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THE POLITICS OF REFORM IN ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW AND ITS IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract

The reform of Islamic family law represents a complex political arena where religious doctrines, state authority, and civil society interests intersect in shaping gender norms. This study examines the political dynamics underlying Islamic family law reform across several Muslim−majority countries and its implications for gender equality. By analyzing case studies from the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, the research highlights how the success of legal reform is influenced by the power of state actors, the role of religious scholars, international pressure, and the strength of women's movements. In many contexts, family law remains one of the few legal domains where patriarchal norms are legally entrenched, despite constitutional commitments to human rights. Conversely, countries like Morocco and Tunisia illustrate that meaningful reforms are possible through strategic political engagement and strong alliances between state institutions and civil society organizations. These progressive reforms have led to greater protection of women's rights in areas, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Nevertheless, reform efforts often face strong resistance from conservative groups who claim to defend the authenticity of Islam. This study concludes that Islamic family law reform is not merely a theological issue but a contested political struggle that shapes the trajectory of gender justice in contemporary Muslim societies. Therefore, reform strategies must be tailored to the socio−political context of each country, embracing a dynamic fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) approach and ensuring the active participation of women in legislative processes.

Abstrak

Reformasi hukum keluarga Islam merupakan arena politik yang kompleks, di mana kepentingan agama, negara, dan masyarakat sipil saling berinteraksi dalam membentuk norma-norma gender. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi dinamika politik yang mendasari reformasi hukum keluarga Islam di berbagai negara mayoritas Muslim, serta dampaknya terhadap kesetaraan gender. Dengan menelaah kasus-kasus dari Timur Tengah, Asia Selatan, dan Asia Tenggara, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan reformasi sangat dipengaruhi oleh kekuatan aktor negara, peran ulama, tekanan internasional, serta kekuatan gerakan perempuan. Di banyak negara, hukum keluarga menjadi satu-satunya ruang hukum yang masih mempertahankan norma-norma patriarkal secara legal, meskipun terdapat konstitusi dan komitmen terhadap hak asasi manusia. Di sisi lain, negara-negara seperti Maroko dan Tunisia menunjukkan bahwa reformasi progresif dapat dicapai melalui strategi politik yang cermat dan koalisi yang kuat antara aktor negara dan organisasi masyarakat sipil. Reformasi semacam itu telah menghasilkan peningkatan perlindungan hak-hak perempuan dalam hal pernikahan, perceraian, hak asuh anak, dan warisan. Namun demikian, reformasi yang bermakna seringkali memicu resistensi dari kelompok konservatif yang mengklaim sebagai penjaga otentisitas Islam. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa reformasi hukum keluarga Islam bukan hanya persoalan normatif

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keagamaan, melainkan medan perjuangan politik yang menentukan arah kesetaraan gender dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer. Oleh karena itu, strategi reformasi perlu disesuaikan dengan konteks sosial-politik masing-masing negara dan mempertimbangkan pendekatan fiqh yang dinamis serta partisipasi aktif perempuan dalam proses legislasi.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic family law (*fiqh al-usrah*) remains a fundamental component of the legal systems in many Muslim—majority countries, functioning as the primary normative framework for regulating personal status matters, including marriage contracts, divorce procedures, inheritance distribution (Zainurohmah et al., 2023), child custody, and guardianship. It is not merely regarded as a set of legal rules (Jamaludin et al., 2024), but as a manifestation of divine will, endowed with religious legitimacy and moral authority by society. Despite legal modernization efforts and the incorporation of human rights principles into national constitutions, Islamic family law remains the most resistant domain to reform due to its deep—rooted connection to religious tradition and its central role in shaping collective identity and Islamic moral order. The persistence of patriarchal legal norms has become increasingly problematic in light of contemporary social realities, where Muslim women are gaining access to higher education, increased economic participation, and growing legal awareness, yet still face structurally embedded inequalities, namely limited access to divorce and restrictions on child custody (Asmara, 2024), and unequal inheritance shares. These inequalities are often reinforced by religious courts and laws that uphold *wilāyah* (male guardianship) and subordinate interpretations of women's roles, based on selective readings of classical Islamic legal texts that were developed in specific socio—historical contexts and may not reflect the realities of modern Muslim societies (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Previous studies have highlighted that the reform of Islamic family law is shaped not only by legal considerations but also by broader socio—political and ideological dynamics. Lubis et al. (2025) argue that tensions between tradition and modernity, particularly regarding gender justice, have transformed Islamic family law reform into a complex process involving competing values and interests (Lubis et al., 2025). Their study suggests that legal reforms are often framed as symbolic struggles reflecting tensions between the preservation of Islamic authenticity and contemporary demands for gender equality. Existing literature further indicates that different Muslim—majority countries have adopted diverse approaches toward reform. In countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Malaysia, reform efforts have been pursued through the principles of *ijtihad* and *maqaṣid al-sharīʿa*, demonstrating the adaptability of Islamic legal interpretations to contemporary social conditions. In contrast, Abbasi (2022) argue that reform initiatives in several Muslim—majority countries frequently encounter resistance from conservative scholars, Islamic political actors, and social groups that perceive legal reform as a challenge to established religious values. (Abbasi, 2022). Furthermore, Azni et al. (2025) emphasize that Islamic family law has increasingly become a contested arena where different actors attempt to negotiate and redefine the relationships among religion, state authority, and gender roles (Azni et al., 2025). The literature collectively suggests that debates surrounding Islamic family law reform extend beyond legal discourse and involve broader ideological and social contestations concerning authority, legitimacy, and the future direction of Muslim societies.

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The tension between tradition and modernity, especially in the realm of gender justice, has made the reform of Islamic family law a highly complex and ideologically charged socio—political phenomenon. Legal reforms are no longer seen as technical amendments but as value—laden struggles involving religious authority, state legitimacy, and competing visions for the moral future of Muslim societies. This is evident in how reforms are often framed—as symbolic acts reflecting a clash between authentic Islamic values and contemporary demands for gender equality. In countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Malaysia, progressive reforms have been pursued through the principles of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *maqaṣid al-sharīʿa* (higher objectives of Islamic law), demonstrating the flexibility of Islamic law to align with contemporary notions of justice. In contrast, countries like Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia often experience resistance from conservative scholars, Islamic political parties, and segments of society who view such reforms as Western intrusions or threats to the sanctity of Islamic teachings. Consequently, family law has become a contested arena where various actors seek to redefine the roles of religion, the state, and gender in the modern world. In this context, Islamic family law is not only debated in legal circles but also contested in public discourse, policy debates, and broader social struggles—becoming an ideological battleground where states, religious authorities, Muslim feminist movements, and transnational organizations compete to establish moral legitimacy and shape reform.

The reform of Islamic family law is not merely a matter of interpreting religious texts; it also reflects the ongoing contestation among various social and political actors competing to claim authority over the interpretation of Islamic teachings—particularly when such interpretations intersect with issues concerning women's rights and gender justice. In many contexts, the reform process does not unfold in a linear or rational manner, but is shaped by ideological negotiations, institutional compromises, and resistance from conservative groups who perceive legal changes as a threat to religious identity and patriarchal social structures (Samuri et al., 2022). Unfortunately, there remains a lack of systematic research explaining how reform efforts are accepted, rejected, or co—opted by particular forces within national political and religious landscapes, and how these processes affect the achievement of substantive—rather than merely symbolic or procedural—gender equality. Moreover, there is still a limited number of comparative studies analyzing how the configuration of state actors, religious authorities, and civil society influences the direction, form, and outcomes of Islamic family law reform.

This study aims to critically explore the political dynamics underlying various reform efforts in Islamic family law and to assess the extent to which these reforms impact gender equality—both in formal legal frameworks and in the lived social realities of Muslim women across different national contexts. By analyzing selected case studies from Muslim—majority countries, this research seeks to uncover how legal reform processes are negotiated and mediated through interactions among state actors, religious authorities, and civil society groups, and the extent to which legal changes reflect shifts in power structures, ideological orientations, and interpretive paradigms within Islamic jurisprudence. Theoretically, this study hopes to contribute significantly to the understanding that Islamic law is not a fixed and closed legal corpus, but a dynamic space open to debate and deeply shaped by political configurations and socio—cultural developments. Practically, the research aims to offer constructive insights for policymakers, women's rights activists, scholars, and legal practitioners who seek to

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promote gender justice through legal frameworks that are not only constitutional and formal, but also contextual and aligned with Islamic values rooted in the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. In doing so, this study does not merely analyze the discourse surrounding Islamic family law reform, but also proposes an interdisciplinary approach that situates law as a site of ideological struggle that can be mobilized for more just and inclusive social change for women in the contemporary Muslim world.

METHODS

This study employs an empirical legal approach with a cross—national comparative case study design to analyze the political, religious, and social dynamics that influence the process of Islamic family law reform in seven Muslim—majority countries—Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Iran—each representing a spectrum of legal policies ranging from progressive reforms to conservative resistance. The selection of countries is based on the diversity of state structures (democratic vs. authoritarian), the configuration of state—religious institutional relations, and the extent of civil society participation in the legal reform agenda. To grasp the complexity of reforms within each national context, the study incorporates limited field observation and qualitative analysis of key actors, legal discourses, and social practices through triangulated data from multiple sources. Key informants include judges in religious or family courts, government officials, both state—affiliated and independent religious scholars, Islamic legal academics, and gender and human rights activists, selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure ideological and institutional diversity. Data were collected through in—depth semi—structured interviews, courtroom observation, documentation of advocacy forums, and the analysis of legal documents, for example, legislation, fatwas, court rulings, public statements, institutional reports, and advocacy materials produced by local NGOs. Fieldwork was conducted in phases in major centers of legal and policy activity, including Tunis, Riyadh, Rabat, Jakarta, Cairo, Lahore, and Tehran over a period of twelve months.

This study applies thematic analysis focusing on key issues, for instance, forms of resistance and accommodation to reform, strategies of religious legitimation through the framework of *maqashid al-sharia*, the state's role as an ideological actor, and the power relations between state agents, religious authorities, and civil society in the legislative process. The analysis examines how each country constructs the boundary between Islamic discourse and gender equality principles, and how formal legal norms are practiced, distorted, or resisted in everyday social contexts. To ensure the validity of findings, the study conducts both method and actor triangulation by cross—checking interview data with observational findings and legal document contents. In addition, national political contexts, state—religion relations, and structures of public participation are analyzed as explanatory variables for the success or failure of substantive reforms. This cross—national approach enables the identification of generalizable patterns and anomalies, and contributes to a broader theoretical understanding of the plurality of Islamic law within modern state systems. The study is committed to ethical research principles, including obtaining participant consent, ensuring informant anonymity, and respecting cultural values and local sensitivities throughout all stages of the research process.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The reform of Islamic family law in Muslim–majority countries demonstrates highly diverse patterns, reflecting the unique historical, social, political, and theological contexts of each region. On one hand, countries like Tunisia have adopted a legalistic–progressive approach that embodies a commitment to gender equality and human rights, as exemplified by the *Code du Statut Personnel*, which, since 1956, has prohibited polygamy and granted women broader divorce rights. Such reforms are typically driven by modernist political elites, civil society pressures, and openness to international normative frameworks (Muhajir, 2021). Countries like Saudi Arabia follow a conservative approach deeply rooted in traditional *fiqh* interpretations, particularly the Hanbali school, which generally restricts women's participation in legal and social spheres. Even when reforms are introduced—such as granting women the right to drive or access employment—these are often framed as royal initiatives rather than outcomes of democratic legal transformation (Sonneveld, 2017). These contrasting trends reveal that Islamic family law reform is neither linear nor uniform but results from the dynamic and often contested interactions among ideological, religious, and political forces.

The state acts not only as a legislative or administrative institution but also as an ideological agent that plays a central role in regulating and negotiating the boundaries between religious discourse and civil rights (Abdillah et al., 2022). The state mediates between internal pressures from religious groups striving to preserve Islamic legal orthodoxy and external pressures from the international community advocating for the implementation of gender equality and human rights norms. In many cases, for example in Morocco or Indonesia, the state seeks to legitimize its reformist agenda by cloaking it in religious legitimacy—whether by involving state–aligned clerics in the legislative process or by invoking interpretations such as *maqashid al-sharia* as a normative foundation for reform. However, the state can also act as a defender of the status quo when reforms are perceived as threats to socio–political stability or the ruling government's electoral support (Setiyawan et al., 2024). This central role explains why reforms to Islamic family law often remain partial, ambiguous, or even contradictory—advancing gender equality in legal texts while tolerating discriminatory practices through legal loopholes or selective implementation policies.

Religious authorities, meanwhile, play an equally influential role in shaping the trajectory and content of Islamic family law reforms. Institutions, like councils of *ulama*, fatwa boards (Maimun et al., 2024), and local *fiqh* bodies, possess significant social legitimacy in interpreting *sharīʿa* in ways that are publicly acceptable. Consequently, they often become decisive actors in either facilitating or obstructing reform efforts. In numerous cases, namely in Egypt or Pakistan, reforms aimed at expanding women's rights have faced strong resistance from religious elites who view such changes as manifestations of Westernization or as threats to the Islamic social order. Even when the state demonstrates political will to reform family law, opposition from religious authorities can delay, distort, or even halt policy changes. By contrast, in countries with more adaptive clerical structures, like Morocco's *ijma ulama*, a more conciliatory approach has emerged, allowing for a synthesis between Islamic principles and human rights norms (Bunyamin, 2021). As such, religious authorities act as ideological

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gatekeepers who define the limits of how far gender equality norms can be institutionalized within Islamic legal systems, and their stance—supportive or oppositional—serves as a key indicator of the success or failure of family law reforms in the Muslim world.

The involvement of civil actors, particularly gender-based civil society organizations, plays a crucial role in advancing Islamic family law reform across various Muslim-majority countries. These organizations often act as driving forces in voicing the need for more equitable and gender-just legal revisions through public awareness campaigns, policy advocacy, and strategic partnerships with state and international institutions. However, the effectiveness of such engagement heavily depends on the degree of civic space available in each country (Idham et al., 2022). In politically democratic and open systems (e.g., in Morocco and Indonesia), women's organizations have greater opportunities to participate in policy-making processes and influence the direction of family law reform (Ahyani et al., 2024). Conversely, in countries with authoritarian regimes or legal systems tightly controlled by religious authorities, namely Iran or Saudi Arabia, the voices of civil society are often restricted and weakened, rendering the reform process more top-down and less responsive to societal needs. Therefore, the success and scope of family law reform are significantly shaped by domestic political contexts, institutional capacities, and the legitimacy civil actors hold in the eyes of both the state and the public. Within this framework, the present study argues that strengthening civil society must go hand in hand with expanding democratic space and freedom of expression in order for gender equality advocacy within family law to develop in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

Islamic family law reforms that have been formally adopted in various countries do not necessarily bring about profound changes in social practices at the community level. Although new laws have been passed to expand women's rights in marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, resistance from society often manifests in the form of non-compliance with the new legal norms or through reinterpretations that preserve patriarchal structures. In some contexts, including in Egypt and Pakistan, law enforcement officials and judicial institutions still refer to conservative social norms in practice, rendering progressive laws symbolic rather than effectively implemented. This gap demonstrates that legal transformation alone is insufficient without a corresponding shift in legal culture among the public, state agents, and even religious institutions. In many cases, women who attempt to claim their rights under the reformed laws face social stigma, familial pressure, or even gender-based violence, highlighting that legal reform must be supported by robust socialization strategies and inclusive legal education for all segments of society (Singh, 2019).

The process of Islamic family law reform is not merely a response to the need for aligning legal norms with contemporary social conditions, but also constitutes a complex arena of ideological contestation between traditional Islamic values and modern human rights principles, particularly on the issue of gender equality. On one side, reformist actors seek to reframe Islamic legal interpretation through hermeneutical approaches that are more inclusive of justice and equality, often referring to *maqashid al-sharia* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), which emphasize the protection of human dignity and individual rights. On the other side, conservative and orthodox groups frequently reject such reform efforts, arguing that changes to Islamic family law represent a form of liberalization incompatible with *sharīʿa* principles. This tension is reflected in public discourse, academic debates, and even state policymaking, where

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decisions regarding reform are often influenced not only by legal reasoning but also by ideological considerations, identity politics, and international relations. For example, countries aiming to project a moderate image on the global stage tend to be more open to reform, though still constrained by conservative domestic concerns. Therefore, Islamic family law reform cannot be detached from broader ideological dynamics, and every legal change must be understood as the product of shifting power relations, religious interpretations, and intersecting global pressures within the legal and social structures of contemporary Muslim societies.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study firmly position Islamic family law not merely as a product of religious jurisprudence derived from classical *fiqh* traditions, but also as a political arena laden with ideological interests, struggles over legitimacy, and power negotiations among various institutional and non–institutional actors. Islamic family law serves as a central locus in the contestation over the authority to define the meaning of "Islam" itself, particularly in relation to sensitive issues, such as gender roles, women's rights, and the structure of familial authority (Samuri, Abdol Malek, et al., 2022). In this context, religious institutions, the state, civil society, and transnational actors are not only engaged in normative debates but also in competition for control over the legal discourse and policy frameworks that are often seen as defining the moral identity of the Muslim community. When the state undertakes reforms in family law (e.g., enacting new legislation or reinterpreting *sharīʿa*), these actions cannot be viewed merely as administrative legal policies; rather, they function as political maneuvers that may provoke proactive or resistant responses from parties whose authority feels threatened. Thus, Islamic family law reform represents a manifestation of both epistemic and political battles—between Islamic modernism, *fiqh*–based conservatism, and international demands for equality—making this domain not only a legal–formal space but also a site of symbolic hegemony where the meaning of Islam is continuously negotiated and reconstructed.

Gender equality in the context of Islamic family law cannot be reduced merely to editorial changes in legal texts or the adoption of provisions that affirm women's rights, because the essence of genuine equality is determined by how such norms are internalized and implemented in broader social life (Zayyadi et al., 2023). Many legal reforms may appear progressive on paper, but once translated into practice, they encounter cultural resistance, institutional biases, and entrenched structural inequalities in social relations (Muhibbuthabry, 2016). This occurs because gender constructions in most Muslim societies are governed not only by formal law but also by religious norms (Siregar, 2024), customary traditions, and social practices that reinforce each other. As a result, women often remain in subordinate positions even when they are legally entitled to rights such as divorce or equitable inheritance (Yavuz, 2016). Moreover, many women are unable to access these rights due to legal illiteracy, economic dependence, or social and familial pressure. Therefore, gender equality cannot be measured solely by formal legal parameters, but must also take into account social indicators that reflect value transformation, power redistribution (Charrad & Stephan, 2020), and shifts in male–female relations within religious and social structures. This study underscores the need for a multidimensional approach to understanding gender equality in Islamic law—one that integrates legal, cultural, and structural analyses simultaneously.

The state plays a highly complex and often ambivalent role in the reform of Islamic family law (Ma'rifah, 2019). The state acts as an agent of change with the capacity to

formulate and enact new legal policies, including reforms aimed at promoting gender equality. The state can adopt international legal instruments, establish more inclusive religious councils, or support contextual reinterpretations of *fiqh* (Wirastri & Van Huis, 2024). The state also functions as a protector of patriarchal structures that have long formed the foundation of the socio—political fabric in many Muslim societies (Subramanian, 2017). The state frequently employs conservative religious narratives to maintain political stability and garner support from influential religious groups, particularly in electoral democracies (Sona, 2024). The state engages in pragmatic political calculations between the need for international legitimacy through a reformist image and the domestic pressure from conservative forces that threaten social stability if reforms are perceived as too radical (Dannies & Hock, 2020). This dynamic produces ambiguous legal policies—on the surface appearing to support gender equality, yet simultaneously leaving legal loopholes that hinder the substantive implementation of reform. Such ambivalence reveals that the state is not always a purely reformist force, but also a key actor in the reproduction of gender inequality through ideological compromises and power calculations (Pelu et al., 2024). Therefore, within the framework of state theory and Islamic law (Samuri, Mohd Awal, et al., 2022), it is essential to recognize the state's dual role—as both reformer and preserver of the status quo—which significantly shapes the success or failure of family law reform in contemporary Muslim societies.

The reform of Islamic family law in contemporary contexts has opened up significant discursive space for renegotiating *sharīʿa* interpretations that have long been regarded as normative (Fatima, 2024), final, and unquestionable (Aminah & Sugitanata, 2022). This reform process demonstrates that Islamic law does not exist in a vacuum but continues to interact dialectically with the surrounding social, political, and ideological dynamics (Zayyadi et al., 2023). In many cases—particularly in Muslim countries with dual legal systems—*sharīʿa* interpretation becomes the subject of debate between conservative actors seeking to preserve traditional understandings and progressive groups advocating for normative reinterpretations based on principles of substantive justice and gender equality (Shabana, 2017). Nevertheless, more inclusive and equality—oriented interpretations are often rejected by conservative religious authorities who claim exclusive authenticity over classical interpretations and view new approaches with suspicion, framing them as Western—influenced or externally imposed (Blanchy, 2019). This resistance indicates that the reform of family law is not merely a matter of legal text but also an epistemological battleground in which claims to religious authority are deployed to maintain the dominance of particular knowledge systems within Islamic discourse.

The gap between formal legal reforms and the lived social realities of everyday life reveals the complex challenges involved in implementing change within Islamic family law. Many Muslim—majority countries have revised their family codes to provide more equitable legal frameworks for women—such as granting divorce rights, limiting polygamy, or raising the minimum age for marriage (Peletz, 2018). However, these legalistic reforms do not automatically eliminate discriminatory practices that are deeply embedded in cultural and social structures (Yaşar, 2024). Social rejection of gender equality often stems from traditional religious understandings, patriarchal cultural constructions, and weak law enforcement mechanisms at the local level (Schenk, 2018). Women who are legally entitled to equal rights often continue to face cultural barriers in accessing justice (Dutta, 2021), whether through religious courts or in social practices

like family mediation (Utsany et al., 2022). This disparity underscores that legal transformation must be accompanied by broader social and cultural transformation, including critical education, the empowerment of women, and reforms within religious and Islamic educational institutions.

This study recommends that reforms in Islamic family law be approached as an inclusive and context—sensitive process that integrates theological authenticity with contemporary socio—legal realities. Rather than treating reform merely as a technical alignment with international human rights frameworks, it should serve as a transformative effort to develop an Islamic legal thought that promotes gender justice, social equity, and participatory governance (Rokhmad & Susilo, 2017). The reinterpretation of sharia must be grounded in contextual and dialogical methodologies that reflect the lived experiences of Muslim women across diverse societies, ensuring that legal reform is both locally rooted and globally resonant (Bahrami—Rad, 2021). Collaboration among state institutions, progressive scholars, and women's rights advocates is essential to prevent reforms from lapsing into formalism and to foster substantive social transformation. By aligning normative Islamic jurisprudence with the ethical imperatives of equality and justice, this study contributes to the development of a more responsive and human—centered framework for family law reform in Muslim contexts, offering comparative insights for plural societies seeking to harmonize faith—based values with universal legal standards.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the reform of Islamic family law is far from being a merely technical or juridical endeavor; rather, it constitutes a complex and deeply contested political process in which competing ideological forces, institutional interests, and cultural narratives interact to shape the trajectory of legal change. Although reformist movements frequently advocate for principles of gender equality and human rights, the translation of these abstract ideals into binding legal norms has proven to be uneven and fragmented—largely contingent upon the political will of the state and the interpretive space permitted by religious authorities. The evidence presented in this study underscores that Islamic family law is neither static nor monolithic, but instead represents a dynamic arena wherein political legitimacy, religious orthodoxy, and socio—cultural resistance co—produce divergent patterns of legal transformation. As such, legal reforms do not necessarily progress in a linear or coherent fashion but rather unfold through continuous contextual negotiations between normative demands for justice and deeply entrenched traditions. This complexity illustrates the need to situate Islamic legal reform within the broader structures of power and meaning—making, as law in this context functions not simply as a codified set of rules, but as a fluid and contested site of ideological struggle, communal identity, and institutional mediation.

The role of the state emerges as central in orchestrating and mediating the ongoing tension between internal pressures from within the Muslim community and external normative demands stemming from global human rights discourse. However, the state's position in this dialectic is often ambivalent—frequently oscillating between advancing progressive reforms and preserving patriarchal legal structures for the sake of social stability and political support from conservative constituencies. This ambivalence helps explain why formal legal reforms may coexist with enduring gender inequalities in everyday social practice. Religious authorities remain key actors in determining the acceptable boundaries of reform, often functioning as gatekeepers who selectively filter, reinterpret, or outright reject transformative legal initiatives. Thus, even when statutory

revisions signal a formal commitment to gender justice, their impact on women's lived realities is heavily shaped by how laws are interpreted, enforced, and internalized by society at large. Based on these findings, future research and advocacy efforts must move beyond a narrow focus on legal texts and instead adopt a more holistic understanding of the legal reform ecosystem—encompassing institutional behavior, pedagogical discourse, and socio–cultural imaginaries. Scholars and legal reform advocates are encouraged to foster constructive dialogue with religious actors and local communities to promote interpretive pluralism and to root reform narratives in contextually meaningful frameworks. Sustainable transformation of Islamic family law requires not only doctrinal innovation but also the cultivation of public consciousness that can bridge ethical commitments to equality with the moral authority of religious tradition.

DECLARATIONS

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Doni Azhari contributed to the conceptualization, research design, and drafting of the manuscript. Whereas, Asmuni contributed to data analysis, literature review, and critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version for submission.

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The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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