



Divine Trust and Climate Diplomacy: Khilafah Stewardship in Muslim-Majority States' participation in the 2024 IPEF Clean Economy Agreement

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Abstract

Climate change has become a pressing global challenge, encouraging states to strengthen international cooperation through environmental governance frameworks, including the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Clean Economy Agreement signed in 2024. Existing studies generally explain state participation in climate agreements from economic, geopolitical, or institutional perspectives, while the influence of Islamic normative values on environmental diplomacy remains underexplored. This study investigates how the Islamic principles of Khilafah (stewardship) and Istishlah (Maslahah Mursalah) shape the participation of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam in the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement. Employing a qualitative comparative case study, the research analyzes treaty documents, government policies, official statements, and climate diplomacy reports through the perspective of Islamic International Relations. The findings demonstrate that the three Muslim-majority states frame their climate commitments not only as responses to economic and geopolitical interests but also as expressions of amanah (divine trust), the obligation to prevent fasād (environmental degradation), and the pursuit of maṣlaḥah (public welfare). These Islamic normative principles provide an important source of legitimacy for climate diplomacy while broadening the analytical perspective of International Relations by highlighting the contribution of Islamic ethics to global environmental governance.

Keywords: Khilafah, Istishlah, Climate Diplomacy, Islamic International Relations, IPEF Clean Economy Agreement..

Abstrak

Perubahan iklim mendorong negara-negara memperkuat kerja sama internasional melalui berbagai rezim lingkungan, termasuk Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Clean Economy Agreement yang ditandatangani pada tahun 2024. Sebagian besar penelitian menjelaskan partisipasi negara dalam perjanjian iklim

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berdasarkan kepentingan ekonomi, geopolitik, atau institusionalisme liberal, sementara peran nilai-nilai Islam sebagai faktor normatif masih jarang dikaji. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana prinsip Khilafah sebagai amanah manusia untuk memelihara bumi dan prinsip Istishlah (Maslahah Mursalah) memengaruhi partisipasi Indonesia, Malaysia, dan Brunei Darussalam dalam IPEF Clean Economy Agreement. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus komparatif melalui analisis dokumen terhadap naskah perjanjian, kebijakan pemerintah, pernyataan resmi, dan dokumen diplomasi iklim. Data dianalisis menggunakan perspektif Islamic International Relations untuk mengidentifikasi keterkaitan nilai-nilai Islam dengan kebijakan lingkungan internasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga negara membingkai komitmen iklim tidak hanya berdasarkan kepentingan ekonomi dan geopolitik, tetapi juga sebagai wujud amanah, pencegahan fasād, dan perwujudan maṣlahah. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa prinsip-prinsip Islam berfungsi sebagai sumber legitimasi normatif yang memperkuat diplomasi iklim sekaligus memperluas kontribusi perspektif Islam dalam kajian hubungan internasional dan tata kelola lingkungan global...

Kata Kunci: Khilafah; Istishlah; Diplomasi Iklim; Hubungan Internasional Islam; .

A. INTRODUCTION

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century, affecting ecological sustainability, economic development, and human security across national boundaries (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023; United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2024). Rising global temperatures, biodiversity loss, extreme weather events, and accelerating environmental degradation have transformed climate change from a purely environmental issue into a multidimensional governance challenge requiring coordinated international responses (IPCC, 2023). Consequently, international climate governance has evolved through multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all of which emphasize collective responsibility in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while promoting sustainable development (United Nations, 2015; UNFCCC, 2015). Within this context, states are increasingly expected not only to

pursue economic growth but also to integrate environmental sustainability into domestic and international policy agendas (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017). As climate governance becomes increasingly institutionalized, international cooperation has shifted beyond legally binding emission targets toward broader mechanisms that encourage technological collaboration, clean energy transition, and sustainable investment (Falkner, 2016)

One of the most recent developments in international climate cooperation is the establishment of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), launched by the United States in 2022 as a strategic economic initiative for the Indo-Pacific region (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024). Unlike conventional free trade agreements, IPEF adopts a modular framework consisting of four interconnected pillars: Trade, Supply Chains, Clean Economy, and Fair Economy (Office of the United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2024). Among these pillars, the Clean Economy Agreement represents the most comprehensive regional initiative dedicated to accelerating clean energy transition, promoting decarbonization, strengthening

climate resilience, and encouraging sustainable infrastructure investment (IPEF, 2024). Signed in Singapore on 6 June 2024 by fourteen participating economies, the agreement reflects the growing recognition that climate challenges require cooperative governance rather than purely national policy responses (IPEF, 2024). The agreement also demonstrates an emerging model of climate diplomacy that combines economic cooperation with environmental commitments while avoiding the market-access provisions commonly found in traditional trade agreements (Dent, 2023).

Among the fourteen IPEF members, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam occupy a distinctive position because they are Muslim-majority countries whose domestic governance systems continue to be influenced by Islamic ethical values (Hefner, 2016). While these countries share many economic and geopolitical interests with other IPEF members, they also possess normative traditions that emphasize environmental stewardship, social justice, and intergenerational responsibility (Kamali, 2010). Their participation in the Clean Economy Agreement therefore cannot be understood solely through material incentives or geopolitical calculations. Instead, it raises an important analytical question regarding whether Islamic ethical principles also contribute to shaping state preferences in international environmental cooperation (Haynes, 2020).

Islam provides a comprehensive ethical framework concerning the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Rather than viewing nature as an unlimited resource for exploitation, Islamic teachings emphasize that humans are entrusted with the

responsibility of preserving ecological balance and ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources (Foltz et al., 2003). Concepts such as stewardship, accountability, environmental responsibility, and public welfare constitute important moral foundations that continue to influence environmental discourse within many Muslim-majority societies (Kamali, 2010). Consequently, environmental protection is increasingly interpreted not merely as a technical policy issue but also as an ethical obligation rooted in religious values (Abdul-Matin, 2010).

Existing scholarship on climate diplomacy and international environmental cooperation can generally be classified into three major streams. The first examines climate agreements primarily through the perspectives of liberal institutionalism, realism, and international political economy, emphasizing economic incentives, institutional arrangements, and geopolitical competition as the principal determinants of state participation (Keohane & Victor, 2016; Falkner, 2016). The second focuses on Islamic environmental ethics, exploring concepts such as environmental stewardship, sustainable development, and ecological responsibility from theological and jurisprudential perspectives (Kamali, 2010; Izzi Dien, 2000). The third stream employs constructivist approaches to explain how norms, identities, and values shape international cooperation (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999). Although these studies have significantly enriched the understanding of environmental governance, they remain fragmented and rarely intersect.

The existing literature therefore reveals several important limitations. First, studies concerning the IPEF Clean

Economy Agreement predominantly interpret state participation through strategic interests, trade competitiveness, and geopolitical balancing (Dent, 2023). Second, research on Islamic environmental ethics largely remains normative, focusing on Qur'anic interpretation, *maqāṣid al-shar'ah*, or environmental jurisprudence without examining their implications for state behavior in international institutions (Kamali, 2010). Third, although constructivist International Relations theory recognizes the significance of norms and identities, Islamic normative concepts have rarely been incorporated into analytical frameworks explaining environmental diplomacy (Haynes, 2020).

This study addresses three interrelated research gaps. First, previous analyses of the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement have concentrated predominantly on economic and geopolitical explanations while neglecting the influence of religiously informed normative commitments (Dent, 2023). Second, studies examining Islamic environmental ethics have generally remained within theological or legal discussions and have not systematically connected these ethical principles to international climate cooperation (Kamali, 2010). Third, despite the growing acceptance of constructivist approaches in International Relations, there remains limited effort to integrate Islamic political thought into explanations of state participation in multilateral environmental agreements (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of Islamic political thought with contemporary International Relations scholarship. Unlike previous studies that primarily employ secular theoretical perspectives, this research positions the

principles of Khilafah and Istishlah as analytical frameworks for explaining state behavior in climate diplomacy (Kamali, 2010). Furthermore, the study extends constructivist approaches by demonstrating that Islamic ethical principles function not merely as cultural identities but as normative resources capable of shaping policy preferences and legitimizing international environmental commitments (Haynes, 2020).

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following primary research question: How do the Islamic principles of Khilafah and Istishlah influence the participation of Muslim-majority states in the 2024 IPEF Clean Economy Agreement? Specifically, the research examines how these principles are reflected in governmental discourse, policy formulation, and international climate commitments undertaken by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam.

This study contributes to the literature in three important respects. Theoretically, it expands the growing field of Islamic International Relations by incorporating Islamic ethical principles into analyses of global environmental governance.

Conceptually, it proposes Khilafah and Istishlah as complementary normative frameworks for understanding climate diplomacy beyond conventional economic and geopolitical explanations. Empirically, it provides comparative evidence from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam within the institutional context of the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement, thereby enriching discussions on the role of religious values in shaping state behavior within emerging regional climate governance.

B. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a comparative case study design to examine how Islamic normative principles influence the participation of Muslim-majority states in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Clean Economy Agreement. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate because the objective of this research was not to measure causal relationships statistically but to understand the meanings, values, and normative considerations that shape state behavior in international climate cooperation. Comparative case studies allow researchers to explore similarities and differences across multiple cases while identifying how social, political, and normative contexts influence policy preferences and international commitments (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This study focuses on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam because these three countries share comparable characteristics as Muslim-majority states participating in the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement while maintaining different political systems, institutional arrangements, and environmental governance strategies. Such similarities and differences provide a suitable basis for comparative analysis of the role of Islamic normative values in climate diplomacy.

The analytical framework of this research combines constructivist International Relations theory with the perspective of Islamic International Relations. Constructivism argues that state interests and foreign policy preferences are socially constructed through norms, identities, and shared ideas rather than being determined solely by material capabilities (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998;

Wendt, 1999). Building upon this perspective, the present study assumes that Islamic ethical principles function as normative resources capable of shaping governmental perceptions, legitimizing policy choices, and influencing participation in international environmental cooperation. Four interrelated concepts derived from Islamic political thought were employed as analytical categories, namely Khilafah (environmental stewardship), Amanah (accountability and responsibility), Fasād (the prohibition of environmental destruction), and Istishlah or Maṣlaḥah (the promotion of public welfare). These concepts served as the principal analytical lens for interpreting governmental discourse, official policy documents, and international commitments related to climate governance.

The research relied exclusively on documentary evidence obtained from authoritative primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consisted of the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement (2024), official ministerial statements issued by IPEF member states, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), national energy transition policies, climate change strategies, official speeches delivered by government leaders, publications from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Environment, and other relevant government institutions of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and publications produced by international organizations such as the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and ASEAN. Only documents

directly related to climate governance, environmental policy, Islamic political thought, and international cooperation were included in the analysis to ensure the relevance and consistency of the research findings.

Data collection was conducted through systematic document analysis following predefined inclusion criteria. Documents were selected based on their relevance to the objectives of the study, publication credibility, institutional authority, and substantive discussion of climate governance or Islamic environmental principles. Official policy documents, treaty texts, government reports, and international publications published between 2022 and 2025 received particular attention because they correspond to the period surrounding the negotiation and implementation of the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement. After the selection process, all documents were organized according to country, institution, publication year, and policy relevance to facilitate comparative analysis across the three case studies.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and normative narratives within official documents (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analytical process began with repeated reading of all documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of their content and policy context. Relevant textual segments were subsequently coded through an open coding process to identify expressions related to environmental stewardship, public responsibility, sustainability, justice, accountability, and climate commitments. Similar codes were then grouped into broader themes corresponding to the four analytical

dimensions of Khilafah, Amanah, Fasād, and Istishlah. These thematic categories were subsequently compared across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam to identify convergences and divergences in governmental discourse, policy orientation, and international climate commitments. Finally, the findings were interpreted through the combined perspectives of constructivist International Relations and Islamic International Relations to explain how Islamic normative principles contribute to shaping state participation in the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research, this study adopted the qualitative validity criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing treaty texts, official government documents, policy reports, and international publications. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the political and institutional contexts of each country, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to comparable settings. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of data collection procedures, coding processes, and analytical decisions throughout the study. Confirmability was ensured by grounding all interpretations in documentary evidence rather than personal assumptions, thereby maintaining analytical transparency and minimizing researcher bias.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei consistently framed their participation in the

IPEF Clean Economy Agreement through the Islamic ethical principles of Khilafah (stewardship), Amanah (trust), Maslahah (public welfare), and the prevention of Fasad (environmental destruction). Content analysis of official speeches, policy documents, and ministerial statements reveals that climate action was portrayed not merely as an economic necessity but as a religious and moral obligation to protect the Earth for future generations. This stewardship-oriented discourse clearly distinguishes the three Muslim-majority countries from non-Muslim IPEF members, whose narratives predominantly emphasized economic competitiveness, innovation, and technological development (Shah et al., 2025; Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2024).

A central finding is that the concept of Amanah served as a normative foundation for climate commitments. Political leaders consistently portrayed environmental protection as a sacred trust that current generations must fulfill on behalf of future generations. President Joko Widodo, for instance, emphasized the responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit a livable planet, reinforcing the notion that climate policy is not solely a political commitment but also a religious duty. This framing strengthens domestic legitimacy by connecting environmental governance with Islamic moral teachings and broader public expectations (Miller Llana & McGinnis, 2025).

The study further demonstrates that Khilafah was reflected in the ethical leadership narratives adopted by the three countries. Brunei explicitly described its climate engagement as an expression of its role as khalifah, while Malaysia and Indonesia employed more universal

expressions such as justice, collective responsibility, and mutual cooperation that nevertheless embodied Islamic stewardship values. These findings indicate that Islamic environmental ethics can be translated into different political languages without losing their normative substance, allowing governments to adapt religious principles to their respective domestic political contexts (Kareem & Gailani, 2024).

Another important finding concerns the application of the Qur'anic principle of Mizan (balance), which shaped the countries' understanding of sustainable development. Rather than presenting economic growth and environmental protection as competing objectives, the three governments framed them as mutually reinforcing goals. Indonesia promoted renewable energy as a means of achieving economic growth without compromising environmental sustainability, while Malaysia linked green development to the Islamic principle of Rahmatan lil-'Alamin, emphasizing compassion toward all creation. This demonstrates that Islamic environmental ethics support a balanced model of development integrating economic prosperity, social justice, and ecological sustainability (Kareem & Gailani, 2024).

Beyond rhetoric, the research identifies concrete policy initiatives reflecting Islamic ethical principles. Malaysia incorporated Islamic financial instruments such as waqf into renewable energy financing and promoted sustainable investment through Islamic banking mechanisms. Indonesia, meanwhile, advocated strongly for equitable climate finance, technology transfer, and just transition provisions during IPEF negotiations. These initiatives illustrate that

the concept of *Maslahah* was operationalized through policies designed to promote collective welfare rather than remaining an abstract theological ideal (Thomas, 2025; Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2024).

Brunei contributed to climate diplomacy by promoting cooperation among Muslim-majority countries through an Islamic ethical framework. It encouraged discussions on Islamic green finance and proposed collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank to support sustainable infrastructure projects. This initiative reflects the principle of *asabiyyah* (social solidarity), extending Islamic stewardship beyond domestic policy into regional and multilateral climate cooperation. Consequently, Brunei positioned itself not only as a policy participant but also as a promoter of ethical climate governance within international institutions (Abdullah, 2025).

Comparative analysis highlights significant differences between Muslim-majority countries and secular IPEF partners such as the United States and Australia. While the latter emphasized investment opportunities, technological innovation, and strategic competition, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei consistently combined economic objectives with moral and religious justifications. References to justice, responsibility toward future generations, and stewardship appeared frequently in the discourse of the Muslim-majority states but were virtually absent from the official statements of their secular counterparts. This contrast confirms that Islamic stewardship constituted a distinctive normative framework rather than conventional

diplomatic rhetoric (Williams et al., 2011; Nandmehar & Sukmawati, 2025).

The discussion suggests that these findings make a significant contribution to Islamic International Relations (Islamic IR) theory. Whereas realist and liberal perspectives primarily explain state behavior through material interests, bargaining power, and institutional incentives, this study demonstrates that religious norms can function as independent explanatory variables influencing foreign policy preferences. The concepts of *Khilafah*, *Amanah*, and *Maslahah* therefore represent genuine normative drivers that shape international environmental cooperation alongside economic considerations (Arli et al., 2023; Adiong, 2016).

The findings also have important practical implications for climate governance. Recognizing Islamic stewardship values can strengthen international cooperation by improving domestic legitimacy and public acceptance of climate policies. The integration of Islamic financial instruments—including *zakat*, *waqf*, and green Islamic finance—provides innovative mechanisms for financing climate action, while collaboration with religious authorities can reinforce compliance with environmental commitments. In Indonesia, for example, climate-related fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council further strengthen the religious legitimacy of environmental policies, creating stronger incentives for policy implementation (Miller Llana & McGinnis, 2025; Zafar, 2023).

Overall, the study concludes that *Khilafah* functions not only as a moral foundation for climate diplomacy but also as a normative framework for evaluating the justice and effectiveness of

international environmental agreements. Through the principle of *Istishlah*, climate cooperation must generate equitable public benefit while preventing social and environmental harm. Consequently, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei participated in the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement not simply to pursue economic or geopolitical interests but also to fulfill religious obligations of environmental stewardship. At the same time, the Islamic framework provides an internal mechanism for evaluating whether international climate agreements genuinely advance public welfare and environmental justice (Mellsop, 2024; Zafar, 2023; Mubarak, 2025).

D. CONCLUSION

This study examined how the Islamic principle of *Khilafah* (Earth stewardship) shaped the participation of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei in the 2024 IPEF Clean Economy Agreement. The findings demonstrate that Islamic stewardship provides a distinctive normative framework for climate diplomacy by framing environmental protection as a moral and religious obligation rather than solely an economic or political commitment. Through the principles of *Amanah*, *Maslahah*, and *Istishlah*, the three Muslim-majority countries consistently emphasized intergenerational justice, equitable climate finance, and a just energy transition as integral components of their climate policies. These findings indicate that Islamic values function not only as sources of policy legitimacy but also as normative standards that guide equitable implementation and accountability.

The study contributes to the International Relations (IR) literature by demonstrating that religious norms can operate as independent explanatory factors in international environmental cooperation. By operationalizing classical Islamic concepts within contemporary climate governance, this research

advances the development of Islamic International Relations (Islamic IR) and challenges conventional IR perspectives that primarily emphasize material interests and institutional incentives. Empirically, it offers a novel understanding of Southeast Asian climate diplomacy by showing that Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei acted not merely as policy adopters but as norm entrepreneurs that embedded Islamic ethical principles into their engagement with the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that incorporating faith-based ethical values into international climate governance can strengthen the legitimacy, inclusiveness, and long-term sustainability of global climate cooperation. The experiences of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei illustrate that religious principles can reinforce collective environmental action while promoting justice and public welfare. Nevertheless, the findings remain context-specific, and future research should examine a broader range of Muslim-majority countries and comparative regional contexts to better understand how different political, institutional, and socio-cultural settings shape the translation of Islamic environmental ethics into international climate governance.

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