AN EXAMINATION OF FATWAS AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN MALAYSIA: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS, LEGAL CHALLENGES, AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Religious pluralism in Malaysia presents a complex and often contentious issue, particularly within the framework of Islamic legal perspectives and fatwas. The coexistence of common law and Islamic law (Shariah) creates a dual legal system in which religious freedom, state authority, and minority rights are constantly negotiated. Fatwas, as authoritative Islamic legal opinions, play a crucial role in shaping legal, social, and theological discourses, influencing governance and interfaith relations. However, their implementation has raised concerns, particularly regarding their impact on minority Muslim groups, such as the Shi'a community, and broader implications for religious governance and societal cohesion. This study critically reviews the historical and ideological underpinnings that inform the issuance of these fatwas and assess the impact of fatwas on interfaith relations, religious governance, and legal pluralism in Malaysia. It assesses their influence on interfaith relations, legal pluralism, and religious governance. A systematic review of academic literature, including articles, conference papers, and book chapters published between 2010 and 2023, was conducted. Using thematic analysis, this research identifies recurring patterns and emerging insights regarding the role of fatwas in regulating religious practices and shaping socio-political dynamics. Findings reveal that while Fatwas provide legal clarity in certain contexts, their rigid application often reinforces societal divisions and challenges pluralistic values. This study underscores the need for a more inclusive and adaptive approach to fatwa issuance and implementation. By promoting mutual understanding and respect, these recommendations can contribute to strengthening Malaysia's multicultural framework and fostering sustainable religious coexistence.

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INTRODUCTION

The complexity of Malaysia's multicultural landscape significantly influences discourses surrounding religious pluralism. The incorporation of both Islamic law and common law establishes a dual legal system that continually negotiates issues of religious freedom, state authority, and minority rights (Nor et al., 2016). Such negotiations are critically shaped by fatwas, which serve as influential legal opinions within Islamic contexts. Fatwas not only guides societal norms but also plays a pivotal role in shaping public policy and perceptions regarding interfaith relations (Sulaiman et al., 2022). While Malaysia's legal system provides constitutional guarantees for religious freedom, the issuance of fatwas often reflects a conservative interpretation of Islamic law, limiting the practical implications of pluralism (Harding, 2012). The role of fatwas is particularly significant as they serve as authoritative guidelines for the Muslim community, influencing various aspects of religious and social life. However, the restrictive nature of certain fatwas on religious pluralism has raised concerns about their impact on interfaith relations, governance, and the broader legal landscape of the country (Hoffstaedter, 2013). This paper aims to critically examine the existing literature on fatwas related to religious pluralism in Malaysia, highlighting their legal status, implications, and the underlying ideological frameworks that inform them.

One of the key challenges in discussing religious pluralism in Malaysia lies in the contradiction between constitutional provisions and the implementation of Islamic legal rulings. Although Article 11 of the Federal Constitution guarantees religious freedom, state Islamic authorities frequently issue fatwas that restrict interfaith engagements and conversions, leading to legal ambiguities and social tensions (Harding, 2012). Furthermore, converts to Islam face significant legal hurdles in matters of personal status, including marriage dissolution and inheritance rights, as the legal system does not always provide clear mechanisms for resolving such cases (Samuri & Khan, 2021). These complexities highlight the need for a comprehensive review of the existing literature on fatwas related to religious pluralism.

Several studies have examined the role of fatwas in shaping religious discourse in Malaysia. Hasyim (2019) explores the discursive patterns of fatwas in Indonesia and Malaysia, emphasizing the conservative stance adopted by the religious authorities in both countries. Moustafa (2013) investigates the relationship between Islamic law, women's rights, and legal consciousness, highlighting the broader socio-legal implications of restrictive fatwas. Similarly, Hoffstaedter (2013) discusses how Islamic legal rulings contribute to the contestation of religious freedoms in Malaysia. Despite these valuable contributions, there remains a lack of comprehensive literature reviews that systematically analyze fatwas on religious pluralism within the broader legal and theological framework. This study seeks to bridge this gap by synthesizing existing research and identifying key trends in fatwa issuance and their implications for religious coexistence.

Objectives of the study, this literature review aims to:

a) To review the historical and ideological underpinnings that inform the issuance of these fatwas
b) To assess the impact of fatwas on interfaith relations, religious governance, and legal pluralism in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Legal Framework and Fatwas in Malaysia

The dual legal system in Malaysia presents unique challenges, particularly regarding the interpretation and application of Islamic law related to pluralism. While Article 11 of the Federal Constitution recognizes religious freedom, fatwas issued in Malaysia often reflect conservative interpretations that can limit interfaith engagements and conversions (Abas & Samuri, 2024). This results in legal ambiguities and tensions among diverse religious communities (Nor et al., 2016). Moreover, fatwas sometimes impose constraints on minority Muslim groups, such as the Shi'a community, leading to issues of societal governance and cohesion (Oseni, 2014). Fatwas issued by state Islamic authorities often serve as regulatory mechanisms to maintain religious

conformity, positioning traditional Islamic practices at the forefront of Malaysia's identity (Asni, 2020). However, these fatwas can also act as ideological tools that reflect and reinforce the conservative stances of religious authorities (Hasyim, 2019). For example, the increasing conservatism within fatwa discourse has raised concerns about their effects on interfaith interactions and the rights of minority religious groups (Powell, 2015).

Fatwas function not only as authoritative religious guidelines for Muslims but also profoundly influence Malaysia's sociocultural landscape. Research by Hasyim (2019) delves into the nuances of fatwa discourse and reveals significant commonalities between Indonesia and Malaysia, emphasizing a prevailing conservative ethos among religious authorities in both contexts (Hasyim, 2019). Furthermore, the investigations by Moustafa (2013) into the intersection of Islamic law and women's rights showcase the broader societal implications of these conservative fatwas (Powell, 2015). Hoffstaedter (2013) articulates how Islamic legal rulings often stifle interfaith relations, underscoring the operational contestation of religious freedoms within Malaysia (Ismail & Baharuddin, 2022). Collectively, such studies underscore the necessity for a comprehensive literature review addressing the intricacies of fatwas about religious pluralism.

Challenges to Religious Pluralism

Amid the legal landscape, the rigid nature of certain fatwas presents considerable obstacles to fostering interfaith relations. Having identified these restrictive practices, research suggests that significant legal hurdles exist for those converting to Islam, particularly regarding personal legal matters such as matrimonial dissolution and inheritance issues (Muhammadi et al., 2021). Studies reveal that the lack of clear mechanisms within the legal system to navigate these situations often leads to exacerbated social tensions and diminished instances of religious cooperation (Hasyim, 2019). Thus, illuminating these barriers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges facing pluralism within Malaysia. Studies on fatwas and religious pluralism in Malaysia indicate that fatwas play a crucial role in shaping legal, social, and theological perspectives within a multicultural society. According to research by Hassan et al. (2021), fatwas related to inter-community relations often reinforce religious and cultural boundaries, making efforts toward social harmony more challenging. Meanwhile, a study by Rahman (2022) found that fatwas can serve as mechanisms for maintaining unity in a multi-religious society, provided they consider the broader socio-cultural context. However, many exclusive activist fatwas have contributed to societal tensions, particularly regarding religious conversion, family law, and freedom of belief.

Furthermore, research by Yusof and Abdullah (2020) examines how debates between Muslims and Christians in Malaysia reflect diverse perspectives on religious pluralism, which sometimes contradict the official state policies. Ahmad (2019) critiques the rigid approach to religious pluralism, which is based on a narrow interpretation of Islam, and how it affects social harmony. A study by Ismail (2023) highlights that misunderstandings in interpreting pluralism have led to divisions within the Muslim community, in addition to challenges in recognizing non-Muslims as part of the broader social structure. Collectively, these studies emphasize that fatwas have significant implications for interfaith relations, religious governance, and legal pluralism, advocating for a more inclusive approach in fatwa issuance in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic and data-driven approach, utilizing Scopus AI as a key tool to identify, analyze, and synthesize academic sources relevant to the research objectives. The methodology is designed to address two primary objectives: (a) reviewing the content and legal standing of fatwas related to religious pluralism in Malaysia, (b) reviewing the historical and ideological underpinnings that inform the issuance of these fatwas. To achieve these objectives, the study leverages Scopus AI's advanced search capabilities to extract peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters published between 2010 and 2023. The natural language query, " What are the Islamic legal perspectives on religious pluralism in Malaysia as reflected in fatwas? Keywords such as "fatwa,"("fatwa" OR "religious ruling" OR "edict") AND ("pluralism" OR "diversity" OR "multiculturalism" OR "inclusivity") AND ("religion" OR "faith" OR "belief" OR "spirituality") AND ("Malaysia" OR "Malaysian" OR "Southeast Asia" OR "ASEAN") AND ("Islam" OR "Muslim" OR "Islamic" OR "Sharia") AND ("tolerance" OR "acceptance" OR "coexistence" OR "understanding")

Inclusion criteria for this study focused on peer-reviewed articles published within the last five years to ensure the relevance and currency of findings. Articles that specifically addressed the legal standing, historical religious ruling, fatwas, faith, Muslim, and belief were prioritized. The abstracts, methodologies, and key findings of the articles were reviewed to determine their relevance. Special emphasis was placed on studies analyzing the impact of pluralism. Additionally, articles that presented case studies or empirical evidence of the application and implications of fatwas in diverse socio-religious contexts were given particular attention. For example, studies highlighting the role of fatwas in addressing interfaith relations, regulating minority religious practices such as those of the Shi'a community, and fostering community cohesion in multicultural settings were extensively reviewed. These articles provided insights into the adaptability of fatwas to contemporary societal challenges, as well as the tensions and opportunities encountered in their implementation across varying legal and social environments. The inclusion of such practical examples further enriches the thematic synthesis, offering nuanced perspectives on how fatwas influence religious pluralism and governance in Malaysia.
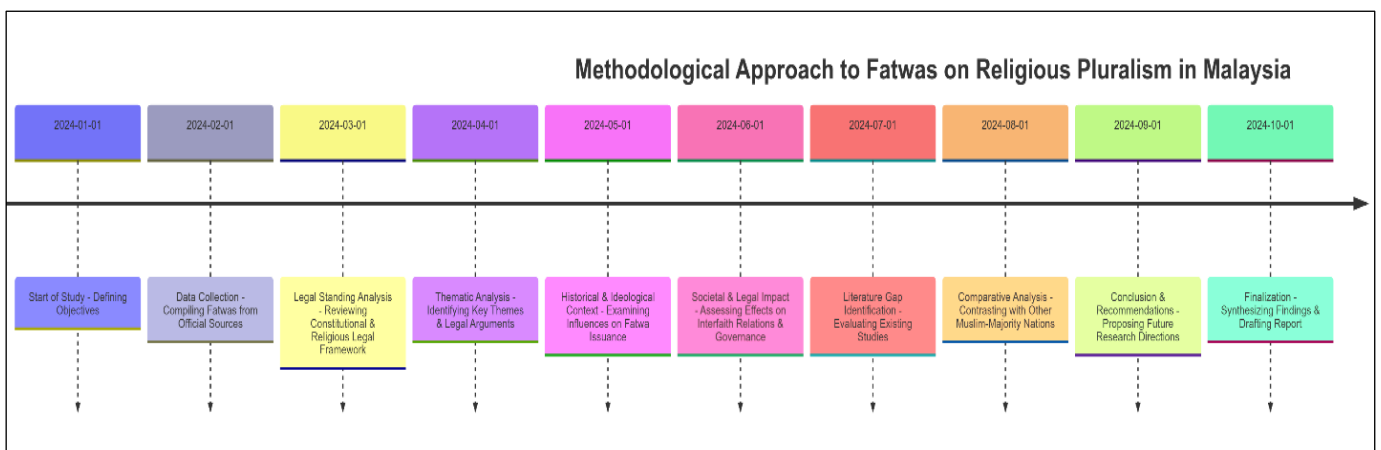

Figure 1: Designed to Address Methodological Approach to Fatwas on Religious Pluralism in Malaysia

Data extracted from the selected articles were synthesized using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and emerging insights. Key themes included the legal standing and institutional framework of fatwas, their ideological underpinnings rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence, and their impact on interfaith relations and legal pluralism. This structured approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how fatwas contribute to shaping Malaysia's religious landscape, addressing societal challenges, and navigating the complexities of governance in a multicultural society. The use of Scopus AI and a rigorous methodology underscores the reliability and validity of this study in uncovering actionable insights for policymakers, religious authorities, and scholars engaged in promoting inclusive and harmonious coexistence in Malaysia. By synthesizing these findings, the study provides a robust foundation for future research and practice aimed at fostering mutual respect and understanding in diverse religious contexts.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To review the historical and ideological underpinnings that inform the issuance of these fatwas

The historical and ideological foundations of fatwas on religious pluralism in Malaysia are deeply rooted in the country's Islamic jurisprudential traditions and socio-political landscape. Historically, Malaysia's Islamic legal framework has evolved in response to colonial legacies and post-independence state-building efforts, shaping the way fatwas address religious pluralism (Harding, 2012). During British rule, Islamic law was relegated to matters of personal and family law, which led to the compartmentalization of religious rulings. However, in the post-independence era, the strengthening of Islamic institutions and the formalization of fatwa councils at the national and state levels reinforced the authoritative role of fatwas in shaping religious discourse (Meerschaut & Saeger, 2019). This historical trajectory underscores the role of the state in mediating religious pluralism through legal instruments, including fatwas.

The ideological underpinnings of fatwas on religious pluralism in Malaysia are influenced by both classical Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary socio-political considerations. The dominant Shafi'i school of thought, which has historically informed Malaysian Islamic legal interpretations, traditionally acknowledges the rights of non-Muslims within a pluralistic society while maintaining the supremacy of Islamic law (Hasyim, 2019). However, in contemporary Malaysia, interpretations of religious pluralism have been shaped by conservative Islamic revivalist movements, leading to stricter positions on interfaith relations. The influence of Salafist and Wahhabi ideologies has further reinforced exclusivist interpretations, often rejecting pluralistic coexistence as incompatible with Islamic doctrine (Hoffstaedter, 2013). These ideological shifts have led to the issuance of fatwas that restrict interfaith engagement and limit the participation of Muslims in religious ceremonies of other faiths.

Fatwas on religious pluralism often serve as mechanisms for regulating Muslim identity and religious boundaries within a multicultural society. The National Fatwa Council and state-level muftis have issued numerous fatwas that prohibit interfaith prayers, participation in non-Muslim religious festivals, and the use of Islamic terminologies by non-Muslims (Moustafa, 2013). Such rulings are framed within the ideological concern of preserving the sanctity of Islamic beliefs and preventing religious syncretism. However, these restrictive fatwas have also contributed to interfaith tensions, particularly when they are perceived as undermining Malaysia's pluralistic heritage (Samuri & Quraishi, 2016). The legal standing of these fatwas varies, as they are generally non-binding but can be enforced when incorporated into state Islamic laws, creating a complex legal landscape for religious governance.

The historical evolution and ideological justifications of these fatwas also reflect broader contestations between progressive and conservative Islamic interpretations in Malaysia. Progressive Islamic scholars and civil society organizations argue that certain fatwas on religious pluralism contradict Malaysia's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom (Harding, 2012). For instance, legal challenges against fatwas declaring groups like Sisters in Islam as deviant highlight the ongoing debates over religious authority and pluralism (Samuri & Khan, 2021). The intersection of state power and Islamic jurisprudence further complicates these discussions, as fatwa councils often align with governmental policies that emphasize religious exclusivity over pluralistic accommodation.

In conclusion, the issuance of fatwas on religious pluralism in Malaysia is deeply influenced by historical legacies, ideological currents, and state-religion dynamics. While classical Islamic jurisprudence offers diverse perspectives on religious coexistence, contemporary fatwas tend to reflect more conservative interpretations, reinforcing exclusivist tendencies. The interplay between legal, theological, and political factors continues to shape the discourse on religious pluralism, highlighting the need for further research on how fatwas can evolve to balance Islamic doctrinal integrity with Malaysia's multicultural reality.

The impact of fatwas on interfaith relations, religious governance, and legal pluralism in Malaysia

Fatwas play a crucial role in shaping interfaith relations in Malaysia, often reinforcing boundaries between religious communities. The National Fatwa Council and state-level fatwa committees have consistently issued rulings that restrict interfaith interactions, particularly in areas such as religious conversions, interfaith marriages, and the use of Islamic terminologies by non-Muslims (Hasyim, 2019). These fatwas contribute to an exclusivist interpretation of Islam that can hinder social cohesion and mutual understanding among religious communities. For example, the 2008 fatwa prohibiting Muslims from practicing yoga due to alleged Hindu elements exemplifies how fatwas can limit cross-cultural engagement and deepen religious divides (Hoffstaedter, 2013).

In the context of religious governance, fatwas significantly influence the administration of Islamic affairs and legal structures in Malaysia. As Islamic law is a state matter, the issuance of fatwas varies across different states, creating inconsistencies in their implementation (Harding, 2012). While fatwas are not legally binding unless enacted into state law, they still carry moral and social authority, often leading to self-regulation among Muslims and shaping state policies. Fatwas on religious pluralism have reinforced governmental control over religious expression, as seen in restrictions against the spread of non-Sunni teachings, particularly targeting the Shi'a community (Samuri & Quraishi, 2016). These rulings have led to the surveillance and criminalization of certain religious practices, affecting the religious freedom of minority Muslim groups.

Legal pluralism in Malaysia is profoundly affected by fatwas, particularly in matters of family law and religious identity. Fatwas on apostasy and conversion pose significant legal and social challenges, especially for individuals seeking to leave Islam. The case of Lina Joy, a woman denied the right to change her religious status in official documents due to Islamic legal restrictions, highlights the legal barriers imposed by fatwas (Meerschaut & Saeger, 2019). Such rulings complicate legal proceedings related to marriage, inheritance, and child custody, often placing converts and interfaith families in precarious legal situations (Samuri & Khan, 2021). This demonstrates how fatwas intersect with civil law, reinforcing an Islamic legal framework that prioritizes religious conformity over individual rights.

The impact of fatwas on interfaith relations and legal pluralism is further evident in the contested space of religious education and proselytization. Fatwas restricting the exposure of Muslims to non-Islamic religious teachings and prohibiting participation in interfaith dialogues reinforce an exclusivist approach to religious discourse (Moustafa, 2013). Such limitations discourage open discussions on religious pluralism and hinder efforts to foster mutual respect among diverse religious communities. Additionally, the banning of certain books and religious materials through fatwas contributes to a controlled intellectual environment, restricting critical engagement with theological and philosophical diversity (Hoffstaedter, 2013).

In conclusion, fatwas in Malaysia have far-reaching consequences on interfaith relations, religious governance, and legal pluralism. They reinforce religious boundaries, shape state policies on religious expression, and create legal barriers for minority groups and converts. While fatwas serve as important tools for Islamic legal guidance, their restrictive interpretations often challenge the principles of religious freedom and social inclusion. Addressing these challenges requires a more inclusive approach to Islamic legal discourse that considers Malaysia's multicultural landscape while upholding fundamental human rights.

Connections to key themes (Legal Pluralism and Shariah Law)

The graph provides a conceptual framework illustrating the intricate relationships between Islamic legal perspectives, legal pluralism, and Shariah law in a multicultural context. It highlights the dynamic interplay between traditional Islamic jurisprudence and modern legal frameworks, showcasing how various elements influence the governance and interpretation of Islamic law, particularly in Malaysia. The diagram branches into two primary themes: Legal Pluralism and Shariah Law, each encompassing distinct yet interconnected components.

Under Legal Pluralism, the graph explores the integration of multiple legal traditions, including custom, which plays a crucial role in shaping Islamic rulings. Customary practices further link to themes such as philanthropy and non-Muslim attributes, reflecting the interaction between Islamic jurisprudence and diverse cultural values. Additionally, the harmonization of law emerges as a key factor in aligning Islamic legal principles with broader governance structures, leading to considerations of multi-culturalism and constitutional frameworks that regulate religious coexistence. Similarly, Shariah Law is analyzed through its institutional application, particularly within Syariah courts, which adjudicate matters related to Islamic jurisprudence. Furthermore, the application of Shariah in civil law demonstrates the extent to which Islamic principles are integrated into national legal systems, influencing governance and policy-making. The interconnected themes in the graph provide a comprehensive overview of the legal and social dimensions of Islamic rulings, emphasizing their impact on religious pluralism, governance, and societal norms. By mapping these relationships, the graph serves as a valuable tool for understanding the complexities of Islamic legal perspectives in contemporary pluralistic societies.
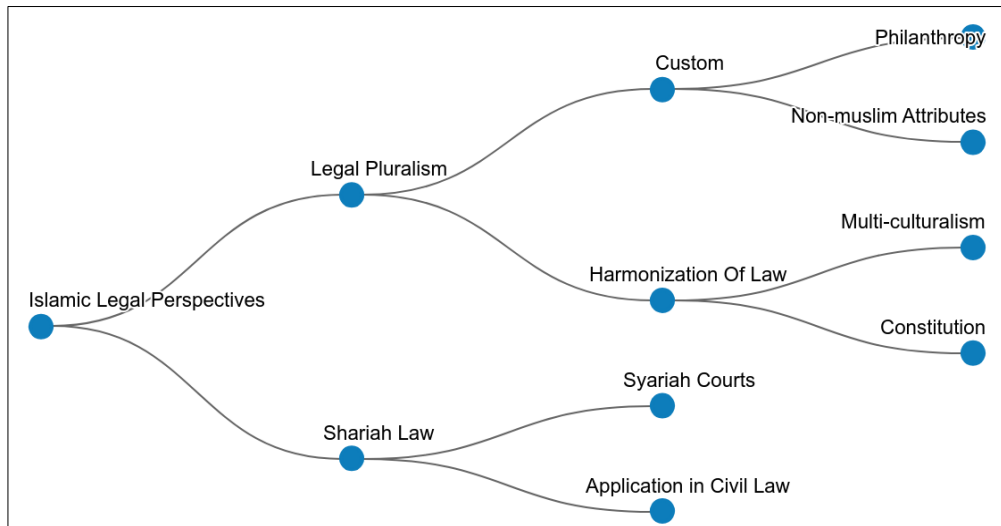
Figure 2: Linkages of Islamic Legal Perspectives

Linkages between Islamic legal perspectives and legal pluralism

The relationship between Islamic legal perspectives and legal pluralism is a crucial area of study in understanding how Islamic law operates within diverse legal environments. Legal pluralism, which refers to the coexistence of multiple legal systems within a single society, has been widely explored with Shariah law and its interaction with state law, customary law, and international legal frameworks (Shahar, 2008). In the Malaysian context, legal pluralism manifests in the dual legal system, where Islamic law governs personal and religious matters for Muslims, while civil law applies to broader legal issues. Fatwas, as non-binding yet influential Islamic legal opinions, contribute to the pluralistic legal landscape by providing religious rulings that coexist alongside statutory laws, creating a complex interaction between state authority and religious governance.

One of the key features of Islamic legal pluralism is the acceptance of multiple interpretations of Shariah law, particularly within the Sunni tradition, which recognizes legal disagreements as valid articulations of the law (Ibrahim, 2019). This internal pluralism within Islamic jurisprudence is evident in the coexistence of various madhhabs (schools of thought), each offering different yet legitimate legal interpretations. In Malaysia, fatwas issued by different state religious authorities can sometimes diverge, reflecting a pluralistic approach within the Islamic legal framework. However, challenges arise when certain fatwas contradict constitutional provisions on religious freedom or civil liberties, creating legal tensions between religious and state authorities. This highlights the necessity of harmonizing Islamic and civil legal principles within the broader scope of legal pluralism.

In some jurisdictions, the application of Islamic law within a pluralistic legal system has led to a model of legal harmonization, as seen in Aceh, Indonesia, where Islamic law is integrated with customary law and state law (Djawas et al., 2024). This model demonstrates that legal pluralism does not necessarily lead to conflict but can instead facilitate a balanced approach to governance by accommodating diverse legal traditions. Similarly, in Malaysia, the administration of Islamic law through Shariah courts coexists with the civil legal system, albeit with jurisdictional disputes arising in cases involving interfaith marriage, conversion, and religious freedom. This situation underscores the importance of developing legal frameworks that ensure cooperation between Shariah and civil courts while maintaining constitutional rights.

A "new legal pluralism" has been proposed to address the limitations of traditional legal classifications, arguing that Islamic law should not be viewed solely as a religious system but as a dynamic legal tradition that interacts with political, social, and economic forces (Amor, 2011). This approach challenges the rigid separation between religious and secular legal domains, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of Islamic law's role in contemporary governance. In Malaysia, the evolution of fatwas on religious pluralism reflects this tension, as state-sanctioned religious rulings seek to regulate interfaith relations while simultaneously being subject to

constitutional scrutiny. This redefinition of legal pluralism in Islamic contexts can offer new pathways for accommodating religious diversity within modern nation-states.

Ultimately, the linkage between Islamic legal perspectives and legal pluralism illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of Islamic law in multicultural societies. The Malaysian experience highlights both the opportunities and challenges of integrating Islamic jurisprudence within a broader legal framework. While fatwas contribute to shaping religious and legal norms, their implications on pluralism require careful assessment to ensure they align with constitutional principles and international human rights standards. Future research should explore models of legal reconciliation that respect religious authority while promoting inclusivity and social cohesion in legally pluralistic societies.

Linkages between Islamic legal perspectives and shariah law

Islamic legal perspectives and Shariah law are deeply interconnected, as Shariah represents the core framework through which Islamic jurisprudence operates. Derived from divine sources—the Qur'an and Hadith—Shariah law governs various aspects of life, including religious duties, ethical conduct, and legal obligations (Azeez, 2012). Unlike conventional legal systems, which are often codified by the state, Islamic law is developed through scholarly interpretations and juristic reasoning, making it a fluid and adaptive system (Yilmaz, 2021). This characteristic allows Shariah to remain relevant across different historical and cultural contexts while maintaining its foundational principles. The non-centralized nature of Islamic law has contributed to the existence of multiple schools of thought (madhhabs), reflecting the diversity within Islamic legal traditions.

One of the key aspects of Shariah law within Islamic legal perspectives is its ability to regulate both public and private behavior, encompassing areas such as criminal law, civil transactions, family law, and religious practices (Alarefi, 2009). In many Muslim-majority countries, fatwas—non-binding legal opinions issued by Islamic scholars—play a crucial role in interpreting Shariah principles in contemporary contexts. In Malaysia, for instance, fatwas are issued at the state level and influence legal rulings on issues such as religious pluralism, interfaith relations, and personal status laws. However, since fatwas are not legally binding, their enforcement depends on whether they are incorporated into state legislation or judicial decisions, illustrating the intersection between Shariah law and the broader legal system.

Despite its adaptability, Shariah law operates within legally pluralistic societies, where it interacts with state law, customary practices, and international legal frameworks (Djawas et al., 2024). This interaction often necessitates legal harmonization to resolve conflicts between Islamic legal norms and national legislation. In Malaysia, for example, Shariah courts function alongside civil courts, each having jurisdiction over different matters. However, jurisdictional conflicts arise in cases involving conversion, marriage, and inheritance, particularly when non-Muslims are affected. The need for harmonization has led to debates on whether Shariah should be reformed to align with constitutional principles while preserving its religious authenticity.

A major challenge in integrating Shariah law within modern legal frameworks is its perceived clash with international human rights norms, particularly in areas such as gender equality, freedom of expression, and religious rights (Nabeel, 2023). Some Muslim-majority states have expressed reservations about international human rights conventions, arguing that certain provisions contradict Islamic principles. However, scholars argue that this conflict should not be seen as irreconcilable but rather as an opportunity to foster dialogue between Islamic and international legal perspectives. Progressive interpretations of Shariah have sought to bridge this gap by advocating for rights-based approaches that uphold Islamic values while accommodating universal human rights principles. Ultimately, the linkage between Islamic legal perspectives and Shariah law reflects a complex yet dynamic legal tradition that continues to evolve in response to contemporary challenges. While Shariah remains a fundamental source of legal and ethical guidance for Muslims, its interaction with state law and international legal frameworks necessitates ongoing interpretation, adaptation, and harmonization. The role of fatwas and legal scholars remains critical in navigating these complexities, ensuring that Islamic legal principles remain relevant in modern governance. Future research should explore innovative models of legal integration that uphold religious values while promoting inclusivity, justice, and legal coherence in diverse societies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has critically examined the historical and ideological underpinnings that inform the issuance of fatwas on religious pluralism in Malaysia, as well as their impact on interfaith relations, religious governance, and legal pluralism. The findings reveal that fatwas on religious pluralism generally reflect a conservative and exclusivist interpretation of Islamic law, often reinforcing legal and theological constraints on interfaith engagement. While some fatwas promote moderation, the dominant discourse remains restrictive, leading to legal ambiguities and social tensions. By situating Malaysian fatwas within the broader context of legal pluralism and theological discourse, this study highlights the intersection between Islamic law and constitutional law, demonstrating how religious rulings influence legal interpretations and governance. The study underscores the need for a more inclusive and dialogical approach in fatwa issuance to ensure that Islamic legal interpretations align with Malaysia's multicultural realities. Moving forward, policymakers, religious authorities, and legal practitioners should work towards a balanced approach that upholds both religious principles and constitutional guarantees, fostering greater harmony in Malaysia's diverse society.

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