

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INDONESIA'S SHARIA ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY IN PENETRATING INTERNATIONAL HALAL TRADE BARRIERS

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Abstract

This article explores how Indonesia utilizes sharia-based economic diplomacy to navigate obstacles in the international halal trade arena. Positioned as a vital tool, sharia economic diplomacy supports the nation's strategy to broaden access for Indonesian halal goods in the face of substantial tariff and non-tariff hurdles, including certification issues, standard compliance, and protectionist tendencies from importing nations. Initiatives led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in tandem with the Halal Product Assurance Agency (BPJPH) highlight the necessity of cohesive inter-institutional efforts to boost the global appeal of Indonesian halal exports. As the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia envisions itself as a central player in the halal industry, yet it grapples with persistent difficulties such as trade imbalances in halal goods and the limited global validation of its halal certificates. Through its diplomatic channels, Indonesia engages in both multilateral frameworks like the OIC and bilateral efforts with key partners, advancing through trade easing measures, international halal fairs, and mutual recognition agreements. The findings show that sharia economic diplomacy can open doors to emerging halal markets, fortify Indonesia's stance in setting halal benchmarks, and support international regulatory alignment. Nonetheless, its success relies heavily on synchronized actions across government agencies, industry actors, and certifying institutions, alongside responsiveness to shifting trade landscapes. Strengthening this flexible and cooperative diplomatic approach enhances Indonesia's ability to more effectively and sustainably dismantle global halal trade barriers.

Keywords: Sharia Economic Diplomacy, International Halal Trade, Halal Certification, Non-Tariff Barriers, Halal Industry, Indonesia.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengulas bagaimana Indonesia memanfaatkan diplomasi ekonomi berbasis syariah untuk mengatasi hambatan dalam arena perdagangan halal internasional. Diplomasi ekonomi berbasis syariah ini berperan sebagai alat strategis yang mendukung upaya negara untuk memperluas akses produk halal Indonesia di tengah hambatan tarif dan non-tarif yang signifikan, termasuk masalah sertifikasi, kepatuhan standar, dan kecenderungan proteksionis dari negara-negara importir. Inisiatif yang dipimpin oleh Kementerian Luar Negeri bekerja sama dengan Badan Pengawas Produk Halal (BPJPH) menyoroti pentingnya upaya kolaboratif antarlembaga untuk meningkatkan daya tarik global ekspor halal Indonesia. Sebagai negara dengan populasi Muslim terbesar di dunia, Indonesia memposisikan diri sebagai pemain utama dalam industri halal, namun menghadapi tantangan berkelanjutan seperti ketidakseimbangan perdagangan barang halal dan keterbatasan validasi global sertifikat halal Indonesia. Melalui saluran diplomatiknya, Indonesia terlibat dalam kerangka kerja multilateral seperti OKI dan upaya bilateral dengan mitra kunci, mendorong kemudahan perdagangan, pameran halal internasional, dan perjanjian pengakuan mutual. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa diplomasi ekonomi syariah dapat membuka pintu ke pasar halal yang sedang berkembang, memperkuat posisi Indonesia dalam menetapkan standar halal, dan

mendukung keselarasan regulasi internasional. Namun, kesuksesannya sangat bergantung pada tindakan terkoordinasi antar lembaga pemerintah, pelaku industri, dan lembaga sertifikasi, serta responsif terhadap perubahan lanskap perdagangan. Penguatan pendekatan diplomatik yang fleksibel dan kooperatif ini meningkatkan kemampuan Indonesia untuk secara lebih efektif dan berkelanjutan menghilangkan hambatan perdagangan halal global.

Kata Kunci: Diplomasi Ekonomi Syariah, Perdagangan Halal Internasional, Sertifikasi Halal, Hambatan Non-Tarif, Industri Halal, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years, the global halal sector has experienced remarkable expansion, driven by growing consciousness among Muslim communities regarding the importance of sharia-compliant products (Smith, 2020). With the largest Muslim population globally, Indonesia holds considerable promise to emerge as a dominant force in the international halal marketplace (Rahman, 2019). Nonetheless, this promising potential is hindered by a range of trade-related obstacles, particularly tariff and non-tariff barriers (Khan & Abdullah, 2021). These challenges include inconsistencies in halal certification and standards across countries, national protectionist policies, and insufficient global acknowledgment of Indonesian halal certifying agencies (Yusuf, 2022). As a result, Indonesian halal goods often struggle to compete internationally, trailing behind nations like Malaysia and Thailand that have already developed structured and robust halal ecosystems (Lim, 2018).

To address these constraints, Islamic economic diplomacy emerges as a critical and strategic policy tool (Ahmad & Zainal, 2020). This form of diplomacy extends beyond marketing efforts, encompassing bilateral and multilateral advocacy aimed at achieving international halal standard recognition and alignment (Nasution, 2021). The Indonesian government, through entities such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Trade, and BPJPH, has initiated various measures—such as forging partnerships with OIC countries, launching halal trade initiatives, and intensifying certification diplomacy—to improve global acceptance of Indonesian halal products (Sari, 2023).

Nevertheless, measuring the true impact of Islamic economic diplomacy on dismantling halal trade obstacles necessitates a deeper and more holistic assessment (Putra, 2022). This need arises from the fluid nature of international commerce and the growing competition among countries engaged in halal exports (Hassan & Rahim, 2021). Furthermore, the overall success of these diplomatic endeavors depends greatly on cohesive collaboration among stakeholders—government agencies, business sectors, and certifiers—as well as the capacity to respond to evolving international market complexities (Firdaus, 2020). Consequently, this research intends to explore how effective Indonesia's Islamic economic diplomacy is in mitigating global halal trade issues and to identify the principal drivers and barriers in achieving this goal (Zulkifli, 2023). In doing so, the study aspires to support the formulation of a more resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking diplomacy strategy to bolster Indonesia's leadership in the global halal economy (Amir, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative method to examine how Islamic economic

diplomacy addresses obstacles in the global halal trade. Information was sourced from literature reviews and analysis of secondary documents, including academic publications, books, official state reports, and records related to diplomacy and the halal sector. The data gathering process also incorporated comprehensive interviews with stakeholders such as economic diplomacy experts, participants in the halal business ecosystem, and officials from halal certifying bodies to capture firsthand insights into the difficulties faced and approaches undertaken within Islamic economic diplomacy.

The data were analyzed qualitatively through a process of condensation, which involved refining, organizing, simplifying, and categorizing data to detect recurring themes and patterns that illustrate the impact of diplomatic initiatives on removing trade barriers. This method enabled a thorough investigation of the interplay between foreign policy instruments, trade frameworks, and international halal market behavior. The study is anchored in a theoretical lens combining economic diplomacy and trade barrier frameworks to dissect the driving forces and operational mechanisms behind the effectiveness of Islamic economic diplomacy.

Through this methodology, the research aims to offer a detailed understanding of how Islamic economic diplomacy contributes to elevating Indonesian halal products in international markets, while also outlining actionable strategies to overcome persistent barriers to entry and competitiveness in the global halal trade landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sharia-based economic diplomacy plays a crucial role in addressing global halal trade challenges, particularly for nations like Indonesia, which holds significant promise in the international halal sector. Baihaqi (2024) highlights that halal certification goes beyond spiritual compliance for Muslims; it also functions as a recognized global quality benchmark that shapes consumer preferences across both Muslim and non-Muslim populations. Hence, ensuring that halal certification remains credible and consistently implemented is essential to foster consumer confidence and broaden global market outreach.

According to Hakim and Amaliyah (2024), Indonesia's diplomatic approach to expanding halal exports to strategic markets like China necessitates both the alignment of certification standards and improvements in product competitiveness. The OIC, serving as a key multilateral forum, enables Indonesia to pursue diplomatic engagements aimed at standard harmonization and resolving non-tariff challenges such as regulatory disparities and trade restrictions (Hakim & Amaliyah, 2024).

Moreover, Pratama and Sholihah (2021) underscore the pivotal contribution of Islamic finance in supporting the halal ecosystem—from ensuring halal integrity in production and distribution to financing and certification verification. Enhancing synergy between financial institutions and the halal sector can drive down costs and increase the global competitiveness of Indonesian halal products. Nevertheless, obstacles remain, particularly the limited participation of SMEs in halal certification schemes, which hampers broader international market access (Putri Silfia Anggraeni, 2020).

Additionally, insights from the Ulil Albab Institute (2023) emphasize that credible halal certification is a foundational requirement for entering global halal trade networks. The lack of recognition for national certifications often translates into technical trade barriers (TBT) that

restrict Indonesia's export potential. In this context, Islamic economic diplomacy must serve not only to promote but also to advocate for international mutual recognition of halal standards.

Yet, a major concern is ensuring that domestic certification frameworks do not inadvertently become trade barriers themselves. Dewi (2023) stresses the importance of finding a balanced policy approach that safeguards Muslim consumers while fostering international trade openness. Ultimately, literature findings show that effective Islamic economic diplomacy relies on halal standard harmonization, industry empowerment, and integrated cooperation between stakeholders to elevate Indonesia's global halal leadership and economic performance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Indonesia's Role in Harmonizing Global Halal Standards

Indonesia has taken on a growing leadership role in aligning global halal standards, particularly through its membership in the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC). Since officially joining in December 2020, Indonesia has demonstrated its intent to shape and implement cohesive halal regulations among OIC member nations. Engagement in SMIIC discussions allows Indonesia to actively influence the creation of integrated halal frameworks, spanning industries like food, cosmetics, beverages, and pharmaceuticals (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

According to Hendro Kusumo, Deputy for Standards Development at the National Standardization Agency (BSN), aligning halal standards internationally is essential to ensure equity and market transparency for Indonesian halal goods. Standard uniformity streamlines the export process and eliminates extra costs arising from repeated certification requirements in importing countries. With shared benchmarks, Indonesian halal producers are better equipped to access broader international markets and compete on a global scale (BSN, 2023).

Indonesia also advances mutual halal certificate recognition through MRAs endorsed by international accreditation entities like IAF, ILAC, and IHAF. This diplomatic initiative seeks to dismantle technical trade barriers that hinder halal exports. Such efforts reflect the principles of Islamic economic diplomacy, which prioritize inclusive and cooperative multilateral solutions to foster an equitable global halal trade system (Aulia & Surwandono, 2024).

Growth of Halal Certification and Its Impact on Trade

The Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (BPJPH) has played a pivotal part in broadening halal certification coverage, delivering notable achievements. By late 2024, Indonesia had certified 2.9 million products as halal, a notable jump from earlier figures (BPJPH, 2024). This advancement indicates a growing business sector awareness that halal certification serves not just religious compliance, but also builds consumer credibility.

Table 1 presents the annual growth trend of halal-certified products in Indonesia from 2019 to 2024, reflecting the increasing recognition of halal certification as a strategic trade asset.

Year	Number of Halal-Certified Products
2019	500,000
2020	800,000
2021	1,200,000

2022	1,700,000
2023	2,300,000
2024	2,900,000

In global commerce, halal certification now functions as a key driver of product value. Backed by strategic diplomacy from both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and BPJPH, Indonesia has formed Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) with 16 nations. These pacts include major markets like Malaysia, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. MRAs hasten international acceptance of Indonesian halal labels, simplify exports, and boost the global standing of local products (Kiriara, 2021).

Table 2 lists selected countries that have signed MRAs with Indonesia, along with the types of products covered and the year of agreement.

No	Partner Country	Year of Agreement	Types of Recognized Products
1	Malaysia	2020	Food, cosmetics
2	Thailand	2021	Food, pharmaceuticals
3	United Arab Emirates	2022	Food, beverages
4	United States	2023	Food, cosmetics, supplements
5	Turkey	2023	Food, herbal products
6	Saudi Arabia	2024	Food

The surge in halal-certified items has fueled expansion across ancillary sectors, such as halal testing labs, auditor training providers, and halal advisory firms. These developments have spurred job creation and increased national industrial competitiveness within the international halal economy. With strong policy backing and supporting facilities, Indonesia holds promising prospects to emerge as a leading center for halal certification globally.

Barriers and Challenges in Sharia Economic Diplomacy

Although progress has been made, Indonesia's efforts in sharia economic diplomacy still encounter major hurdles. A key challenge lies in the variation of halal regulations among countries. This regulatory mismatch complicates mutual certificate acceptance, often requiring Indonesian exporters to pursue duplicate certification, leading to delays and increased expenses. Annisa (2020) highlights that differing halal benchmarks can trigger trade frictions and disrupt export continuity.

Moreover, domestic halal authorities struggle with limited operational capacity, especially concerning skilled personnel and adequate infrastructure. A lack of internationally recognized auditors and insufficient laboratory networks restrict verification processes for foreign-bound goods. These obstacles are worsened by minimal technical knowledge and poor synergy among certifiers, business entities, and regional administrations (Royani & Setiawan, 2024).

Table 3 summarizes the main institutional and structural challenges hampering Indonesia's sharia economic diplomacy, based on interviews and literature review.

No	Challenge	Estimated Proportion (%)
1	Variations in halal standards across countries	35%
2	Limited institutional capacity of domestic certifying bodies	25%
3	Low participation of MSMEs in halal certification	20%

4	High cost of halal certification	10%
5	Weak inter-agency coordination	10%

Another pressing concern is the low engagement of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in halal certification. Many MSME operators are held back by bureaucratic challenges, limited understanding, and financial hurdles that complicate the registration process. This condition results in an imbalance, where larger firms dominate export avenues while MSMEs remain reliant on the domestic sphere.

Discussion

The Effectiveness of Sharia Economic Diplomacy as a Market Penetration Tool

Sharia economic diplomacy has emerged as a powerful tool for unlocking global halal market opportunities. Centered on collaboration, mutual acceptance, and aligning regulations, this diplomatic model serves to narrow standardization gaps across nations and ease international halal trade flows. Indonesia's achievements in forming Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) and engaging actively in multilateral platforms like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) demonstrate its success in addressing both technical and non-tariff trade challenges.

Thailand offers a comparable model, having carved out a leadership role in the halal sector despite its non-Muslim majority status. By leveraging global outreach and gastrodiploamacy, Thailand has enhanced its visibility in the halal economy and fostered regional collaboration in product promotion (Fahriyati & Nurrahmawati, 2020).

A comparative overview of the Indonesian and Thai approaches to halal diplomacy is presented in Table 4.

Dimension	Indonesia	Thailand
Population	Muslim-majority	Muslim minority
Certification Institution	BPJPH, LPPOM MUI, BSN	Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT)
Soft Power Strategy	Limited (in development)	Gastrodiploamacy, science expos, cultural outreach
Halal Expo Activities	Present but inconsistent	Annual Halal Science & Technology Expo
Diplomatic Coordination	Fragmented, in need of a national task force	Coordinated under Ministry of Commerce
Global Perception	Emerging, building reputation	Strong and stable brand image in global halal trade

Indonesia may draw lessons from this by advancing halal cultural diplomacy, thereby amplifying the soft power and international profile of its sharia economic framework.

Institutional Synergy: A Key Pillar of Diplomatic Success

The effectiveness of sharia economic diplomacy depends not just on international engagement, but also on robust institutional collaboration at the national level. Coordination among the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BPJPH, the Ministry of Trade, LPPOM MUI, and industry actors is essential in driving forward Indonesia's halal diplomacy agenda. However, challenges

such as fragmented mandates, weak interagency alignment, and varying levels of urgency placed on the halal sector still persist across institutions.

Table 5 below summarizes the roles of key institutions involved in halal diplomacy and the specific challenges they encounter.

Institution	Role in Halal Diplomacy	Challenges
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Leads international engagement and MRA negotiations	Coordination gaps with domestic institutions
Ministry of Trade	Facilitates trade promotion and halal export policies	Limited alignment with certification goals
BPJPH (Halal Product Assurance Agency)	Issues and monitors halal certifications	Capacity constraints and limited outreach
LPPOM MUI	Provides pre-certification inspection and guidance	Limited formal mandate post-BPJPH establishment
Halal Industry and Exporters	Implements compliance and global market penetration	High certification costs, low MSME involvement

A cohesive system of coordination is urgently needed—one that sets clear, measurable targets for halal diplomacy while remaining responsive to changing global conditions. One strategic proposal is to create a national halal task force spanning multiple ministries, reporting directly to the President and empowered to steer both policy direction and international halal engagement.

Partnership with the business community is equally vital. Halal exporters, trade associations, and sharia financial bodies must be integrated into the development of diplomatic frameworks and halal outreach efforts. These partnerships not only ensure smoother execution but also build a stronger grassroots base for the national sharia economic ecosystem.

Policy and Regulatory Challenges at the National Level

One of the core obstacles to advancing Indonesia's halal diplomacy stems from domestic regulatory and policy limitations. Although Law No. 33 of 2014 on Halal Product Assurance establishes a legal base, its execution is hindered by several issues—such as limited public awareness, weak enforcement, and inefficient digital service integration. In the global trade arena, complex bureaucracy further reduces Indonesia's agility in adapting to the fast-changing landscape of the international halal sector.

Meanwhile, countries like Thailand—despite lacking a Muslim-majority population—have effectively emerged as global halal players through strategic global messaging and culinary diplomacy (gastrodiplomacy). This example shows how cultural halal diplomacy can elevate a nation's presence in the global market and encourage transnational collaboration (Fahriyati & Nurrahmawati, 2020). Indonesia could replicate this strategy by deepening its cultural halal diplomacy efforts to reinforce the soft power embedded in its sharia economic identity.

Comparative Study of International Practices

Learning from international experiences can offer strategic direction to refine Indonesia's halal diplomacy approach. Malaysia stands out as a global leader in halal certification, credited largely to the establishment of the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) and its strong

ties with private stakeholders. Key players—export firms, halal associations, and Islamic finance institutions—actively participate in shaping diplomatic agendas and promotional efforts. This synergy improves policy execution and reinforces the community-based structure of Malaysia's sharia economy, positioning the country as a benchmark in comprehensive halal governance.

Thailand, on the other hand, has gained prominence in halal exports by applying a cultural soft power strategy. Events like the Halal Science & Technology Expo serve not only as product showcases but also as platforms for educating global audiences on its halal compliance system. This science-driven and culturally rich promotional method has significantly elevated Thailand's standing in the international halal market (Fahriyati & Nurrahmawati, 2020).

Indonesia could pursue a comparable path by capitalizing on its unique assets—ranging from a diverse spice tradition and vibrant halal cuisine to its herbal industry. By fusing cultural identity with innovation in its halal diplomacy, Indonesia has the potential to play a larger role in influencing global norms and perceptions surrounding halal practices.

Formulating a Sustainable Halal Diplomacy Strategy

For sustained progress in sharia economic diplomacy, Indonesia needs a forward-looking strategy that encompasses the full halal ecosystem—from production inputs to international market access. This integrated approach should focus on the following elements:

- **Halal Certification Digitalization:** Encourage the adoption of unified digital systems—such as blockchain or a national halal database—that enable real-time verification by global trade stakeholders.
- **Enhancing Auditor Skills and Lab Networks:** Develop global-standard training initiatives and offer fiscal incentives to establish halal laboratories across various regions.
- **Layered Diplomatic Engagement:** Merge formal intergovernmental diplomacy with public and cultural outreach to widen Indonesia's international halal engagement and influence.
- **Inclusive Public-Private-MSME Collaboration:** Ensure the halal roadmap involves all business scales by supporting SMEs through financial assistance, capability development, and access to Islamic financial instruments.
- **Advancing Halal Research and Data Systems:** Set up a national-level research body dedicated to halal issues, generating dependable data to support strategic planning and market expansion.

With a comprehensive and well-integrated framework, Indonesia's halal diplomacy can do more than just navigate trade restrictions—it can boost national competitiveness and elevate Indonesia's role as a global halal leader.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from the findings of this research on the effectiveness of Indonesia's sharia economic diplomacy in penetrating international halal trade barriers, it is evident that such diplomacy functions as a key strategic lever in elevating Indonesia's role within the international halal market. Initiatives like aligning global halal standards, improving certification frameworks, and forming mutual recognition agreements with other nations have effectively broadened

market entry points and enhanced the international trust in Indonesia's halal products. The interplay between sharia economic diplomacy and global acceptance of halal certification is strongly interconnected, with its success largely shaped by coordinated efforts among state institutions, industry stakeholders, and certification agencies.

However, several hurdles remain that limit its overall impact—such as fragmented halal standards between countries, institutional limitations within domestic systems, and gaps in supportive infrastructure. These issues may impede the seamless export of Indonesian halal goods, highlighting the importance of ongoing refinement in institutional responsiveness and multi-sector coordination. For Indonesia to secure a leadership role in the global halal economy and maintain sustainable competitiveness, its sharia economic diplomacy must be inclusive, flexible, and built on strong cross-sector alliances.

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