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Islamophobia's effect on the halal economy and Muslim minority communities: A comparative analysis of Belgium and the Philippines

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Abstract

This paper analyses the influence of Islamophobia on halal economic involvement and socioeconomic inclusion within Muslim minority groups in Belgium and the Philippines. The research employs a qualitative comparative framework, grounded in a comprehensive evaluation of the academic literature, legal documents, and policy materials, supplemented by thematic synthesis derived from institutional theory and political economy. The analysis differentiates between active institutional Islamophobia, manifested through explicit legal and regulatory constraints, and passive institutional Islamophobia, characterised by governance fragmentation, inadequate provision, and insufficient institutional support. Research indicates that Belgium demonstrates significant institutional obstacles, notably through limitations on religious slaughter and the regulation of Muslim visibility, which hinder local halal supply chains and heighten reliance on imports. The Philippines faces passive institutional constraints due to fragmented certification systems, insufficient government capacity, and socio-political marginalisation, which impede market expansion and certification adoption. In these situations, Islamophobia manifests through legislative obstacles, societal bias, and institutional marginalisation, resulting in elevated transaction costs, diminished customer confidence, and limited economic prospects. The research also emphasises gender-specific impacts and disparate policy reactions. This essay presents a framework that elucidates Islamophobia as a financial constraint by integrating political economy and institutional perspectives. The repercussions of policy on the well-being of minorities are examined.

1. Introduction

The global halal sector, based on the principle of halal *tayyiban*, signifies items that are permissible, safe, and hygienic, and constitutes a substantial market seeing tremendous expansion. In 2020, the halal food and beverage sector was valued at $1.37 trillion, representing over 18.2% of the global food market, with forecasts suggesting the halal industry could reach an annual valuation of approximately $2.3 trillion (Siregar & Sugianto, 2024). The market momentum is partially driven by the anticipated rise in the Muslim population, which is expected to reach 2.2 billion by 2030, thereby augmenting global demand for halal products. Furthermore, these items have achieved acceptability beyond Muslim consumers, as they are associated with quality assurance and cleanliness norms that benefit all consumers (Azroh *et al.*, 2025).

Nonetheless, the growth of the halal sector encounters challenges, particularly the rising tide of Islamophobia affecting economic opportunities. Islamophobia emerges through different discriminatory practices and adverse media representations of Islam and Muslims, distorting views and resulting in practical challenges for businesses within the halal industry (Wilujeng & Risman, 2020).

Movements like the "Boycott halal movement" aggressively subvert the market by dissuading the acceptance of halal-certified products and advocating the contamination of halal food with non-halal elements. These factors create social and economic impediments that significantly hinder the Muslim community's capacity to fully participate in the market (Wilujeng & Risman, 2020).

The economic ramifications of Islamophobia require thorough examination, particularly within distinct cultural contexts like Western Europe and Southeast Asia. Efforts in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia underscore the importance of robust legislative frameworks and government support in advancing the halal industry (Siregar & Sugianto, 2024). Governments in these regions have actively promoted halal compliance and market expansion, deliberately enhancing accessibility for Muslim enterprises. Conversely, in Western contexts, perceptions influenced by Islamophobic narratives may create an environment where Muslim businesses encounter extra challenges, affecting their capacity to compete effectively and authentically convey their religious identity through business practices (Zi-li *et al.*, 2021).

This research aims at clarifying the structural obstacles faced by Muslim minority communities in their economic pursuits by analysing the differing effects of Islamophobia in Western Europe and Southeast Asia. The findings will enhance the knowledge of how Islamophobia undermines both business activities and the essential human rights associated with cultural and religious expression (Tariq, 2020).

2. Literature review

2.1 Defining Islamophobia and its manifestations

Islamophobia is a multifaceted phenomenon defined by irrational fear, bias, and animosity against Islam and its adherents. This word encapsulates the social fears and preconceptions that foster adverse impressions of Islamic cultures. Academics observe that Islamophobia frequently exhibits distinct discursive characteristics, such as the view of Islam as a homogeneous entity, inherently distinct from and subordinate to Western civilisations. This perspective often portrays Islam as an antagonistic entity, characterised by manipulation and ideological extremism (Wiedlitzka *et al.*, 2021; Akhtar, 2022). In these situations, bigotry against Muslims is progressively rationalised, resulting in a culture where Islamophobia is deemed acceptable in public discourse.

Hate speech aimed at Muslims has experienced a concerning escalation, especially on social and mass media platforms. Research demonstrates a temporal correlation between online and offline expressions of Islamophobia, indicating that hate speech frequently precedes hate crimes targeting Muslim communities (Wiedlitzka *et al.*, 2021). The discussion presents a skewed portrayal of Muslims as an outsider group, often linking them to violence and terrorism. This narrative has worldwide implications and resonates across cultures, where heightened animosity and negative media representation cultivate atmospheres of exclusion and discrimination (Akhtar, 2022; Saeed *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the digital realm has evolved into a fertile environment for Islamophobic speech. Social media platforms are saturated with hate speech, which reinforces detrimental stereotypes and incites violence against Muslims (Böyük, 2024; Khamis, 2023).

Studies reveal that Islamophobic attitudes are widespread in numerous digital platforms, including TikTok, where content frequently perpetuates stereotypes that marginalise Muslim identities (Böyük, 2024). The swift dissemination of such content highlights the pressing necessity for initiatives to combat Islamophobia in digital spaces. Online statements of Islamophobia frequently result in violent repercussions. This connection highlights the normalisation of discriminatory views and demonstrates how hate speech significantly leads to broader patterns of prejudice and violence against minority communities (Alexander & Wang, 2025). Numerous studies indicate that the globalisation of anti-Muslim sentiments illustrates the pervasive nature of Islamophobia across cultural contexts, presenting considerable challenges for Muslim communities globally (Nawaz *et al.*, 2024; Amin, 2024).

In conclusion, the expressions of Islamophobia are deeply embedded in media narratives and societal interactions, exposing a pattern of discrimination that transcends boundaries. Comprehending these processes is essential for mitigating the economic, social, and psychological effects of such bigotry on Muslim communities.

2.2 The halal industry as an ethical and economic system

The halal industry is significantly impacting global markets by providing a comprehensive framework spanning multiple sectors, including pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, financial services, tourism, logistics, and food. halal, defined as permissible under Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), also signifies "goodness" (*tayyiban*), which encompasses cleanliness, safety, quality, and wholesomeness. Products in the halal industry must meet both permissibility and high-quality criteria to be considered acceptable to consumers Fauzan *et al.* (2023); Khan *et al.* (2020). The inherent connection between halal and *tayyiban* creates a comprehensive ethical framework that differentiates it from secular food and product systems. The principle of *tayyiban* emphasises that items must be nutritious for consumption, hence promoting human safety and welfare. This scrutiny guarantees that halal business operations conform not only to Islamic law but also to the moral implications of those rules, promoting a culture of respect for consumers and the environment (Dawam *et al.*, 2023; Mubarok & Imam, 2020).

The ethical obligation recognised in the halal industry is intricately linked to *tawhidic* epistemology, which combines divine authority (*Rububiyyah*) and ethical stewardship (*Khilafah*). Islam assigns Muslims the role of stewards (*khalifah*) responsible for upholding the principles of sustainability, transparency, and ethical accountability throughout the halal supply chain (Setiawan, 2023; Mirghani & Elgharbawy, 2025). This paradigm promotes the responsible and meticulous development of products, reflecting current expectations for ethical consumption and corporate social responsibility in international markets (Boudawara *et al.*, 2023; Ariff *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the halal market illustrates the convergence of religion and commerce. The demand for halal-certified products has significantly risen, driven by both Muslim communities and non-Muslim consumers who appreciate the associated values of hygiene and quality. Research indicates that halal branding promotes a perception of enhanced product integrity across various consumer demographics, which is essential for broadening market reach (Nurdalila *et al.*, 2024; Mubarok & Imam, 2020). The integration of ethical standards into halal production aligns with customers' preferences for sustainable and responsible choices, thereby improving the industry's reputation and economic sustainability (Mubarok & Imam, 2020; Mustajab, 2025).

The shift towards sustainability is evident in multiple halal industries, such as finance and banking, highlighting ethical investments and risk-sharing models that align with overarching sustainable development objectives (Boudawara *et al.*, 2023; Setiawan, 2023). The halal industry serves as an essential ethical and economic framework, integrating spiritual principles with principled business practices. This simultaneous commitment to halal and *tayyiban* delineates the industry's scope and frames its growth potential amid an increasing global focus on sustainability, ethical consumerism, and corporate responsibility.

2.3 Community adaptation and resilience

Adaptive techniques that safeguard social cohesion and decrease the consequences of exclusion are the means by which Muslim communities respond to Islamophobia in a variety of contexts. Among these tactics are the implementation of innovative approaches to economic activity and the maintenance of culturally anchored behaviours within dispute resolution. Dispute resolution in situations shaped by prejudice and social dislocation is addressed through indigenous techniques in the Philippines, such as the Shari'a Atas Bitiara program (Juego & Lidasan, 2025). These approaches demonstrate how communities draw on religious and local traditions to address these needs.

In addition, the economic participation of Muslims demonstrates resiliency through the establishment of halal markets and entrepreneurial endeavours. Halal-oriented business models can meet religious requirements and support market participation in predominantly non-Muslim countries. Even in situations where enterprises face prejudice and administrative challenges, halal certification remains an essential means of establishing credibility and social legitimacy (Carland, 2022).

Moreover, research on institutional Islamophobia reveals that organised discrimination can manifest itself in the form of bureaucratic obstacles, compliance burdens, and market exclusion, all of which act as barriers to business entry and growth (Sufi & Yasmin, 2022). Social cohesion can also be improved through entrepreneurship. Companies that align with cultural values can strengthen social links and mutual support networks, which, in turn, reduce feelings of isolation caused by discrimination.

According to Ogan *et al.* (2013), this economic engagement has the potential to serve as an identity affirmation, contradicting narratives that portray Muslims as outsiders and underscoring the contributions Muslims have made to their communities' societies and economies. Culturally anchored dispute resolution systems have the potential to maintain social harmony beyond the realm of commerce. There is a program in General Santos City called Shari'a Atas Bitiara that incorporates Islamic conflict resolution techniques into local governance. This program also provides a way that affirms community identity while addressing limited access to formal Shari'a court structures (Juego & Lidasan, 2025).

At the same time, these programs frequently function within bureaucratic frameworks that do not always recognise their legitimacy. As a result, maintaining institutional support remains a challenge. In general, proactive resilience is demonstrated through community adaptation enabled by entrepreneurial and indigenous governance systems. Increasing social cohesion and making Muslim engagement evident across wider society are two ways these tactics might encourage inclusion (Carland, 2022; Juego & Lidasan, 2025). These techniques integrate cultural identification with practical issue solutions and can help foster inclusion.

2.4 Legal and economic impacts on Muslim communities in Belgium

The halal business in Belgium is significantly affected by regional laws governing animal care and religious customs. The primary concern emerges from the slaughter bans implemented by the regions of Flanders and Wallonia. In 2018 and 2019, several regions enacted legislation requiring all animals to be stunned before slaughter, which directly contradicts traditional halal Zabiha and Kosher Shechita practices that require animals to be fully conscious during slaughter (Riaz *et al.*, 2021). This legislation has been actively challenged by Muslim and Jewish groups, who contend that such restrictions violate their rights to freely practise their religions (Reich & Harpaz, 2022).

The Brussels-Capital Region is the sole location where slaughter without previous stunning is allowed; however, discussions about possible prohibitions in this region have occurred. The rationale for these prohibitions is based on advocates' claims that pre-slaughter stunning is more humane and enhances animal well-being (Riaz *et al.*, 2021; Dudinskaya *et al.*, 2021). This viewpoint has faced criticism for marginalising religious rituals under the pretext of enhancing animal welfare. In February 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) affirmed the bans, recognising that although they infringe upon religious liberties, they fulfil a valid public interest in animal welfare. The verdict caused dissatisfaction and alarm from religious leaders and community members, who characterised the prohibitions as "Islamophobia disguised as animal protection" (Reich & Harpaz, 2022; Dudinskaya *et al.*, 2021). They argue that these rules disproportionately affect the practices of religious minorities, hindering their capacity to observe fundamental tenets of their faith.

The economic implications of these prohibitions are substantial for the halal meat sector in Belgium. The prohibition of conventional halal slaughter in Flanders and Wallonia has led to the closure of local slaughterhouses serving the halal market, significantly reducing the supply of locally sourced halal meat (Hardi *et al.*, 2024). As a result, the market has grown progressively dependent on imports. This dependency not only escalates consumer expenses but also poses logistical difficulties for enterprises, including butchers and restaurants in the halal industry. The outcome is a restrictive situation for the Muslim minority in Belgium, impeding both their religious observances and their economic involvement in the halal market. Numerous studies indicate a distinct preference among Muslim consumers for locally sourced halal items, highlighting the adverse effects of slaughter bans on community access to permitted food options (Fuseini & Knowles, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2020).

This scenario illustrates how legal rulings, based on one societal principle, which is animal welfare, can significantly impact another religious freedom, particularly for minority groups (Reich & Harpaz, 2022; Dudinskaya *et al.*, 2021). Although Belgium has a significant Muslim demographic with a distinct need for halal products, the legal and political environment presents considerable obstacles to the halal meat sector. The slaughter bans not only limit conventional animal processing methods but also jeopardise the economic sustainability of the Muslim community, forcing a transition to expensive imports and compromising their capacity to maintain religious traditions.

2.5 Halal development in the Philippines: Regulatory challenges, social barriers, and the politics of Muslim representation

The halal sector in the Philippines is recognised for its considerable potential, yet it faces substantial hurdles, particularly in developing a comprehensive halal certification framework. The Muslim demographic in the Philippines is approximated at 10% to 11% (Balah & Makakena, 2024), yet the nation lags neighbouring Muslim-majority nations such as Malaysia and Indonesia in establishing comprehensive halal standards and infrastructure. This disparity impedes the expansion of the Philippine halal market, especially in industries such as tourism, food, and cosmetics, where halal certification is essential (AbdulRaof, 2024).

A significant limitation on halal business growth in the Philippines is the restricted scope of promotional efforts and the inadequate supporting infrastructure for halal tourism and associated services. Conversely, Malaysia has developed a more established reputation as a halal hub that attracts a range of customer segments, including non-Muslim consumers. In the Philippines, promotional initiatives are inadequate and fail to capitalise on the growth of the global halal industry fully. In 2020, the halal food and beverage sector was valued at over 1.37 trillion United States dollars, with projections indicating that the broader halal business may attain an annual worth of around 2.3 trillion United States dollars (Siregar & Sugianto, 2024). Market momentum is bolstered by demographic forecasts, notably the expectation that the Muslim population will reach 2.2 billion by 2030, thereby increasing demand for halal-compliant goods and services (Azroh *et al.*, 2025).

This constraint is exacerbated by societal views and biases that depict Islam unfavourably, potentially hindering the mainstream acceptance of halal products and diminishing consumer trust both within and beyond Muslim communities (Balah & Makakena, 2024). The Philippines risks losing economic opportunities associated with halal tourism, halal-certified services, and broader halal market engagement, despite increasing global demand and the expanding recognition of halal as an indicator of quality and hygiene (Siregar & Sugianto, 2024; Azroh *et al.*, 2025). The stigmatisation of Muslims and the hurdles presented by Islamophobia have further marginalised the halal sector, hindering the prosperity of businesses and entrepreneurs in the Philippines. Discriminatory attitudes may hinder investments in halal brands and restrict collaboration opportunities within essential segments of the halal supply chain (Castro *et al.*, 2021). The unfavourable depiction of Muslims in many media affects the acceptance of halal products, which customers may perceive as unfamiliar or linked to bad preconceptions. The practical approaches developed in Malaysia and Indonesia, especially in halal certification and comprehensive market integration, serve as benchmarks for enhancement in the Philippines. These instances demonstrate how halal certification can improve market standards, elevate consumer confidence, and foster inclusivity across multiple sectors (AbdulRaof, 2024).

The Philippines is still in a "catch-up" phase, with significant opportunities to enhance institutional support, legislative clarity, and the strategic marketing of halal products (Balah & Makakena, 2024). Economic problems must be addressed concurrently with promoting conversation over attitudes of Islam and Muslims. Campaigns designed to counteract Islamophobia in the Philippines must incorporate educational initiatives that foster comprehension and respect for religious diversity, hence enhancing consumer awareness and acceptance of halal products. Furthermore, improving halal-related infrastructure and harmonising local regulatory frameworks with the practices of prominent halal economies could substantially fortify the halal industry in the Philippines.

The halal sector in the Philippines offers significant growth

The halal sector in the Philippines offers significant growth potential; however, it is essential to tackle the problems posed by Islamophobia while fostering effective legislation and community involvement. Addressing these obstacles could promote the expansion of the halal business and enhance social cohesiveness and economic inclusivity within Philippine society.

2.6 Islamophobia as racialisation and governance

Islamophobia in academic scholarship has shifted from a narrow focus on hostility toward Islam that produces discriminatory outcomes, to a broader account that treats Islamophobia as a structural condition that racialises people perceived to be Muslim, and that reproduces exclusion through institutions that claim neutrality (Runnymede Trust, 1997; Meer & Modood, 2009; Zempi, 2019; Lauwers, 2019). This shift is strongly associated with work that frames Islamophobia as cultural racism, where the object of stigma is not only belief but also embodied identity and visible practice, and where Muslimness becomes a marker through which unequal treatment is normalised in education, employment, and public life (Meer & Modood, 2009) (Zempi, 2019). Meer and Modood argue that cultural racism targets expressions of Muslim identity, which expands the debate beyond biological notions of race and helps explain how Muslims are constructed as incompatible with dominant narratives of modernity and civility (Meer & Modood, 2009; Selod, 2014; Moosavi, 2014). This framing is consistent with findings that link anti Muslim stereotyping to recurring associations with violence, oppression, and social threat, which then become embedded within institutional routines and policy assumptions (Awan, 2014; Bukar, 2020). A governmentality approach further strengthens this analysis by focusing on how governance mechanisms regulate Muslim conduct and visibility through policy design, administrative practice, and everyday institutional procedures (Islam, 2018; Ahmed *et al.*, 2021).

From this view, Islamophobia is not only an attitude, but it is also a set of techniques that organise risk, discipline behaviour, and shape the conditions of belonging. This governance dimension is visible in policies justified through security or public order narratives that disproportionately target Muslim communities through surveillance, profiling, and restrictive legislation, which can position Muslims as permanent objects of suspicion within their own societies (Ghosh, 2022; Bukar, 2020). These dynamics can weaken social citizenship and intensify social fragmentation, especially when unequal scrutiny becomes normalised across public institutions (Lauwers, 2019). Public discourse also matters because it both reflects and reinforces structural dynamics, primarily when media and political narratives repeatedly circulate harmful tropes that legitimise exclusion and normalise public hostility (Moosavi, 2014; Bazian, 2018). At the definitional level, the literature continues to debate whether Islamophobia is best treated as a specific form of racism or as religious intolerance, with some scholars emphasising anti Muslim racism rooted in socio political structures. Others warn that religious animosity should remain explicit rather than analytically dissolved into racism alone (Lauwers, 2019; Cheng, 2015).

Overall, the scholarship presents Islamophobia as both discourse and structure, where stereotypes and narratives interact with institutional practice and governance to produce durable inequalities that shape the lived experiences of Muslims across contexts, and this recognition supports the need for comprehensive responses that address systemic exclusion rather than only interpersonal prejudice (Meer & Modood, 2009; Islam, 2018).

2.7 Political economy and institutional theory in understanding Islamophobia

The intersection of institutional theory and political economy offers a comprehensive lens for analysing Islamophobia within contemporary economic and social systems. Institutional theory clarifies how rules, norms, and enforcement practices shape market conduct and determine who can access opportunities, while political economy emphasises how state action structures power relations and resource distribution. When these perspectives are integrated, researchers can distinguish active institutional Islamophobia from passive institutional Islamophobia, which supports a more nuanced account of how exclusion affects Muslims and their economic participation.

2.7.1 Active institutional Islamophobia

Active institutional Islamophobia refers to deliberate institutional measures that restrict Muslim practice or public visibility. These measures can include formal prohibitions on religious expression, exclusionary administrative rules, and securitised governance that places disproportionate scrutiny on Muslim life. Economic effects can follow through labour market exclusion, barriers to entrepreneurship, higher compliance costs, and reduced trust in public institutions, which together weaken full and effective economic participation by Muslim communities (Ruiz Bejarano, 2017).

Empirical scholarship also indicates that Muslim entrepreneurs can face higher barriers to entry than non-Muslim entrepreneurs, which limits business growth and can entrench disadvantage over time (Haldar, 2019). These dynamics can extend to broader market ecosystems, including the halal industry, when institutional bias and fear shape regulatory environments and commercial confidence (Ruiz Bejarano, 2017; Altin *et al.*, 2017).

2.7.2 Passive institutional Islamophobia

In the context of Islamophobia, the term "passive institutional Islamophobia" refers to the omission and under-provision of institutions that indirectly replicate exclusion. The governance is fragmented, the enforcement capability is weak, compliance standards are varied, and there is minimal public support for the economic infrastructure of minority groups.

These conditions frequently result in economic consequences, such as increased transaction costs, low uptake of certification pathways, weak routes for business scaling, and uneven access to markets and essential services, all of which can be barriers for Muslim entrepreneurs, despite their capability and ambition (Wang, 2020).

This approach also enables an in-depth analysis of governance failings that sustain structural disadvantage. When institutional recognition and support are lacking, Muslim enterprises may struggle to compete on equal terms within larger economic systems.

This can lead to a decrease in market participation and a weakening of engagement with public resources. Halal marketplaces may remain underdeveloped even when demand exists. This is because supportive institutional structures and networks are not adequately constructed or coordinated (Kanze *et al.*, 2020).

2.7.3 Integration of perspectives

Distinguishing between active and passive forms of institutional Islamophobia is analytically sound because it shows that Islamophobia is not limited to explicit restrictions. Islamophobia can also be reproduced through governance gaps and limited institutional support that systematically disadvantage Muslim minorities. Recognising these mechanisms supports an integrated approach that combines institutional theory and political economy, guiding policymakers, researchers, and community actors in designing targeted interventions to reduce barriers and strengthen equitable economic participation. An understanding of Islamophobia through political economy and institutional theory also clarifies how entrenched power relations and regulatory practices shape the economic conditions experienced by Muslim communities. Active institutional Islamophobia and passive institutional Islamophobia both indicate the need for comprehensive reforms that address structural inequality and expand opportunities for Muslim entrepreneurs across diverse market settings.

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative comparative design that integrates a systematic review of scholarly discourse with documentary analysis of legal, policy, and institutional materials. This approach enables an in-depth examination of how Islamophobia shapes halal governance and economic outcomes in two distinct Muslim minority settings, namely Belgium and the Philippines, and how these dynamics contribute to the economic marginalisation of Muslim communities. The comparative perspective is important because it makes visible the different configurations through which similar exclusionary effects can arise in dissimilar political and cultural environments.

3.1 Data sources and analysis

Data were gathered from credible research, scholarly papers, and systematic reports addressing halal governance, Islamophobia, and economic issues faced by minorities in Europe and Southeast Asia. The selection criteria emphasised identifying issues, policy-induced barriers, and the sociocultural contexts in the target regions of Belgium and the Philippines. This review includes material outlining the emerging challenges confronting the halal economy and Islamophobia, and highlights the systemic obstacles faced by Muslim communities (Priatna *et al.*, 2023; Astiwara, 2023; Castro *et al.*, 2021). The research employs a qualitative comparative methodology that integrates expert interviews and focus group discussions with documentary and academic materials to elucidate the impact of Islamophobia on the halal sector and the economic circumstances of Muslim minorities in Belgium and the Philippines.

The empirical basis comprises a semi-structured interview with the President of the Council of Muslim Scholars of Belgium and a recorded roundtable discussion on Islamophobia and the halal industry, organised by the Peace, Dialogue and Xenophobia Studies Centre at the International Islamic University Malaysia. The primary materials are studied alongside legislative papers, community narratives, and scholarly literature on halal governance and minority experiences, employing a common theme framework that distinguishes legal, social, and institutional procedures. This design addresses a research issue that emphasises institutional processes and lived experiences above population-level prevalence, facilitating triangulation among expert narratives, multi-party discourse, and secondary data.

3.2 Comparative justification

The comparative methodology of this study is validated by its analysis of two different forms of institutional Islamophobia that produce analogous adverse economic effects for Muslim minorities. The initial case, Belgium, exemplifies explicit legal and institutional bias. Explicit policy barriers, such as the restrictions on religious slaughter in the Flanders and Wallonia regions, are justified under the pretext of public welfare while disproportionately infringing upon Muslim religious freedom and economic activity (Jafari & Saleh, 2024). This situation illustrates a definitive instance of active legal constraints in a Western state.

The second scenario, the Philippines, exemplifies a structural barrier resulting from historical marginalisation and bureaucratic stagnation. The state's inability to implement and sustain a comprehensive halal governance framework result in a disjointed, underdeveloped sector (Castro *et al.*, 2021). This illustrates passive institutional neglect, wherein the lack of helpful policy, rather than the existence of a prohibitive one, signifies the systemic marginalisation of Muslims in a primarily Catholic country. This research illustrates how Belgium's active legislative limits and the Philippines' structural neglect represent two distinct forms of institutional Islamophobia that converge to establish institutional Islamophobia that converge to establish substantial and persistent obstacles to the halal economy.

3.3 Analytical approach

This study used a qualitative theme synthesis methodology to investigate the impact of Islamophobia on the halal economy within Muslim-minority communities, particularly in Belgium and the Philippines. The methodology incorporates components of socio-anthropological analysis and thematic categorisation, based on an examination of essential legal texts, socio-political discourses, and institutional frameworks influencing halal governance in both nations. Thematic synthesis was utilised to categorise findings into three primary themes: legislative, social, and institutional.

This approach facilitates a systematic analysis of the socio-economic effects of Islamophobia by clarifying the connections among national legislation, public discourse, and administrative structures related to halal practices. The analysis is strengthened by the anthropological framework of the "tripartite cultural politics of halal," a concept utilised by the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (Azhari *et al.*, 2025), which emphasises the negotiation between religious expression and state authority in a predominantly non-Muslim context. This model facilitates a comparative investigation of the influence of halal certification, Muslim representation, and Islamophobic narratives on the halal economy in both regions. In the Philippines, the government's endorsement of the integration of Muslim identities into policy, while ostensibly inclusive, frequently leads to institutional constraints.

In Belgium, Islamophobia is evident through political prohibitions on ritual slaughter, resulting in socio-economic marginalisation and commercial obstacles for halal producers and consumers. To improve transparency and reproducibility, the study utilised AI-assisted thematic analysis, following a methodological approach derived from Naeem *et al.* (2025), facilitating consistent theme creation and validation. Data

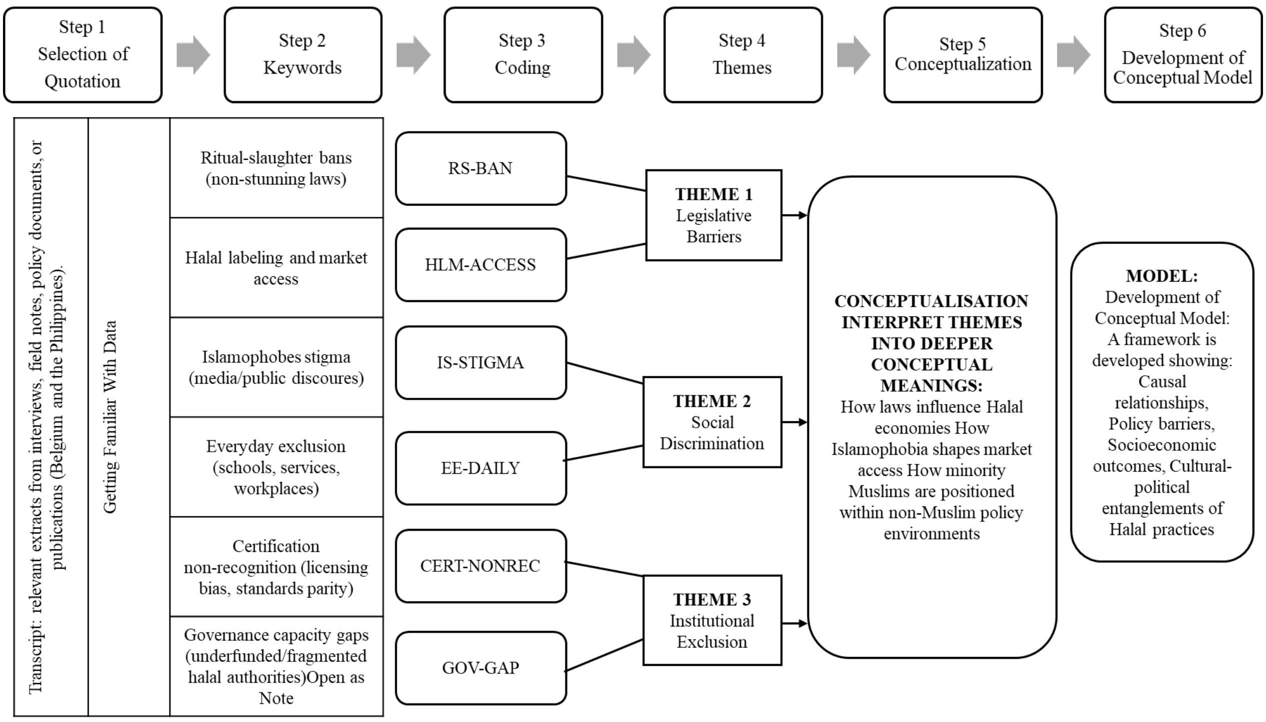

Figure 1: Systematic thematic analysis process based on Naeem *et al.*, 2023.

sources encompass legislative documents, community reports, interviews, and academic literature on halal governance and the experiences of Muslim minorities. Figure 1 illustrates the thematic analysis process for the investigation of Islamophobia and the halal industry in Belgium and the Philippines. The diagram illustrates the six analytical phases, encompassing quotation selection, keyword extraction, coding, theme development, conceptualisation, and the ultimate conceptual model that associates legal hurdles, societal discrimination, and institutional exclusion with halal market outcomes.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Overview of dataset and analytic frame

A qualitative comparative theme synthesis of the Belgian and Philippine instances uncovers a coherent pattern of constraints created by Islamophobia across three intersecting domains: Legal barriers, societal discrimination, and institutional exclusion. Each sphere presents clear challenges for halal industry engagement and for the economic and social welfare of Muslim minorities. The analysis utilises legal instruments, policy discussions, and scholarly research, interpreted within the framework of the tripartite cultural politics of halal, which connects issues of governance, representation, and market results.

4.2 Theme 1: Legislative barriers

4.2.1 Belgium: Regulatory prohibition presented as animal welfare

Regional regulations in Flanders, practical from 2019, and in Wallonia, practical from 2018 to 2019, prohibit slaughter without prior stunning. This regulation directly impacts both zabiha and shechita, causing Muslim and Jewish communities to challenge the laws in court on the basis that they infringe upon religious freedom.

In February 2024, the European Court of Human Rights affirmed the constitutionality of these prohibitions. The Court acknowledged that the rules restrict religious practices but deemed them warranted by a legitimate public interest in

animal welfare. Religious leaders, meanwhile, condemned the ruling as an instance of Islamophobia disguised as animal welfare advocacy.

These legal modifications have produced distinct economic impacts. Several slaughterhouses serving halal markets have ceased operations, resulting in diminished local supplies. Operators increasingly rely on imported meat, resulting in elevated expenses for customers and halal-oriented enterprises. Logistical challenges have intensified, with restaurants and retailers under pressure on pricing and supply.

Animal welfare has evolved into a policy framework that substitutes overt prejudice with ostensibly impartial regulations. These regulations continue to limit minority religious consumption and restructure the halal meat value chain towards more costly import-based models.

4.2.2 Philippines: Unclear laws and slow execution instead of clear bans

Muslims make up about 10-11% of the population in the Philippines. Even though it has many people, Malaysia and Indonesia are still ahead of it in terms of halal standards and facilities. This gap affects industries that heavily rely on halal certification, such as food, cosmetics, and tourism. A comprehensive halal government system is complex to implement because states lack sufficient resources, do not adequately promote halal, and the administrative process takes too long.

In this case, the issue is not an official ban, but the missed chances and slow entry of halal goods into larger markets, especially in places where Muslims are a minority. The result is a state of always having to catch up. The country has a lot of promise that has not been used yet, and it is still open to prejudice against Muslims. Because of this bias, non-Muslim customers and businesses are less likely to see halal approval as a sign of good quality.

4.2.3 Interpretation

Belgium is an example of active institutional Islamophobia that shows up in the form of clear rules and regulations. The Philippines shows a type of passive institutional Islamophobia that shows up when policies are not followed, institutions are broken up, and not enough money is invested. These actions make it harder for a strong halal ecosystem to grow.

In both places, the legal system turns cultural disagreements into economic outcomes, either by erecting clear barriers, as in Belgium, or by failing to create the right conditions for market growth, as in the Philippines.

4.3 Theme 2: Social discrimination

4.3.1 Anti-Muslim sentiments are getting stronger and more common online

The increasing amount of hate speech on digital platforms links online discourse to real-world consequences. Empirical research demonstrates temporal correlations between surges of hostility on social media and subsequent hate crimes. They also record the growing number of stereotypes that portray Muslims as outsiders, violent individuals, or fanatics.

Platforms like TikTok disseminate Islamophobic content that proliferates swiftly, perpetuates derogatory narratives, and, in certain instances, seems to incite or rationalise acts of violence. These dynamics highlight the necessity for enhanced systematic digital protections. From a market perspective, such conversations shape consumer perceptions. A significant number of non-Muslim consumers exhibit hesitance in purchasing halal products. They may perceive halal labels as symbols of cultural threat rather than indicators of quality. This response destroys trust and restricts the growth of demand beyond primary Muslim consumer categories.

4.3.2 Organised consumer activism against halal

Campaigns like 'Boycott Halal' misrepresent halal certification as a type of contamination or an undercover attempt to impose religious standards. These actions put pressure on companies and shops, creating reputational risks for participants in the halal industry. They can disrupt supply chains, affect inventory decisions, and heighten uncertainty for businesses reliant on halal branding. Thus, coordinated action increases the credibility costs and access barriers imposed by legislative restrictions and conflicting standards. It establishes a contentious narrative landscape that halal enterprises must perpetually navigate.

4.3.3 Interpretation

Social discrimination serves as a reputational barrier to halal businesses. It diminishes companies' and investors' inclination to engage, escalates the costs of customer acquisition and retention, and promotes practices such as de-labelling or rendering halal certification invisible, even when the products are certified. These inclinations undermine the market indications that typically facilitate category growth and consumer education. Simultaneously, public discourses that diminish halal's ethical significance of *tayyiban* undermine its potential for cross-cultural appeal and restrict the greater, values-driven demand that may facilitate sectoral expansion.

4.4 Theme 3: Institutional exclusion

4.4.1 Fragmented standards and credibility challenges

Variations in halal standards and the lack of a unified, widely recognised set of definitions limit cross-border expansion and degrade consumer confidence. When requirements vary substantially across jurisdictions, both companies and consumers may regard halal claims as untrustworthy, despite the robust ethical principles underlying halal and *tayyiban*.

These issues become increasingly evident in situations where governmental and independent certification systems are developing, fragmented, or inadequately resourced. In these circumstances, attaining export readiness or incorporating halal products into mainstream domestic markets remains challenging.

4.4.2 Structural neglect and politics of representation

In the Philippines, long-standing marginalisation of Muslim communities and bureaucratic delays in halal governance limit local interests and increase economic vulnerability. This is evident even in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, where political autonomy has only partially translated into meaningful growth of the halal industry or strong national recognition, beyond provinces with a Muslim majority; popular understanding of halal remains low. This limits market penetration and slows collaborative efforts throughout the supply chain. As a result, access to certification services and market knowledge remains divided between the centre and the periphery.

4.4.3 Interpretation

The pattern of institutional exclusion within the global halal system, manifested through inconsistent standards or inadequate governance, creates a significant capability gap that hinders the formalisation and expansion of halal markets. In the Philippines, this is particularly associated with institutions that have not yet reached their full potential. In the absence of credible, widely acknowledged standards and institutions adequately funded and staffed by professionals, businesses face elevated compliance costs and diminished motivation to invest. Consumers consequently face confusion about authenticity and safety, which reduces demand.

4.5 Cross-case synthesis: Convergent results via several mechanisms

While Belgium and the Philippines ultimately reach comparable results. Belgium operates under clear legal

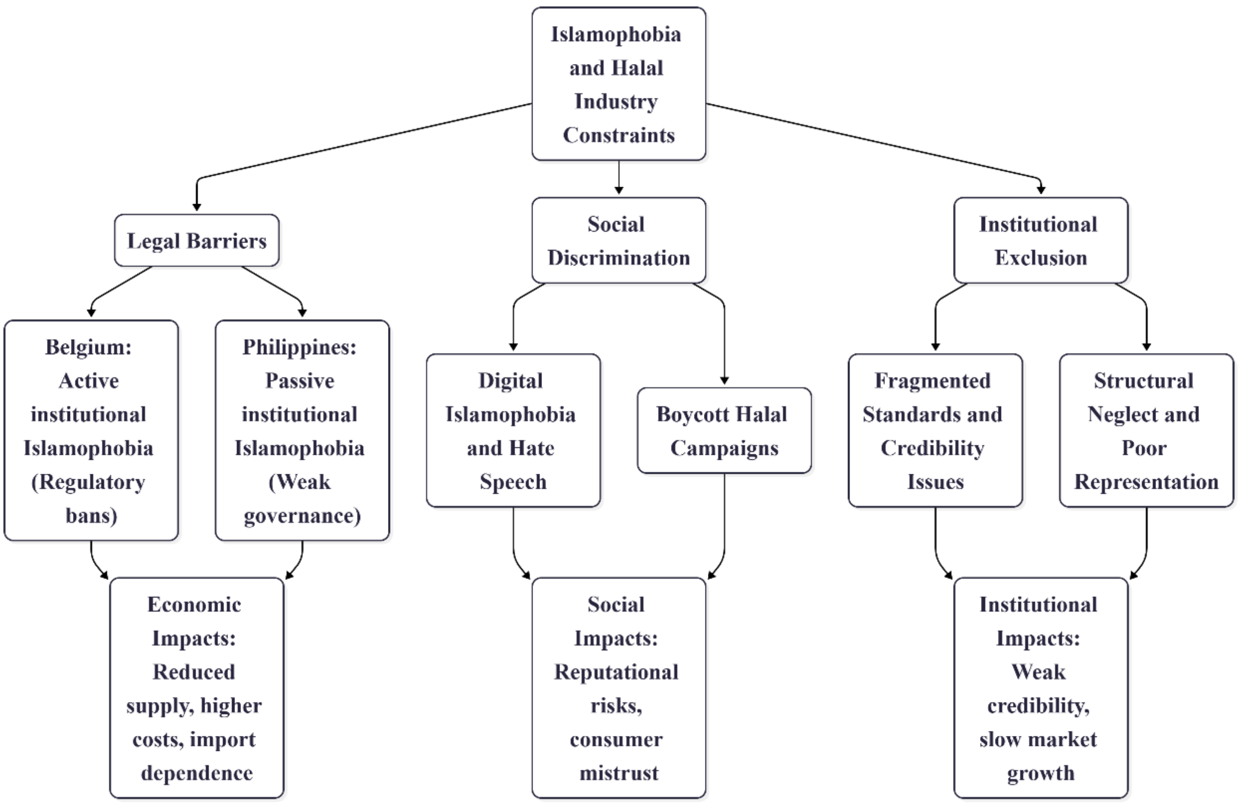

Figure 2: Summary analytic framework: Islamophobia and halal industry constraints .

restrictions, whereas the Philippines lacks a policy framework and minimal institutional support. In both scenarios, the availability of halal supply is limited, leading to increased transaction and compliance costs, a decline in consumer confidence, and diminished economic agency for Muslim communities in areas where halal should promote inclusion and progress.

This comparison illustrates that Islamophobia extends beyond a simple social bias. This also disrupts the economy, influencing prices, quality indicators, and investment decisions across the entire halal value chain, encompassing slaughter, processing, distribution, retail, and hospitality.

Figure 2 illustrates how Islamophobia creates interconnected limits across three domains: legal barriers, societal discrimination, and institutional exclusion. It contrasts Belgium's active institutional Islamophobia, seen in regulatory prohibitions, with the Philippines' passive variant, characterised by ineffective governance.

Social discrimination manifests through digital hate speech and anti-halal initiatives, whilst institutional exclusion is evident in inconsistent standards and inadequate representation. Collectively, these processes produce economic, social, and institutional effects that impede the advancement of the halal business and the welfare of Muslim minorities.

4.6 Economic and social consequences

In Belgium, the shift towards imported halal meat due to the slaughter bans has increased costs and complicated logistics. Small enterprises face significant challenges, as narrower margins compel tough decisions regarding sourcing and pricing. The elevated retail price of halal products places additional financial strain on consumers, particularly those with lower incomes.

The absence of a robust certification framework and the limited promotion of halal in the Philippines delay the development of economies of scale and diminish the potential to establish the country as an export hub. Unmet demand remains substantial, yet numerous firms are entrenched in low productivity and unable to engage in regional halal trade fully.

The transition of online stigma into real-life situations, such as through boycotts or harassment, diminishes Muslim involvement in public spaces and commercial settings. This can amplify feelings of isolation and perceived illegitimacy, potentially harming psychological well-being. From an economic perspective, these pressures drive Muslim-owned businesses away from mainstream market channels. Simultaneously, numerous non-Muslim companies steer clear of halal branding due to concerns about potential backlash, limiting the expansion of halal categories into broader consumer segments.

4.7 Countervailing potentials in the halal ecosystem

Halal is grounded in the principle of halal *tayyiban*, which underscores that items are permissible, safe, and hygienic. This approach links religious devotion with modern standards for quality assurance, sustainability, and business responsibility. In specific markets, these characteristics have also drawn non-Muslim consumers who link halal with hygiene and reliable standards. The proliferation of halal across industries, including finance, tourism, cosmetics, logistics, and pharmaceuticals, demonstrates that halal operates not merely as a niche category but also as a comprehensive ethical framework compatible with global sustainability efforts.

In 2020, the halal food and beverage sector was valued at approximately 1.37 trillion United States dollars, constituting over 18.2 percent of the global food market, with projections suggesting that the broader halal industry may attain an annual valuation of around 2.3 trillion United States dollars (Siregar & Sugianto, 2024). This impetus is partially fuelled by demographic shifts, including forecasts that the Muslim population may attain 2.2 billion by 2030, hence augmenting global demand for halal-compliant products. Simultaneously, halal products have gained acceptance beyond Muslim customers due to their association with quality assurance and sanitary standards that appeal to a broader consumer demographic (Azroh *et al.*, 2025). These findings underscore the magnitude of opportunity costs incurred when Islamophobia limits engagement in halal markets. Obstacles that restrict engagement adversely affect the livelihoods of Muslim minorities and hinder expansion in a significant ethics-focused sector of the global economy (Siregar & Sugianto, 2024).

4.8 Implications and pathways forward

First and foremost, it is of the utmost importance to refocus the discussion of halal on its ethical base. When it comes to establishing halal as a universal quality assurance system and reducing stigma in cultures where Muslims are a minority, effective communication with the public and industry that emphasizes hygiene, safety, and traceability can be highly beneficial. Taking measures to harmonise and mutualise standards is the second step needed to address standard fragmentation. These approaches have the potential to lower compliance costs, improve credibility, and expand international trade, thereby addressing one of the primary institutional challenges identified in both case studies' analyses.

Third, it is of utmost importance to strengthen governance capacity in regions where it is still lacking. To accomplish this in the Philippines, it would be necessary to invest in competent certification bodies, train auditors systematically, and promote halal industries more consistently, particularly in regions where Muslims do not constitute the vast majority. These initiatives would increase market access while also reducing the likelihood of prejudice occurring.

Fourth, tackling the dangers posed by digital technology demands direct participation. It is critical to implement targeted counter-speech, coordinate with platform providers on moderation, and pursue digital literacy efforts as essential complements to legislative and trade changes. Given the potential for online hate speech to escalate into offline incidents, it is essential to implement these strategies.

4.9 Comparative themes of islamophobia and halal economy constraints in Belgium and the Philippines

Table 1 summarises the influence of Islamophobia on halal economy engagement and the well-being of Muslim minorities via specific institutional channels in Belgium and the Philippines. The comparative analysis indicates that both environments face systemic obstacles; however, the mechanisms vary across the two settings due to differing

Table 1: Comparative synthesis of Islamophobia related barriers shaping halal economy participation and Muslim minority wellbeing in Belgium and the Philippines

Theme	Belgium	Philippines	Comparative Insight
Structural Discrimination	Institutional Islamophobia (headscarf bans, employment, and education bias)	Socio-political marginalization, fragmented halal certification	Both face systemic barriers, but forms and mechanisms differ
Halal Economy Barriers	Market clustering around mosques, legal hurdles (ritual slaughter bans)	High certification costs, fragmented standards, and limited government support	Both struggle with regulatory fragmentation and market access
Gendered Impacts	Headscarf bans limit women's entrepreneurship and job access	Understudied, indirect effects via social exclusion	Gendered impacts are more documented in Belgium, and there is a research gap in the Philippines
Community Coping Strategies	Creative adaptation, privatization of religious life, and digital networks	Indigenous practices (SAB), interfaith food sharing, ummah building	Both show resilience, but strategies are contextually distinct
Policy Responses	Interconvictional dialogue, evolving case law, secular policies	Halal Export Act, indigenous justice, and limited certification reform	Policy innovation is present but unevenly effective in both contexts

institutional designs, governance capacities, and socio-political histories.

Belgium exhibits structural discrimination, typified as institutional Islamophobia manifested in the exclusion of headscarves and bias in employment and education. This pattern implies an environment in which institutional and informal regulations govern Muslim visibility and limit equitable participation in essential opportunity structures. Conversely, the Philippine context is significantly influenced by socio-political marginalisation and disjointed halal certification, indicating a governance issue where Muslim inclusion is constrained not only by bias but also by systemic deficiencies in regulatory coherence. This discrepancy discrepancy reinforces the theoretical differentiation between active institutional Islamophobia, characterised by explicit prohibitions, and passive institutional Islamophobia, manifested in governance omissions that indirectly perpetuate disadvantage.

The analysis of impediments to the halal economy elucidates the economic implications of these discriminatory frameworks. In Belgium, the aggregation of halal marketplaces near mosques and the existence of regulatory obstacles, such as regulations concerning ritual slaughter, indicate a market that is both robust and limited. Clustering can facilitate community access and trust, but it may also exacerbate segmentation and subject enterprises to regional regulatory and reputational challenges. In the Philippines, the primary limitations include higher certification costs, disparate requirements, and insufficient government support. These characteristics raise transaction costs and diminish the adoption of certification, thereby undermining the capacity of small and medium firms to expand, compete, and enter higher-value industries such as tourism and exports. Regardless of divergent approaches, all contexts culminate in the same end categories, including challenges related to regulatory fragmentation and limited market access, which may hinder halal market expansion and minority economic advancement.

The gendered effects reveal a distinct imbalance in the evidence foundation. Belgium exhibits a greater incidence of documented gender-based exclusion associated with headscarf prohibitions that hinder women's access to employment and entrepreneurship. This indicates that Islamophobia may have economic implications due to the control of visibility, impacting women more directly in many institutional contexts. The table reveals that gendered effects in the Philippines are inadequately researched and frequently manifest indirectly through social exclusion. This gap is analytically significant because it suggests that the literature on the Philippine halal economy may inadequately address the intersection of gender with minority status, enterprise involvement, and access to certification. This also underscores the need for future research designs that specifically investigate women's roles in halal value chains, informal markets, and microenterprise development.

Table 1 also illustrates how communities respond when institutions limit involvement. In Belgium, coping techniques encompass creative adaptation, the commodification of religious life, and dependence on digital networks. These patterns signify both resilience and risk. They can mitigate exposure to discrimination and facilitate the building of alternative social capital; yet, they may also divert economic activity from formal systems, thereby constraining scalability and diminishing involvement with public support.

In the Philippines, coping techniques encompass indigenous customs such as SAB, interfaith food distribution, and the cultivation of ummah. This indicates a collection of community-based social behaviours that enhance cohesion and legitimacy, especially in environments influenced by prolonged marginalisation and political conflict. The comparison suggests that resilience exists in both contexts; however, its manifestation is influenced by the characteristics of institutional barriers and the historical dynamics between Muslim communities and the state.

Policy responses indicate that both contexts exhibit innovation, albeit with varying degrees of efficacy. Belgium is linked to international discourse, the development of jurisprudence, and secular policy frameworks. These answers may open avenues for rights-based contestation and institutional learning; nevertheless, the persistent focus on secular policy also risks perpetuating limitations on religious visibility if equality frameworks are not meticulously implemented. In the Philippines, policy measures include the Halal Export Act, indigenous justice initiatives, and reforms to restricted certification. This combination signifies a policy strategy that acknowledges economic promise but faces challenges in implementation coherence and institutional capacity, especially regarding certification governance. The comparative analysis indicates that policy effectiveness varies across situations, underscoring the necessity for measures that synchronise legal obligations, administrative capabilities, and community legitimacy.

Table 1 substantiates a comparative assertion that Islamophobia influences participation in the halal sector via both direct institutional constraints and indirect governance deficiencies. Belgium demonstrates a more pronounced pattern of active restrictions, including visibility and legal obstacles. In contrast, the Philippines exhibits a more pronounced pattern of passive constraints, driven by fragmented standards and insufficient support. The implicit understanding is that successful reform must tackle both discrimination and governance structures. It must incorporate gender-sensitive analysis and enhance institutional credibility, enabling halal markets to serve as a platform for inclusive economic participation rather than a fragmented survival economy.

5. Recommendations

The limitations of the evidence base and the pathways for the forthcoming inquiry. This comparative study unites legal decisions, policy discussions, and research on social media from two distinct national contexts. Nonetheless, the analysis would be enhanced by incorporating more longitudinal, firm-level data that can track the specific pathways from debate and policy to prices, profit margins, and investment choices, especially for small and medium enterprises transitioning between domestic and export halal markets. Similarly, panel data on consumers in non-Muslim-majority societies could provide valuable insights into how trust and willingness to pay fluctuate as stigma diminishes and standards become more aligned.

Future studies should emphasise the spatial examination of halal market ecosystems in Belgium. Research should examine how mosques and other religious infrastructure facilitate halal company clustering beyond Liège, and how spatial concentration influences market resilience, consumer accessibility, and susceptibility to regulatory pressures. Research must also examine gendered consequences through empirical studies that assess the socioeconomic effects of Islamophobia on Muslim women entrepreneurs.

This is especially critical in the Philippine context, where evidence is scarce and often indirect. Subsequent research should investigate obstacles to employment, business registration, access to certification, financing, and market penetration, as well as the adaptive methods employed by women-led firms. Another priority is the harmonisation of certifications. Research should investigate digital and community-based interventions that can facilitate the harmonisation of halal certification criteria between the Philippines and Europe. Research should assess frameworks for governance coordination, trust establishment, auditing uniformity, and cost minimisation for small and medium firms, while preserving international credibility and acknowledgement.

Ultimately, community resilience ought to be investigated using longitudinal methodologies. Future research must evaluate the long-term efficacy of indigenous mechanisms and interfaith methods in mitigating exclusion, enhancing social cohesion, and safeguarding participation in the halal economy amidst persistent Islamophobia.

6. Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that Islamophobia extends beyond mere social prejudice. It also generates distinct economic challenges for the halal business and for the Muslim minority. In Belgium, Islamophobia manifests mostly through official legislation and regulations. The prohibitions on non-stunned religious slaughter constrain fundamental Islamic practices and diminish local halal meat production. This escalates expenses, increases reliance on imports, and puts pressure on small halal businesses and customers. In the Philippines, there are limited open bans. Muslims encounter inadequate governance, inefficient bureaucracy, and disjointed policies. Halal standards are delayed and inconsistent, and Muslim regions like BARMM have inadequate access to certification and promotion. Islamophobic sentiments in society reduce confidence in halal products.

In all instances, Islamophobia operates simultaneously through legislation, societal perceptions, and institutional frameworks. Digital hate speech and boycott initiatives tarnish the reputation of halal. Ambiguous norms and inadequately supported institutions diminish credibility and complicate trade. These issues elevate company expenses and undermine the economic status of Muslim minorities. However, the halal industry possesses significant positive potential. The ideals of halal and *tayyiban* connect religious obligation with safety, quality, and sustainability. The global demand is substantial and increasing among both Muslims and non-Muslims.

To move forward, governments and industries must safeguard religious practices, enhance and unify halal standards, and establish competent halal organisations. Public communications need to portray halal as a credible ethical framework rather than a symbol of threat. Mitigating Islamophobia constitutes both a matter of justice and an economic prospect for fostering more equitable and sustainable development.

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