the MUI is formally a non-state body, it has forged strong institutional ties with various levels of government.⁹ Since Indonesia's political reform era began in 1998, the MUI has asserted greater autonomy, shifting from a government-dependent institution to one that independently pursues its own agenda. A central aspect of this agenda has been the progressive integration of sharia into the national legal system through the strategic issuance of fatwas.¹⁰

In Malaysia, the institutionalisation of fatwas is more formalised due to Islam's constitutional designation as the official religion of the federation.¹¹ Although fatwas are legally categorised as non-binding opinions in the

8. Pasuni 2018; S. Hasyim 2023; Saat 2018a; Saat 2018b; Daniels 2017.

9. Mudzhar 1993; MUI 2011.

10. Hasyim 2023; Ichwan 2013; Adams 2012.

11. Cammilleri 2013; Holst 2012; Rabb 2025; Moustapha 2018.

classical Islamic tradition,¹² their legal standing is reinforced through state mechanisms. Once gazetted, a fatwa carries legal consequences: non-compliance can result in fines of up to RM 5,000 or a prison sentence of up to three years.¹³ At the federal level, fatwas are issued under the authority of the National Fatwa Council of Malaysia (Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan bagi Hal Ehwal Agama Islam Malaysia), which operates in close coordination with JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), the Department of Islamic Development. Additionally, the sultan of nine out of thirteen states in Malaysia is accompanied by a mufti who serves as the religious authority in that jurisdiction.¹⁴ In comparison to Indonesia and Singapore, Malaysia has more effectively integrated fatwas into its legal and governance structures.¹⁵ Although fatwa institutions at both federal (*kebangsaan*) and state (*negeri*) levels are robust and widely utilised by the population, the dual system occasionally produces inconsistencies and conflicting rulings, revealing the structural complexity of Malaysia's fatwa-making system.¹⁶

During the Melaka Sultanate, Singapore was a fief of Melaka before the Portuguese conquered Melaka in 1511. It was under the Sultanate of Johor from the mid-16th century, and under the Sultanate of Johor-Riau from early 17th century until complete British ownership in 1824.¹⁷ The region had a long-established tradition of Islamic governance, including the appointment of muftis, *qāḍīs* (judges), and other religious officials.¹⁸

In 1880, the Muhammadan Marriage Ordinance was enacted, marking one of the earliest formal recognitions of Islamic legal authority. Singapore gained full independence in 1959, briefly joined Malaysia in 1963, and became a fully sovereign state in 1965. In 1966, the government passed the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), establishing the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and formalising fatwa issuance as a function of the state.¹⁹ Through MUIS, both the office of the mufti and the issuance of fatwas became *de facto* components of Singapore's state apparatus. As such, Singaporean fatwas are expected to align with state interests,²⁰ serving as a platform for negotiation between the government and the Muslim community. This relationship helps maintain Singapore's vision of a "shared home" for all

12. Rabb 2025.

13. Musa 2022, p. 5.

14. Hasyim 2023; Musa and Tan 2017.

15. Kasan 2008; Nasohah 2005.

16. Kasan 2008, pp. 26–27.

17. "Singapore Before Raffles" 1986; National Museum of Singapore 2019.

18. Pasuni 2018.

19. Kuchit 2018.

20. Ibid., p. 200; Pasuni 2018, p. 60.

citizens.²¹ MUIS-issued fatwas play a crucial role in assuring Singaporean Muslims that their right to observe sharia is protected within the broader framework of the secular state.

Despite their distinct historical, social, and political contexts, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore all share a notable reliance on fatwas as a means of mediating the relationship between sharia and modern governance. In many cases, fatwas have evolved from routine legal opinions into “effective fatwas” in response to societal needs or the strategic interests of religious and political elites. While Islamic legal theory typically categorises fatwas as non-binding, their role in these three states underscores their capacity to embed sharia within national legal frameworks—without necessitating the creation of a formal sharia state.²² In this sense, fatwas operate as instruments of a “living sharia,” extending beyond personal religious observance to influence domains such as economic regulation and family law.²³ The following section explores specific cases in which effective fatwas emerge and function as key mechanisms of shariatisation.

Effective Fatwas and Their Applications

A fatwa is a non-binding religious opinion given by qualified Islamic scholars in response to a specific question about how Islamic law applies in a particular situation. A fatwa is an atomic dimension of Islamic legal discourse and practice that has an impact on Islamic legal formation.²⁴ It is merely guidance for believers, not the decision of an Islamic Court (*qada'*), and not automatically enforceable.²⁵ A classical jurist, for instance Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī, differentiates fatwa from *qada*, noting that a fatwa is to give an *ikhbār* (information) on *ilzām* (obligatory) or *ibāḥa* (allowable), while *qada* is to issue an obligatory ruling based on the decision of a judge in court.²⁶ An effective fatwa is one that not only reflects the doctrinal authority of sharia but also shapes national law, policy, and societal norms. In this context, shariatisation refers not merely to the broad application of Islamic principles but to their tangible impact on public life. An effective fatwa thus becomes more than a theological pronouncement; it serves as a significant force that influences regulation, legislation, and public policy. It represents a dynamic space where rigid sharia doctrine intersects with the fluid realities of social, cultural, political, and human contexts. For example, fatwas on halal certification and Islamic banking demonstrate how traditional legal concepts can be adapted to modern systems of economic regulation.

21. Kadir 2004.

22. Pasuni 2018; Kasan 2008; Hasyim 2023.

23. Daniels 2017.

24. Awass 2023, p. 3; Rabb 2025.

25. Badreddine 2020, p. 234.

26. al-Qarafi 2003, p. 120; Badreddine 2020, p. 236.

To be considered effective, a fatwa must establish both discursive and practical relationships with its audience—eliciting reactions from state institutions and social actors alike. These responses may not always take the form of formal laws, but they frequently shape public discourse. A notable example is the 2017 blasphemy case involving former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok). The largest Islamist protests in Indonesian history—held in 2016 and 2017—were sparked by an MUI fatwa that labelled Ahok's interpretation of *al-Mā'ida* 52 (regarding leadership in Islam) as blasphemous.²⁷ In this case, the fatwa triggered not only legal action but also political mobilisation and social unrest, thereby meeting the criteria of an effective fatwa through its widespread influence.

The issuance of effective fatwas across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore reveals both the diversity and contextual specificity of fatwa-making in Southeast Asia. While often framed as authoritative legal opinions, many fatwas—such as those declaring Ahmadiyah a deviant sect—neglect the pluralistic traditions that exist within and beyond the bounds of Sunni orthodoxy. These rulings illustrate differing models of shariatisation, which have led to prohibitions on practices ranging from yoga to secularism, pluralism, and liberalism. Ultimately, an effective fatwa is one that bridges Islamic legal theory with practical application, exerting influence on both state policy and societal norms in a way that is substantial and enduring.

The presence of effective fatwas in Singapore, despite the absence of an Islamic legal system, demonstrates that sharia can still shape public life even in Muslim-minority settings. Indonesia, with its majority-Muslim population, and Singapore, with its minority-Muslim demographic, both exhibit environments in which fatwas—particularly those supported by strong institutional frameworks—can become powerful tools of shariatation.

To assess the effectiveness of fatwas in these three countries, this study adopts a framework based on three key criteria:

1. **Judicial Recognition:** A fatwa is considered effective when courts and judicial bodies recognise it as a legal reference or consideration.
2. **Social Acceptance:** A fatwa achieves effectiveness when it is internalised and actively applied by society, including civil society organisations, as part of their religious or social practice.
3. **Regulatory Incorporation:** A fatwa becomes effective when it is integrated into official legal or policy frameworks, influencing lawmaking and enforcement mechanisms.

A fatwa needs not meet all three criteria to be deemed effective; in some cases, fulfilment of even one or two is sufficient to establish its influence.

27. Peterson 2020; Hasyim 2021.

The following sections analyse key cases of effective fatwas that have been legislated, enforced, or widely adopted in the legal systems and daily practices of Muslim communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In these countries, fatwas are generally classified into four broad categories: beliefs (*‘aqīda*), acts of worship (*‘ibāda*), public morality and lifestyle (including dietary regulations), and business transactions (*mu‘āmalah*), which encompass areas such as Islamic banking and finance.²⁸ This study focuses on three representative examples: fatwas addressing deviant Islamic sects (within the category of belief), halal standards (within lifestyle regulations), and Islamic economic practices (within *mu‘āmalah*). These cases have been selected due to their substantial influence on both public policy and legal frameworks in each country.

Deviant Islam

Effective fatwas concerning so-called deviant Islamic sects have emerged in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In these contexts, “deviant” refers to groups perceived as heterodox in relation to Sunni orthodoxy, which is considered the standard theological and legal tradition. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, such fatwas have been incorporated into judicial practices, embraced by segments of the population, and integrated into regulatory frameworks—criteria that render them “effective.” In Singapore, however, such fatwas do not hold the same regulatory weight.

a) Indonesia

In Indonesia, fatwas targeting deviant sects primarily focus on minority groups such as the Ahmadiyah and Shia, labelled by the Indonesian Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, or MUI) as *aliran sesat* (deviant streams). The Ahmadiyah movement arrived in Indonesia in 1924, well before the country’s independence in 1945 and the formation of the MUI in 1975.²⁹ In 1980, the MUI issued a fatwa entitled *Ahmadiyah Qadiyan* (Qadiyan Ahmadiyah), declaring this sect of Ahmadis to be deviant due to its recognition of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet—despite the group’s adherence to Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī jurisprudence.³⁰ This fatwa, however, had minimal effect during Suharto’s New Order regime, which prioritised national unity, diversity, and pluralism, and thus discouraged the persecution of religious minorities.

Following Suharto’s resignation in 1998, the political climate shifted, and the fatwa gained renewed relevance. In 2005, under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the MUI reaffirmed its earlier fatwa with a newer ruling on *Aliran Ahmadiyah* (Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, No. 11/MUNAS VII/

28. MUI 2011; JAKIM 2015.

29. Benda 1958, p. 52.

30. MUI 2011, pp. 96–100; MUI n.d.

MUI/15/2005),³¹ effectively positioning itself as the principal arbiter of *'aqīda* (Islamic creed) in Indonesia.³² This reaffirmation elevated the MUI's authority, granting it *de facto* recognition from the state as the highest religious body responsible for defining the theological boundaries of Islam in Indonesia.

This heightened legitimacy emboldened the MUI to issue further rulings against groups it deemed heretical. Consequently, in 2005, a coalition of radical Islamic organisations used the MUI's fatwa to justify the first major wave of anti-Ahmadiyah violence in Indonesia's history. The group attacked and destroyed the Ahmadiyah national headquarters in Parung, Bogor, West Java, arguing that violence against deviant sects was religiously sanctioned. This marked the most significant act of persecution against the Ahmadiyah community to date and catalysed further attacks by Islamist militants in various regions across Indonesia.

Since 2005, mainstream Islamic groups have increasingly pressured the Indonesian government to formally outlaw the Ahmadiyah and exclude them from the national Muslim identity. This hostility intensified when the government issued the Joint Decree of Three Ministers (Minister of Religious Affairs, Attorney General, and Minister of Home Affairs), formally restricting the public activities of the Ahmadiyah. Maftuh Basuni, who served as Minister of Religious Affairs from 2004 to 2009, publicly stated that this policy mirrored Malaysia's approach to the Ahmadiyah issue. His remarks indicated a shared policy discourse among Muslim-majority states in Southeast Asia, aligning with broader regional trends.³³

A further significant example of an effective fatwa concerns *Paham Syiah* (Shiism) in Indonesia. Issued by the MUI in 1984, this fatwa served to remind Indonesian Muslims to be vigilant (*waspada*) regarding the presence of Shia Islam.³⁴ Historically, the presence of Shia Islam in Indonesia has been part of a broader historiographical debate regarding the origins of Islam in the archipelago. Some historians argue that Islam first entered Indonesia through Shia channels from Persia.³⁵ However, this narrative has been largely dismissed by Sunni scholars, who maintain that Sunni Islam was the first to reach the region.³⁶ This marginalisation of Shia contributions to Indonesia's Islamic heritage has contributed to the exclusion of Shia Islam from the dominant religious narrative.

Mainstream Muslim organisations such as the MUI, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Persatuan Islam (PERSIS), alongside hardline Sunni groups like

31. MUI 2011, pp.101–118.

32. Hicks 2013; Regus 2021; Hasyim 2016.

33. *Menag: Ahmadiyah Juga Ditolak Di Malaysia, Brunei Dan Pakistan* 2008.

34. MUI 2011, pp. 46–47, MUI n.d.

35. Atjeh 1977; Parlindungan 2007.

36. Suryanegara 2009; Tjandrasasmita 2009.

the FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*, Islamic Defenders Front) and ANNAS (*Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah Indonesia*, Anti-Shia National Alliance),³⁷ have commonly categorised Shia as a deviant sect. Nonetheless, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 temporarily altered this perception. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a notable increase in positive portrayals of Shia Islam among Indonesian Muslims. Works by prominent Iranian scholars and revolutionaries—including Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali Chariati, and Murtadha Mutahhari—were widely translated and published by Indonesian publishers such as Mizan, Mutahhari Press, Lentera, and Pustaka Hidayah. These materials were readily available at institutions like UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri, formerly IAIN), and the success of the Iranian Revolution was celebrated not only as a political triumph but also as an Islamic intellectual and spiritual revival.

The MUI issued a fatwa addressing Shia Islam in 1984. Although it stopped short of explicitly declaring Shia as deviant, it warned the Indonesian Muslim community about the dangers of *ghulāt* (extremist) Shia teachings. Over time, however, this fatwa has been reinterpreted and weaponised by hardline Sunni groups in Indonesia, who treat it as a blanket condemnation of all Shia denominations. Salafi and Wahhabi clerics—such as Khalid Bassalamah, Syafig Bassalamah, and Firanda Andirja, all alumni of Madinah University—have played a prominent role in amplifying anti-Shia rhetoric and promoting a narrative of theological exclusivism.

Anti-Shia sentiment intensified during the *reformasi* era. One of the most severe incidents occurred in 2012 in Madura, East Java, where a violent conflict—allegedly involving both the NU and the MUI—resulted in deaths, displacement, and the destruction of property belonging to the Shia community.³⁸ Following this violence, the East Java branch of the MUI—Indonesia's largest provincial chapter—issued a fatwa (No. Kep-01/SKF-MUI/JTM/2012) officially declaring Shia a deviant sect.³⁹ This provincial fatwa significantly inflamed anti-Shia sentiment in East Java and legitimised further acts of exclusion and aggression.

The effects of this fatwa were not confined to East Java. In West Java, the Anti-Shia National Alliance (*Aliansi Nasional Anti-Syiah*, ANNAS) launched widespread campaigns against the Shia community, reflecting a growing intolerance within segments of the Sunni majority.⁴⁰ These developments highlight the fatwa's instrumental role in catalysing and justifying sectarian hostility.

At the national level, efforts to strengthen the MUI's stance on Shia were also underway. In 2013, senior MUI figures—including Ma'ruf Amin

37. Kayane 2023, p. 102; Darmadi 2021.

38. Hilmy 2015.

39. Haq 2018, p. 110; Yaqin 2014.

40. Tim Aliansi Nasional Anti Syiah 2018; *Ribuan Umat Islam Saksikan Deklarasi ANNAS Solo Raya* 2017.

(Chairman of the MUI from 2015–2020, Vice President of Indonesia from 2019–2024, and an influential *ulama* of the Nahdlatul Ulama), Yunahar Ilyas, Ichwan Sam, and Amirsyah Tambunan—commissioned and co-authored a book titled *Panduan Majelis Ulama Indonesia Mengenal dan Mewaspadai Penyimpangan Syiah di Indonesia* (“Guidance of the Council of Indonesian Ulamas to Know and Be Vigilant Against Shia Deviance in Indonesia”).⁴¹ Although the book has not yet led to a new fatwa, it underscores the continued effort among influential Islamic elites to further marginalise Shia Islam within the Indonesian religious landscape.

In sum, the MUI fatwas concerning both Ahmadiyah and Shia can be classified as effective fatwas, given their widespread implementation, public legitimacy, and endorsement by state authorities.⁴² Their influence extends beyond doctrinal boundaries, shaping social attitudes and legitimising policies that restrict the religious freedom of minority Muslim sects in Indonesia.

b) Malaysia

In Malaysia, fatwas on deviant Islam are more effective than in Indonesia, owing to their integration into the judiciary, religious communities, and regulatory frameworks—both in general fatwa practice and in those specifically targeting deviant groups. The Ahmadis have a long-standing presence in Malaysia, with records of their arrival as early as 1906, which predates the founding of Malaysia as a nation-state.⁴³ However, this historical longevity has not shielded Malaysian Ahmadis from marginalisation by the Muslim mainstream.

In 1975, the Selangor Fatwa Council (MAIS, Majlis Agama Islam Selangor) declared Ahmadiyah followers to be unbelievers (*kāfir*) and thus excluded them from the Malaysian Muslim community, based on their belief in the status of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Consequently, deceased Malaysian Ahmadis are not allowed to be buried in Muslim cemeteries because of their status as unbelievers.⁴⁴ Ahmadiyah was formally declared not a part of Islam, its members were barred from performing Friday prayers in their mosques, and the designation “Islam” was removed from the identity cards (MyKads) of many Qadiani Ahmadis.⁴⁵

While restrictions on Ahmadiyah occurred earlier, a notable decision emerged from the 8th *Muzakarah* (conference) of the NFC held on 24–25 September 1984, which discussed the deviance of Qadiani/Ahmadiyah. It described the Ahmadiyah as “*puak yang terkeluar daripada Islam dan tidak boleh menerima hak-hak sebagai seorang Islam termasuk pengkebumian*”

41. Tim Penulis MUI Pusat 2013.

42. Regus 2021, p. 118.

43. Musa 2022, p. 24.

44. Malaysia Today 2011.

45. Dali 2010.

dalam tanah perkuburan Islam,” meaning, a group which is outside of Islam and may not receive the rights of being a Muslim, including burial in an Islamic burial ground.⁴⁶ Then, a formal fatwa banning Ahmadiyah was also issued by the Selangor Fatwa Council (state level) in 1998. That fatwa asserted two primary claims: first, that Qadianism opposes “true Islam,” and that followers of the Qadiani Ahmadiyah—excluding the Lahore Ahmadis, since they do not recognise Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet but as a *mujaddid* (reformer)—are considered by many global *ulamas* to be *kāfir*; second, that MAIS also officially regards Qadiani Ahmadiyah followers as *kāfir*.

In 2001, the Selangor Fatwa Council outlined details regarding followers of Ahmadiyah, stating they are considered to have apostatised or left Islam, which can have consequences under both sharia and civil law. According to Section 46 of the Islamic Family Law 1984 (Islamic Family Law -Federal Territories- Act 1984), the Ahmadi may not be a guardian in his daughter’s marriage contract; the person may not inherit property from his Muslim relatives; and such person is not entitled to any privileges reserved for Malays under the Federal Constitution and State Laws. Furthermore, if such rights have already been granted, enjoyed, or obtained by such a person, he shall cease to have power and may be stripped of, withdrawn and annulled, as appropriate, by the relevant authorities.⁴⁷

The NFC, under the mufti Mohammed Yusoff bin Hussain (mufti for the Federal Territories), later issued a banning fatwa in 2003 against Qadiani Ahmadiyah, declaring: “*Bahawa ajaran Ahmadiyah Atau Qadiani yang dibawa oleh Mirza Ghulam Ahmad adalah bukan daripada ajaran Islam dan orang-orang yang mengikuti ini bukanlah orang Islam*” (the teaching of Ahmadiyah or Qadiani introduced by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is not part of Islam, and those who follow this teaching cannot be considered Muslims).⁴⁸

To this day, due to all the fatwas mentioned, Ahmadiyah remains socially and legally marginalised in Malaysia. Unlike in Indonesia, however, there have been fewer large-scale violent incidents. Nonetheless, the fatwa demonstrates that fatwas in Malaysia can carry regulatory weight and social enforcement.⁴⁹

With regard to Shia Islam, both the institutional fatwa authorities (federation and state level)—operating as state-linked bodies—and the majority Muslim public recognises the authority of fatwas banning or restricting Shia teachings.⁵⁰ The government cites concerns that Shia doctrines might influence Malaysian Muslims, particularly youth, and accordingly restricts Shia organised activities and publications. Scholars such as Mohd Faizal Musa and Tan Beng Hui argue

46. JAKIM 2015, p. 2.

47. Dali 2010, p. 50.

48. Akta Pentadbiran 2004.

49. IHRC 2019.

50. JAKIM 2015, p. 8.

that these actions amount to intentional discrimination.⁵¹ Although fatwas do not possess binding legal force in all cases under Malaysian law, the close alignment between religious authorities and political leaders yields high levels of societal acceptance. Consequently, fatwas are widely perceived as integral components of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence by many Malaysian Muslims.

The presence of a long-standing Shia community in Insular Southeast Asia⁵² notwithstanding, anxiety about Shia influence escalated after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which aligned Malaysia publicly with Saudi Arabia's narrative of Shia Islam as a global threat. Saudi Arabia's increasing influence—financial, intellectual, and political—helped propagate anti-Shia rhetoric in several Muslim-majority countries, including Malaysia. As part of this dynamic, the government drew on the resources and legitimacy afforded by Saudi alliances to reinforce restrictive policies toward Shia Islam.

Indeed, Saudi efforts have had lasting effects: in twelve out of Malaysia's fourteen states, the public practice of Shia Islam is effectively prohibited. Tan Sri Harussani Zakaria, Mufti of Perak, has urged Malaysian authorities to act against individuals identified with Shia Islam, citing the prohibition on Shia teachings.⁵³ This close surveillance of Shia communities has manifested in detentions of Shia adherents celebrating *Ashura* (the first ten days of Muharram) across twelve states,⁵⁴ while states such as Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pulau Pinang, Wilayah Persekutuan, and Terengganu continue to monitor Shia activities closely.⁵⁵

c) Singapore

Though Singapore is not an Islamic state, the state-aligned use of fatwas against deviant Islamic sects is clearly observable. In Singapore, this authority is vested in MUIS, which functions as part of the state, meaning fatwas issued by MUIS receive formal institutional recognition—unlike in Indonesia, where the MUI is independent of state machinery. MUIS thus occupies a role similar to that of the MUI in terms of issuing fatwas, and also resembles Malaysia's JAKIM–NFC insofar as it is a state body. MUIS houses the Office of the

51. Musa and Tan 2017.

52. Ibid., p. 2.

53. Ahmad 2019.

54. ANNAS Indonesia 2019; Osman 2013; ABNA24 2016; Musa and Tan 2017, pp. 8–9.

55. MAIS 2015, pp. 1–2; Müller 2019.

Mufti, whose occupant is appointed by the President of Singapore. The Mufti chairs a five-member legal committee tasked with issuing fatwas in response to queries from the community.⁵⁶

MUIS aligns closely with Sunni theological norms. Its fatwas promote the primacy of Sunni Islam, and in practice, they do not incorporate groups such as the Ahmadiyah and Shia into an Islamic pluralist framework. Since 1969, MUIS has had a fatwa banning the Ahmadiyah. This ruling answered the query: “Are the followers of Qadiani considered *kāfir* (unbeliever)?”.⁵⁷ It declared Qadiani Ahmadis a deviant sect. In issuing it, MUIS referenced *Anjam Atham* by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. The fatwa states that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is not merely *kāfir* but also *murtad* (apostate), and that his teachings lead the Muslim community away from what MUIS regards as the correct path. This conclusion was supported by al-Shaikh Muhammad Anuar al-Kashmiri, who in *Ikfār al-Mulhidīn* identified seventy-seven statements by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad deemed to constitute unbelief. MUIS also cites a fatwa from the Mufti of Johor, Alawi ibn Tahir al-Haddad, in his book *Anwār al-Qur’ān al-Māhiyati li Zulūmati Mutanabbi ‘in Qāḍiyān*, to reinforce this position.⁵⁸

Since 1991, MUIS has issued a fatwa advising Singaporean Muslims to be vigilant about Shia teachings. While MUIS does not officially label Shia Islam as deviant, this fatwa echoes similar measures in Indonesia. When asked in Question No. 21, “What is MUIS’s stance towards the concept and thought of Shia?,” MUIS affirmed that Shia is one among many sects in the broader Islamic tradition, but that it is not part of *Ahlussunnah Waljama‘ah* (Sunni Islam). MUIS’s stance reflects a broader trend in the Islamic world, which frequently classifies Shia within *al-gullāt*—those who purportedly exceed the legitimate bounds of Islam.⁵⁹

Interestingly, while MUIS has not formally banned Shia Islam, it continues to caution Singaporean Muslims against adopting Shia teachings. Its explicit fatwa on “deviant notions” in Islam, issued in 2021, aligns closely with rulings in Indonesia and Malaysia regarding *aliran sesat* (deviant sects). This alignment suggests a regional pattern: the perception of Shia in Singapore mirrors that in Indonesia and Malaysia. The convergence of these fatwas is facilitated by flows of information and the influence of social media, enabling collaboration and idea exchange among fatwa-making bodies across Southeast Asia.

56. Baderin 2016.

57. MUIS 2025.

58. Haddad 1956; “Habib Alwi Bin Thahir Al-Haddad” 2011.

59. MUIS 1991, p. 22.

Islamic Economy

The effectiveness of fatwas in shaping the Islamic economy—particularly in finance and insurance—can be observed across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In these countries, fatwas have become essential instruments for embedding sharia principles into economic institutions and regulatory frameworks.

a) Indonesia

In Indonesia, the institutional role of fatwas in the sharia economy is evident through their integration into State Law No. 21/2008 on Sharia Banking. A pivotal moment occurred in 1997 when the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) issued a fatwa on *Reksadana Syariah* (Islamic mutual funds), mandating adherence to sharia principles in financial operations. This marked the beginning of more structured oversight, leading to the establishment of the Dewan Syariah Nasional (National Sharia Council, DSN) under the MUI in the same year. The DSN became the central authority for ensuring sharia compliance across Islamic financial institutions.⁶⁰

A key mechanism for implementing fatwas is the Dewan Pengawas Syariah (DPS) or Sharia Supervisory Boards, appointed by the DSN. Each Islamic financial institution is required to have its own DPS, which provides sharia-based advice on product development and operational compliance. In this context, fatwas are not only theological opinions but also regulatory tools deeply embedded in financial governance.

The 2004 fatwa banning *ribā*⁶¹ reinforced the MUI's authority and laid the groundwork for formal legislative action, culminating in the 2008 Sharia Banking Law (Law No. 21/2008).⁶² However, despite this progress, the Islamic banking sector has struggled to gain traction. Many Indonesian Muslims remain sceptical, and the market share of Islamic banks remains significantly lower than that of conventional banks. Even Bank Muamalat Indonesia, once a pioneer of Islamic finance, faced financial instability and required state intervention.

Under President Joko Widodo's administration, sharia finance has seen renewed momentum. With support from prominent Islamic leaders like Ma'ruf Amin, the state launched Bank Syariah Indonesia (BSI)—now the largest sharia bank in the country. Backed by the government, BSI saw its assets reach IDR 305.73 trillions in 2023, reflecting a 15.14% annual increase.⁶³

60. Abbas et al. 2019; Dewan Syariah Nasional MUI-Bank Indonesia 2006.

61. According to Muhammad Ayub (2007), *ribā* refers to “any increase over and above the principle amount payable in the contract in a contract obligation, not covered by a corresponding increase in labor, commodity, risk or expertise.”

62. Perbankan Syariah 2008.

63. Zefanya 2023.

b) Malaysia

The second focal point concerns the effectiveness of fatwas in shaping Malaysia's Islamic economy. Their impact is particularly evident in the incorporation of fatwas into formal regulatory frameworks governing Islamic banking and finance. The historical roots of Islamic economic practices in Malaysia can be traced to the sixteenth century, grounded in *mu'āmala* transactions.⁶⁴ After independence, the sharia economy made early advances with the formation of the Lembaga Urusan Tabung Haji (LUTH, Hajj Fund) in 1965. Though not a bank, LUTH provided Muslim pilgrims with a secure, sharia-compliant means of saving for the Hajj. Its establishment helped lay the financial and social infrastructure that later supported formal Islamic banking, such as the founding of Bank Islam Malaysia in 1983.⁶⁵ Since its inception, LUTH has expanded into a major global player in Islamic finance.⁶⁶ The steady advancement of Malaysia's Islamic banking and finance sector cannot be disentangled from the regulatory role played by fatwas in this domain.

Across the Muslim world, the presence of a fatwa council is a prerequisite for Islamic banking and financial institutions. In Malaysia, all fatwas pertaining to Islamic finance are deemed effective because they are issued by the Shariah Advisory Council (SAC), an official state body. The SAC is charged with issuing rulings on Islamic financial products and services, and these rulings are directly implemented, although they bind exclusively Islamic financial institutions (IFIs) operating within the country. In this respect, the SAC fulfils a role analogous to that of the DSN in Indonesia, with both recognised as state-sanctioned authorities on sharia compliance.⁶⁷ However, as a government representative, the SAC ensures that its fatwas are highly effective through direct implementation within Malaysia's institutional framework. This illustrates how deeply fatwas are embedded in Malaysia's regulatory processes, demonstrating a much stronger integration into state mechanisms than in Indonesia.

In practice, Malaysia has proven more successful than either Indonesia or Singapore in institutionalising and managing its Islamic banking and finance sector. Over the past decade, the country has positioned itself at the forefront of the global Islamic economy.⁶⁸ Its financial system is particularly robust, registering a 20% increase in sharia-compliant funds.⁶⁹ The maturity of Malaysia's Islamic finance ecosystem has significantly bolstered national

64. Asni 2019, p. 307.

65. Zubair 2023, p. 145.

66. Nasr 2001, p. 123.

67. Zakaria et al. 2025, p. 77; Bank Negara Malaysia 2010, p. xv.

68. Aliff 2022.

69. Tani 2022.

economic performance,⁷⁰ placing the country ahead of Indonesia—ranked fourth globally—and well above Singapore.

c) Singapore

In Singapore, the effectiveness of fatwas in shaping the Islamic economy is influenced by both the Malay Muslim community's recognition of Islamic Banking and Finance (IBF) and the government's broader commitment to economic pluralism. The institutional foundation for fatwa issuance lies with the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS),⁷¹ which serves as the official religious authority and the sole institution authorised to issue fatwas. MUIS plays a crucial role in offering religious guidance to the Muslim community on matters including Islamic finance and banking under the framework of the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA).⁷²

While Islamic finance in Singapore remains relatively modest compared to its regional counterparts, all financial products marketed as sharia-compliant must obtain MUIS's endorsement through a formal fatwa. MUIS has issued rulings on various financial matters such as *waqf* (endowment) properties,⁷³ joint tenancy,⁷⁴ and revocable insurance nominations,⁷⁵ establishing itself as the key reference point for Islamic financial practices in the country. Unlike Malaysia's SAC or Indonesia's DSN, however, MUIS does not maintain a specialised division solely for Islamic finance—a likely reflection of the limited domestic demand and smaller Muslim population.

The formal inclusion of Islamic finance within Singapore's national financial framework began in 2005, although preliminary steps were taken earlier, particularly when the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) identified Islamic Banking and Finance (IBF) as a strategic priority in 2003.⁷⁶ In response to regional developments and to remain competitive with Malaysia and Indonesia, major financial institutions in Singapore—such as DBS Bank and Maybank Singapore—introduced sharia-compliant financial products to cater to local and international markets.

Singapore's ambition to position itself as a global financial hub (center) has further motivated the state's interest in Islamic finance.⁷⁷ The city-state's existing strengths in wealth management, project financing, and trade financing

70. World Bank Group 2022.

71. Saat 2018a; Saat 2018b; Pasuni 2018.

72. Ginting et al. 2019, p. 236.

73. MUIS 1985.

74. MUIS 2019.

75. MUIS 2012.

76. Ginting et al. 2019; Wilkinson 2012.

77. Ginting et al. 2019, p. 240.

have been identified as key areas for the growth of sharia-compliant services, potentially enhancing its standing within the global Islamic economy.⁷⁸

Despite these initiatives, the growth of Islamic finance in Singapore remains limited. A lack of public understanding—among both Muslims and non-Muslims—combined with perceptions of higher complexity and cost associated with Islamic products, has constrained market expansion.⁷⁹ These challenges echo those faced in Indonesia, where similar perceptions have also slowed Islamic financial adoption.

Halalisation Project

a) Indonesia

As the world's largest halal market, Indonesia demonstrates how fatwas can be institutionalised and exert influence at regional, national, and international levels through halal governance. The major push began in the early 1990s, when widespread use of pork in food and beverage manufacturing—including among small, medium, and large industries like Dancow in East Java—sparked public concern and economic losses for small farmers. Backed by the Suharto government, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) responded by introducing halal certification to prevent contamination. Though initially voluntary, certification rapidly became a vital added value for producers seeking to cater to Indonesia's large Muslim consumer market.

In 1989, the MUI established the Institute for the Study of Food, Medicine, and Cosmetics (LPPOM-MUI) as the body responsible for halal certification.⁸⁰ Under its Fatwa Commission, LPPOM-MUI held exclusive authority to issue halal fatwas until State Law No. 33/2014—implemented in 2019—made certification compulsory. The law also created the Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Produk Halal (BPJPH, State Agency for Halal Product Assurance) to take over certification duties, while the exclusive power to issue halal fatwas remained with the MUI.⁸¹ Under both of President Jokowi's terms (2014-2024), the BPJPH continued functioning under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), maintaining its established institutional placement. Under the Prabowo administration since 2024, the BPJPH was restructured to become an independent state agency, no longer working under MORA.⁸² Even after these structural changes, Indonesia's halal governance remains deeply anchored in fatwas issued by the MUI because,

78. Ariff 1988.

79. Gerrad and Cunningham 1997.

80. Girindra 2008; LPPOM MUI and AIFDC ICU 2010.

81. Hasyim 2022.

82. *Transformasi Kelembagaan, BPJPH Dan Kemenag Serah Terima Likuidasi Aset Dan Kewajiban* 2025.

under Law No. 33/2014 on Halal Product Assurance, the legal authority to issue a halal fatwa still resides exclusively with the MUI.

Halalisation has also become a centrepiece of state policy under President Jokowi. The government's cooperation with the MUI acknowledges the enormous economic potential of the halal sector and is exemplified in comprehensive regulatory frameworks. By standardising labeling for consumable goods—such as food, beverages, medicines, and cosmetics—monopolising halal certification became a strategic mechanism to satisfy consumer demand and ensure products comply with sharia. Thus, halalisation has become one of the most tangible cases of effective fatwas in practice, bridging religious norms with state market regulation. Indonesia had even set its sights on becoming an international halal hub by 2024,⁸³ and regulatory initiatives have consolidated both industrial and governmental participation to accelerate the growth of the halal industry.⁸⁴

b) Malaysia

Effectiveness of fatwas within the halal project is deeply visible in the country's institutionalisation of halal standards. The concept of halal has a long evolutionary history in Malaysia, predating the nation's independence. Among the post-colonial countries in Southeast Asia, Malaysia pioneered the halal industry long before Indonesia and Singapore, and it is now the largest halal hub in the Muslim world. This is evident in its position as a global market leader and a role model in the halal food industry.⁸⁵ Malaysia, for instance, has secured the top position in the halal food category, based on the Global Islamic Economy Index (GIEI), for 11 consecutive years.⁸⁶

Unlike Indonesia, the institutionalisation of halal in Malaysia is mainly driven by the government since the beginning because Malaysia adopts sharia in its legal framework. JAKIM, operating under the Prime Minister's Office, starting in 1974, is the main halal certifier.⁸⁷ The NFC and JAKIM are essentially acting as fatwa-issuing bodies on halal matters,⁸⁸ and all these fatwas become the source for establishing halal standards and national halal governance.⁸⁹ JAKIM and the Department of Halal Standardisation Malaysia worked to establish the halal standard.⁹⁰ In 2006, JAKIM established the Halal

⁸³. Pratama 2021.

⁸⁴. Indonesian Ministry of National Development Planning 2019.

⁸⁵. Talib et al. 2018; Fischer 2015.

⁸⁶. Ng 2025.

⁸⁷. Saidin and Abd Rahman 2016, p. 147; Muhammad et al. 2019.

⁸⁸. Kamali 2021.

⁸⁹. Anuar et al. 2023, p. 75; Talib et al. 2018.

⁹⁰. Muhammad et al. 2019; Anuar et al. 2023, p. 75.

Industry Development Corporation (HDC) to implement the Malaysian vision of becoming an international halal hub. As a vehicle for the halal industry, the HDC is responsible for providing training, market access for businesses, and ensuring compliance with sharia, as well as capacity building for the halal industry and certification.⁹¹ However, the HDC is accompanied by religious advisors (fatwa-makers) in managing halal governance.

Although Malaysia and Indonesia dominantly adhere to the strictly interpreted Shāfi'ī school of Islamic law for halal certification, Malaysia has a more flexible tendency to follow other *madhhabs* (schools of jurisprudence) like the Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools. This is evident in the use of *istiḥāla* (Ḥanafī school of Islamic law) for some products. The use of *istiḥāla* enables Malaysia to adjust and accommodate market needs, especially for pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and confectionary products like chocolate, candies, and cakes. The halalisation project of Malaysia reflects the effectiveness of fatwas not only in terms of its high adaptability to industry but also in adding value to the national economy.

c) Singapore

Singapore presents a different model. There, fatwas on halal matters function more as instruments of quasi-public policy, promoting diversity and multiculturalism while maintaining adherence to Islamic doctrinal norms. MUIS (the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) was first empowered to propose halal certification in 1978,⁹² and following the 1999 amendment of the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), obtained formal legal authority to issue halal certificates.⁹³

Local demand from Singapore's Muslim community has been the immediate driver behind its halal project, yet the expansion of the global halal market has provided a wider impetus.⁹⁴ Relative to other forms of shariatisation such as Islamic banking, halalisation in Singapore has advanced more quickly over the last forty years, thanks to the burgeoning market for halal food, beverages, and related goods. Although Muslims constitute just 13.3% of the population, Singapore leverages its regional position and economic strength to participate in and influence the halal industry internationally. The country's status as a financial and trade hub in Asia, combined with the relatively high purchasing power of its Muslim citizens, reinforces this ambition. Additionally, geographic proximity to Indonesia and Malaysia—two major Muslim-majority markets—offers significant opportunities for cross-border halal trade.

91. Zakaria et al. 2025; Muhammad et al. 2019.

92. Suratty 2018, p. 199.

93. Ibid., p. 120.

94. Fischer 2016, p. 176.

By comparison with Indonesia and Malaysia, Singapore has shown greater flexibility in defining its halal standards. MUIS draws on the Ḥanafī school's principle of *istiḥālah* in its approach to halal, even while the majority of Singaporean Muslims adhere to the Shāfi'ī school. The Ḥanafī perspective places more emphasis on the end-product, whereas the Shāfi'ī school tends to stress the production process. By adopting the Ḥanafī methodology, Singapore's halal fatwas can align more easily with international standards, boosting its prospects of becoming an international halal hub in the region.

Shared Patterns and Differences

Despite divergent legal, historical, and political contexts, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore exhibit significant commonalities in their reliance on fatwas as instruments of shariatization. Fatwas targeting so-called deviant sects consistently undermine the position of minority Muslim communities across all three countries. While constitutional frameworks in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore uphold the principle of equal treatment for all religious groups, in practice, communities such as the Ahmadiyah and the Shia continue to experience marginalisation. In Indonesia and Malaysia, such groups face structural constraints, including difficulties in constructing places of worship, while in Singapore their legitimacy is contested within the Muslim majority, even in the absence of direct state repression. Fatwas in these contexts often function as mechanisms for safeguarding a majoritarian religious orthodoxy. For example, in defending the fatwa banning the Ahmadiyah, the MUI argued it aimed solely to protect the Muslim *ummah*, without interfering in the affairs of other religious groups, as noted by Utang Ranuwijaya: “*MUI hanya menjaga umat Islam, tidak mengganggu umat yang lain, juga tidak berbicara tentang umat lain*”.⁹⁵ This illustrates a domestically framed interpretation of religious freedom, grounded not in universal rights but in the preservation of theological boundaries within Islam.

Second, the development of Islamic finance and banking has been uneven, with Malaysia exhibiting the most advanced infrastructure. Nonetheless, across all three countries, sharia-based financial institutions remain less dominant than conventional banks, which continue to operate on the basis of *ribā*. In Indonesia, Islamic financial institutions are often viewed as lacking competitiveness, perceived as offering services similar to conventional banks but at a higher cost. Fatwas supporting Islamic finance tend to be based on religious rather than economic reasoning, and often fail to address market realities. Nevertheless, these fatwas—by virtue of their incorporation into regulatory frameworks—retain a degree of effectiveness and transnational relevance, contributing to broader regional patterns of shariatization.

95. Sitepu 2017.

Third, the halalisation of consumer goods reveals more pronounced differences. In both Malaysia and Indonesia, state-driven halal regulation has not always accounted for the rights of non-Muslim communities, whose religious traditions may prescribe different standards of lawful consumption. As each religious tradition holds distinct theological interpretations of purity, enshrining halal certification into national law—such as Indonesia’s State Law No. 33/2014—effectively imposes sharia-based norms as universal standards. In a religiously plural and non-theocratic state, this may privilege Islamic legal principles over other ethical or religious perspectives. Consequently, the halalisation project risks institutionalising structural inequality by elevating one religious legal system above others in governing public consumption.

Concluding Remarks

The widespread integration of effective fatwas into the legal and public spheres of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore suggests that the process of shariatisation has unfolded with relative ease, though to varying degrees across these contexts. This phenomenon highlights the dual capacity of sharia both to conform to and to contest the secular modern state: evident in fatwas on halal certification and Islamic economics in some cases, and in rulings against so-called deviant Islamic sects in others. This duality—of conformity and resistance—illustrates that sharia meets both acceptance and opposition within these societies. In its affirmative dimension, fatwas concerning halal practices and Islamic economics help to align sharia values with those of the modern state, whereas in their exclusionary dimension, fatwas directed against heterodox groups such as Shia Muslims, Ahmadis, or localised Islamic traditions risk fostering discrimination and undermining religious freedom as guaranteed in secular state models. The prominence of effective fatwas in these three countries also reflects institutional interconnections and the transnational circulation of religious authority, as issuing bodies adopt similar trajectories in advancing sharia compliance in matters of Islamic economy, halal lifestyles, and belief.

Within this framework, the nature of the political system—whether democratic or otherwise—appears less decisive than the adaptability of fatwas themselves, which can operate effectively even within democratic institutions. While Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore exhibit differing levels of implementation, what remains consistent is the enduring presence of sharia in their legal and public domains. Together, these cases point to a dynamic landscape in which fatwas are shaped both by national political and social conditions and by cross-border religious currents. Their incorporation into national regulation further underscores the inherent ambiguity of asserting a strictly secular state identity. The phenomenon of effective fatwas thus signals the emergence of what may be termed “sharia zones” in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, and more broadly in Southeast Asia. In Muslim-

majority contexts such as Indonesia and Malaysia, this often translates into attempts by mainstream Islamic actors to regulate the practices of non-mainstream Muslims and, at times, non-Muslims. In Singapore, by contrast, where Muslims constitute a minority, the idea of a “sharia zone” tends to take the form of claims for accommodations or exemptions in the name of sharia compliance. Across all these settings, the legitimating force of effective fatwas remains central.

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