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## State-Led Islamization and Religious Conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia: A Latest Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract

This systematic literature review analyzes recent patterns of state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia, focusing on the interaction between state institutions, religious actors, and sociocultural forces in shaping contemporary Islamic governance. Although Islam in Southeast Asia has been widely studied, few works synthesize the most recent empirical findings using a structured and transparent review framework. To address this gap, the study applies the PRISMA protocol to guide systematic identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. Searches were conducted in Web of Science and Scopus using keywords related to Islamization, Islamic governance, religious policy, conservatism, fundamentalism, traditionalism, and orthodoxy. Limiting the review to publications from 2025 ensured attention to the latest scholarly developments. After screening, 35 primary studies were selected for qualitative thematic synthesis. Findings are organized into three themes: (1) State, Law, and Islamic Governance, emphasizing legal reforms and institutional regulation; (2) Religious Authority, Education, and Intellectual Islamization, highlighting contestation in educational and fatwa institutions; and (3) Islam, Identity Politics, and Cultural Negotiation, examining identity formation and digital activism. The review concludes that Islamization operates through interconnected legal, intellectual, and cultural mechanisms rather than a single centralized model.

**Keywords:** Conservatism, Islamization, Indonesia, Malaysia, religion.

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## Introduction

The state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia have evolved through complex interactions between the state, political society, and civil society. In Indonesia, the process of Islamization has been driven by various actors over time. Initially, the state had limited control over religious dynamics, but from the mid-1980s until the fall of Suharto, the state apparatus increasingly directed the Islamization process. Post-Suharto, civil society forces have predominantly driven Islamization, leading to a diverse yet mostly conservative Islamic landscape. However, the Islamization of politics has remained moderate, with civil society mass organizations significantly influencing the discourse on Islam and limiting the state's and political parties' ability to set the agenda (Ufen 2009). In contrast, Malaysia's Islamization has been more centrally planned and stimulated by the state, with the central bureaucracy playing a significant role. The politicization of religion in Malaysia has been strong, with Islamic political parties and the state acting more independently compared to Indonesia (Ufen 2009).

The Suharto government in Indonesia and the Mahathir government in Malaysia both launched Islamization programs that upgraded and created religious institutions. These programs often required religious teachers (ulamas) to support state ideologies, although there were instances where ulamas influenced state policies in their favor (Saat 2025). In Malaysia, the relationship between the state and Islam has been characterized by the state's efforts to frame Islam as a public matter to achieve racial harmony, contrasting with Indonesia's approach of treating Islam as a private matter managed by mass Islamic organizations (Kohno 2021). This framing has allowed the Malaysian state to maintain a more direct influence over religious affairs, contributing to the rise of religious conservatism (Saat 2025).

The impact of Muslim organizations and political parties on democracy in both countries has been significant. In Malaysia, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Association (PAS) has had varying levels of influence, often needing to moderate its appeals and build coalitions with secular or non-Islamic groups to gain power and influence (Sebastian, Hasyim, and Arifianto 2020). Under more democratic conditions, Islamic groups or parties in both countries have had to adapt their strategies to accommodate pluralist leanings. However, the rise of Islamic conservatism in Indonesia poses challenges to its secular state, with far-reaching implications for the country's social, cultural, and political fortunes (Sebastian et al. 2020). The involvement of extreme Islamic loyalist organizations in Indonesia has hampered democratic growth by interfering in government affairs and decision-making processes (Alam, Al-Fatih, and Borsa 2023).

In Malaysia, the Islamization process has had profound effects on society, particularly on Muslim women. The restrictive effects of Islamization are felt by Muslim women, especially those from professional backgrounds, although these effects are not always publicly articulated (Olivier 2016). The rise of religiously motivated hatred and the decline of moderate Islam in Malaysia can be attributed to various factors, including geopolitical influences and the political behavior of the ruling elite (Akhmetova 2019). Effective governance and respect for citizens' rights are proposed as ways to eliminate extremism and prevent radicalization (Akhmetova

2019). Overall, the state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia have been shaped by the interplay of state policies, political dynamics, and civil society influences, leading to distinct trajectories in each country.

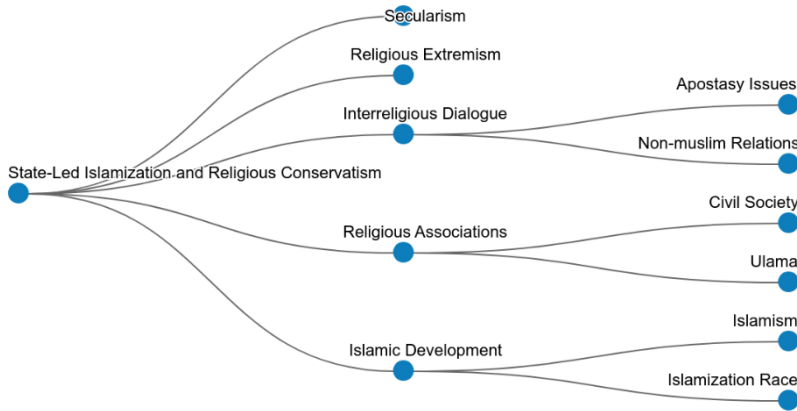


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of State-Led Islamization and Religious Conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia

Figure 1 illustrates the central role of state-led Islamization in shaping religious conservatism, highlighting its interconnected influence on secularism, religious extremism, and interreligious dialogue, as well as its structural linkages with religious associations and Islamic development agendas. These dynamics extend into critical socio-political domains, including apostasy issues, non-Muslim relations, civil society engagement, the authority of ulama, Islamism, and the Islamization race, demonstrating how institutional religious policies interact with societal actors and ideological movements. Overall, the concept map suggests that religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia is not an isolated phenomenon but a multidimensional process driven by state mechanisms, religious institutions, and socio-political contestations, collectively shaping governance, identity politics, and interreligious relations in both countries.

In conclusion, the state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia reflect the intricate interplay between state authority, political dynamics, and civil society engagement, resulting in distinct yet overlapping trajectories in each country. While Malaysia's approach has been characterized by a more centralized and state-driven Islamization process, Indonesia has experienced a more decentralized and civil society-driven evolution of Islamic practices and ideologies. Both nations face challenges posed by rising religious conservatism, which impacts social cohesion, governance, and individual rights, particularly for marginalized groups such as women. As these countries navigate their unique paths, the balance between maintaining religious identity and fostering democratic values will be crucial in shaping their future socio-political landscapes.

## Research Question

Research questions constitute the conceptual and methodological foundation of a systematic literature review (SLR), as they determine the analytical direction, delimit the scope of inquiry, and structure the entire review process. In rigorous evidence synthesis, research questions are not merely introductory elements but serve as the guiding architecture that shapes database selection, keyword construction, screening criteria, and thematic integration. Clearly articulated questions define the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, ensuring alignment between the objectives of the study and the body of literature examined. This structured formulation reduces the risk of selection bias and enhances internal coherence by linking search strategy, data extraction, and analytical synthesis within a unified logic (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). Moreover, explicit research questions facilitate systematic comparison across heterogeneous studies, enabling the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches into coherent conclusions. By strengthening conceptual precision and methodological transparency, well-defined questions contribute to the reproducibility and credibility of the review, allowing other scholars to replicate or extend the analytical framework in related contexts (Page et al. 2021). In this regard, research questions function as both epistemological anchors and procedural instruments that safeguard analytical rigor throughout the SLR process.

The formulation of research questions is widely recognized as the most critical phase in planning a systematic review because it directly informs all subsequent methodological decisions, from search string construction to quality appraisal and thematic synthesis (Kitchenham 2007). To enhance conceptual clarity and methodological coherence, the present study adopted the PICo framework—Population, Interest, and Context—as a structuring device for developing the research questions. The PICo approach is particularly suitable for qualitative and mixed-method reviews, where complex social phenomena require contextualized interpretation rather than purely quantitative aggregation (Lockwood, Munn, and Porritt 2015). By explicitly identifying the relevant population, clarifying the central phenomenon of interest, and delimiting the contextual setting, PICo enables systematic decomposition of the research focus and strengthens alignment between theoretical objectives and empirical search strategy. This framework improves both the sensitivity and specificity of database retrieval while ensuring that the review remains analytically focused on its core constructs. In examining state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia, the PICo model facilitated the development of research questions that integrate institutional actors, ideological processes, and sociopolitical environments within a coherent analytical structure. Through this methodological grounding, three interrelated research questions were formulated to guide the identification, screening, and synthesis of the selected literature.

RQ1: How do state institutions and legal bodies in Malaysia and Indonesia institutionalize Islamization and religious conservatism within constitutional and governance frameworks?

RQ2: How do religious scholars and Islamic educational institutions in Malaysia and Indonesia shape and negotiate religious conservatism through intellectual production and educational practices?

RQ3: How is Islamic identity constructed and negotiated in Malaysia and Indonesia amid state-led Islamization, religious conservatism, and diverse sociocultural contexts?

## Material and Methods

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) represents the prevailing methodological benchmark for conducting systematic reviews, offering an internationally recognised framework that promotes transparency, methodological consistency, and reproducibility in evidence synthesis (Page et al. 2021). Compliance with PRISMA enhances analytical rigor by establishing a structured and explicit process for study identification, screening, and selection, thereby mitigating selection bias and strengthening the credibility of review outcomes. The framework further emphasises critical appraisal of study design quality, recognising that methodologically robust research—particularly well-designed empirical studies where applicable—contributes to stronger evidentiary validity and reduces the risk of systematic error. In accordance with these principles, the present review utilised Web of Science and Scopus as primary data sources, given their extensive coverage, high indexing standards, and suitability for interdisciplinary research.

From an operational perspective, the PRISMA-guided process was implemented through four sequential stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and data abstraction. The identification phase employed comprehensive and replicable search strategies to ensure broad capture of potentially relevant records across databases. Screening subsequently involved the removal of duplicates and the systematic evaluation of titles and abstracts against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to exclude studies lacking relevance or methodological adequacy. The eligibility stage consisted of full-text assessment to confirm alignment with the review objectives and established quality thresholds. Finally, data abstraction enabled the systematic extraction, organisation, and synthesis of key findings, facilitating coherent thematic integration and robust analytical interpretation. Collectively, this structured workflow provides a transparent audit trail from search execution to synthesis, ensuring that the resulting evidence base is credible, replicable, and informative for both scholarly advancement and practical application.

### Identification

This study adopted a rigorous and internationally recognized systematic review approach to develop a comprehensive and policy-relevant body of evidence. The process began with the careful identification of core conceptual terms directly aligned with the research objectives. These preliminary keywords were not selected arbitrarily; instead, they were critically refined and expanded through systematic term harvesting from authoritative academic sources, including disciplinary dictionaries,

specialized thesauri, encyclopedias, and a wide range of empirical and theoretical scholarship. This iterative refinement ensured conceptual breadth while maintaining analytical precision. The finalized keywords were then translated into structured, database-specific search strings tailored to the indexing systems of Web of Science and Scopus (see Table 1). By calibrating the search syntax to each platform, the study maximized retrieval sensitivity without compromising relevance. The comprehensive search strategy yielded 999 records across both databases, providing a robust initial corpus for subsequent screening and eligibility assessment.

Table 1: The Search String

<b>Screening</b>	
Scopus	<p>TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( "Islamization" OR "Islamisation" OR "Islamic influence" OR "Islamic governance" OR "religious policy" OR "religious conservatism" OR "religious fundamentalism" OR "traditionalism" OR "orthodoxy" ) AND ( "Malaysia" OR "Malaysian" OR "Indonesia" OR "Indonesian" ) ) AND PUBYEAR = 2025 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBSTAGE , "final" ) )</p> <p><b>Date of Access: Feb 2026</b></p>
WoS	<p>( "Islamization" OR "Islamisation" OR "Islamic influence" OR "Islamic governance" OR "religious policy" OR "religious conservatism" OR "religious fundamentalism" OR "traditionalism" OR "orthodoxy" ) AND ( "Malaysia" OR "Malaysian" OR "Indonesia" OR "Indonesian" ) (Topic) and 2025 (Publication Years) and Article (Document Types) and English (Languages)</p> <p><b>Date of Access: Feb 2026</b></p>

Following the identification phase, a systematic and carefully structured screening procedure was undertaken to refine the dataset in strict accordance with the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This stage was designed to ensure that only studies directly aligned with the scope and objectives of the review were retained. After preliminary screening, 62 records remained eligible for further consideration, consisting of 45 articles indexed in Scopus and 17 in Web of Science. A substantial proportion of records ( $n = 937$ ) were excluded at this stage due to non-compliance with the established criteria. Excluded materials included publications in languages other than English, studies published prior to 2025, and document types such as conference proceedings, books, review papers, and articles in press. These exclusions were applied deliberately to preserve conceptual coherence, methodological comparability, and direct relevance to the most current academic and policy discussions. Limiting the dataset to peer-reviewed journal articles strengthens evidentiary reliability, as such publications are typically subjected to more rigorous scholarly scrutiny and quality assurance processes.

In addition to applying these eligibility filters, duplicate records identified across both databases ( $n = 9$ ) were systematically removed to prevent redundancy and

minimize the risk of disproportionate representation of particular studies. The overlap observed between Scopus and Web of Science reflects their complementary yet partially convergent indexing coverage. Eliminating duplicates at this stage was essential to maintain analytical precision and avoid distortion in subsequent thematic synthesis. The resulting corpus constitutes a carefully curated and methodologically robust body of contemporary scholarship, closely aligned with the review’s objective of examining recent developments in state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia. Overall, the screening process achieved a deliberate balance between inclusiveness and rigor, ensuring that the retained studies are both substantively relevant and methodologically sound, thereby establishing a defensible foundation for the subsequent stages of eligibility assessment and qualitative analysis.

Table 2: The Selection Criterion in Searching

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Time line	2025	< 2025
Literature type	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
Publication Stage	Final	In Press

## Eligibility

The third phase of the review involved a comprehensive eligibility assessment designed to ensure substantive alignment between the selected studies and the objectives of the research. At this stage, 53 articles underwent detailed examination. Rather than relying solely on surface-level screening, each study was carefully reviewed through its title, abstract, and core content to evaluate conceptual relevance, thematic consistency, and empirical robustness. This close reading allowed for a more nuanced determination of whether the study meaningfully addressed the central dimensions of state-led Islamization and religious conservatism within the specified national contexts.

Through this rigorous appraisal process, 18 articles were excluded. The primary reasons for exclusion included limited relevance to the research focus, insufficient conceptual depth, weak thematic correspondence with the guiding research questions, lack of empirical substantiation, or absence of accessible full-text versions. These decisions were made to safeguard analytical integrity and ensure that the final corpus reflected both intellectual coherence and methodological credibility. Following this critical filtering stage, 35 articles were retained for inclusion in the qualitative synthesis. This final dataset represents a carefully validated body of scholarship, forming a robust foundation for thematic integration and interpretive analysis in the subsequent stage of the review.

## Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analytical approach was employed to enable systematic comparison and synthesis across diverse research designs, including both qualitative and

quantitative methodologies. This approach was selected to ensure that variations in methodological orientation did not fragment the analytical process but instead contributed to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The primary objective of this stage was to identify recurring patterns, conceptual clusters, and emerging subthemes grounded in the evidence. The thematic development process began with structured data extraction, during which all 35 included studies were carefully examined for statements, findings, and analytical insights directly relevant to the core focus of the review. As illustrated in Figure 2, each publication was scrutinized to identify conceptual linkages and substantive contributions to the broader discourse on Islamic higher education and Islamization dynamics in Malaysia.

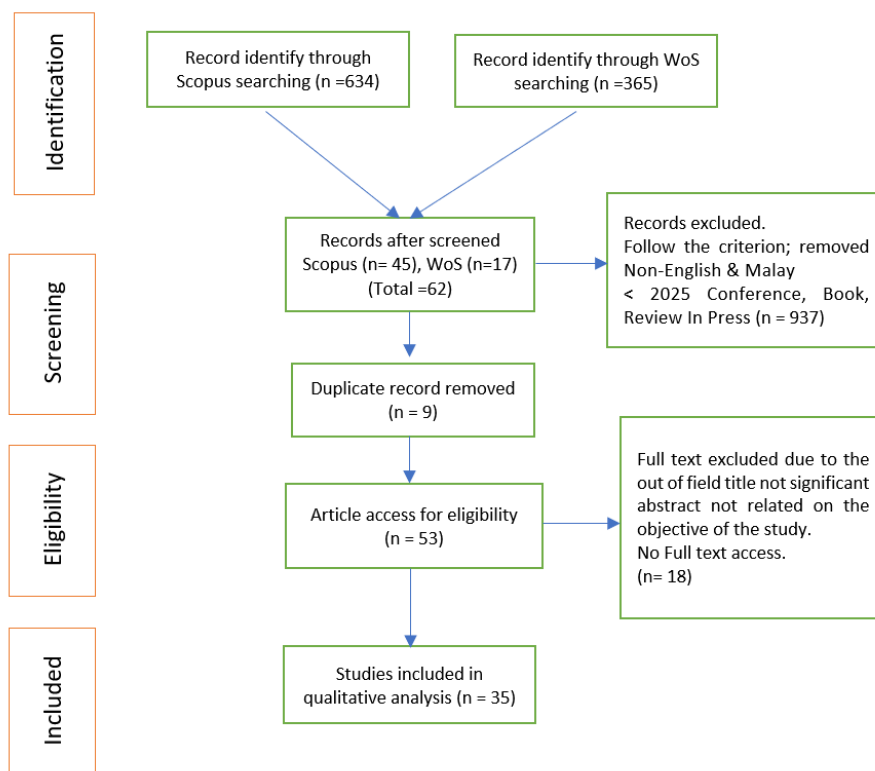
Beyond extracting thematic elements, methodological characteristics and key findings from each study were systematically compared to identify convergences, divergences, and theoretical orientations. This comparative process strengthened analytical depth by situating individual findings within a broader interpretive framework. Theme construction was conducted collaboratively among the research team to enhance analytical rigor and minimize individual interpretive bias. Throughout the analysis, a detailed audit trail was maintained to document emerging interpretations, analytical reflections, conceptual uncertainties, and methodological observations. This reflexive log served as a transparency mechanism, ensuring that thematic decisions were traceable and systematically justified. Following initial theme development, cross-validation was undertaken to examine consistency across categories and to detect potential overlap or conceptual ambiguity. Where interpretive differences emerged, these were resolved through structured discussion until analytical consensus was achieved. This iterative and collaborative procedure enhanced the credibility, coherence, and robustness of the final thematic framework.

### Quality of Appraisal

Consistent with established guidance for systematic reviews, the studies retained after the initial selection phase underwent a structured quality appraisal to assess evidentiary robustness and support quantitative comparability across the reviewed corpus (Kitchenham, B., & Charters 2007). This appraisal was operationalised using a six-criterion quality assessment framework adapted from (Abouzahra, Sabraoui, and Afdel 2020), with each criterion evaluated on a three-point scoring scale: “Yes” (Y = 1) when fully satisfied, “Partly” (P = 0.5) when partially addressed with identifiable limitations, and “No” (N = 0) when the criterion was not met.

- QA1. Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
- QA2. Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
- QA3. Is the study methodology clearly established?
- QA4. Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
- QA5. Is the work compared and measured with other similar work?
- QA6. Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

Each study was independently evaluated by multiple experts against the established quality criteria, after which the individual assessments were aggregated to generate an overall quality score. Progression to subsequent stages of the review required a cumulative score exceeding 3.0 based on the combined evaluations, a predefined threshold designed to act as a quality filter and ensure that only studies meeting an acceptable standard of methodological and reporting rigor were retained for further analysis.



## Result and Discussion

The quality assessment of PS1–PS27 shows that all evaluated articles meet the minimum acceptance threshold, as none scored below 50%. Overall, the studies demonstrate strong methodological and conceptual rigor, with most papers scoring between 75% and 91.7%, indicating generally high research quality. QA1 (clarity of purpose), QA2 (usefulness and contribution), and QA4 (clarity of concepts) were fully satisfied (Y) across all papers, reflecting that each study clearly states its objectives, significance, and theoretical framing. QA3 (methodology) was also strong, with only a few papers (e.g., PS14 and PS21) rated “Partly,” suggesting minor gaps in methodological explanation. QA5 (comparison with similar work) showed moderate strength, frequently rated “Partly,” indicating that while most studies situate their work within existing literature, direct comparison or benchmarking is not always comprehensive. The weakest criterion across the set was QA6 (limitations), which

was often rated “No” or “Partly,” showing that many abstracts do not explicitly acknowledge research limitations. The highest-performing papers (PS15, PS22, and PS26, each scoring 91.7%) stand out for strong methodology, clearer comparative elements, and partial acknowledgment of limitations. In summary, all selected articles are acceptable based on the  $\geq 50\%$  criterion, with the majority demonstrating good to very good overall quality, though future improvements could focus on explicitly stating study limitations and strengthening comparative analysis.

PS	AUTHORS	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total	%
PS1	(Wijaya, Abidin, and Syaifudin 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3%
PS2	(Idzhar, Muqorrobieen, and Kasumawati 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS3	(Saefullah et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3%
PS4	(Wahib and Raushan 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7%
PS5	(Arif et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS6	(Ibrahim and Ibrahim 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	4.0	66.7%
PS7	(Karim, Muhsin, and Hadi 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS8	(Wakano et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3%
PS9	(Aprison and Sulong 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS10	(Abdullah et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS11	(Muhammad Alwi, Parninsih, and Abubakar 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS12	(Addzaky et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS13	(Abas et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3%
PS14	(Kloos 2025)	Y	Y	P	Y	P	N	4.0	66.7%
PS15	(Permata et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.7%
PS16	(Harun et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS17	(Kusmayanti et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS18	(Daulay, Siregar, and Akhyar 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3%
PS19	(Alnizar 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3%
PS20	(Hariyanto, Mukhlis, and Rismana 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%

PS	AUTHORS	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	Total	%
PS21	(Meyer 2025)	Y	Y	P	Y	P	N	4.0	66.7%
PS22	(Hoyle and Harry 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.7%
PS23	(Suryati and Indrawan 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS24	(Ichsan Azis, Anwar, and Djakaria 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS25	(Hajar, Said, and Maram 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS26	(Yunus, Adam, and Ibrahim 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.7%
PS27	(Jamin, Khalid, and Ahmad 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3%
PS28	(Achyani et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.7%
PS29	(Massey 2025)	Y	Y	P	Y	P	N	4.0	66.7%
PS30	(Irwansyah, Soehadha, and Sm 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS31	(Samsul Hady et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.7%
PS32	(Naily and Riza 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	5.0	83.3%
PS33	(Rohmana 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	N	4.5	75.0%
PS34	(Taufika, Ritonga, and Ohorella 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	P	5.0	83.3%
PS35	(Permata et al. 2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	P	5.5	91.7%

## State, Law, and Islamic Governance

The literature grouped under the theme of State, Law, and Islamic Governance demonstrates that state-led Islamization in Indonesia and Malaysia is primarily articulated through constitutional reinterpretation, juridical reform, and doctrinal negotiation within modern nation-state structures. (Idzhar et al. 2025) reveal that the Indonesian Constitutional Court has progressively recalibrated classical Sunni doctrines on lineage by incorporating scientific evidence into the determination of legitimate child status. The findings indicate partial judicial compliance and ongoing tension between fiqh authority and constitutional guarantees, suggesting a gradual accommodation rather than abrupt transformation. A comparable pattern of doctrinal adaptation appears in (Harun et al. 2025), where classical legal categories defining non-Muslim status are reassessed against Indonesia's democratic and pluralist constitutional framework. The study concludes that the concept of *al-muwāṭinūn* provides a more contextually relevant model for equal citizenship, reflecting the elasticity of Islamic jurisprudence when confronted with contemporary governance

norms. At the societal level, (Kusmayanti et al. 2025) document ideological contestation surrounding traditional sharecropping contracts in rural West Java, illustrating how local actors reinterpret Islamic law in response to economic inequality and technological change. (Daulay et al. 2025) further extend this adaptive dynamic into academic institutions, demonstrating that integration of religious and general sciences remains structurally and epistemologically constrained, yet necessary for contextualized *ijtihād*. Together, these studies show that constitutionalization of Islamic norms does not represent rigid Islamization; instead, it embodies a negotiated process shaped by legal pluralism, institutional constraints, and evolving interpretations.

Beyond constitutional reform, Islamic governance is increasingly embedded within regulatory systems, administrative ethics, and sectoral policy frameworks. (Saefullah et al. 2025) examine halal governance and find that although moderation principles such as *wasatiyyah* and *maṣlaḥah* are formally recognized, implementation remains fragmented due to bureaucratic inefficiency and limited accessibility for small enterprises. The discussion highlights the need for digitalization and inter-agency coordination to strengthen structural coherence. Institutional ethics are further examined by (Yunus et al. 2025), whose quantitative findings demonstrate that Islamic work ethics and engagement significantly enhance Sharia police performance in Aceh, while leadership exerts a direct but not moderating influence. This suggests that internal moral orientation plays a more decisive role than hierarchical authority in faith-based enforcement contexts. In the financial domain, (Achyani et al. 2025) show that the characteristics of Sharia Supervisory Boards correlate positively with disclosure of Islamic Corporate Ethical Identity and financial outcomes, indicating that governance quality reinforces ethical transparency. (Hariyanto et al. 2025) address administrative ambiguity in regional governance, concluding that marginalization of deputy regional heads contradicts principles of consultation and justice within Islamic political thought (Massey 2025) broadens this governance discussion by situating Islamic public administration within historical and epistemological trajectories, arguing that Islamic public value systems provide alternative normative foundations to Western administrative paradigms. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that state-led Islamization functions through measurable regulatory mechanisms and institutional ethics rather than symbolic rhetoric alone.

The discursive dimension of governance further illustrates how moral authority and ideological framing shape state-Islam relations. (Wijaya et al. 2025) find that state-sponsored Qur'anic exegesis operates as an ideological instrument reflecting governmental religious orientation. Comparative analysis reveals that inclusive hermeneutics aligned with pluralist national identity can promote interreligious cooperation, while scripturalist interpretations may reinforce exclusivist tendencies. The role of moral evaluation in policy practice is examined by (Hoyle and Harry 2025), who identify how compassion and traditionalist moral reasoning influence Indonesia's bifurcated drug sentencing system. Findings suggest that penal outcomes are shaped not only by statutory provisions but also by normative perceptions of harm and moral deservingness among justice professionals. These insights resonate with broader patterns identified by (Saefullah et al. 2025) and (Yunus et al. 2025), where

ethical principles are operationalized within governance institutions but remain mediated by structural and cultural factors. Across these studies, state-led Islamization emerges as a layered phenomenon composed of constitutional adaptation, administrative restructuring, and discursive production of legitimacy. Religious conservatism is neither uniform nor monolithic; it is reproduced through legal codification, bureaucratic implementation, and moral narratives that define social order and public value. At the same time, pluralist constitutional commitments and adaptive jurisprudential reasoning continue to shape the trajectory of Islamic governance in complex and context-sensitive ways.

### Religious Authority, Education, and Intellectual Islamization

The scholarship under the theme of Religious Authority, Education, and Intellectual Islamization indicates that Islamic authority in Malaysia and Indonesia is continuously negotiated through educational institutions, theological production, and interpretive practices. (Wakano et al. 2025) demonstrate that Islamic higher education institutions respond to multicultural pressures through three institutional pathways: symbolic accommodation, substantive curricular integration, and theological resistance. The findings show that rhetorical endorsement of inclusivity is insufficient without structural alignment between leadership commitment and institutional culture. A similar negotiation between orthodoxy and modernity appears in (Abas et al. 2025), where comparative analysis of Indonesian and Malaysian pesantren reveals divergent pedagogical strategies. Indonesian pesantren tend to preserve memorization-based instruction and stronger theological conservatism due to institutional autonomy, while Malaysian institutions reflect greater curricular structuring influenced by state involvement. Contestation between national policy and local Islamic values is further examined by (Aprison and Sulong 2025), whose findings show that Minangkabau resistance to Indonesia's national hijab regulation reflects defense of communal identity and educational autonomy rather than simple doctrinal rigidity. Together, these studies suggest that educational arenas function as key sites where religious conservatism, pluralism, and state authority intersect, producing diverse models of intellectual Islamization shaped by institutional structures and sociocultural context.

Beyond formal education systems, the production of religious knowledge through tafsir, manuscripts, and intellectual reform initiatives demonstrates the dynamic role of local scholarship in shaping Islamic discourse. (Muhammad Alwi et al. 2025) highlight the significance of Bugis tafsir in Eastern Indonesia, emphasizing how local-language Qur'anic interpretation facilitated Islamization while preserving cultural identity. The findings identify culturally rooted da'wah, preservation of pesantren intellectual heritage, and contextual engagement as central functions of this tradition. (Rohmana 2025) complements this perspective by documenting Sundanese kitāb printed in Egypt, illustrating how transregional scholarly networks accelerated Islamization and expanded literacy through print culture. Meanwhile, (Samsul Hady et al. 2025) demonstrate that Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia serve not only as textual heritage but as living instruments for fostering moderation. The findings indicate that manuscript traditions historically mediated adaptation between

Islamic teachings and local adat, promoting dialogue rather than rigid legal imposition. Intellectual reform discourse is further elaborated by (Addzaky et al. 2025), whose study on K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid identifies reinterpretation of fiqh, defense of minority rights, and grassroots empowerment as pillars of an Indonesian liberation theology. These combined findings illustrate that intellectual Islamization operates through both preservation and reinterpretation, enabling Islamic thought to respond to pluralism, modernization, and social justice concerns without abandoning doctrinal foundations.

The literature also reveals intense contestation within religious authority structures, particularly regarding gender, minority status, and discursive power. (Naily and Riza 2025) document ideological divergence between progressive and conservative factions within Nahdlatul Ulama concerning female circumcision, demonstrating that competing interpretations of Shafi'i jurisprudence continue to shape contemporary debates. The study concludes that such contestation reflects enduring tension between reformist and traditionalist orientations within pesantren networks. (Alnizar 2025) analyzes the fatwa of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia on Ahmadiyah and finds that linguistic strategies—such as abstraction, repetition, and categorical labeling—reinforce institutional authority and marginalize dissenting groups. This demonstrates that religious authority is constructed not only through doctrinal reasoning but also through discursive framing that shapes public perception. Kloos (2025) provides a Malaysian perspective by examining female Islamic preachers who employ hybrid genres combining theology, self-help, and narrative storytelling to establish legitimacy in a polarized public sphere. The findings indicate that authority can be extended and subtly reconfigured through performative strategies that balance tradition with innovation. Collectively, these studies reveal that intellectual Islamization in Malaysia and Indonesia is characterized by layered negotiations: between state policy and local culture, between conservative orthodoxy and progressive reform, and between textual authority and communicative strategy. Religious conservatism persists through institutional reinforcement and doctrinal defense, yet it is continually challenged and reshaped by educational reform, manuscript traditions, and evolving modes of religious expression.

### Islam, Identity Politics, and Cultural Negotiation

The literature categorized under Islam, Identity Politics, and Cultural Negotiation indicates that Islamization in Malaysia and Indonesia is deeply embedded in processes of identity construction, political adaptation, and negotiation between religious norms and local traditions. (Wahib and Raushan 2025) demonstrate that contemporary religious conservatism among urban Muslim youth is mediated through digital activism, where early marriage campaigns strategically employ state legal frameworks to legitimize moral agendas. The findings suggest that even movements critical of state regulation simultaneously internalize and reproduce state law, illustrating a reciprocal relationship between society and governance. (Arif et al. 2025) similarly portray Islamic identity as adaptive and politically engaged, showing how the Khalwatiyah Samman Sufi order transformed from a ritual community into a socio-political actor capable of negotiating accusations of heresy and responding to

shifting power constellations. Political engagement, in this context, functions as a survival strategy that consolidates doctrinal continuity. Historical perspectives provided by (Hajar et al. 2025) reinforce this adaptive pattern by identifying Islam as a catalyst for anti-colonial resistance, where religious institutions, pesantren networks, and Sufi leaders strengthened communal solidarity under external domination. (Permata et al. 2025) further challenge colonial historiography by demonstrating that Islamization in East Kalimantan was initiated through local political agency rather than passive reception, linking religious expansion to regional power consolidation. Across these studies, Islam emerges not as a static doctrinal system but as a dynamic identity resource mobilized in response to political pressure, colonial intervention, and contemporary digital activism.

Cultural heritage and local traditions constitute another significant dimension of identity negotiation. (Abdullah et al. 2025) analyze the Rambang manuscript and conclude that Sufi thought in Java historically mediated tensions between orthodox and heterodox tendencies, contributing to the formation of tolerant Islamic expressions. This manuscript demonstrates that theological adaptation to local idioms was central to maintaining social harmony during earlier Islamization processes. Archaeological findings presented by (Ibrahim and Ibrahim 2025; Ichsan Azis et al. 2025) show material evidence of acculturation in Aceh and Bolaang Mongondow, where Islamic symbols merged with pre-existing artistic forms. Such artefacts illustrate gradual cultural integration rather than abrupt replacement of indigenous traditions. (Meyer 2025) provides an anthropological perspective by examining grave visitations in Java, revealing that ritual practices enable contemporary Muslims to negotiate belonging beyond rigid modernist–traditionalist dichotomies. In a similar vein, (Suryati and Indrawan 2025) demonstrate how Islamic musical elements embedded within Malay secular songs reinforce local identity while preserving religious aesthetics. (Suryati and Indrawan 2025) further show that Malay midwifery traditions adapt ritual elements to conform with Islamic principles without eliminating cultural continuity. These findings collectively suggest that Islamization involves continuous cultural reinterpretation, where identity is negotiated through manuscripts, architecture, music, ritual, and intangible heritage, rather than through uniform doctrinal enforcement.

The negotiation between Islamic doctrine and plural social realities is also visible in contemporary debates on syncretism, family ethics, and customary law. (Irwansyah et al. 2025) argue that the Tridharma tradition in Indonesia illustrates a complex form of religious syncretism shaped by historical state policies and minority identity politics, demonstrating that negotiated religious spaces can promote coexistence. (Karim et al. 2025) identify the ethical framework of Mohd. Kamal Hassan as a response to modern family challenges in Malaysia, proposing Islamicisation of the self and al-Wasaṭiyyah as strategies for strengthening familial cohesion amid globalization. (Taufika et al. 2025) examine the Batak community and conclude that interaction between Dalihan Na Tolu customary law and Islamic theology produces flexible integration rather than rigid conflict, indicating pragmatic accommodation. (Wahib and Raushan 2025) further illustrate how digital religious campaigns reframe early marriage within administrative legality, reinforcing

conservative values through modern communication platforms. Meanwhile, (Arif et al. 2025) emphasize that Sufi institutions historically transformed political contestation into opportunities for institutional consolidation. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that Islam, identity politics, and cultural negotiation in Malaysia and Indonesia operate through layered processes: reinterpretation of tradition, adaptation to political authority, and rearticulation of religious norms within diverse social contexts. Religious conservatism coexists with plural negotiation, and identity formation remains contingent upon historical memory, cultural heritage, and socio-political transformation.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic literature review set out to examine the contemporary patterns of state-led Islamization and religious conservatism in Malaysia and Indonesia by synthesizing peer-reviewed studies published in 2025 and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science . The review was guided by three central research questions focusing on institutionalization within state and legal frameworks, the role of religious authority and education, and the negotiation of Islamic identity in sociocultural contexts. Applying the PRISMA protocol ensured a transparent and replicable process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and qualitative synthesis. From an initial large pool of records, 35 primary studies were retained for final analysis, all meeting predefined quality appraisal thresholds. The scope was intentionally limited to journal articles in English to capture the most recent and methodologically robust scholarship. By concentrating on a single publication year and clearly defined inclusion criteria, the review aimed to provide a focused and updated mapping of current academic discourse surrounding Islamization policies and religious conservatism in both national contexts.

The synthesis of findings reveals several consistent patterns across the selected studies. First, state-led Islamization operates through multidimensional mechanisms that include constitutional reinterpretation, bureaucratic regulation, institutional restructuring, and discursive legitimation. Rather than representing a uniform top-down imposition, Islamization appears as a negotiated process shaped by interactions between state authorities, religious elites, and civil society actors. Second, religious authority and intellectual Islamization are actively produced and contested within educational institutions, manuscript traditions, fatwa bodies, and digital platforms. Educational reforms, theological reinterpretations, and debates on gender, minority rights, and orthodoxy demonstrate ongoing tension between conservative and reformist orientations. Third, identity politics and cultural negotiation constitute a central dimension of Islamization, where heritage, local customs, digital activism, and minority experiences interact with state religious policies. Across themes, religious conservatism coexists with adaptive pluralism, suggesting that Islamization in both Malaysia and Indonesia is neither monolithic nor static. The review further identifies methodological diversity, with qualitative approaches dominating but supported by empirical surveys and institutional analyses. Thematically, the literature converges on the importance of governance structures, intellectual production, and socio-cultural mediation as interlinked components of contemporary Islamization.

This review contributes to the field by integrating fragmented discussions into a coherent thematic framework that connects legal governance, intellectual authority, and identity negotiation within a single analytical structure. By categorizing the literature into three interrelated themes, the study extends previous comparative works and provides a clearer conceptual map of how state mechanisms and religious conservatism intersect in Southeast Asia. The findings carry practical implications for policymakers, educational leaders, and religious institutions, particularly in designing governance models that balance religious identity with constitutional pluralism, strengthening institutional transparency, and fostering inclusive educational environments. Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. The restriction to two databases and to publications in English may exclude relevant regional scholarship. The focus on a single publication year offers depth in recency but limits longitudinal perspective. Future research should expand temporal coverage, incorporate additional databases, and conduct empirical comparative fieldwork to assess policy outcomes and societal impact. Overall, conducting systematic reviews in this domain remains essential for advancing evidence-based understanding, reducing analytical fragmentation, and guiding future theoretical and empirical development in the study of Islamization and religious conservatism.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. All contributions were made objectively without any personal, financial, or institutional influence that could compromise the integrity of the work.

### Authors' Contributions Statement

All authors contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology, and analysis.

1. **Mohammad Hassan Sharafi Che Mohd Adli** proposed the research, collected the data and prepared the first draft.
2. **Razaleigh Muhamat Kawangit and Muhammad Faisal Ashaari** handled the restructuring, review and editing.
3. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

### Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles and academic integrity. All procedures were carried out responsibly, with informed consent obtained from participants (when applicable) and strict confidentiality maintained.

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