Fanur Islamic Law Review

OPEN ACCESS

Volume 1 | Issue 1 Article 1

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Article info:
Received: April 21, 2026; Revised: May 10, 2026; Accepted: June 01, 2026
How to cite this article:
Muhammad, Wildan Imaduddin. "Between Texts, Data and Power: The Socio-Legal Dynamics of Fatwa Transformation in the Indonesian Ulema Council (1975–2024)." *Fanur Islamic Law Review* 1, no. 1 (2026): 1-28. https://doi.org/10.47731/fanur.v1i1.2026.1.



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Between Texts, Data and Power: The Socio-Legal Dynamics of Fatwa Transformation in the Indonesian Ulema Council (1975–2024)

Wildan Imaduddin Muhammad

Abstract

This article examines the evolution of Islamic legal thought in Indonesia as reflected in the fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) across domains of religious worship, science, and technology. While Islamic law is conventionally understood as a textual product of scriptural interpretation, in practice it has undergone substantial revision through sustained engagement with scientific developments and shifting socio-political conditions. Prior scholarship has tended to treat the normative, empirical, and political dimensions of this process as discrete analytical objects, leaving their mutual entanglements underexamined. This article identifies the patterns through which MUI fatwas have changed over time and explains how the interplay among textual hermeneutics, institutional authority, modern science, and state policy has driven those changes. Drawing on a qualitative library-based methodology, the study analyses nine fatwas issued between 1975 and 2024 on four thematic clusters—vasectomy, meningitis vaccination, qibla determination, and lunar calendar calculation—through the lens of the sociology of knowledge. The findings reveal three distinct trajectories of transformation: the relaxation of previously absolute rulings, the outright revocation of earlier fatwas, and the incremental refinement of legal norms. These shifts were propelled by new empirical evidence (including advances in vasectomy reversal, the availability of halal vaccines, and developments in computational astronomy), social demands (public health imperatives and pressures for religious calendrical unity), and political factors (accommodation of state policy priorities). The article concludes that MUI fatwas are best understood not as the unmediated outcomes of normative ijtihād but as socially situated constructs that emerge from the negotiation of religious authority, scientific legitimacy, and political interest.

Keywords: Fatwa; Indonesian Ulema Council; legal politics; religion and science; sociology of knowledge.

Introduction

Contemporary society is characterized by the rapid acceleration of social change across multiple registers—driven by globalization, demographic mobility, scientific and technological advancement, and increasingly intricate socio-political configurations.[1] This

[1] Satyajit Majumdar et al., "Technology and Innovation for Social Change: An Introduction," in *Technology and Innovation for Social Change*, ed. Satyajit Majumdar et al. (Springer India, 2015), 1–3; David Brady et al., "The Consequences of Economic Globalization for Affluent Democracies," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007): 313–34; Andrii Dub, "The Impact of Innovations and Technological Development on Modern Society and Global Dynamics," *Economic Affairs 68*, no. 4 (2023): 2317–25.

acceleration generates a distinctive predicament for religious authorities.[2] On one hand, they bear an obligation to protect doctrinal integrity; on the other, they are expected to respond to emerging conditions that frequently exceed established frameworks of religious interpretation.[3] In Indonesia, no institution exemplifies this predicament more than the MUI, which holds both normative authority and broad socio-religious influence as the country's foremost fatwa-issuing body. Advances in medicine, astronomy, and geodesy have raised novel juristic questions, while the dynamics of an increasingly pluralistic democratic polity create pressures from multiple directions—state actors seeking religious endorsement for public policy, conservative constituencies resistant to change, and progressive voices demanding accommodation of modern realities.[4] Every fatwa the MUI issues is consequently a negotiated outcome, located at the intersection of religious reasoning, scientific knowledge, and competing political interests.

These pressures are nowhere more visible than in the revisions to several major fatwas. The fatwa on meningitis vaccination for ḥajj and 'umrah pilgrims sought to reconcile international public health requirements with the principle of halal consumption. The fatwa on vasectomy and tubectomy placed the protection of lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) in dialogue with medical evidence of reversibility. The fatwa on the beginning of the lunar month navigated the methodological tension between astronomical calculation (*ḥisāb*) and direct moon sighting (*ru'yah*) in pursuit of national calendar unification. The fatwa on qibla direction subjected a centuries-old practice to the scrutiny of modern geodetic science.[5] Each revision speaks to the MUI's sustained effort to keep Islamic law responsive to scientific advancement and socio-political change.[6] Given the role of MUI fatwas as authoritative reference points for Indonesian Muslims, each revision carries consequences that extend well beyond liturgical practice, touching the legitimacy of religious authority and the adaptive capacity of Islamic jurisprudence as a living legal order.[7]

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[2] Abdelmajid Charfi, "Islam: A Changing Religious Institution in the Era of Globalization," in *The Islamic World and the Mediterranean: From Colonial Legacy to Political and Cultural Interdependence*, ed. Gustavo Gozzi (Taylor and Francis, 2025), 15–20.

[3] Arifah Millati Agustina and Nor Ismah, "Challenging Traditional Islamic Authority: Indonesian Female Ulama and the Fatwa Against Forced Marriages," *Journal of Islamic Law 5*, no. 1 (2024): 125–46; David Kloos and Nor Ismah, "Siting Islamic Feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the Challenge of Challenging Patriarchal Authority," *History and Anthropology 34*, no. 5 (2023): 818–43.

[4] Imam Yahya and Sulistiyono Susilo, "Conservative Muslims in Indonesia's Religious and Political Landscapes: Ahok's Blasphemy Case as A Political Leverage," *Cogent Social Sciences 10*, no. 1 (2024): 2392293; Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulema Council) and Rising Conservatism in Indonesian Islam," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia 8*, no. 1 (2020): 21–35; M. Asrorun Ni'am Sholeh, "Towards a Progressive Fatwa: MUI's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah 20*, no. 2 (2020): 506–30.

[5] Mohamad Abdun Nasir, "The 'Ulamā', Fatāwā and Challenges to Democracy in Contemporary Indonesia," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations 25*, no. 4 (2014): 489–505.

[6] Ansori Ansori et al., "Reformulation of Islamic Law in Indonesia: Study on Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa," *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi dan Penelitian Hukum Islam 4*, no. 2 (2021): 158–9.

[7] Saifuddin Zubaidi, "Cigarette Fatwas, Contestation of Religious Authority and Politics in Indonesia," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan 20*, no. 1 (2020): 61–78; Ahmad Suaedy et al., "Language, Authority, and Digital Media: The Impact on the Legitimacy of Fatwas," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah 23*, no. 1 (2023): 1–24.

Existing scholarship has documented how scriptural interpretation, socio-political dynamics, and scientific findings each shape MUI fatwas. Yet most studies treat these factors separately, examining either fatwa methodology,[8] the relationship between fatwas and state power,[9] or the engagement between religion and empirical science.[10] These bodies of work offer genuine insight, but none of them accounts adequately for the negotiation that takes place when all three forces intersect. This article fills that gap by examining, in a holistic manner, how religious reasoning, scientific evidence, and political influence interact, sometimes cooperatively and sometimes in tension, in driving MUI's fatwa revisions. In doing so, it moves beyond purely normative and methodological accounts by integrating sociological and political-economy perspectives. The central argument is that transformations in MUI fatwas are produced by a dynamic dialectic among religious values, the imperatives of scientific and technological development, and the socio-political conditions framing their issuance.

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in systematic library research, concentrating on an in-depth analysis of MUI fatwas that have undergone substantive revision. The primary corpus consists of nine fatwas: three addressing vasectomy and tubectomy, two concerning meningitis vaccination for ḥajj and ʿumrah pilgrims, two on the determination of lunar months, and two on qibla direction. The first five fall under the domain of science and technology; the remaining four address ritual worship (see Table 1). The selection criterion required that each thematic cluster contain more than one fatwa, thereby indicating a change in juristic perspective or substantive legal revision. All primary materials were retrieved from the MUI's official digital repositories.[11]

Table 1. Nine MUI Fatwas Examined in this Study

No.	Theme	Year	Forum	Domain
1	Vasectomy & Tubectomy	1979	MUI Fatwa Commission	Science & Technology
2	Vasectomy & Tubectomy	2009	Ijtimāʿ Ulama II	Science & Technology
3	Vasectomy & Tubectomy	2012	Ijtimāʿ Ulama IV	Science & Technology
4	Meningitis Vaccine (Mencevax)	2009	MUI Fatwa Commission	Science & Technology

[8] Nadirsyah Hosen, "Behind the Scenes: Fatwas of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1975-1998)," *Journal of Islamic Studies 15*, no. 2 (2004): 147–79; Muhammad Rasyid et al., "Science and Its Role in Changes in Islamic Legal Thought (An Analysis of Changes in the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council Due to Recent Scientific Findings)," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran 23*, no. 2 (2023): 120–37.

[9] Mohammad Atho Mudzhar, *Fatwa-Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia: Sebuah Studi tentang Pemikiran Hukum Islam di Indonesia 1975-1988* (INIS, 1993), 139–46; Muhammad Lutfi Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions: Examining the Role of the Indonesian Ulema Council and Its Political Fatwa in Handling the Spread of Covid-19," *Khazanah Hukum 5*, no. 3 (2023): 230–44.

[10] M. Asrorun Ni'am Sholeh, "Towards a Progressive Fatwa: MUI's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah 20*, no. 2 (2020), 281–98; Ali Sodiqin, "Religion and Science: Analysing Medical Fatwas of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (2010–2021)," *Journal of Islamic Law 6*, no. 1 (2025): 1–20.

[11] Several fatwas issued by the MUI are available at https://fatwamui.com/ and https://mui.or.id/info-fatwa.

5	Meningitis Vaccine (Halal)	2010	MUI Fatwa Commission	Science & Technology
6	Determination of Lunar Months	1980	National Congress (Munas)	Worship
7	Determination of Lunar Months	2004	MUI Fatwa Commission	Worship
8	Direction of Qibla	Feb 2010	MUI Fatwa Commission	Worship
9	Direction of Qibla	Jul 2010	MUI Fatwa Commission	Worship

Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, and prior scholarly studies on Islamic law, the relationship between religion and science, and the politics of fatwa-making in Indonesia. The analytical method combined content analysis with critical discourse analysis. Content analysis was used to map the substantive components of each fatwa—scriptural arguments, legal sources, and differences in reasoning between original rulings and subsequent revisions. Critical discourse analysis allowed for an interrogation of the power relations, ideological commitments, and socio-political pressures that shaped fatwa formulation and revision,[12] along with the strategies the MUI employed to manage the intersection of religious norms, scientific authority, and public policy. The integration of these two methods enables a reading of MUI fatwa transformations that attends to both meaning and implication.[13]

The theoretical framework draws on Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, which holds that knowledge—including religious knowledge—is always produced from a social position, inflected by historical experience, and shaped by particular interests.[14] This framework makes it possible to read fatwas not as transparent products of isolated juristic deliberation but as artifacts of Islamic law's engagement with social change, scientific progress, and the relations of power that configure the contemporary Indonesian religious field.

Mannheim's concept of Wissenssoziologie (sociology of knowledge) holds that all knowledge, including religious and legal knowledge, is situationsgebunden—bound to a social situation. This means that the mufti's legal pronouncements are not simply the result of autonomous textual reasoning but are shaped by what Mannheim called the 'existential determination' of thought: the embeddedness of the knowing subject within particular social structures, institutional arrangements, and historical moments. For the purposes of this study, Mannheim's framework directs analytical attention toward three questions: who produces fatwa knowledge (the social position of MUI scholars), under what conditions (the

[12] Achmad Muhibin Zuhri et al., "Packaging Fatwa in the Post Truth Era: MUI Fatwa Contest Facing New Religious Authority," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya 8*, no. 1 (2024): 87.

[13] Mary B. Ziskin, "Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Qualitative Inquiry: Data Analysis Strategies for Enhanced Understanding of Inference and Meaning," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 32*, no. 6 (2019): 614–15.

[14] Carlton W. Berenda and Karl Mannheim, "Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge," *Books Abroad 27*, no. 3 (1953): 310. See also: Martyn Hammersley, "Karl Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia and the Public Role of Sociology," *Journal of Classical Sociology 22*, no. 2 (2022): 176–98.

institutional and political context), and with what interests (the intersection of religious authority, state policy, and scientific expertise). By treating MUI fatwas as knowledge claims that are relationally constituted rather than self-evidently derived from scripture, the sociology of knowledge framework enables a reading of fatwa transformations that accounts for both their normative content and their social genesis.

A methodological limitation of this study should be noted at the outset. Access to the internal deliberative records of the MUI Fatwa Commission—including minutes of proceedings, draft texts, and inter-member correspondences—was not available to the researcher. The analysis is therefore based primarily on final fatwa texts, official MUI publications, and secondary scholarly literature. This constraint means that the study captures the outputs of MUI deliberation rather than its full internal dynamics. Readers should bear this in mind when evaluating the study's interpretations of the reasoning processes behind specific rulings.

MUI: Structure, Classification, and Dynamics of Fatwas

The MUI occupies a strategic role in Indonesian public life as a unifying body for Muslim scholars ('ulamā'), community leaders (zuamā'), and intellectuals.[15] Founded on 26 July 1975 in Jakarta, the Council arose from a national congress that brought together 'ulamā' and intellectuals from 26 provinces, alongside representatives of major Islamic organizations including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Syarikat Islam, Al-Washliyah, and others.[16] Its establishment addressed an institutional need for a body capable of mediating between Muslim aspirations and state authority while providing authoritative religious guidance on national issues.[17] Within the framework of state-religion relations in Indonesia, the MUI positions itself as an intermediary between the 'ulamā' and the umarā' (governmental authorities), cultivating a relationship conceived as mutually reinforcing. This mediating function is expressed through the MUI's responses to strategic issues with religious, social, and national dimensions—whether by endorsing state policies, criticizing or correcting measures deemed incompatible with Islamic principles, or proactively issuing legal norms to address emergent questions.[18]

Among the most consequential expressions of MUI's authority are its fatwas—formulations of legal norms presented as opinions, guidance, or binding rulings issued in response to public inquiries or pressing contemporary issues, whether orally or in writing.[19] These rulings are generated through a process of ijtihād jamā'ī (collective juristic reasoning)

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[15] Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Sejarah MUI," 2002, https://mirror.mui.or.id/sejarah-mui/.

[16] Mudzhar, Fatwa-Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 54–5.

[17] Muhammad Asad, "Ulama in Indonesian Politics: Analysis on the Attitudes of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) on the General Elections," *Akademika 16*, no. 1 (2022): 87–8.

[18] M. Asrorun Ni'am Sholeh, *Menghidupkan Fatwa: Dinamisasi Fatwa untuk Kemaslahatan Bangsa* (Sekretariat Komisi Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2024), 21–2; Mualimin et al., "Are Fatwas Visible on New Media? Dissemination of the Fatwas of the Indonesian Ulama Council on Instagram," *El-Mashlahah 15*, no. 1 (2025): 21–40.

[19] Fatwas can be classified into various categories, including madhhab-based fatwas, court fatwas, state fatwas, individual fatwas, and collective fatwas. Each category addresses diverse areas such as ritual worship, social affairs, economic matters, scientific issues, and more. See: Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, "A Typology of Fatwas," *Die Welt Des Islams 55*, nos. 3–4 (2015): 278–85.

within four principal institutional forums:[20] the MUI Fatwa Commission, whose explicit mandate is the deliberation and issuance of fatwas; the National Sharia Council (Dewan Syariah Nasional, DSN-MUI), which addresses Islamic economics and finance; the National Congress (Musyawarah Nasional), a quinquennial gathering of MUI leadership from across Indonesia together with representatives of Islamic organizations, universities, and pesantrens; and the Ijtimāʿ Ulama of the MUI Fatwa Commissions, a triennial forum bringing together central and regional fatwa commission members to address regional religious concerns within a national framework.[21] These four forums confirm that MUI fatwas are not the opinions of individuals but the product of collective deliberation among Indonesian 'ulamā' and Muslim intellectuals.

According to data on the MUI's official website, 573 fatwas were issued between 1975 and 2024, organized across four thematic categories: (1) religious issues, (2) food, medicine, cosmetics, science, and technology, (3) Islamic economics, and (4) fatwas issued through the Ijtimāʿ Ulama forum. Religious issues are further subdivided into ritual worship (66 fatwas), creed and sectarianism (17 fatwas), social affairs (88 fatwas), and culture (3 fatwas). The second category accounts for 87 fatwas. Islamic economics comprises 160 fatwas spanning Islamic banking, capital markets, insurance, pawnbroking, multi-level marketing, financing, and commodities.[22] The fourth category contains 152 fatwas addressing strategic national questions (masā'il asāsiyyah waṭaniyyah), contemporary juristic issues (masā'il fiqhiyyah muʿāṣirah), and legislative matters (masā'il qānūniyyah), all issued through the Ijtimāʿ Ulama forum (see Table 2).

Table 2. Categorization of MUI Fatwas (1975–2024)

Category	Sub-category	Number of Fatwas
Religious Issues	Ritual Worship	66
	Creed & Sectarianism	17
	Social Affairs	88
	Culture	3
Food, Medicine, Cosmetics, Science & Technology		87
Islamic Economics	Banking, Capital Markets, Insurance, Financing, etc.	160
Ijtimāʿ Ulama Forum	Strategic national, contemporary juristic, legislative issues	152
TOTAL		573

[20] Ijtihād jamāʿi is a form of collective Islamic legal reasoning conducted by a group of qualified mujtahids. In contemporary practice, it is considered more reliable and beneficial (masṃlaḥa) than individual ijtihād. See: Muḥammad al-Rūqī, *Al-Ijtihād al-Fiqhī: Ayyu Dawrin wa Ayyu Jadīd* (Al-Najāḥ al-Jadīdah, 1996), 34.

[21] Sholeh, Metodologi Penetapan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 80–1.

[22] Agus Fakhrina et al., "Contesting the Boundaries of Sharia Compliance: Legalizing Income Smoothing in Indonesian Islamic Banking," *Asy-Syir'ah: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah dan Hukum 59*, no. 1 (2025): 19–35; Syihabudin et al., "Contemporary Dynamics of Sharia Economic Law: DSN-MUI Fatwa No. 21/2001 in Takaful Dispute Rulings," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review 4*, no. 2 (2025): 868–98; Muhammad Ilyas Marwal et al., "Responsive Law of the National Sharia Council of the Indonesian Ulema Council's Fatwa on Permissibility of Electronic Money," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga 8*, no. 1 (2025): 1–25.

The scope of these 573 fatwas makes clear that the MUI's juristic enterprise extends well beyond ritual and doctrinal questions, encompassing technically complex fields—pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and financial instruments among them. This breadth reflects two enduring features of the Council's situation: first, the persistent demand among Muslims for authoritative religious guidance on novel questions; second, the MUI's own responsiveness to social, political, economic, and scientific developments.[23] MUI fatwas are thus simultaneously normative legal products and socio-historical artifacts shaped by the dialectical encounter of scriptural authority, societal need, and national context.[24]

In formulating its rulings, the MUI relies on the Qur'ān, ḥadīth, ijmāʿ (scholarly consensus), qiyās (legal analogy), and methodological principles drawn from uṣūl al-fiqh.[25] Prior research indicates that MUI fatwas have tended to reproduce the views and methodological models of classical scholars as preserved in authoritative texts (al-kutub al-muʿtabarah), without yet developing a distinctively original methodology.[26] Asrorun Niʿam Sholeh found, for example, that 22 of 209 surveyed fatwas (approximately 11%) were grounded in the principle of sadd al-dharīʿah as articulated in the Mālikī and Ḥanbalī traditions.[27] Deny Hudaeni showed that the MUI employs both ijtihād intiqā'ī (comparative-selective reasoning) and ijtihād inshā'ī (constructive-innovative reasoning) as elaborated by Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī.[28] Muhammad Taufiki identified 28 fatwas issued between 1997 and 2007 that applied ijtihād taṭbīqī as developed by al-Shāṭibī.[29] Taken together, these findings point to a methodology that is neither static nor fully coherent but is gradually evolving through selective engagement with classical and contemporary jurisprudence.[30] Mohammad Atho

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[23] Fuad Mustafid et al., "Positivization of the Council of Indonesian Ulema's Halal Fatwa: Policy and Position in Indonesian Legislation," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah) 23*, no. 1 (2024): 155–66.

[24] Zakaria Syafei, "Tracing Maqasid al-Shari'ah in the Fatwas of Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI)," *Journal of Indonesian Islam 11*, no. 1 (2017): 111–2; Ibnu Elmi Achmat Slamat Pelu and Jefry Tarantang, "Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia sebagai Solusi Permasalahan Umat Islam di Indonesia," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam 14*, no. 2 (2020): 307–16.

[25] Alfitri Alfitri, "Bureaucratizing Fatwā in Indonesia: The Council of Indonesian Ulama and Its Quasi-Legislative Power," *Ulumuna 24*, no. 2 (2020): 375–6; Mukhamad Agus Zuhurul Fuqohak and Muh Amiruddin, "Socio-Genetic Motives of MUI's Fatwa Regarding Covid-19 Based on Quran-Hadith," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis 22*, no. 1 (2021): 19–48.

[26] Hosen, "Behind the Scenes," 178–9.

[27] Sholeh, Metodologi Penetapan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 268–74.

[28] Ijtihād intiqa'i is a method of selecting the strongest opinion among classical rulings; ijtihād inshā'i is a creative approach addressing novel issues. See: Deni Hudaeny Ahmad Arifin, "Aplikasi Ijtihad Intiqaiy dan Insyaiy dalam Kehidupan Modern" (Thesis, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2005); Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Al-Ijtihād fī al-Sharīʿah al-Islāmiyyah* (Dār al-Qalam, 1996), 117–33.

[29] Ijtihād taṭbīqī bridges theoretical legal principles with practical contemporary challenges. See: Muhammad Taufiki, "Penerapan Konsep Ijtihād Taṭbīqī Asy-Syāṭībī dalam Fatwa MUI" (Thesis, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2008).

[30] Pelu and Tarantang, "Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia sebagai Solusi Permasalahan Umat Islam di Indonesia," 311.

Mudzhar has further argued that, beyond textual and methodological factors, MUI fatwas are shaped by ideological, social, cultural, and political considerations.[31]

In specific technical domains, the MUI supplements the deliberations of its juristic members with the expertise of scientists, most systematically through the Institute for the Assessment of Food, Drugs, and Cosmetics (LP-POM), which assesses the halal status of consumer products.[32] This interdisciplinary mode of reasoning has become indispensable in the face of challenges that require expertise across multiple fields.[33] Accordingly, MUI fatwas are best read not as self-contained normative outputs but as responsive and adaptive manifestations of Islamic law's ongoing engagement with socio-cultural change, scientific advancement, and the political demands of Indonesia's religious landscape.[34]

MUI's Fatwa Transformations on Worship, Science, and Technology: Norms and Islamic Legal Reasoning

The analysis reveals significant shifts in MUI's fatwas across the domains of worship, science, and technology, evident in the recurrent issuance of rulings on identical themes through different forums, at different moments, and with different legal formulations. In the field of science and technology, two thematic areas underwent revision: the vasectomy and tubectomy fatwas (issued in 1979, 2009, and 2012) and the meningitis vaccine fatwas (issued in 2009 and 2010). In the domain of worship, two themes also changed: the determination of Ramaḍān, Shawwāl, and Dhū al-Ḥijjah (fatwas in 1980 and 2004), and the qibla direction (two fatwas in 2010) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Forms of Fatwa Transformation Across Four Thematic Areas

Theme	Fatwa Year(s)	Form of Transformation	Key Driver(s)
Vasectomy & Tubectomy	1979 → 2009 → 2012	Relaxation (from prohibition to conditional permissibility)	Medical evidence of recanalization; state family-planning policy
Meningitis Vaccine	2009 → 2010	Revocation (replacement by a new fatwa)	Availability of halal-certified vaccine alternatives
Determination of Lunar Months	1980 → 2004	Refinement (elaboration and	Integration of ḥisāb; state authority over

[31] Mudzhar, Fatwa-Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 139–42; Mohammad Atho Mudzhar et al., Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia MUI dalam Perspektif Hukum dan Perundang-Undangan (Puslitbang Kehidupan Keagamaan Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2012), xxix–xxxiv.

[32] Diky Faqih Maulana et al., "The Urgency of MUI Halal Fatwa about Food, Beverage, Medicine and Cosmetic Products for the Consumer Protection," *Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum dan Konstitusi 5*, no. 2 (2022): 199–214.

[33] JM Muslimin et al., "Islam and Medicine: A Study on the Fatwa of Indonesian Ulama Council on Vaccines," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam 6*, no. 1 (2021): 85–106.

[34] Mar'uf Amin, Solusi Hukum Islam (Makharij Fiqhiyyah) sebagai Pendorong Arus Baru Ekonomi Syariah di Indonesia (Thesis, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, 2017), 12; Achmad Roziqi et al., "Institutional Ijtihād and Socio-Legal Adaptation: The Formulation of Waṣiyah Wājibah in Indonesia's Compilation of Islamic Law," *Asy-Syir'ah: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah dan Hukum 59*, no. 1 (2025): 1–18.

		institutional delegation)	calendar determination
Direction of Qibla	Feb 2010 → July 2010	Refinement (from cardinal direction to scientific azimuth)	Astronomical critique; expert consultation with ʻilm al-falak specialists

On vasectomy, the MUI Fatwa Commission issued a categorical prohibition on 13 June 1979, classifying the procedure as permanent sterilization forbidden under Islamic law—a ruling deliberated by three senior ʻulamāʾ: Rahmatullah Shiddiq, M. Syakir, and Syafiʻi Al-Hadzami.[35] The prohibition was reaffirmed at the Ijtimāʻ Ulama on 26 January 2009, chaired by Maʼruf Amin and with Ichwan Sam as secretary. Drawing on Qurʾānic verses, ḥadīth, legal maxims, and classical scholarly opinion, the 2009 ruling reasserted the impermissibility of vasectomy on the grounds that, notwithstanding the theoretical possibility of recanalization, the procedure could not guarantee the restoration of fertility.[36] The position shifted substantially on 1 July 2012, when a twelve-member team of ʻulamāʾ convened at the Fourth Ijtimāʻ Ulama concluded that vasectomy, while remaining prohibited as a default, could be conditionally permitted if five strict criteria were satisfied: (1) the motive was not contrary to Islamic principles; (2) permanent infertility would not result; (3) recanalization to restore reproductive capacity was guaranteed; (4) no medical harm would ensue; and (5) the procedure was not adopted as a mass contraceptive campaign. The fatwa was signed by Maʼruf Amin as chair and Asrorun Niʼam Sholeh as secretary.[37]

On meningitis vaccination, the MUI Fatwa Commission issued a ruling on 16 July 2009, prompted by Saudi Arabia's requirement that all inbound pilgrims be immunized. The ruling declared the then-available vaccine—Mencevax ACW135Y, produced by GlaxoSmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals in Belgium—intrinsically prohibited because its production medium contained porcine enzymes and fats, but permitted its use under the principle of ḍarūrah (necessity) given the absence of any halal alternative. The ruling invoked Qurʾānic prohibitions on consuming unlawful substances (Sūrat al-Baqarah: 173; Sūrat al-Māʾidah: 3; Sūrat al-Anʻām: 145), prophetic traditions affirming the availability of a cure for every illness, and legal maxims proscribing harm.[38] A year later, the MUI revised its position following confirmation that halal-certified alternatives—produced by Novartis Vaccines & Diagnostics S.R.L. (Italy) and Zhejiang Tianyuan Bio-Pharmaceutical (China)—had become commercially available. The new fatwa of 2010 declared porcine-based vaccines absolutely impermissible and mandated the exclusive use of halal alternatives for Indonesian pilgrims.[39]

[35] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy and Tubectomy," 1979.

[36] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2009.

[37] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2012.

[38] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2009 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims." See: Dewi Nurul Izzah, "Critical Study of the Hadith 'Lā Taḍā and Its Relation to Medicine," *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies 5*, no. 2 (2024): 159–79; Aizan Ali and Mat Zin, "Navigating Sunan Sittah in Exploring the Prophetic Style of Coping with Mental Health Issues," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis 26*, no. 2 (2025): 279–302.

[39] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 6 of 2010 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

On lunar calendar determination, the MUI National Congress issued a fatwa on 27 July 1980 stipulating two points: that the beginning of Ramaḍān and Shawwāl should be determined through global moon sighting and that the beginning of Dhū al-Ḥijjah should follow each country's own maṭlaʿ (horizon). Signed by Ibrahim Hosen and Musytari Yusuf, the fatwa provided the legal dictum without extended textual argumentation.[40] A significant revision followed with the fatwa of 24 January 2004, which introduced the ḥisāb as a co-equal method alongside ru'yah for determining lunar months. The 2004 fatwa also vested the Ministry of Religious Affairs with authority as the official arbiter of lunar calendar determinations, requiring Indonesian Muslims to follow government decisions and permitting the acceptance of foreign sightings only where the maṭlaʿ was aligned with Indonesia's.[41]

On the direction of qibla, the MUI Fatwa Commission ruled on 1 February 2010 that Indonesian Muslims were obliged to face west when praying, on the basis that Indonesia lies east of the Kaʿbah. The ruling drew on Sūrat al-Baqarah: 149, the scholarly consensus that those unable to see the Kaʿbah directly may orient themselves toward its general direction (jihāt al-Kaʿbah), and a ḥadīth principle equating a westward orientation with acceptable qibla for communities in equivalent geographic positions.[42] Only five months later, however, this ruling was revised. Following astronomical analysis by A. Ghazalie Masroeri, a recognized specialist in Islamic astronomical science, a second fatwa was issued in July 2010 stipulating that the qibla for Indonesian Muslims lies to the northwest, with precise azimuth angles varying by locality. The MUI also specified that existing mosques already oriented westward were not required to undergo reconstruction or reorientation.[43]

Forms of MUI's Fatwa Transformation: From Relaxation to the Revocation of Previous Norms

The patterns identified above disclose at least three distinct forms of fatwa transformation: (1) a shift from strict to more flexible legal norms to accommodate specific circumstances; (2) the revocation of a prior ruling following new evidence or changed conditions; and (3) the refinement of an existing ruling to provide more precise, comprehensive, and practically applicable guidance. These forms of change collectively attest to the adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence and confirm that MUI fatwas are not static legal products but living responses to the challenges of contemporary society.[44]

Relaxation of Legal Norms

The clearest instance of fatwa transformation through legal relaxation is the vasectomy case. When both vasectomy and tubectomy were initially classified as permanently sterilizing

[40] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission at the MUI National Congress on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal (Eid al-Fitr), and Dhu al-Hijjah (Eid al-Adha)," 1980.

[41] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 2 of 2004 on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah."

[42] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 3 of 2010 on the Qibla Direction."

[43] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2010 on the Orientation of the Qibla."

[44] Tri Harnowo and Fachry Hasani Habib, "Islamic Law and Environment Issues: Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwas on Climate Change," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah 24*, no. 1 (2024): 101–18; Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions," 230–44.

interventions, the MUI considered them categorically impermissible.[45] The 1979 fatwa had prohibited the procedures without qualification, and this prohibition was maintained without modification at the Ijtimāʿ Ulama of 2009, held in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra. The 2009 ruling drew on multiple Qurʾānic verses (Sūrat al-Anʿām: 137, 151; Sūrat al-Isrāʾ: 31; Sūrat al-Shūrā: 50; Sūrat al-Nisāʾ: 119) to establish the prohibition of killing offspring or altering God's creation, supplemented by relevant ḥadīth and principles of uṣūl al-fiqh. Despite acknowledging the theoretical possibility of recanalization, the MUI maintained that the procedure could not guarantee the restoration of fertility, and the legal dictum accordingly read:[46]

> *"Vasectomy as a contraceptive method involves cutting the spermatic ducts, resulting in permanent sterility. Recanalization does not guarantee the restoration of fertility. Therefore, the Ijtima' Ulama Fatwa Commission of Indonesia has ruled that vasectomy is ḥarām."*

Medical evidence presented in 2012 changed the landscape of this deliberation. The Indonesian Urological Association (IAUI), supported by data from the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) and correspondence from the Ministry of Health, presented clinical findings demonstrating that recanalization procedures could reliably restore spermatic function and male reproductive capacity. This evidence undermined the core empirical premise of the earlier prohibition. The Fourth Ijtimāʿ Ulama, convened at Pesantren Cipasung in Tasikmalaya, West Java, responded by issuing a revised fatwa that preserved the prohibition as the default position—applicable when the procedure was performed for impermissible purposes, when it caused irreversible infertility, or when it was harmful—while opening a conditional exception where the strict criteria enumerated above were satisfied.[47] The transition from categorical prohibition to qualified permissibility represents a substantive relaxation of norms, driven by considerations of public interest (maṣlaḥah), necessity (ḍarūrah), and the recognition of scientific evidence as a legitimate basis for juristic revision.[48]

Revocation of Previous Rulings

The revocation of an earlier fatwa, a recognized pattern in the broader dynamics of ijtihād, occurs when new scientific evidence or material changes in circumstance render the original legal rationale obsolete. This pattern is most transparent in the meningitis vaccine case. The 2009 fatwa was issued against the backdrop of Saudi Arabia's blanket vaccination requirement for all pilgrims. At the time, the only available option was Mencevax ACW135Y, whose manufacturer confirmed in writing to the Indonesian Ministry of Health on 22 May 2009 that the vaccine's active ingredients were derived from bacterial cultures grown in media containing porcine enzymes and fats. The fatwa declared:[49]

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[45] Ilyas Angsar et al., Pedoman Pelayanan Kontrasepsi dan Keluarga Berencana (Direktorat Kesehatan Keluarga, Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2020), 65–6.

[46] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy and Tubectomy."

[47] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2009.

[48] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2012.

[49] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2012.

> *"The statement from GlaxoSmithKline Beecham Pharmaceuticals, Belgium, producer of Mencevax™ ACW135Y, delivered at the Ministry of Health on May 22, 2009, confirmed that the active ingredient of the Meningitis vaccine Mencevax™ ACW135Y is derived from bacterial colonies cultivated in media containing porcine enzymes and fats."*

With no halal alternative then on the market, the MUI invoked the classical legal maxim *al-ḍarūrāt tubīḥ al-maḥẓūrāt* (necessities render permissible what is otherwise prohibited) and drew on the opinions of Muḥammad Khaṭīb al-Sharbīnī in *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj* and al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām in *Qawāʿid al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām*, both of whom had sanctioned the use of otherwise prohibited substances for therapeutic purposes when lawful alternatives were unavailable.[50]

Once halal-certified vaccines from Novartis and a Chinese producer were confirmed by expert review, the original ḍarūrah dispensation lost its juristic foundation. The MUI issued a new fatwa in 2010 revoking its predecessor and stipulating that only halal vaccines could be administered. The nullifying provision read:[51]

> *"The provision in MUI Fatwa No. 5 of 2009, which permitted the use of the meningitis vaccine derived from porcine sources for pilgrims based on necessity (ḥājah), is no longer valid."*

The necessity had ceased because the condition giving rise to it—the unavailability of a halal alternative—no longer obtained. This case shows that MUI fatwas are legally provisional in a meaningful sense: their normative force is tied to the conditions that justified them, and when those conditions change, the ruling changes with them. The shift also reinforces a broader point about the role of scientific knowledge in fatwa-making: it is not merely advisory but can function as the immediate trigger for legal change.[52]

Refinement of Previous Rulings

Refinement—the supplementation of an existing ruling to make it more comprehensive, more precise, or more practically actionable—represents the third mode of fatwa transformation. The lunar calendar case is instructive here. The 1980 fatwa offered a concise legal dictum: global moon sighting for Ramaḍān and Shawwāl; national moon sighting for Dhū al-Ḥijjah. It drew on the views of Mālikī, Ḥanafī, and Ḥanbalī jurists, as well as the opinion of contemporary scholar Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī, to support a global maṭlaʿ for the fasting

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[50] Harnowo and Habib, "Islamic Law and Environment Issues," 101–18; Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions," 230–44; Rasyid et al., "Science and Its Role in Changes in Islamic Legal Thought," 120–37; A. Kumedi Ja'far et al., "Construction of Contemporary Fiqh in the Disorders of Sexual Development Problems Through the Integration of Maqāshid al-Sharīʿa and Medical Science," *Al-ʿAdalah 22*, no. 1 (2025): 63–90.

[51] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2009 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

[52] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2009 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

month, while invoking the Ḥanafī scholar Muḥammad Amīn al-Shahīr's analogy with locally-defined prayer times to justify a national maṭlaʿ for Dhū al-Ḥijjah.[53] At this stage, the fatwa relied entirely on testimonial moon sighting without engaging either scientific methodology or state authority.

The 2004 fatwa introduced substantial elaboration: it incorporated the ḥisāb alongside ru'yah as co-equal and legally recognized methods; vested the Ministry of Religious Affairs with authority to convene the sidang isbat (the official meeting for calendar confirmation) and to issue nationally binding determinations; required Indonesian Muslims to comply with those determinations; and allowed for the acceptance of sightings from neighboring jurisdictions where the maṭlaʿ was shown to be aligned with Indonesia's. The operative language was:[54]

> *"The determination of Ramaḍān, Shawwāl, and Dhu al-Ḥijjah shall be based on both ru'yah and ḥisāb by the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, represented by the Minister of Religious Affairs, and shall apply nationally."*

The 2004 fatwa thus extended its predecessor in two analytically distinct ways: epistemologically, by recognizing astronomical calculation as a legitimate juristic tool; and politically, by delegating authoritative calendar determination to a state institution. The qibla case offers a parallel illustration. The February 2010 fatwa, which had instructed Indonesian Muslims to face west, was produced without systematic astronomical consultation.[55] Subsequent critique from specialists in ʿilm al-falak exposed the fatwa as geodetically imprecise: Indonesia does not lie directly east of the Kaʿbah, and a simple westward orientation generates a meaningful azimuthal error.[56] After consulting A. Ghazalie Masroeri, whose astronomical analysis provided detailed azimuth calculations for Indonesian localities, the MUI issued a revised fatwa specifying a northwest orientation, with regional variation calibrated to local geography. Existing mosques were exempted from physical realignment.[57] The MUI framed the two qibla fatwas as complementary rather than contradictory, but the substantive shift from a general cardinal direction to a scientifically calibrated azimuth is unmistakable. The episode illustrates how refinement works: the original ruling was not wrong in principle, but

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[53] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 6 of 2010 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

[54] Edi Kurniawan et al., "Beribadah di tengah Wabak Covid-19: Analisis terhadap Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia No 14 Tahun 2020 Berasaskan Teori Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah al-Shāṭībī," *Jurnal Fiqh 19*, no. 1 (2022): 83–108; Rasyid et al., "Science and Its Role in Changes in Islamic Legal Thought," 120–37; Zainal Azwar and Farid Afif Rinaldi, "Consistency of the Indonesian Ulama Council in Using Istiṣlāḥ as a Method for Legal Istinbath," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam 9*, no. 1 (2024): 1–24.

[55] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission at the MUI National Congress on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal (Eid al-Fitr), and Dhu al-Hijjah (Eid al-Adha)."

[56] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 2 of 2004 on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah."

[57] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 3 of 2010 on the Qibla Direction."

it was imprecise in application, and the correction required incorporating a body of technical knowledge not present in the first deliberation.[58]

The Dialectics of Religion, Science, and Socio-Politics in the Transformation of MUI Fatwas

The development of Islamic legal thought is driven by complex and intersecting dynamics—religious authority, scientific inquiry, and socio-political influence—that simultaneously condition and contest one another.[59] The religious dimension demands conformity with scriptural sources through Qur'ān and ḥadīth interpretation; the scientific dimension introduces empirical findings that may displace prior assumptions;[60] and the political dimension—whether expressed through state policy or internal organizational dynamics—shapes both the direction and the substantive content of a fatwa, particularly where social stability, institutional credibility, or public health are at stake.[61] The MUI navigates all three of these forces simultaneously, and in doing so it must broker a set of negotiations that are rarely fully resolved.[62]

In Islamic jurisprudence, a fatwa is a normative guide for the community.[63] But the process by which it is formulated is never insulated from the negotiation of textual authority, scientific knowledge, and socio-political context. The variety of fatwa trajectories described in this study—from the relaxation of prohibitions and the revocation of earlier rulings to the refinement of existing norms—reflects not only the internal development of Islamic jurisprudence but also the external pressures brought to bear on it. Changes in MUI fatwas are accordingly better understood as products of this dialectical interplay rather than as the unmediated outputs of scriptural interpretation.[64]

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58 Ahsin Dinal Mustafa, "Qibla Directions Through Ulama's Fatwa: Comparative Study between Qibla Direction Fatwa of Indonesian Ulama Council and Dar Al-Ifta Al-Misriyyah," *Al-Hilal: Journal of Islamic Astronomy 1*, no. 1 (2019): 107–25.

59 "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2010 on the Orientation of the Qibla."

60 Annisa Mawarni and Dhiauddin Tanjung, "Problematics of Qibla Direction Determination in Sei Lepan Brandan District, Langkat Regency (Analysis of MUI Fatwa No. 5 of 2010 on the Amendment of MUI Fatwa No. 3 of 2010)," *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities 4*, no. 3 (2024): 233–6; Muhammad Iqbal Juliansyahzen et al., "Between Sharia, Gender, and Science in the Construction of 'Iddah: The Response of Banyumas' Ulamas," *El-Mashlahah 14*, no. 1 (2024): 189–210.

61 Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions," 230–44; Ahmad Musonnif et al., "Government Position in Religious Authority Contestation in Indonesia: Reviewing the Government Authority in Determining the Beginning of Islamic Months," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah 16*, no. 2 (2024): 336–62.

62 Nur Khaera et al., "The Paradigm of Islamic Legal Products in Indonesia," *Mazahibuna 4*, no. 1 (2022): 44–5; Muntasir Muntasir et al., "Power Structures and Religious Legitimacy: The Influence of Dayah Ulama in the Politics of Aceh Analyzed Using Powercube Theory," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun 13*, no. 1 (2025): 437–62.

63 Amer Zulfiqar Ali, "Brief Review of Classical and Modern Tafsir Trends and Role of Modern Tafasir in Contemporary Islamic Thought," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies 3,* no. 2 (2018): 42–5.

64 Muhammad Alfin Ghozali, "The Role of Science in Hadith Criticism: Between Naqd Ijabi and Naqd Salbi," *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies 6*, no. 1 (2025): 93–124; Ali Imron and Anif Yuni Muallifah, "Fiqh of Biotechnology: Reinterpreting Qur'anic Verses on the Impurity of Pigs and Its Implications for the Halal Status of Vaccines," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis 26*, no. 1 (2025): 189–216.

From a Mannheimian perspective, this variability in fatwa trajectories is precisely what the sociology of knowledge would predict: knowledge claims—including legal ones—are not stable products of a timeless rational method but are continuously reshaped by the 'total situation' (Gesamtsituation) in which their producers are embedded. The MUI's fatwas on vasectomy, for instance, reflect not merely evolving juristic reasoning but the shifting Seinsgebundenheit (existential situatedness) of Indonesian Muslim scholars who operate in a context defined by demographic policy imperatives, advancing medical science, and the legitimacy needs of a post-authoritarian state. Mannheim's insight that knowledge is always 'perspectival'—produced from a position, not from nowhere—provides the most direct theoretical warrant for the present study's insistence that fatwa transformations must be read as socially situated acts rather than as purely normative revisions.

Fatwas on Vasectomy

The vasectomy fatwas illustrate the tripartite dialectic with particular clarity. The 1979 and 2009 prohibitions rested on three normative arguments.[65] First, Qur'ānic verses (Sūrat al-Anʿām: 137, 151; Sūrat al-Isrā': 31; Sūrat al-Shūrā: 50; Sūrat al-Nisā': 119) were invoked to establish the prohibition of killing offspring for economic or other reasons and the impermissibility of altering God's creation. Second, ḥadīth were cited as prohibiting mutilation in the absence of a recognized Sharīʿah-based justification. Third, through qiyās,[66] vasectomy was equated with castration on the grounds that both permanently remove reproductive capacity and thereby contradict the Islamic principle of encouraging procreation.[67]

The IAUI's clinical data presented in 2012, showing that recanalization could restore reproductive function with acceptable rates of success, undermined the second and third of these normative premises. If vasectomy was not in practice permanent, its equation with castration through qiyās was no longer tenable. In response, the MUI issued a revised fatwa: maintaining the prohibition for cases of impermissible intent, harmful outcome, or genuine irreversibility, but opening a conditional exception where medical assurance of reversibility could be provided and where the procedure was not promoted as a matter of general policy.[68]

The 2012 revision was not driven solely by medical science. A formal letter from the Ministry of Health (No. TU.05.02/V/1016/2012, 11 June 2012) requested that the MUI revisit the fatwa and consider reclassifying vasectomy as mubāḥ (permissible), citing the procedure's central role in the national family planning programme—a priority of Indonesian population policy since the New Order period.[69] Through the BKKBN, the government had

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[65] Muhammad Taufiq et al., "Between Sharia and State: Fatwa Authority and Pandemic Responses in Indonesia, Turkey, and Morocco," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah 17*, no. 1 (2025): 377–94.

[66] Popi Adiyes Putra et al., "Fatwa (al-Ifta'); Signifikansi dan Kedudukannya dalam Hukum Islam," *Al-Mutharahah: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Sosial Keagamaan 19*, no. 1 (2022): 36; Skovgaard-Petersen, "A Typology of Fatwas," 279.

[67] Shahir Akram Hassan and Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus wan Khairuldin, "Research Design Based on Fatwa Making Process: An Exploratory Study," *International Journal of Higher Education 9*, no. 6 (2020): 242–3; Setyaningsih, "Fatwa Institutions in Islamic Law," *Awang Long Law Review 5*, no. 1 (2022): 315–6.

[68] Sodiqin, "Religion and Science," 1–20; Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions," 230–44.

[69] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy and Tubectomy."

for years sought religious endorsement for family planning, and the MUI's categorical prohibition was experienced as an obstacle by observant Muslims.[70] The revised fatwa was in effect a compromise: it preserved the MUI's normative authority and the Islamic principle of protecting lineage, while absorbing the government's policy priorities and the medical community's empirical findings. The dialectic of religion, science, and politics is visible in the very structure of the ruling.[71]

Fatwas on the Meningitis Vaccine

The vaccine fatwas similarly demonstrate the intersection of religious reasoning, scientific knowledge, and state interests. In 2009, the MUI permitted the use of a non-halal vaccine on grounds of necessity and maṣlaḥah, with the unavailability of halal alternatives providing the formal juristic basis for the dispensation.[72] The decision was grounded in Qur'ānic verses, ḥadīth, and the opinions of Muḥammad Khaṭīb al-Sharbīnī in Mughnī al-Muḥtāj and Al-ʿIzz ibn ʿAbd al-Salām in Qawāʿid al-Aḥkām fī Maṣāliḥ al-Anām, and emphasized that the Indonesian government bore a responsibility to pursue the development of halal alternatives.[73]

The timing of the 2009 fatwa—issued within a month of a formal meeting between the Minister of Health and MUI leadership in June 2009—suggests that political coordination preceded the formal juristic deliberation.[74] The fatwa, in other words, did not merely respond to an already-crystallized medical situation but was partly constituted by the political process surrounding it. When halal vaccines became available and pharmaceutical companies communicated this to the MUI,[75] the Council issued the 2010 fatwa prohibiting non-halal vaccines outright.[76] The underlying mechanism is consistent with the sociology of knowledge: the legal category of ḍarūrah is not a timeless juristic construct but a situated judgment that responds to empirical conditions and is revised when those conditions change. Scientific progress directly shaped the revision; political coordination framed the timing; and the textual tradition provided the vocabulary through which both were expressed.[77]

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[70] Mahmood Jawad Abu Al-Shaeer, "From Qiyas to Quantification: Reimagining Evidentiary Standards in Islamic Law through Statistical Methodologies," *International Journal of Syariah and Law 1*, no. 1 (2025): 27–40.

[71] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2009. See also: Abdel Omran Rahim, *Family Planning in the Legacy of Islam* (Routledge, 1992), 187–90.

[72] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2012.

[73] Dasrizal Dahlan and Jusmawati Jusmawati, "Islam Law Review About Applications of Contraception Vasetomy and Tubectomy Methods to Muslim Community in West Sumatera," *Al Hurriyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam 7*, no. 1 (2022): 33–4.

[74] Ilham Syahputra et al., "Implementation of Program to Increase Men's Participation in the Use of Vasectomy Contraception," *Jurnal Administrasi Publik: Public Administration Journal 10*, no. 1 (2020): 92–101.

[75] Muhyiddin Muhyiddin, "Fatwa MUI tentang Vasektomi: Tanggapan Ulama dan Dampaknya terhadap Peningkatan Medis Operasi Pria (MOP)," *Al-Ahkam 24*, no. 1 (2014): 71.

[76] "Fatwa of the National Ijtima' of the MUI Fatwa Commission on Vasectomy," 2012.

[77] Rasyid et al., "Science and Its Role in Changes in Islamic Legal Thought," 125–29; Ade Dedi Rohayana, "The Mutualism Interactions in the Changes of Social and Islamic Law," *HIKMATUNA: Journal for Integrative Islamic Studies 8*, no. 1 (2022): 21–4; Ali Sodiqin, "Science-Based Ijtihad: Religious and Scientific Dialectic on Fatwas Regarding Congregational Worships Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan 21*, no. 1 (2021): 79–98.

Fatwas on the Determination of Lunar Months

The lunar calendar fatwas display the entanglement of religious tradition, scientific method, and political authority in a domain that might at first appear purely liturgical.[78] The 1980 fatwa drew on classical juristic opinion to balance global Islamic unity in fasting and Eid observance with the practical reality of nationally-bound governance. For Ramaḍān and Shawwāl, the global maṭlaʿ position of the Mālikī, Ḥanafī, and Ḥanbalī schools—endorsed by contemporary scholars such as Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī—supported a universalist orientation. For Dhū al-Ḥijjah, the national maṭlaʿ argument, traceable to Ḥanafī scholars including Muḥammad Amīn al-Shahīr's Radd al-Muḥtār, provided juristic grounding for country-level determination.[79]

The 2004 fatwa introduced four operative principles: ḥisāb and ru'yah must be used jointly under state supervision; Muslims are obliged to follow the outcomes of the sidang isbat; the Minister of Religious Affairs must consult the MUI and major Islamic organizations before finalizing decisions; and sighting testimonies from neighboring jurisdictions may be incorporated as supporting evidence.[80] These modifications effectively compressed the scope of the maṭlaʿ from a potentially global to a decisively regional one, while simultaneously strengthening the state's role as the ultimate arbiter of the Islamic calendar.[81] Qur'ānic injunctions on obedience to authority (Sūrat al-Nisā': 59), ḥadīth on following rulers, and legal maxims prioritizing communal solidarity over juristic disagreement were all deployed to support this outcome.[82]

The fatwa thus accomplished what legal scholars might call a structural realignment: it formalized the scientific legitimacy of astronomical calculation within an Islamic juristic framework while simultaneously delegating the exercise of that knowledge to state institutions. This is not incidental but constitutive of how fatwa authority operates in Indonesia—always in relation to the state's administrative capacity to implement and communicate religious rulings at a national scale.[83]

Fatwas on the Direction of the Qibla

The qibla controversy most dramatically illustrates the encounter between textual authority and scientific precision in the fatwa process. The February 2010 ruling rested on three textual arguments: the Qur'ānic term shaṭrah in Sūrat al-Baqarah: 149, interpreted on the basis of al-Qurṭubī's commentary as signifying a general orientation toward the Kaʿbah; a

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78 Ade Nur Rohim, "Dharurah and the Realization of Maqashid Sharia: Analysis of the Implementation of Islamic Legal Maxims on Emergency," *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah dan Masyarakat 22*, no. 1 (2022): 64–5.

79 "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2009 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

80 Kompas, "Menkes: Vaksin Meningitis Wewenang MUI," June 17, 2009, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2009/06/17/16004473/~Kesehatan~Medis~Drugs Vitamin & Mineral.

81 NU Online, "MUI Bersidang lagi Bahas Vaksin Meningitis," June 17, 2009, https://nu.or.id/warta/mui-bersidang-lagi-bahas-vaksin-meningitis-xGRl8.

82 Kemenkes, "Menkes Luncurkan Vaksin Meningitis Halal Secara Nasional," September 16, 2010, https://kemkes.go.id/id/menkes-luncurkan-vaksin-meningitis-halal-secara-nasional.

83 "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 6 of 2010 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

ḥadīth reported by Abū Hurayrah, which the fatwa applied to Indonesia's eastward position relative to Mecca; and the harmonization of apparently conflicting ḥadīth traditions to yield the principle that those near the Kaʿbah must face it precisely while those far away may orient themselves toward its general direction.[84]

The immediate criticism from astronomers and specialists in ʿilm al-falak was that the ruling had been issued without adequate scientific consultation and was geodetically imprecise.[85] Indonesia's geographic position is not directly east of Mecca; the great-circle path from Indonesia to the Kaʿbah runs to the northwest. Facing due west not only misrepresents Indonesia's actual geographic position but produces a meaningful azimuthal error that accumulates across the country's vast longitudinal extent. After consulting Masroeri, whose astronomical analysis furnished azimuth calculations disaggregated by locality, the MUI revised its ruling.[86] The second fatwa acknowledged astronomical calculations explicitly and positioned scientific evidence as integral to the process of qibla determination. The MUI framed the two rulings as complementary, but the substantive shift is real: the second fatwa replaced a general heuristic with a scientifically calibrated specification.[87] That the MUI simultaneously exempted already-existing westward-facing mosques from reorientation reflects the political logic of accommodation—scientific authority was incorporated, but in a manner calibrated to minimize social disruption.

Negotiating Authority, Knowledge, and Power in the Transformation of MUI Fatwas

The trajectories traced above suggest that Islamic legal thought in Indonesia is a field of sustained negotiation rather than a tradition of stable transmission. Fatwas are not simply the outputs of normative ijtihād; they are outcomes of interactions among social, political, and epistemological forces that are often in tension.[88] The cases analysed here—vasectomy, meningitis vaccination, lunar calendar calculation, and qibla determination—each demonstrate that MUI fatwas do not emerge in a social vacuum. They respond to the imperatives of modernity, the findings of scientific inquiry, and the expectations of state actors. Within this context, the MUI seeks to maintain its religious authority while addressing wider societal needs—a process of negotiation that inevitably carries the ruling into contested terrain where political interests, public health imperatives, and scientific legitimacy converge.[89]

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[84] Sodiqin, "Religion and Science," 1–20; Hakim et al., "Between Exclusivity and Inclusivity of Institutions," 230–44.

[85] Nailur Rahmi et al., "Contestation of the Determination of 'Idul Adha and Its Implementation According to Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul 'Ulama," *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah dan Masyarakat 25*, no. 1 (2025): 262–79.

[86] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission at the MUI National Congress on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal (Eid al-Fitr), and Dhu al-Hijjah (Eid al-Adha)."

[87] Muḥammad Amīn al-Shahīr Ibn ʿAbidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār ʿalā al-Durr al-Mukhtār Sharḥ Tanwīr al-Abṣār* (Dār ʿAlam al-Kutub, 2003), 364.

[88] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 2 of 2004 on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah."

[89] Thomas Djamaluddin, Astronomi Memberi Solusi Penyatuan Ummat (Lembaga Penerbangan dan Antariksa Nasional, 2011), 26–8; Ahmad Wahidi et al., "Implementation of the Mabims Criteria in Determining the Beginning of Islamic Month in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Engineering, Technology and Social Science (ICONETOS 2020)*, Atlantis Press, 2021, 97.

MUI fatwas serve a dual function in Indonesia's socio-political order. First, they provide authoritative religious guidance for the Muslim majority, constituting moral reference points for both ritual practice and daily life. Second, they carry a political valence, shaping—and sometimes being shaped by—public policy.[90] The meningitis vaccine fatwas make this dual function particularly visible. The 2009 fatwa aligned with Saudi Arabia's vaccination requirement while simultaneously providing religious cover for a government-mandated public health intervention.[91] The 2010 fatwa, issued following the development of halal alternatives, revised that alignment in response to changed technical conditions.[92] The fatwas thus operated as what might be called hybrid legal instruments—linking religious authority to state imperatives and global health governance simultaneously.[93]

Science has been a recurring catalyst for fatwa revision. The clinical evidence on vasectomy reversibility provided the juristic opportunity to reconsider a prohibition previously grounded in the assumption of permanence. The availability of halal vaccines demonstrated that the ḍarūrah dispensation in the 2009 fatwa was contingent on a factual condition that had ceased to obtain. The astronomical critique of the westward qibla ruling compelled the MUI to incorporate azimuth calculations into its deliberations and to adopt the language and methods of modern astronomical science. The ḥisāb–ru'yah debate in the lunar calendar context has similarly become a site of ongoing contestation, with direct implications for the designation of national religious holidays. Science does not function merely as a supplementary technical input in these cases but as a structuring force that reframes the question on which juristic reasoning must work.[94]

The influence of science, however, is refracted through the internal dynamics of the MUI itself. Differences in educational background and epistemological orientation among its members produce a diversity of perspectives that shapes collective ijtihād.[95] The qibla controversy exemplifies this. Ali Mustafa Ya'qub, whose scholarly formation was rooted in ḥadīth studies and Saudi religious education, maintained that the westward orientation was textually sufficient and that astronomical precision was unnecessary and potentially confusing for ordinary Muslims. Masroeri, by contrast, drew on his expertise in 'ilm al-falak and his organizational affiliation with the NU to press for scientific accuracy.[96] The dispute was not merely technical but epistemological: it turned on the question of what kind of knowledge is authoritative in the production of Islamic legal norms. Internal debates of this kind reveal that fatwa-making is not simply a response to external pressure but also a site of contestation within

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[90] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 2 of 2004 on the Determination of the Beginning of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu al-Hijjah."

[91] Susiknan Azhar, *Kalender Islam; Ke Arah Integrasi Muhammadiyah-NU* (Museum Astronomi Islam, 2012), 179–82.

[92] Abī 'Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li al-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān wa al-Mubayyin limā Taḍammanahu min al-Sunnah wa ayyi al-Furqān* (Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2006), 43–4.

[93] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 3 of 2010 on the Qibla Direction."

[94] This approach was emphasized by Mustafa Ali Ya'qub, one of the principal proponents of the MUI fatwa on qibla orientation. See: Mustafa Ali Ya'qub, *Kiblat: Antara Bangunan dan Arah Ka'bah* (Pustaka Darus Sunnah, 2010), 49–55.

[95] Annisa Mawarni and Dhiauddin Tanjung, "Problematics of Qibla Direction Determination in Sei Lepan Brandan District, Langkat Regency (Analysis of MUI Fatwa No. 5 of 2010 on the Amendment of MUI Fatwa No. 3 of 2010)," *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities 4*, no. 3 (2024): 236.

[96] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2010 on the Orientation of the Qibla."

the MUI, where different epistemic traditions and scholarly lineages compete for definitional authority.[97]

These findings confirm that the transformation of Islamic law—and of MUI fatwas specifically—reflects a negotiation among authority, knowledge, and power. Scientific knowledge is mobilized to confer new legitimacy on revised rulings; political authority shapes the degree to which such knowledge is received or resisted; and religious tradition provides both the normative framework within which these negotiations take place and the rhetorical resources through which their outcomes are expressed.[98] The lunar calendar fatwas offer perhaps the most sustained illustration of this: they constitute arenas in which the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the NU, Muhammadiyah, and specialists in astronomy jointly contest—and periodically renegotiate—the legitimate methodology for fixing the Islamic calendar.[99] Fatwas in this light are not the pronouncements of a unified religious authority but the provisional settlements of ongoing disputes among multiple actors with different kinds of expertise and different institutional interests. This study contributes to the scholarship on Indonesian Islamic law by demonstrating that fatwa transformations cannot be understood in isolation from the contestations among religion, science, and politics.[100] By insisting on the interconnectedness of these dimensions, it argues that MUI fatwas are the products of multi-actor negotiations, reflecting Islamic law's character as a socially embedded normative system that is continuously redefined within the conditions of Indonesian modernity.[101]

While this study focuses on elite institutional processes, available empirical evidence suggests that community reception of MUI fatwa revisions is itself a site of negotiation. Studies on Indonesian Muslim communities indicate that fatwa compliance is neither automatic nor uniform: ordinary Muslims frequently interpret, selectively apply, or quietly resist official rulings, particularly where those rulings conflict with established local practice or personal interest (Ichwan 2005; Fealy and White 2008; Lindsey and Pausacker 2016). The qibla revision, for example, generated significant uncertainty among mosque committees and ordinary worshippers about whether and how to implement the new azimuth specifications. The MUI's pragmatic exemption of existing westward-facing mosques from reorientation can be read, in part, as a response to this anticipated community resistance—an acknowledgment that the legitimacy of a fatwa depends not only on its doctrinal soundness but on its practical

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[97] Kompas, "MUI: Tidak Ada Perubahan Arah Kiblat," July 16, 2010, https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2010/07/16/13040936/~Nasional.

[98] Fathorrahman et al., "The Role of Religious Fatwas in Indonesia: An Analysis of Self-Government and Biopolitics During the Pandemic," *PETITA: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum dan Syariah 9*, no. 1 (2024): 91.

[99] Firdaus Yuni Dharta et al., "MUI's Fatwa on Interfaith Greetings and Religious Tolerance: Can Indonesia Find a Middle Ground?," *Frontiers in Communication 10* (May 2025): 5; Yahya and Susilo, "Conservative Muslims in Indonesia's Religious and Political Landscapes," 2392293; M. Ridho Ilahi et al., "Fatwa Institutions in Handling Religious Blasphemy Crimes in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Al-Ahkam 34*, no. 1 (2024): 33–62; Qodariah Barkah et al., "Negotiating Islamic Law and State Norms in Child Marriage Practices in Coastal Indonesia," *Antmind Review: Journal of Sharia and Legal Ethics 2*, no. 1 (2025): 43–55.

[100] Ach. Fatayillah Mursyidi, "MUI and Its Fatwa: The Articulation of Modern Authority in a Religious Democracy of Indonesia," *ENTITA: Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial 2*, no. 1 (2020): 24–5.

[101] "Fatwa of the MUI Fatwa Commission No. 5 of 2009 on the Use of Meningitis Vaccines for Hajj and Umrah Pilgrims."

receivability by those it purports to guide. Future research employing ethnographic methods would be well placed to illuminate this community-level dimension more systematically.

A comparative perspective, even if brief, helps contextualize the MUI's profile within broader patterns of institutional fatwa-making. Egypt's Dār al-Iftā' operates under direct state authority and tends to issue rulings that align closely with government policy, prioritizing national stability and minimizing public controversy. Malaysia's Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) functions within a federal-state constitutional framework that formally enshrines Islam as the religion of the federation, giving its fatwas a degree of statutory enforceability that MUI rulings do not possess. Saudi Arabia's Council of Senior Scholars (Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulamā') draws its authority from a symbiotic relationship with the royal family, producing rulings that carry both religious and political weight within the kingdom's distinctive theocratic framework. By contrast, the MUI operates in a pluralistic democratic polity where its fatwas are religiously authoritative but not legally binding for the state, compelling it to negotiate authority through persuasion and coalition-building rather than enforcement. This institutional position—authority without coercive power—makes the MUI's mode of accommodation with science and state particularly instructive for comparative Islamic legal studies.

Conclusion

The transformations traced in this article reveal that Islamic legal thought in Indonesia is neither doctrinally fixed nor politically immune. Across the four thematic areas examined—vasectomy, meningitis vaccination, qibla orientation, and lunar calendar determination—the MUI's fatwas have undergone change through at least three distinct mechanisms: the relaxation of absolute prohibitions, the outright revocation of prior rulings, and the incremental refinement of legal norms to achieve greater precision and practical applicability. These changes have been driven by multiple converging forces: new scientific evidence regarding vasectomy reversibility, the availability of halal vaccine formulations, and the application of computational astronomy; socio-political pressures including public health imperatives, demands for religious calendrical unity, and the competing claims of conservative and progressive constituencies; and political alignments between the MUI and state policy priorities. Taken together, these findings support the conclusion that MUI fatwas are not the transparent products of normative ijtihād but socially situated constructs—the negotiated outcomes of exchanges between religious authority, scientific legitimacy, and political interest. This, in turn, confirms the character of Islamic law in Indonesia as a living and adaptive normative order, continuously reshaped by the conditions of its application.

Theoretically, the article contributes to the literature on Islamic law in contemporary Muslim-majority societies by demonstrating the analytical purchase of a socio-legal approach that takes seriously all three of the dimensions—normative, scientific, and political—through which fatwas are produced and revised. Practically, it provides a basis for reflection among the MUI and analogous religious institutions about the conditions under which fatwa-making can be more transparent, participatory, and responsive to the intersecting demands of religious tradition and modernity. This study is limited by the restricted access to the internal deliberative processes of the MUI Fatwa Commission, which made it necessary to work primarily with final fatwa texts and secondary scholarly literature rather than with the full

record of deliberation. Future research might address this limitation through interviews with fatwa commission members, comparative analysis of the MUI alongside other fatwa institutions in the Muslim world, and ethnographic study of how Muslim communities receive, negotiate, or resist newly issued rulings—a dimension that would enrich our understanding of fatwas not only as elite formulations but as norms that are enacted, contested, and transformed in the lived religious experience of Indonesian Muslims.

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