

The Role of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office in Addressing Contemporary Religious Issues in Malaysia

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000287>

Received: 08 July 2025; Accepted: 16 July 2025; Published: 13 August 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamic and multifaceted role of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office (FTMO) in addressing contemporary religious issues within Malaysia's evolving socio-religious landscape. With the growing impact of globalisation, digital media, and ideological shifts, the need for authoritative and relevant Islamic guidance has become increasingly crucial. The FTMO functions not only as a fatwa-issuing body but also as a policy advisor, community educator, and social stabiliser. Drawing from the Maqasid Shariah framework and the principles of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), the Office addresses complex matters such as medical ethics, social morality, financial jurisprudence, and interfaith sensitivities. This paper highlights FTMO's efforts to enhance public religious literacy, utilise modern communication tools, and navigate public expectations amid digital misinformation and ideological polarisation. While the institution has demonstrated adaptability and scholarly depth, ongoing support in resources, collaboration, and digital infrastructure is essential to reinforce its relevance and authority. The findings reveal that FTMO is a key religious institution that ensures societal harmony and maintains the integrity of Islamic teachings in Malaysia.

Keywords: Mufti institution, Federal Territories Mufti Office, fatwa, Maqasid Shariah, public policy, religious communication, digital Islam

INTRODUCTION

In this fast-paced era of globalisation, contemporary issues related to Islam have become increasingly challenging and complex. Muslims in Malaysia are not spared from facing various polemics resulting from the clash between traditional values and modernisation, as well as the influence of unrestricted social media. In this context, the role of the Federal Territories Mufti Office (FTMO) is crucial as an authoritative body responsible for providing sound religious guidance, resolving public confusion, and defending the purity of Islamic teachings. The FTMO plays an active role in addressing current issues such as liberalism, deviant teachings, same-sex marriage, the usage of the term "Allah," extremism, and the emergence of unauthorised religious figures on social media.

The FTMO issues fatwas based on sound Shariah principles through a structured mechanism aided by the Fatwa Committee, composed of religious scholars. The approach is based on the methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah and contemporary ijtihaad aligned with the Maqasid al-Shariah and the local needs of Muslims in the Federal Territories. This role is essential in ensuring that Muslims are not misled and can live in peace and harmony.

This aligns with the words of Allah SWT in Surah al-Nahl, verse 43:

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

"So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know."

(Surah al-Nahl, 16:43)

This verse guides Muslims to refer to those with knowledge, namely the scholars and mufti institutions, in the face of religious confusion or questions (Rosidi et al., 2021). In the national context, the FTMO is among the leading institutions bearing this responsibility through various media such as *Bayan Linnas*, *Irsyad al-Fatwa*, *Irsyad Hukum*, *Al-Kafi li al-Fatawi*, *Irsyad Usul Fiqh*, *Irsyad al-Hadith*, *Tahqiq al-Masail*, *Al-Afkar*, *Bayan li al-Haj*, *Tashih al-Mafahim* and official social media. These efforts reinforce the unity of the ummah and strengthen the understanding of authentic Islamic teachings in Malaysia (Rosidi, 2021).

This study also critically explores the limitations of the FTMO's jurisdiction, challenges in public trust, and the tensions between religious rulings and federal/state legal frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design that focuses on document analysis to examine the role, limitations, and influence of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office (FTMO) in addressing contemporary religious issues in Malaysia. The qualitative approach is chosen for an in-depth understanding of the subject, particularly the complexities of religious governance, legal frameworks, and public engagement.

Data collection involved purposive sampling of secondary sources. These include official documents from the FTMO, fatwas issued by the Federal Territories Fatwa Committee, legal texts such as the National Land Code 1965 and the Rent Control Act 1966, as well as reports from JAWHAR, Yayasan Waqaf Malaysia, and related government agencies. Academic sources, including journal articles, dissertations, and research papers, were reviewed to provide scholarly context and critique. In addition, interviews published in previous studies involving religious administrators and policymakers were analysed to strengthen the findings.

The selection of sources was guided by their relevance to three thematic areas: (1) FTMO's role and jurisdiction in religious governance, (2) legal and administrative challenges surrounding waqf (endowment) land development, and (3) public perception and institutional trust. Documents were analysed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and gaps between religious rulings and implementation on the ground.

This methodology provides a systematic framework for understanding how the FTMO operates within a multi-layered governance structure, how legal and institutional constraints shape its effectiveness, and how it may better respond to contemporary religious concerns in Malaysian society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office in Addressing Contemporary Religious Issues in Malaysia

According to Abdul Rahman (2020), the mufti institution in Malaysia, including the Federal Territories Mufti Office, plays a vital role in guiding Islamic rulings in line with current needs. He emphasised that fatwas not only serve as legal references but also as instruments of social guidance and public policy, especially in dealing with contemporary issues such as modern medicine, technology, and Islamic finance. This article provides insights into the strategic position of the mufti as a bridge between Islamic law and contemporary realities.

A study by Mohd Farid (2018) explores how the *Maqasid Shariah* approach is applied in contemporary fatwas, particularly by fatwa institutions like the Federal Territories Mufti's Office. This approach ensures that legal decisions are not rigid but cater to the needs of modern Muslim societies by preserving the five essential values of Shariah (religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property). This is evident in issues such as vaccination, fetal abortion, and organ donation.

Zulkifli (2021) discusses the challenges faced by the mufti institution in the digital age, especially in disseminating authentic religious information to the public. In the context of the Federal Territories Mufti Office,

innovative approaches through platforms such as *Irsyad al-Fatwa* and *Bayan Linnas* have helped address religious queries in a timely and accessible manner. However, he highlights the need to control the spread of fake fatwas or extremist views on social media.

In a study by Roslan and Ahmad (2019), it was found that multi-institutions play an active role in addressing social issues such as LGBT, child marriage, and moral decay. The study highlights the Federal Territories Mufti Office's role in presenting Islamic views based on *wasatiyyah* (moderation), supported by authentic evidence and current realities, to maintain social harmony and stability.

Hashim (2022) analyses how fatwas issued by the Federal Territories Mufti's Office influence the formation of public policy, particularly in health and Islamic finance matters. Fatwas on Shariah-compliant investments and the COVID-19 vaccine are clear examples of the mufti institution's direct involvement in national development.

Although the Federal Territories Mufti's Office (FTMO) plays a crucial role in issuing fatwas and providing religious guidance, its jurisdiction is limited strictly to the Federal Territories—namely Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Labuan. The FTMO's authority is further constrained by federal law and the constitutional role of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as the Head of Islam in the Federal Territories. This limitation distinguishes its scope of influence from other state-level religious authorities, which operate under different enactments and administrative structures. Tensions often arise when fatwas conflict with federal government policies, particularly on sensitive matters such as the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, where early public hesitancy intersected with religious concerns; the discourse surrounding LGBT rights, which challenges traditional Islamic values upheld by the FTMO; or the utilisation of waqf (endowment) lands for government-led development projects, which may raise legal and ethical questions if not processed through appropriate *istibdal* (substitution) mechanisms. Moreover, fatwas issued by the FTMO are not binding on all institutions unless they are formally gazetted and approved by relevant authorities. This reflects a broader legal and administrative reality in Malaysia, where religious rulings, though authoritative within the Islamic legal tradition, require legal codification and institutional cooperation to ensure effective implementation.

The Challenges Faced by the Federal Territories Mufti's Office

Zulkifli (2020) highlights a significant challenge faced by mufti institutions, particularly the Federal Territories Mufti Office, regarding public perception and acceptance of fatwas. Many in society, especially the younger generation influenced by liberal ideologies, view fatwas as optional or irrelevant. This scepticism weakens the authority of the mufti institution and complicates the implementation of religious rulings. The study recommends improved communication strategies and enhanced public education to increase engagement with fatwas.

Hasan (2021) discusses the rise of unauthorised religious opinions in the digital era, particularly on social media platforms. These unofficial views often contradict the fatwas issued by the mufti's office. The Federal Territories Mufti's Office faces the challenge of asserting its authority amid online influencers and self-proclaimed religious figures. The study suggests strengthening the institution's digital presence and collaborating with online platforms to counter religious misinformation.

Rahman and Idris (2019) identify bureaucratic delays and unclear legal frameworks as significant challenges that hinder fatwa enforcement. Although fatwas have legal status under the Mufti Act, their implementation often depends on coordination with state or federal agencies. The Federal Territories Mufti's Office struggles with enforcement when its fatwas require action beyond its jurisdiction or cooperation from other ministries, resulting in delays or inaction.

Khalid (2022) examines the challenge of issuing fatwas within a pluralistic and multicultural society, such as the Federal Territories. The mufti must balance Islamic legal principles with social sensitivities, especially in a multi-religious context. This balancing act can limit the scope or wording of certain fatwas to prevent interfaith tensions or public backlash, particularly in moral or ethical matters under public scrutiny.

Norazlan and Sani (2020) highlight issues related to limited resources within mufti institutions, including the Federal Territories Mufti Office. The lack of sufficient qualified scholars, researchers, and funding hampers the

institution's ability to address complex contemporary issues. Furthermore, dependence on part-time advisory panels slows the fatwa issuance process, reducing the institution's responsiveness to emerging societal needs.

Public Engagement and Religious Communication by the Federal Territories Mufti's Office

According to Zulkifli (2021), the Federal Territories Mufti's Office has adopted a strategic approach to religious communication by utilising various digital media platforms such as *Bayan Linnas*, *Irsyad al-Fatwa*, and official social media pages. These initiatives allow the office to engage directly with the public on urgent and sensitive religious issues, using accessible language and current contexts. This strategy has effectively increased public trust and interest in official religious discourse (Rosidi, 2021).

Rahman and Salleh (2020) argue that effective religious communication should not be unidirectional. The Federal Territories Mufti's Office has implemented *e-Irsyad* (online Q&A), public seminars, and youth engagement programs to establish two-way communication. These platforms provide channels for the public to ask questions and receive authoritative guidance, strengthening the relevance of religious institutions in daily life (Rosidi, 2024).

In their study, Khalid and Ibrahim (2022) highlight the rising role of social media in religious communication. The Federal Territories Mufti Office's presence on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube enables rapid dissemination of spiritual content, infographics, and video explanations. These formats attract a younger audience and promote understanding of complex religious rulings. However, the study also cautions about the need for consistent monitoring to avoid misinterpretation or misuse.

Mustafa (2021) examines how the Federal Territories Mufti's Office responded to public confusion during the COVID-19 pandemic. The office addressed key religious concerns such as Friday prayers, vaccination, and funeral rites through timely fatwas, official statements, and FAQ infographics. The study praises the Office's ability to maintain spiritual clarity, calm public anxiety, and counter misinformation during crises.

Hassan and Arifin (2019) discuss how the Federal Territories Mufti's Office organises community outreach programs such as *Ziarah Mahabbah*, mosque-based talks, inter-agency collaborations, and youth dakwah camps. These efforts aim to make religious authorities more approachable and involved in grassroots issues. The study notes that consistent outreach improves public perception and positions the mufti as a legal authority and a spiritual guide.

Public scepticism towards religious institutions such as the FTMO often stems from perceived lack of transparency and delayed responses to urgent social issues, particularly youth, gender, or economic justice.

The Impact of the Mufti Office on Religious Harmony and Policy: A Study of the Federal Territories Mufti Office

According to Zainuddin and Mohd Noor (2020), fatwas issued by the Federal Territories Mufti's Office have significantly contributed to preserving religious harmony in Malaysia. By considering the diverse backgrounds of the population and avoiding extremist interpretations, fatwas help maintain peace and mutual respect in society. The authors emphasise that religious rulings that promote *wasatiyyah* (moderation) can prevent sectarian tension and inter-religious conflicts.

Hashim (2022) explores the influence of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office in shaping public policy, especially in areas such as Islamic finance, public health, and education. The study illustrates how fatwas regarding zakat investment, organ donation, and vaccination resolve religious questions and guide national decision-making. The Mufti Office's alignment with national policy objectives while upholding Shariah principles has made it a key policy advisor in Malaysia's Islamic governance framework.

In their research, Farid and Yusof (2019) discuss how the Mufti Office's engagement in interfaith matters helps defuse religious misunderstandings. Through carefully worded fatwas and public statements, the Federal Territories Mufti's Office supports peaceful coexistence, especially in sensitive religious terms (e.g., usage of the

word “Allah”) and shared public spaces. The study notes that religious tolerance can be institutionalised through inclusive fatwa practices.

According to Roslan and Abdullah (2021), fatwas contribute to the ethical framework of the Malaysian Muslim community. The Federal Territories Mufti's Office frequently addresses emerging moral issues such as LGBT, gender interaction, and digital ethics through religious rulings. While grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, these fatwas are often crafted to align with the country's multicultural sensitivities, reinforcing moral order and communal peace.

Ahmad and Jamaludin (2018) analyse the Mufti Office's involvement in resolving religious disputes. The Federal Territories Mufti's Office often acts as an intermediary in disputes involving Islamic rituals, sectarian claims, and deviant teachings. Its authority and scholarly recognition allow it to issue guidance that prevents legal and social escalations. The study shows that the mufti institution plays a conflict resolution role that complements the judicial system.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The literature review highlights several critical findings regarding the role of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office in addressing contemporary religious issues in Malaysia:

I. Strategic Legal and Social Role

The Federal Territories Mufti's Office is a religious legal authority and a social and policy advisor. Fatwas issued by the institution serve beyond their traditional legal framework by guiding public behaviour and influencing policy, particularly in modern fields such as medicine, technology, and Islamic finance (Abdul Rahman, 2020).

II. Application of Maqasid Shariah in Contemporary Fatwas

The Office adopts the *Maqasid Shariah* framework to ensure flexibility and relevance of Islamic rulings in the modern era. This methodology, as discussed by Mohd Farid (2018) and Rosidi et al. (2022), preserves the fundamental objectives of Islamic law (protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property) while addressing sensitive issues such as vaccination, abortion, and organ donation.

III. Digital Engagement and Media Strategy

The Federal Territories Mufti's Office has embraced digital platforms like *Irsyad al-Fatwa* and *Bayan Linnas* to improve accessibility to religious rulings (Rosidi et al., 2022a). Zulkifli (2021) commends these innovations but points to the rising threat of misinformation and fake religious online content, which challenges the Office's authority.

IV. Role in Addressing Moral and Social Challenges

The Office has actively engaged with emerging moral and social issues such as LGBT, child marriage, and societal moral decline. According to Roslan and Ahmad (2019), the Office's approach emphasises moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and contextual sensitivity, which helps preserve religious harmony.

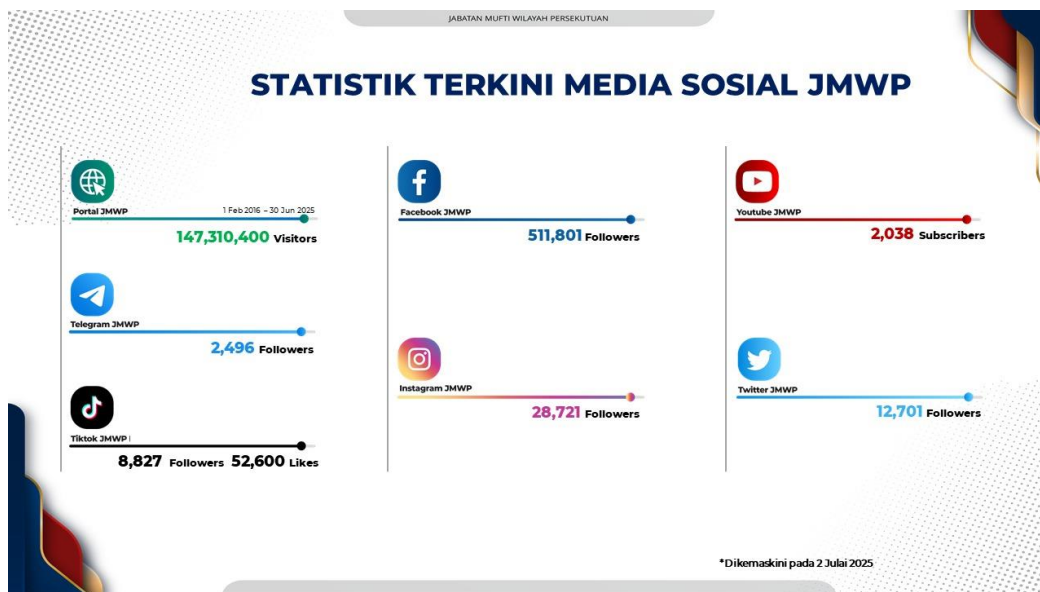
V. Contribution to Public Policy Formation.

Fatwas issued by the Mufti Office directly impact national policies, especially during public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and in guiding economic activities through Shariah-compliant investment advice. Hashim (2022) provides evidence of how the Office has become an essential stakeholder in policy discourse at the federal level.

The Federal Territories Mufti's Office has emerged as essential in navigating modern Malaysia's complex religious, social, and policy landscape. Integrating *Maqasid Shariah* as a framework reflects the institution's

progressive attitude in balancing Islamic jurisprudence with real-world concerns. This shift is crucial for ensuring that fatwas remain relevant to a multigenerational and multiethnic society.

Moreover, the institution's digital transformation demonstrates adaptability to modern communication trends. Social media and interactive platforms like e-Fatwa and Irsyad al-Fatwa have significantly improved public accessibility to religious guidance. However, this exposes the institution to new challenges, such as the proliferation of unauthorised religious content, necessitating more robust media monitoring and public digital literacy initiatives.



Figures 1 and 2 show the statistics of social media in the Federal Territories Mufti's office

In addressing sensitive societal issues, the Federal Territories Mufti's Office adopts a middle-path (*wasatiyyah*) approach, reinforcing social harmony and aligning with national values. This methodology effectively avoids polarisation and promotes inclusivity, especially in interfaith dynamics and moral debates.

Furthermore, the institution's involvement in public policy illustrates the expanding scope of religious authorities in Malaysia's governance. Fatwas are no longer confined to private religious concerns but have become tools for guiding state decisions, particularly in crises like the pandemic and complex sectors such as Islamic finance. This highlights the evolving synergy between religion and policy, where the mufti institution plays a pivotal advisory role.

In conclusion, while the Federal Territories Mufti's Office demonstrates commendable agility in adapting to contemporary realities, ongoing support in resources, legal clarity, and inter-agency cooperation will be necessary to enhance its effectiveness and impact further.

RECOMMENDATION

Considering the findings and discussion, several strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance the role and effectiveness of the Federal Territories Mufti's Office in addressing contemporary religious issues:

Firstly, the institution should continue to strengthen its application of *Maqasid Shariah* in the formulation of fatwas. This approach ensures the relevance of rulings and aligns them with the realities of modern Malaysian society. Developing comprehensive training programs for researchers and fatwa committee members on the practical use of *Maqasid* will ensure consistency and depth in fatwa development.

Secondly, the Mufti Office should invest in a more robust digital infrastructure to combat the challenges of misinformation and unauthorised religious discourse online. This includes enhancing its official website, producing more interactive content such as infographics and short educational videos, and collaborating with credible influencers to disseminate accurate religious information. A dedicated media monitoring unit could help track and counter false narratives more effectively.

Thirdly, the Federal Territories Mufti's Office is encouraged to broaden its community engagement strategies. Programs such as *Ziarah Mahabbah*, mosque dialogues, and youth da'wah camps should be scaled up with proper impact evaluation tools. This will improve public trust and perception and position the institution as a more approachable and people-centred authority.

Fourth, the Mufti Office should formalise cooperation mechanisms with federal agencies such as the Ministry of Health, Finance, and the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) to support policy influence. Creating a multidisciplinary advisory council involving Islamic scholars, medical experts, economists, and legal practitioners will improve the quality of fatwas with policy relevance.

Finally, addressing resource constraints is crucial. Increased government funding, long-term human capital development, and partnerships with local universities can help ensure the Office remains equipped to tackle complex and rapidly evolving religious challenges.

Public scepticism towards religious institutions such as the Federal Territories Mufti's Office (FTMO) often stems from a perceived lack of transparency, limited accessibility to decision-making processes, and delayed or cautious responses to pressing and urgent social issues. These issues frequently involve sensitive areas such as youth welfare, gender equality, and economic justice—domains in which religious bodies are often seen as either overly conservative or insufficiently engaged. Such perceptions contribute to a widening gap between institutional religious authority and the lived realities of a younger, more socially conscious generation that seeks relevant, compassionate, and forward-looking religious leadership.

Through these recommendations, the Federal Territories Mufti's Office can continue to lead with credibility, relevance, and impact in navigating religious affairs in Malaysia's pluralistic and dynamic society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the Federal Territories Mufti Office (FTMO) plays a vital and strategic role in addressing contemporary religious issues in Malaysia. In the face of globalisation, liberal ideologies, intellectual extremism, and the widespread availability of unfiltered information through social media, FTMO serves as a key institution in safeguarding the purity of Islamic creed and law among the Muslim community. Its approach combines the classical Islamic scholarly tradition—based on the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah methodology—with modern tools such as digital media, infographics, videos, and community-friendly articles.

FTMO's success in issuing fatwas and providing religious guidance through platforms like *Bayan Linnas*, *Irsyad al-Fatwa*, and its official social media channels reflects its adaptability to the demands of the modern era. Today's Muslim society seeks rulings that are not only grounded in scriptural evidence but also presented in accessible and relevant formats. Hence, the presence of FTMO as a central reference point for contemporary issues—such as LGBT, the use of the term “Allah,” deviant sects, vaccines, digital finance, and others—is crucial in dispelling confusion and preventing the spread of misinformation from unverified sources.

Nevertheless, this study also recognises several challenges that FTMO must address. These include the public's limited understanding of the proper role of mufti institutions, the growing influence of unqualified religious figures on social media, and a general lack of awareness regarding the disciplines and methodology behind fatwa issuance. To overcome these challenges, FTMO must strengthen its strategic partnerships with educational institutions, mainstream media, and Islamic NGOs to ensure its messages reach broader segments of society.

Additionally, greater emphasis must be placed on promoting religious literacy and understanding the objectives of Shariah (*maqasid al-shariah*) so that the public does not fall prey to misleading ideologies or purely rationalist interpretations that lack scriptural basis. Improving communication skills among FTMO officers, producing creative content rooted in scholarship, and actively engaging in the digital public sphere are necessary to enhance the office's outreach and relevance.

In summary, the Federal Territories Mufti's Office functions not merely as a fatwa-issuing authority but also as a da'wah institution, a provider of public enlightenment, and a guardian of Islamic creed and unity. Amid the many intellectual and social challenges of today's world, its credibility and steadfastness are crucial in ensuring that the Muslim community in Malaysia continues to adhere to authentic, revelation-based religious guidance. With community support and inclusive, innovative strategies, FTMO will remain relevant and effective in addressing contemporary religious issues in a scholarly, compassionate, and faithful manner to Islamic principles.

To remain relevant in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society, the Federal Territories Mufti's Office (FTMO) must transcend its traditional role of providing doctrinal guidance by actively asserting its influence in broader institutional reforms, engaging in efforts toward the harmonisation of Shariah and civil legal frameworks, and fostering sustainable community-level empowerment initiatives. This includes strengthening policy advocacy, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, and promoting inclusive religious discourse that resonates with the diverse socio-religious landscape of Malaysia.

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