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## The Strategic Role Of Indonesia's Geopolitics In The Implementation Of The International Halal Regime

**Siti Darojatun Rizki Putri<sup>1</sup>, Nuraini Rachmawati<sup>2</sup>**

Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia<sup>1-2</sup>

Email Korespondensi: [sitirizkiputri58@student.hi.unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:sitirizkiputri58@student.hi.unida.gontor.ac.id),  
[nurainirachmawati50@student.hi.unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:nurainirachmawati50@student.hi.unida.gontor.ac.id)

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article examines Indonesia's strategic position in the increasingly institutionalized framework of international halal governance, shaped by interactions between state and non-state actors. The objective of this research is to analyze how Indonesia can leverage its geopolitical advantages, including its demographics as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, its strategic location, and its active diplomacy, to influence this governance framework and promote its national interests amid significant constraints. The main issues investigated are the tension between state sovereignty and the growing power of multinational corporations (MNCs), as well as the challenges of domestic institutional coordination and regional competition for leadership. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology with a geopolitical and international system theoretical framework, this study conducts a literature-based case study. Data was obtained from national policy documents, global industry reports, and corporate publications, analyzed through qualitative content analysis to understand strategic narratives and governance dynamics. The findings show that although Indonesia has significant geopolitical influence, its ability to act as a global rule-maker is limited by the hegemonic influence of multinational corporations (MNCs) in setting standards, fragmentation among domestic institutions (BPJPH, MUI), and competition with neighboring countries such as Malaysia. This study concludes that Indonesia's effective transition from policy recipient to norm-setter in the halal system depends on a coherent geo-economic strategy that integrates effective diplomacy in forums such as ASEAN and the OIC with strong capacity building for domestic industries and strategic partnerships.*

**Keywords:** Halal Industry; Halal Regime; Geopolitics; Economic Diplomacy

### **ABSTRAK**

*Artikel ini mengkaji posisi strategis Indonesia dalam kerangka tata kelola halal internasional yang semakin terinstitusionalisasi, yang dibentuk melalui interaksi antara aktor negara dan non-negara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Indonesia dapat memanfaatkan keunggulan geopolitiknya – termasuk faktor demografis sebagai negara dengan populasi Muslim terbesar di dunia, letak geografis yang strategis, serta diplomasi aktif – untuk memengaruhi kerangka tata kelola tersebut dan memajukan kepentingan nasionalnya di tengah berbagai keterbatasan. Isu utama yang dikaji meliputi ketegangan antara kedaulatan negara dan meningkatnya kekuatan perusahaan multinasional (multinational corporations/MNCs), serta tantangan koordinasi kelembagaan domestik dan persaingan regional dalam memperebutkan kepemimpinan. Penelitian ini menggunakan*

metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan kerangka teori geopolitik dan sistem internasional melalui studi kasus berbasis kajian pustaka. Data diperoleh dari dokumen kebijakan nasional, laporan industri global, serta publikasi korporasi, yang dianalisis menggunakan analisis isi kualitatif untuk memahami narasi strategis dan dinamika tata kelola. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Indonesia memiliki pengaruh geopolitik yang signifikan, kemampuannya untuk berperan sebagai pembentuk aturan global masih dibatasi oleh dominasi hegemonik MNCs dalam penetapan standar, fragmentasi kelembagaan domestik (BPJPH dan MUI), serta persaingan dengan negara tetangga seperti Malaysia. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa transisi efektif Indonesia dari penerima kebijakan menjadi penentu norma dalam sistem halal global bergantung pada strategi geo-ekonomi yang koheren, yang mengintegrasikan diplomasi yang efektif dalam forum seperti ASEAN dan Organisasi Kerja Sama Islam (OKI) dengan penguatan kapasitas industri domestik serta kemitraan strategis.

**Kata Kunci:** Industri Halal, Rezim Halal, Geopolitik, Diplomasi Ekonomi

## INTRODUCTION

The halal industry has evolved into a complex international regime, involving cross-border norms, rules, and governance mechanisms to regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of products that comply with Islamic principles. In international relations, the concept of an international regime refers to a framework for cooperation between actors to address common problems, such as standardization and the risk of fraud in the halal supply chain (Siahaan, 2021). In this context, the halal regime is not limited to religious aspects, but also includes economic, political, and social fields, with key norms such as halal (permissibility), thoyyib (cleanliness), and trade ethics (Wilson et al., 2011). This evolution began with local practices in the Muslim world in the 20th century, which were then supported by the globalization of trade, migration, and digital technology, enabling cross-border integration. Thus, the halal regime can be understood as a form of transnational governance that is becoming increasingly institutionalized (Rasyidah et al., 2025).

Organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) play a central role in shaping global halal standards followed by countries and non-state actors. The OIC, founded in 1969 with 57 member countries, has promoted halal certification as a tool of economic diplomacy. Meanwhile, SMIIC, as a technical body of the OIC since 2010, has developed international standards for halal certification, which are recognized by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and used by countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, and Indonesia (Abdullah, 2021). This governance mechanism involves bilateral cooperation and ensures that halal standards not only meet religious requirements but also scientific criteria such as food safety in accordance with FAO or WHO guidelines, even covering various other sectors such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and tourism (Syamsiyah & Ardiana, 2022). This standardization not only harmonizes technical specifications, but also establishes an authority that determines the halal criteria for products on a global scale (Yuanita & Poetry, 2025).

The halal regime now involves not only countries, but also Multinational Corporations (MNCs) that are exploiting the halal trend as a strategic global market opportunity. MNCs such as Nestle, Unilever, and Cargill have integrated halal certification into their business strategies, investing in halal supply chains to access the Muslim market, which is growing in value every year (Pimada, 2021). This growth is driven not only by the Muslim population, but also by increasing demand from non-Muslim consumers who want halal products with guaranteed quality, safety, and ethical production (Islam et al., n.d.).

In fact, MNCs control 42% of the global halal product market, creating complex interdependencies where transnational business interests interact with national regulations and international standards (Report, n.d.). Therefore, the participation of MNCs strengthens the regime by providing economic and technological needs, but at the same time MNCs also create inequality, because they often set standards for profit, benefiting developed countries outside the OIC. For example, the dominance of MNCs in halal raw materials such as gelatin can reduce the independence of developing countries, and they also promote trends such as the attractive halal lifestyle for non-Muslim consumers (Mukti et al., 2024).

In this context, Indonesia's geopolitics as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, accounting for 86.9% of its 237 million inhabitants, has a vital interest in shaping the global halal regime. (Haq, 2025). Its strategic position in Southeast Asia provides a great opportunity to influence the implementation of an international halal regime. Through policies such as the Halal Product Guarantee Law (2014) and BPJPH (2019), Indonesia is striving to become a Global Halal Hub, but also faces governance challenges such as inter-agency coordination and the dominance of MNCs (Khotibul Umam, Dyah Purbaningrum, 2024). The hegemony of foreign halal standards and the dominance of MNCs create structural dependencies that have the potential to marginalize domestic traders. This is because many types of halal products on the Indonesian market are imported or produced by MNCs (Mukti et al., 2024). This situation is a reflection of geopolitical competition in implementing and controlling global halal standards.

Therefore, this article argues that a geopolitical approach is a suitable strategy for Indonesia. Through the geo-economics theoretical framework developed by Blackwill & Harris (2016), Indonesia needs to utilize its domestic market strength, its position in international organizations such as ASEAN, OIC, and G20, as well as its economic diplomacy capacity to form a halal regime that is more equitable and beneficial to national interests (Cloud, 2016). This diplomacy also promotes inclusive standards, reduces dependency, and enhances competitiveness. However, obstacles such as regional competition, for example with Malaysia, or geopolitical tensions, for example in the South China Sea, can affect its effectiveness. Once again, the effective implementation of an international halal regime depends not only on domestic regulations, but more on Indonesia's ability to take advantage of geopolitical benefits in a competitive global arena (Hidayati, 2023). This article provides an in depth analysis of how Indonesia's geopolitics can shape the halal regime, focusing on strategies to integrate global norms while advancing national interests in an increasingly complex economic ecosystem.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach to analyze Indonesia's geopolitical role in the international halal regime. The main data sources for this study were obtained from national policy documents and global reports such as the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report and articles from multinational corporations (MNCs) that are relevant to the theme taken as the source of the study. (Bowen, 1997). The theoretical framework of this study uses Geopolitical Theory and International Regime Theory. (Umam, 2025) to analyze the relationship between state authority and corporate power in halal governance.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis techniques to understand the narratives, strategic objectives, and policy instruments used by the state, as well as the strategies of corporate actors in shaping the halal ecosystem. The data collection for this article was conducted through a case study (literature) approach to previous studies, which aimed to support and enhance understanding of the research object, as well as to find more data so that the analysis would be more in-depth and specific to the topic of discussion. This study also added references from books as additional references.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Significance of the Halal Regime in International Relations and Geo-economics*

The halal regime has evolved into a powerful global economic tool, not merely a religious or cultural concept. To gain access to the rapidly growing Muslim consumer market and enhance their reputation in international trade, governments and multinational corporations (MNCs) are gradually implementing halal standards. Countries and companies gain moral legitimacy by complying with halal regulations, which demonstrate a commitment to ethical production, safety, and quality requirements that appeal to Muslim consumers and a broader global audience seeking reliable and transparent supply chains.

Countries can now leverage the halal industry as a tool of geo-economic power to increase their political influence and impact global economic governance. Countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates are deliberately promoting their halal certification bodies, standards, and regulatory frameworks to expand their influence in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim markets. By institutionalizing halal governance, these countries strengthen their bargaining position in trade negotiations and regional cooperation initiatives. In addition to ensuring religious compliance, research shows that state-funded halal organizations can enhance national image, export competitiveness, and regulatory leadership in global value chains (Yusran et al., 2025).

Adopting halal standards is a strategic move for multinational corporations (MNCs) to increase their market share and strengthen their global brands. Companies such as Nestlé see halal certification as a way to reach new customer groups and use it to increase trust and differentiate their products in a highly competitive industry. Halal has also become a political tool and economic asset, transforming international production networks, influencing cross-border legislation, and strengthening interactions between corporate power and

governments within the global halal framework. MNCs often collaborate with international halal organizations or national regulators to expedite certification and gain exclusive access to markets. However, their hegemony risks overwhelming local businesses, transforming the halal economy into an arena where corporate power increasingly clashes with national sovereignty and policy (Butt et al., 2017).

Multinational corporations (MNCs) view halal as a geoeconomic advantage to increase market share and strengthen their position abroad. According to Wilson & Liu (2011, *Journal of Islamic Marketing*) and Alserhan (2015, *Journal of Macromarketing*), companies such as Nestlé, Unilever, and Carrefour integrate halal certification into their supply chains to serve a growing Muslim consumer base. MNCs gain market dominance, influence consumer standards, and shape expectations regarding halal governance by integrating halal compliance into their global manufacturing networks. By using halal as a commercial tool and a corporate-driven geoeconomic instrument of influence, these dynamics enable multinational corporations (MNCs) to function as powerful non-state actors that can gradually undermine state authority at the international level (Wilson & Liu, 2014) (Alserhan et al., 2016).

The halal regime is also growing rapidly at the regional level, including in ASEAN. Each ASEAN country is striving to establish regional norms and gain a more prominent position in the international halal value chain, making the region a competitive arena for countries vying for leadership in the halal sector. In an effort to position themselves as regional centers for halal governance, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Brunei all support their respective national halal frameworks and halal certification organizations. This competition also influences how each country positions its regulatory bodies, negotiates the acceptance of halal standards, and attracts capital to halal-related industries, including food processing, pharmaceuticals, fashion, and logistics. As a result, ASEAN is engaged in a strategic competition in which the country that can claim the most trusted and widely recognized halal system will gain political legitimacy and economic advantage (Abimanyu & Faiz, 2023).

By collaborating with MNCs to create a transnational halal ecosystem that extends beyond Southeast Asia, Malaysia in particular has strengthened its position. Malaysia works with MNCs such as Nestle, Colgate Palmolive, and Nippon to standardize production processes, create halal logistics networks, and promote global halal brands through organizations such as the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) and programs such as the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC). This alliance strengthens Malaysia's position as a global halal leader while providing significant influence for MNCs in the development of the halal market. Due to these dynamics, Indonesia faces strategic challenges in navigating regional competition and the growing influence of the corporate-driven halal ecosystem. A larger Muslim population does not automatically translate into regulatory leadership (Tohe et al., 2021).

### *The Strategic Role of Indonesia's Geopolitics in the Implementation of the International Halal Regime*

The implementation of the halal regime at the national level in Indonesia has a clear foundation. The main legal basis for Indonesia's national halal system is Law No. 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Guarantee (JPH Law), which requires halal certification for goods traded and consumed domestically. This law established the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH), which issues halal certificates in collaboration with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Halal Inspection Agency (LPH). To facilitate access, the law also established a "self-declare" certification program for micro and small businesses, although its implementation faces obstacles. To register under the BPJPH, for example, many MSMEs still experience difficulties in terms of administrative capacity and understanding (Yunus, 2021).

To maximize Indonesia's opportunities in implementing the international halal regime, the government has created specific halal regulations as a sign of its seriousness. Four strategic pillars are outlined in the 2019–2024 Indonesian Sharia Economic Masterplan (MEKSI) to build a strong national sharia economy: strengthening the halal value chain, improving the Islamic finance sector, empowering micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and utilizing the digital economy (Kementerian Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, 2018). These pillars aim to strengthen Indonesia's ability to compete internationally in the halal market and expand the country's halal ecosystem. Indonesia plans to turn its large Muslim majority population into a sustainable economic engine by investing in the halal value chain, which includes food, pharmaceuticals, fashion, and tourism (Mardi, 2023).

Although Indonesia is a major producer of halal raw materials and has a large local market, the country has not yet succeeded in positioning itself as a major global certification center. The National Master Plan and regulatory reforms aim to close this gap. Although the scope of formal certification and regulatory capacity has increased as a result of Indonesia's institutional reforms such as BPJPH and Law No. 33/2014, as well as the latest call for mandatory certification, coordination and international recognition remain issues that are being worked on. At the same time, MNCs and integrated global supply chains use patented international standards, logistics, and brands to control production and distribution chains, which limits domestic companies and makes it difficult for Indonesia to transform its demographic advantage into rule-making power in the halal system (Juliana et al., 2025).

From a geopolitical perspective, Indonesia bases its halal diplomacy and regional economic cooperation on this master plan. The government leverages its position as the country with the largest Muslim population to influence halal governance through soft power projection and efforts to create international norms through its halal policies. To coordinate these initiatives, build alliances with ASEAN countries, and promote Indonesian halal standards internationally, institutional actors such as the National Committee for Islamic Economics and Finance (KNEKS) are crucial (Sugianto, 2024). In an effort to increase international acceptance of its certification system, particularly within the OIC and ASEAN frameworks, Indonesia is also seeking to establish mutual halal recognition agreements, according to a recent

study. By minimizing dependence on foreign or corporate-dominated halal regulatory frameworks, these diplomatic efforts strengthen Indonesia's geo-economic position (Viartasiwi et al., 2024).

At the international and regional levels, the SMIIC (Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries) standards and ASEAN halal standards are two international frameworks that have been sought to be harmonized with Indonesian halal standards. SMIIC norms are voluntary for some countries, not all OIC members have adopted them, and there are still differences in technical requirements and religious interpretations, making this process difficult. To harmonize the national certification scheme with these international standards, BPJPH must coordinate with MUI and other organizations, so institutional harmonization is still in progress. This requires contributions from relevant parties so that the implementation of the halal regime remains based on applicable national and international regulations and standards (Hakim & Amaliyah, 2024).

However, there are still clear differences between the halal standards prioritized by global companies and government regulations based on the JPH Law. These companies often rely on global certification schemes that are more in line with SMIIC or other international halal institutions, which may not be fully compatible with Indonesia's mandatory halal certification framework. According to academics, this difference has led to a power struggle: in order to promote trade, Indonesia must participate in mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) while maintaining its domestic regulatory authority. In addition, there is conflict between local micro-enterprises, authorities, and multinational companies due to differences in certification reasons, including validity period, supervision, and costs (Nasir et al., 2025).

Along with the digitization of the halal certification system, Indonesia is increasingly emphasizing the "Halal Indonesia" branding, which enhances transparency and strengthens consumer confidence. According to a recent study, the BPJPH digital certification platform (SIHALAL) significantly improves productivity, accountability, and consumer confidence in halal status. To develop their brand identity in local and international markets, companies and MSMEs are simultaneously implementing digital marketing techniques including SEO, social media, influencer campaigns, and storytelling to sell halal products more successfully. As a result, the "Halal Indonesia" trademark has become a crucial commercial and diplomatic tool that strengthens Indonesia's position in the international halal market (Fadilah, 2025).

To develop and expand the halal supply chain, Indonesia is also collaborating with multinational companies, which carries potential financial risks and challenges. Strategic alliances can indeed increase global competitiveness and help expand production, but they also risk strengthening dependence on foreign resources and knowledge. To reduce this dependence, local innovation is being encouraged as a temporary measure. By utilizing halal labels and product testing as competitive advantages, MSMEs are creating new halal products to target niche markets in the food, cosmetics, and travel sectors. This dual strategy is gradually shifting the balance of power away from the dominance of foreign corporations while ensuring that Indonesia's halal sector develops inclusively.

By actively participating in ASEAN, OIC, and other bilateral alliances, Indonesia strengthens its halal diplomacy to raise awareness of its halal standards and expand its influence in the international halal system. To facilitate regional trade, Indonesia promotes the harmonization of halal standards and mutual recognition programs through ASEAN, and participates in standardization initiatives led by SMIIC within OIC to enhance its international position. To develop "Halal Indonesia" certification and create a cooperative halal supply chain, Indonesia is collaborating bilaterally with key trading partners in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. To respond to the growing influence of multinational corporations, Indonesia is implementing a combination of regulatory enforcement, domestic incentives for MSMEs, and public-private partnerships that strengthen local capacity while maintaining state authority over halal governance (Alkaff, 2025).

### *Geopolitical Leverage and Power Constraints of Indonesia in the International Halal Regime*

Indonesia has significant geopolitical influence in the halal industry thanks to its strategic location as the world's largest archipelago. Indonesia can leverage its geographical advantages to attract international halal trade by positioning itself as a hub for halal supply chains and logistics, given its location connecting important maritime trade routes between the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Yudhiya, 2025). Its demographic advantages are further strengthened by its large and predominantly Muslim population, which provides a large domestic market and moral-political claims to leadership in international halal governance. According to the latest analysis, Indonesia's strategic significance in influencing cross-border halal flows is further strengthened by its increasingly broad participation in regional connectivity projects such as the integration of the ASEAN halal market (Nursita, 2025).

However, Indonesia's ability to independently set and implement halal standards may be threatened by the economic power of multinational corporations (MNCs) involved in the halal sector. According to the study, these MNCs exert significant pressure on Indonesia's regulatory environment thanks to their extensive distribution networks and support from international certification systems. Their control over the production and export chain often exceeds Indonesia's legislative changes, which limits local businesses and reduces the country's bargaining power in the global halal system. In addition, academics highlight that Indonesia risks becoming dependent on international corporate supply chains rather than becoming a leader in the halal system if significant investments are not made in the domestic halal industry's capabilities (Mohammad, 2024).

Countries and multinational corporations (MNCs) are clearly competing with each other to influence international halal standards and practices. While MNCs use their market power, global networks, and exclusive certification procedures to influence the direction of halal standard setting, countries such as Indonesia are seeking to promote their national halal policies through regulation and diplomacy. "The large number of competing countries" and the absence of integrated global halal certification standards are two of Indonesia's main external challenges, according to an analysis published in *Ekonom: Jurnal Ekonomi dan Bisnis* (2023). By

incorporating halal criteria into multinational supply chains, MNCs are increasingly acting as de facto global norm entrepreneurs, according to growing research (Suhaimi & Marliyah, 2024).

However, Indonesia continues to play an important role in the global halal system as a policy recipient rather than a rule maker. International standards, which are often shaped or dominated by certification bodies affiliated with MNCs, require Indonesia to continuously adjust its national certification and regulatory environment. In addition, the fragmented institutional structure between BPJPH, MUI, and LPH weakens Indonesia's normative power by limiting its ability to set uniform and globally accepted standards. Many studies also show that Indonesia's structural position in the halal system will remain peripheral rather than directive without further institutional consolidation and involvement in international standard setting (Wijayanti, 2025).

### *Institutional Challenges and Strategic Path Forward*

One of the main challenges in managing halal revenue in Indonesia is coordination between domestic institutions. BPJPH, MUI, and KNEKS have good policies, but their implementation is often hampered by issues of administrative capacity, operational synergy, and overlapping authorities. However, in recent years, the surge in BPJPH certification together with LPH/LP3H has shown a significant increase in the number of certified products. Many MSMEs still face pressure to follow procedures, read halal literature, and digitize the certification process, which has not yet been completed (Yulia, 2023).

However, by basing certification, quality control, and distribution on networked corporate practices rather than strict national regulations, Indonesia's dependence on complex and transnational halal supply chains that are often under the control or strong influence of MNCs limits policy space. This tension is further highlighted by the implementation and enforcement of stricter halal label inspections in 2024. While large international manufacturers can comply with most requirements, importers, restaurants, and businesses involved in complex supply chains led by MNCs report operational challenges and demand clearer mutual recognition mechanisms, highlighting how corporate-driven logistics and certification models can limit Indonesia's aspirations to fully assert regulatory sovereignty in the halal system (Kurniawati et al., 2024).

## **CONCLUSION**

The halal regime has developed into a complex global governance system, where the market power of multinational corporations and state diplomacy compete with each other. In this arena, Indonesia has great geopolitical potential to become a leader in the implementation of the international halal regime. With a Muslim majority population in Indonesia and the emergence of the halal lifestyle as a current trend, there are great opportunities for Indonesia to become a leader in the international halal regime. Indonesia also has strong domestic market potential, supported by national policies such as the Halal Product Guarantee Law. However, the dominance of MNCs requires a policy strategy that balances global openness and

national sovereignty. To turn this potential into real leadership, Indonesia must overcome the challenges of global corporate dominance, regional competition, and domestic institutional coordination. Its success depends on an active geo-economic strategy, namely strengthening halal diplomacy in international forums, building local industry capacity, and leveraging its strategic position to become a norm-setter or Indonesia rule maker in the global halal regime.

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