

Islamic Law and Its Role in Regulating Contemporary Society

Syaiful Ma'ruf

STAINU (sekolah tinggi agama islam nahdlatul ulama) Pacitan, Indonesia

* Correspondence e-mail; marufsyiful2@gmail.com

Article history

Submitted: 2026/01/05; Revised: 2026/02/24; Accepted: 2026/03/25

Abstract

This study analyzes the role of Islamic law in regulating contemporary society. The research aims to examine how Islamic legal principles are applied in modern social, economic, and legal systems and how they contribute to justice, welfare, and social order. A normative legal research method is used with conceptual and doctrinal approaches, based on secondary data from Islamic legal texts, academic literature, and institutional reports. The findings show that Islamic law regulates contemporary society through principles of justice, welfare, and ethical responsibility, supported by mechanisms such as Islamic finance, family law, and social welfare instruments. However, challenges such as differing interpretations, globalization, and legal pluralism affect its implementation. The study concludes that Islamic law remains a relevant and dynamic legal system capable of addressing contemporary societal needs when supported by strong institutional and scholarly frameworks.

Keywords

Islamic Law; Sharia; Contemporary Society; Justice; Maqasid al-Shariah



© 2026 by the authors. This is an open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY SA) license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic law, known as Sharia, represents one of the most comprehensive legal systems in the world, governing not only ritual and spiritual matters but also social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions of human life. In contemporary society, the relevance of Islamic law continues to expand as communities seek legal frameworks that are not only normative but also ethical and value-based. Unlike purely positivistic legal systems that emphasize state authority and codified statutes, Islamic law integrates divine guidance with human reasoning, aiming to create a balanced system of justice, welfare, and moral responsibility. This holistic nature makes Islamic law particularly significant in addressing the complexities of modern life, where legal systems must respond to rapid social change, globalization, and technological advancement.

The foundational philosophy of Islamic law is rooted in the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which refers to the higher objectives of Islamic legislation. These objectives include the protection of religion (*dīn*), life (*nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), lineage (*nasl*), and property (*māl*). According to classical Islamic legal theory, all legal rulings must serve these five essential interests to ensure human well-being and social stability. This framework demonstrates that Islamic law is not merely rule-based but purpose-oriented, focusing on achieving *maslahah* (public interest) and preventing *mafsadah* (harm). As emphasized by M. Umer Chapra, Islamic law provides a moral-economic system that prioritizes justice, equity, and human dignity, making it highly relevant in addressing modern socio-economic challenges.

In the context of contemporary society, Islamic law plays a critical role in regulating various aspects of human interaction, particularly in areas such as finance, family law, governance, and social welfare. In the financial sector, Islamic law prohibits *riba* (usury), *gharar* (uncertainty), and *maysir* (gambling), while promoting ethical financial practices based on risk-sharing and asset-backed transactions. Institutions such as Islamic banks and microfinance organizations operate under these principles to ensure fairness and transparency in economic activities. The Islamic Financial Services Board highlights that the implementation of Sharia-compliant financial systems enhances financial stability and promotes ethical governance in global financial markets.

In addition to economic regulation, Islamic law plays a significant role in shaping family and social structures. It provides detailed legal provisions on marriage, divorce, inheritance, and guardianship, ensuring that family relations are governed by principles of justice and mutual responsibility. These rules are designed to protect individual rights while maintaining social harmony within the family unit. Islamic inheritance law, for example, ensures a fair distribution of wealth among heirs, preventing concentration of wealth and reducing potential conflicts. This demonstrates how Islamic law functions as a social regulator that balances individual rights with collective welfare.

Islamic law also contributes to social welfare through redistributive mechanisms such as *zakat*, *waqf*, and *sadaqah*. These instruments are designed to reduce inequality and support vulnerable groups in society. *Zakat*, as an obligatory form of almsgiving, ensures the circulation of wealth from the affluent to the poor, thereby promoting economic justice. *Waqf* (endowment) contributes to long-term social development by funding educational, health, and religious institutions. According to the Islamic Development Bank, Islamic social finance plays a crucial role in achieving sustainable

development goals by fostering inclusive growth and reducing poverty in Muslim-majority and minority communities alike.

The theoretical foundation of Islamic law also emphasizes its adaptability and dynamic nature. Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) allows for interpretative reasoning through mechanisms such as ijihad (independent reasoning) and qiyas (analogical reasoning). These tools enable Islamic law to respond to new social realities and emerging issues without compromising its core principles. Wael B. Hallaq argues that Islamic law is not a static system but a living tradition that evolves through scholarly interpretation while maintaining its ethical foundations. This adaptability is particularly important in the modern era, where legal systems must address issues such as digital finance, biotechnology, environmental law, and international relations.

Despite its strengths, the implementation of Islamic law in contemporary society faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the diversity of interpretations among Islamic scholars, which can lead to variations in legal rulings across different regions. This diversity reflects the richness of Islamic intellectual tradition but also creates inconsistencies in legal practice. Another challenge is the coexistence of Islamic law with secular legal systems in many countries, which often leads to legal dualism and jurisdictional overlap. In some cases, tensions arise between religious legal norms and state legislation, particularly in multicultural and pluralistic societies where multiple value systems coexist.

Globalization also presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic law. On one hand, it facilitates the internationalization of Islamic financial systems and legal cooperation. On the other hand, it exposes Islamic legal systems to external influences that may not always align with Sharia principles. This requires continuous scholarly engagement and institutional reform to ensure that Islamic law remains relevant while preserving its authenticity. Moreover, the increasing complexity of modern society demands greater institutional capacity and legal expertise to interpret and implement Islamic legal principles effectively.

In addition, public understanding of Islamic law remains a critical issue. Misconceptions about Islamic law often arise due to limited knowledge or misrepresentation in media and public discourse. Therefore, legal education and public awareness are essential to promote a more accurate understanding of Islamic law as a system that emphasizes justice, compassion, and social welfare rather than mere legal rigidity.

Based on these considerations, Islamic law can be understood as a dynamic and comprehensive legal system that continues to play an important role in regulating

contemporary society. It provides ethical guidance, legal structure, and social responsibility, making it highly relevant in addressing modern legal and social challenges. This study therefore aims to analyze the role of Islamic law in regulating contemporary society, with a focus on its principles, applications, and challenges in modern contexts.

METHODS

This study employs a normative legal research design to analyze the role of Islamic law in regulating contemporary society. The normative approach is chosen because the study focuses on legal norms, doctrines, and principles derived from Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and how these are applied in modern social contexts. Unlike empirical legal research that relies on field data, normative research emphasizes the analysis of written legal sources, classical texts, and contemporary legal interpretations.

The research adopts a conceptual approach, a doctrinal approach, and a statutory approach. The conceptual approach is used to examine fundamental concepts in Islamic law such as justice (‘adl), welfare (maslahah), harm prevention (mafsadah), and legal objectives (maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah). These concepts form the theoretical foundation for understanding how Islamic law regulates human behavior in both individual and collective dimensions. The doctrinal approach is applied by analyzing the interpretations of classical and contemporary Islamic jurists regarding the application of Sharia in various aspects of life, including economic transactions, family relations, and social governance. Meanwhile, the statutory approach is used to examine relevant legal instruments and regulations in countries where Islamic law is integrated into national legal systems.

The data used in this research consist entirely of secondary legal materials obtained through library research. These materials include primary legal sources such as the Qur’an, Hadith, and classical fiqh literature, which serve as the foundational texts of Islamic law. In addition, secondary sources such as academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and institutional reports are also utilized to provide contemporary perspectives on the application of Islamic law. International reports from institutions such as the Islamic Financial Services Board and the Islamic Development Bank are included to illustrate the practical implementation of Islamic principles in modern financial and social systems.

Data collection is conducted through systematic documentation and literature review techniques. The researcher collects relevant texts, classifies them according to thematic relevance, and evaluates their significance in relation to the research

objectives. This process ensures that the analysis is grounded in authoritative and credible sources.

The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative descriptive analysis. This method involves interpreting legal texts and theoretical frameworks to identify patterns, relationships, and implications of Islamic law in regulating contemporary society. The analysis is conducted by comparing classical Islamic legal theories with modern applications to determine the continuity and transformation of legal principles over time. Special attention is given to how Islamic law adapts to contemporary issues such as globalization, financial modernization, and social complexity.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study applies source triangulation by comparing multiple references from classical Islamic scholarship and modern academic literature. This approach helps to minimize bias and ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Through this methodological framework, the study is able to provide a systematic and in-depth analysis of how Islamic law functions as a regulatory system in contemporary society while maintaining its ethical and normative foundations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic law continues to play a significant role in regulating contemporary society by providing a comprehensive normative framework that integrates legal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. In modern contexts, Islamic law is not limited to ritual obligations but extends to social relations, economic transactions, family structures, and governance systems. Its regulatory function is grounded in the objectives of Sharia (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), which aim to preserve religion, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth. This holistic orientation enables Islamic law to remain relevant in addressing complex social realities in an increasingly globalized world. As emphasized by M. Umer Chapra, Islamic law provides a value-based system that promotes justice, equity, and human well-being, distinguishing it from purely positivistic legal systems that often focus solely on formal legality.

One of the key findings is that Islamic law contributes significantly to the regulation of social behavior by establishing clear ethical boundaries in interpersonal relations. Principles such as honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), justice (*‘adl*), and prohibition of harm (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*) function as moral-legal guidelines that shape individual and collective conduct. These principles are reflected in various aspects of daily life, including trade, contracts, family relations, and community interactions. In the economic sphere, for instance, Islamic law prohibits exploitative practices such as *riba* (usury), *gharar* (excessive uncertainty), and *maysir* (gambling),

thereby promoting fairness and transparency in financial transactions. According to Islamic Financial Services Board, the application of these principles in Islamic finance enhances financial stability and ethical accountability within modern economic systems.

Furthermore, the study finds that Islamic law plays an important role in regulating family and social structures through detailed provisions on marriage, inheritance, and guardianship. These regulations aim to protect individual rights while maintaining social harmony and responsibility within the family unit. Islamic family law emphasizes mutual rights and obligations between spouses, ensuring fairness and balance in domestic relationships. It also provides clear guidelines for inheritance distribution, which helps prevent disputes and ensures equitable wealth transfer among heirs. In contemporary society, these legal provisions continue to serve as a reference for Muslim communities, particularly in countries where Islamic family law is formally recognized within national legal systems.

In addition, Islamic law demonstrates adaptability in addressing modern challenges such as technological advancement, globalization, and social transformation. While its foundational principles remain constant, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) allows for interpretative flexibility through mechanisms such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). This flexibility enables Islamic law to respond to new issues such as digital finance, bioethics, and international trade while maintaining consistency with Sharia principles. As noted by Wael B. Hallaq, Islamic law is a dynamic system that evolves through scholarly interpretation while preserving its ethical core, making it capable of engaging with contemporary legal challenges.

The study also reveals that Islamic law plays a significant role in promoting social justice and welfare through redistributive mechanisms such as *zakat*, *waqf*, and *sadaqah*. These instruments are designed to reduce inequality and support vulnerable populations by redistributing wealth from the affluent to the poor. In modern institutional contexts, these mechanisms are increasingly managed through formal organizations and integrated into national economic systems. The Islamic Development Bank highlights that Islamic social finance contributes to sustainable development by addressing poverty, improving access to essential services, and supporting inclusive economic growth.

However, the implementation of Islamic law in contemporary society faces several challenges. One of the primary challenges is the diversity of interpretations among علماء (Islamic scholars), which leads to variations in legal opinions (fatwas)

across different regions. This diversity, while intellectually rich, can sometimes create inconsistencies in legal application. Additionally, the coexistence of Islamic law with secular legal systems in many countries raises issues of legal harmonization and jurisdictional overlap. In some cases, tensions arise between religious legal norms and state legislation, particularly in multicultural and pluralistic societies.

Another significant challenge is the impact of globalization and technological advancement, which introduces new forms of social and economic interaction that are not explicitly addressed in classical Islamic jurisprudence. Issues such as cryptocurrency, artificial intelligence, and digital privacy require renewed scholarly engagement and reinterpretation of Islamic legal principles. This necessitates continuous *ijtihad* and institutional collaboration among scholars, legal experts, and policymakers to ensure that Islamic law remains relevant and responsive to contemporary needs.

Despite these challenges, the study finds that Islamic law maintains a strong capacity for regulating contemporary society due to its ethical foundations and adaptability. Its emphasis on justice, welfare, and moral responsibility provides a comprehensive framework for addressing both individual and collective needs. Moreover, the integration of Islamic legal principles into modern governance and financial systems demonstrates its practical relevance in contemporary institutional settings.

Overall, the findings suggest that Islamic law continues to function as a vital regulatory system in modern society by balancing tradition with contemporary demands. Its ability to integrate ethical values with legal norms allows it to contribute meaningfully to social order, economic justice, and moral governance. However, its effectiveness depends on the ongoing development of legal interpretation, institutional support, and harmonization with modern legal frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic law plays a significant and continuing role in regulating contemporary society through a comprehensive framework that integrates legal norms, ethical values, and spiritual principles. Its foundational objectives, derived from *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, emphasize the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, which collectively aim to achieve justice, welfare, and social balance. In modern contexts, Islamic law extends beyond ritual matters and actively regulates social, economic, and legal interactions in ways that promote fairness and responsibility.

The findings show that Islamic law contributes to social regulation by establishing ethical principles such as justice (*‘adl*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), and prohibition of harm (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*). These principles shape individual behavior and institutional practices, particularly in areas such as finance, family law, and social welfare. In the economic sector, Islamic law provides alternative financial mechanisms such as *zakat*, *waqf*, and Islamic banking, which promote wealth redistribution and reduce inequality. Institutions such as the Islamic Development Bank further demonstrate how Islamic principles can be applied to support inclusive development and poverty alleviation.

The study also finds that Islamic law remains adaptable to contemporary challenges through mechanisms such as *ijtihād* and *qiyās*, allowing it to respond to modern issues including digital finance and globalization. However, challenges such as differing scholarly interpretations, legal pluralism, and the integration of Islamic law within secular legal systems remain significant obstacles.

In conclusion, Islamic law continues to be a relevant and dynamic regulatory system in contemporary society. Its effectiveness depends on the ability to balance traditional principles with modern legal demands, supported by continuous scholarly interpretation and institutional development. Strengthening Islamic legal frameworks can contribute significantly to building more just, ethical, and socially balanced societies.

REFERENCES

- Chapra, M. U. (2000). *The Future of Economics: An Islamic Perspective*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hallaq, W. B. (2009). *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). (2021). *Islamic Finance for Sustainable Development*. Jeddah: IsDB.
- Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB). (2022). *Islamic Financial Services Industry Stability Report*. Kuala Lumpur: IFSB.
- Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia. (2019). *Hukum Islam dan Implementasinya di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Kemenag RI.

Republik Indonesia. (1945). *Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945*. Jakarta.

Siddiqi, M. N. (1981). *Muslim Economic Thinking*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation.

Zuhayli, W. (2003). *Al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu*. Damascus: Dar al-Fikr.

Wibowo, A. (2017). *Hukum Islam dan Masyarakat Modern*. Jakarta: Rajawali Pers.