

# RPCS

## QUARTERLY

Developing New Horizons of Knowledge for  
Islam in the Contemporary World

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## 2024 RPCS Year-In-Review

### INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 marked a period of significant growth for the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS). Throughout the year, RPCS remained committed to delivering research and events that are intellectually rigorous, draws from and contributes to Islamic knowledge traditions, and attuned to the evolving needs of Muslim-minority communities in secular, plural, and advanced economies. RPCS also continued its endeavors to support the development of research skills and competencies among Asatizah and practitioners in the religious sector.

RPCS delivered a range of initiatives throughout the year – roundtable discussions, workshops, seminars, research fellowships, as well as local and international stakeholder engagements, that brought together scholars, practitioners, and community leaders. These engagements were designed to deepen critical reflection, strengthen research capacity, and inspire scholarly insights into real-world application. This year-in-review outlines the key highlights of 2024, offering a thematic overview of RPCS's contributions to discourse, institutional development, and the advancement of contextualised new bodies of knowledge.

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**RPCS**  
RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY  
OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS

## 2024 RPCS YEAR - IN - REVIEW



### I. ROUNDTABLES AND TALKS: BRIDGING TRADITION AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

A key feature of RPCS's programmes in 2024 was a curated series of roundtable discussions and talks that engaged deeply with the moral-ethical, ritual, legal, and institutional dimensions of Muslim life in plural-secular societies and advanced economies. These sessions brought together leading scholars in Islamic knowledge traditions, humanities, and social sciences, each offering distinct insights into how our knowledge traditions can respond to the demands of modernity and contemporary public life. Framed not as isolated events but as part of a larger conversation, these events provided participants with insights and tools, to examine and reflect on issues and trends, involving socioreligious life, family, finance, public values, and religious authority.

The year began with a landmark roundtable on Fiqh and Finance held in February, featuring Professor Koutoub Moustapha Sano, Secretary-General of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA). A distinguished figure in contemporary Islamic jurisprudence, Professor Sano addressed the evolving relationship between Islamic jurisprudence and modern financial systems. His presentation emphasized the capacity of fiqh - when guided by the higher objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-

sharī'ah) - to respond meaningfully to complex economic realities, including emerging financial technologies. Advocating for collective ijtihād as a necessary scholarly response to global shifts, Professor Sano argued that ethical wealth management is not merely permissible but a form of religious duty. The discussion resonated deeply in Singapore's context, where Muslim communities must navigate existing economic structures and thrive, without compromising their ethical commitments.

In April, RPCS turned its attention to another pressing concern: the transformation of family life in advanced economies and modern secular states. In a roundtable titled "Defining Family in the Context of a Secular State and Multi-Religious Society," RPCS Research Fellow Ustazah Dr Siti Nur 'Alaniah Abdul Wahid led a discussion on the evolving nature of family structures in Singapore, drawing insights from social workers, counsellors, and Islamic tradition. The discussion explored how legal, cultural, and religious frameworks shape the definition of family, and how non-normative family forms, such as reconstituted or incarcerated households, often face marginalisation and policy-related challenges. Drawing from *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Dr 'Alaniah explained that the Arabic term *usrah* (family) derives from a root meaning "to bind" or "to support," highlighting the significance of kinship, care, and mutual responsibility beyond biological or marital ties. She cited examples from Islamic history, such as the bond between the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Ḥalimah as-Sa'diyyah, or the fraternal relationship between Salmān al-Fārisī and the Prophet's family, to illustrate how familial connections in Islam have long included non-marital and non-biological relationships. The roundtable called for a more inclusive understanding of family that supports all households, regardless of form, as essential to building a cohesive and pluralistic society. Participants also underscored the importance of holistic, compassionate, and context-sensitive family interventions, guided by both professional ethics and the Islamic principle of *maṣlaḥa* (well-being).





In June, RPCS hosted Dr Omer Awwas, Associate Professor at the American Islamic College, for two critical engagements in June. His first presentation, “Reconceiving Secularisation in Muslim Societies”, interrogated dominant theories of secularisation, proposing instead that religious norms are not displaced but often repurposed by modern political regimes. Dr Awwas introduced the concept of “value inversion” to explain how secular projects can subtly redefine religious ethics to fit technocratic and bureaucratic frameworks. In his subsequent session, “Contemporary Approaches to Fatwa Making”, he traced the historical and doctrinal continuities between pre-modern Islamic jurisprudence and current institutional fatwa-making processes. Rather than dismissing classical jurisprudence as outdated, Dr Awwas argued for its adaptive potential, provided that muftīs are trained not only in technical law, but also in ethics, context, and the evolving nature of public concerns.



In July 2024, the research programme held its annual RPCS Seminar continuing its commitment to convening scholarly dialogue in support of its three core research pillars: governance, society, and science and technology. Each year, the seminar invites a leading thought leader, expert, or academic to offer insights into one of these domains, creating space for sustained engagement between global scholarship and the lived realities of Muslim communities in secular, plural societies. The 2024 seminar focused on the governance pillar, and featured Professor Mohammad Fadel of University of Toronto, as speaker. An internationally renowned scholar of Islamic legal theory and law, Professor Fadel delivered a lecture titled “Islamic Values and Secular Societies,” which challenged the presumption of inherent conflict between Islamic tradition and modern secular institutions. Drawing on José Casanova’s typology of secularism - institutional differentiation, privatisation, and marginalisation, Professor Fadel argued that only



the third form fundamentally threatens the place of religion in public life. In contrast, the first two offer opportunities for religious frameworks to coexist and even enrich public institutions. Central to Professor Fadel's argument was the idea of cooperative adjustment, a model that encourages Islamic law to interact meaningfully with secular state systems through shared ethical goals such as justice, equity, and public interest. He further showed how Islamic jurisprudence, particularly through tools like *maṣlaḥah* (common good), *furūḍ kifāyah* (collective obligations), and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning), provides the conceptual flexibility to operate within diverse political orders. The seminar drew a wide range of participants from academia, public service, *asatizah* fraternity, as well as postgraduate programmes, and prompted rich discussions on what it means for Muslim communities to engage secular governance not from a position of tension or defensiveness, but from one of ethical confidence and civic responsibility.

The final major discussion of the year was in October with Dr Salah Chafik, Senior Research Fellow at the University College London Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. In a lunch talk titled "Theorising Governance Beyond the West: The Islamic Public Value Project," Dr Chafik introduced the concept of "sacred craft" to describe how Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *barakah* (blessing), and *khidmah* (service) underpin governance practices in Muslim communities outside of state-centred paradigms. Drawing on ethnographic research from North and West Africa, he showcased examples of religiously informed economic cooperation and communal stewardship that defy dominant Western models of public administration.

Together, these knowledge dissemination events reflected RPCS's institutional goal to situate Islamic scholarship within contemporary debates and concerns, inviting participants to think across disciplines, time periods, and social contexts. Each session provided a space not only for academic inquiry, but also for practical reflection on how Muslim communities can engage the challenges of modern life with confidence and clarity.

## SUMMARY OF RPCS EVENTS IN 2024

### FIQH AND FINANCE RTD *Professor Moustapha Koutoub Sano*

“Islamic jurisprudence can meaningfully engage with modern financial systems through ethical wealth management as a religious duty”



### FAMILY IN MODERN SOCIETY RTD, Dr. Siti Nur 'Alaniah

Islamic traditions support an inclusive understanding of family that extends beyond biological and marital bonds



### SECULARISATION & FATWA MAKING RTD, Dr. Omer Awass

“Modern secular systems don't eliminate religious norms but transform how they're expressed and applied”



### ISLAMIC PUBLIC VALUE PROJECT RTD, Dr. Salah Chafik

“Islamic values provide alternative frameworks for governance and public administration beyond Western models”



### SEMINAR: ISLAMIC VALUES AND SECULAR SOCIETIES Prof Mohamed Fadel

“Islamic traditions can positively engage with secular institutions through shared ethical frameworks rather than conflict”



## II. VISITING INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP: PROFESSOR ABDULKADER TAYOB'S EMBEDDED SCHOLARSHIP

In 2024, RPCS launched its Visiting International Fellowship (VIF) as part of its commitment to deepening research capacity through sustained academic collaboration. The inaugural fellow, Emeritus Professor Abdulkader Tayob from the University of Cape Town, brought with him decades of expertise in Islamic thought, ethics, and religion in the public sphere. Over a three-month residency from April to June, Professor Tayob played a formative role in shaping RPCS's internal research culture, offering not only public engagements but also close mentorship, critical dialogue, and institutional insight.

Professor Tayob became an integral part of the RPCS research environment, guiding internal discussions, offering strategic advice on research framing, and creating platforms for deeper thinking about how Islamic scholarship can respond to the demands of life in a modern, plural society. His time at RPCS demonstrated the value of long-term scholarly presence: relationships were built, conversations matured, and ideas developed across months of close engagement.

As part of his tenure, Professor Tayob conducted three in-depth workshops, each of which was designed to connect Islamic ethical traditions with contemporary questions of governance, society, and economy:

1. ***"Religion and State Entanglements" (17 April)*** examined how Islamic and secular frameworks have approached the relationship between religion and politics. Drawing on historical sources and comparative case studies, the session asked how Muslims might engage with state authority while preserving religious integrity.
2. ***"Life Trajectories of Values and Ethics" (10 May)*** explored how individuals form ethical commitments over the course of their lives. Bringing Islamic concepts such as *tarbiyyah* and *tazkiyah* into conversation with modern ideas about moral development, the workshop encouraged participants to reflect on their own ethical journeys as individuals and community members.
3. ***"Ethics in Muslim Minority Contexts: Moral Economies" (23 May)*** explored how modern societies engage with economic systems that often prioritise profit over ethical concerns. Drawing on Islamic teachings and Western social theory, the session discussed how values such as trust, fairness, and collective responsibility can guide more balanced and socially conscious economic practices.





Alongside these workshops, Professor Tayob initiated a fortnightly reading group, which quickly became a cornerstone of internal development at RPCS. He curated readings that included classical Islamic texts, contemporary ethical theory, and critical social science. These sessions designed for RPCS and its fellows, sharpened analytical thinking, and created a space for careful, reflective engagement with difficult ideas.

Following his fellowship, Professor Tayob returned to Singapore in October to present his research findings at a roundtable discussion titled “Ethical Journeys in Singapore: The Ulama in a Successful Semi-Authoritarian State”. Based on a series of interviews with local religious scholars, Professor Tayob’s research during his fellowship in Singapore examined how the ulama in Singapore navigate their responsibilities in a society that balances religious freedom with strong state oversight. His analysis offered a unique view of how religious leaders live out their ethical commitments in a complex environment.

The impact of Professor Tayob’s fellowship was felt across the programme. His contributions and mentorship elevated the standard of internal dialogue and supported the growth of RPCS researchers, in large part because he brought to the VIF role not only deep subject expertise but also decades of experience guiding and developing scholars. Over the course of his career, spanning more than 35 years of scholarship in Islamic thought, ethics, and religion in public life, he has supervised and mentored numerous doctoral and master’s students, many of whom have gone on to become established scholars and educators in their own right. During his time at RPCS, he drew on this extensive background not only as a scholar but as a teacher deeply committed to nurturing reflective and responsible research practice. Perhaps most importantly, his guidance helped sharpen the programme’s sense of what it means to do meaningful, responsible scholarship, work that is grounded in tradition, attentive to context, and committed to the well-being of the communities it seeks to serve.

### III. RESEARCH TRAINING AND BUILDING CAPACITY

In 2024, RPCS continued to strengthen the research capabilities of its team through a series of hands-on training programmes, workshops, and learning opportunities. These efforts focused not only on building technical skills, but also on encouraging researchers to reflect more deeply on the purpose and ethics of their work.

One of the key highlights of the year was the Participatory Action Research (PAR) workshop held at the Social Service Research Centre (SSR), National University of Singapore. This workshop taught by Dr Hana Alhadad, introduced RPCS researchers to methods that involve working directly with communities as equal partners in the research process. Participants learned how to build trust with community members, design projects that reflect shared concerns, and produce findings that lead to meaningful change. The workshop also addressed important ethical questions such as power asymmetry, informed consent, and how research findings are used and shared.

RPCS also participated in the Google AI Bootcamp, which explored how Google's artificial intelligence tools, such as Gemini, can be used to support social and research projects. The bootcamp introduced researchers to ways AI might assist with tasks like analysing data and generating ideas. At the same time, it raised important questions about fairness, accuracy, and the possible risks of relying too much on generative AI technology. The bootcamp helped RPCS plan more carefully for how AI tools might be used in its research in the future.

In addition, RPCS researchers took part in courses offered through the 13th IPSA-NUS Summer School for Social Science Research Methods. The training covered areas such as data science, introducing skills in data handling and visualisation, as well as, qualitative data analysis, with a focus on approaches to interpreting interview material and other text-based data. These foundational skills are being applied in current research projects to support clearer analysis and reporting.

All of these training activities were supported by ongoing mentoring within the RPCS team. Senior researchers worked closely with Junior Fellows, providing guidance not just on writing and finding resources, but also on how to craft crucial research questions and carry out research with care and confidence.

In addition to this, RPCS continues to provide research exposure and mentoring through its 10–12-week internship programme. Targeted at undergraduate students with an interest in Islamic studies, social sciences, or related fields, the internship offers participants practical exposure to a range of tasks carried out within a research body. These include literature reviews, event documentation, qualitative data handling, transcription, copy editing, and preparation of public-facing research materials. Interns also gain insight into the full workflow of RPCS, from event curation to publication. Notably, the internship culminates in the production of a commentary based on the research project or pillar the intern assisted with. In 2024, three interns, each pursuing different academic disciplines at different universities, completed the programme. All of them contributed to research on past Singapore asatizah, by doing an exploratory analysis of the works by asatizah whom they have selected based on their interest areas such as governance or social cohesion.

These efforts in training younger and budding asatizah reflect RPCS's broader goal - to build a team of researchers and nurture future generations of researchers who are skilled, thoughtful, and committed to making a positive contribution to the Islamic knowledge traditions, as well as to discourses of Islam and society.

### RPCS Junior Fellows 25/26

#### Ustazah Siti Raudhah

Siti Raudhah is a Junior Research Fellow with the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS). She holds a bachelor's degree in Qur'an and Sunnah Studies with a minor in Psychology from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She also graduated as part of the first cohort of the Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Societies (PCICS) programme. RPCS Research Project: "Strengthening Social Cohesion in Muslim Communities with Disability Inclusion"

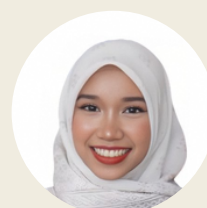
*Research interests: Religion and society, social cohesion, and disability inclusion.*



#### Ustazah Hannani Rehan

Hannani Rehan is a Junior Research Fellow with the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS). She holds a First-Class Honours degree in Bachelor of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage, majoring in Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She is also part of Cohort 10 of the Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Societies (PCICS) programme. RPCS Research Project: "Toward a Framework of Muslim Citizenry in a Plural and Secular State: Analyzing Fiqh Al-Muwatanah in the Context of Singapore's Sociopolitical Landscape "

*Research interests: Religion and governance, Islamic thought and contemporary issues, comparative religion.*





## IV. ICCOS 2024

In 2024, RPCS also served as the research and editorial backbone for the International Conference on Communities of Success (ICCOS), organised by MUIS, contributing substantively as part of the inter-departmental MUIS subcommittee overseeing speakers' presentations. Drawing from its expertise in research, RPCS shaped the narrative direction of key sessions, working closely with speakers and moderators to refine conceptual clarity, bridge academic-practitioner divides, and ensuring they addressed the importance of partnerships among religious, community and government leaders in supporting minority Muslim communities to thrive in their societies. RPCS researchers also played a central role in ensuring rigorous documentation of the event, taking detailed notes and verbatim transcripts during all panels and keynote sessions. These were not merely procedural outputs but formed the basis for a curated publication, a post-conference volume that RPCS was tasked with compiling and editing to capture, synthesise, and translate ICCOS insights into a form that could benefit both scholarly and policymaking audiences. In assuming this editorial leadership, RPCS ensured that the intellectual contributions of ICCOS would also feed back into institutional research trajectories and inform the evolving curriculum of the Singapore College of Islamic Studies (SCIS). The conference also allowed RPCS to deepen its network of collaborators, facilitating meaningful exchanges between international scholars, local asatizah, and community leaders.



## V. PUBLICATIONS

In 2024, RPCS strengthened its institutional visibility and credibility through the consistent production of three main publication types: Quarterly Reports, Commentaries, and Insights and Perspectives. The Quarterly Reports provide regular institutional updates, highlighting RPCS's engagements, research activities, and programme developments; four issues are released each year. The Commentaries and Insights and Perspectives series are contributed by a diverse group of local and international scholars and researchers, asatizah, and interns. The Commentaries offer timely reflections on key issues of contemporary concern to Muslim communities. Contributions in 2024 include:

- *"Islamic Legal Values in Secular Societies"* by Professor Mohammad Fadel, analysing how Islamic legal reasoning can engage productively with secular institutional frameworks;
- *"Muslim Communities of Success: Singapore-Style"* by RPCS VIF Emeritus Professor Abdulkader Tayob, reflecting on the ethical dimensions that should complement conceptions of success in Muslim communities;
- *"Shaping a Modern Future: Inspirations from the Visionary Leadership of Syed Sheikh al-Hadi"* by RPCS Intern and SISS scholar Haninah Rehan, examining al-Hadi's contributions to modernising Islamic education and promoting social reform
- *"Muslim Communities of Success: Respecting Diverse Viewpoints for Harmonious Co-Existence in Singapore's Secular Multicultural Context"* by RPCS Fellow Ustazah Dr. 'Alaniah Wahid, exploring Islamic concepts to guide Muslim engagement with diversity and differing perspectives;
- *"Fatwas and the Limits of Secularism"* by visiting researcher Dr. Omer Awass, analysing how fatwa practices embed religious ethics into various social fields, countering secular disembedding;
- *"The Saliency of Fatwas for Historical Research and Charting Social Change"* also by Dr. Omer Awass, highlighting the potential of fatwas as anthropological and historical sources for understanding Muslim societies;
- *"The Pioneers of the Singapore Muslim Identity"* by RPCS Intern and SISS scholar Hakeem Samsuri, profiling key asatizah whose work laid the groundwork for a contextualised Singapore Muslim identity;
- *"Moulavi M. H. Babu Sahib: A Scholar's Legacy of Interfaith Harmony and Social Activism"* by RPCS Intern Nun Musyarrafah, documenting Moulavi's pioneering work in interfaith dialogue and convert support.

The Insights and Perspectives series provided space for longer-form analysis on emerging themes:

- *“AI, Authority, and Intention in Religious Decision Making”* by James McGrail, exploring ethical concerns arising from AI-generated religious content;
- *“Engaging with Modern Activism: Empowering Young Muslims Through Creative and Critical Religious Discourse”* by Ustaz Ahmad Ubaidillah, reflecting on the importance of equipping Muslim youth with principled and reflective engagement strategies in the face of contemporary activist currents.

Through these varied publications, RPCS continues to contribute relevant scholarships to the ongoing conversations shaping Muslim thought and life in plural, secular societies.

### VI. ENGAGEMENTS WITH KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS

Throughout the year in 2024, RPCS conducted a number of purposeful engagements with both local and regional institutions, aimed at strengthening relationships with key knowledge partners, sharing institutional developments, and identifying areas of research synergy. In March, RPCS hosted a courtesy visit from the Studies in Interreligious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme at RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, where discussions explored shared interests in interreligious relations, and the role of religion in fostering social cohesion in plural societies. This was followed by a regional visit in July to Malaysia’s International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) and the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM). Both visits allowed RPCS to exchange





perspectives with well-established Islamic think tanks on various topics. The meetings also underscored the value of comparative learning between Muslim-minority and Muslim-majority contexts, and affirmed the potential for future collaboration. RPCS visited PERGAS in October to explore avenues for training, resource sharing, and community engagement. Discussions focused on how RPCS's research capacities could complement PERGAS's efforts in religious leadership development. Last but not least, in December, RPCS hosted a courtesy visit from the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA). The meeting provided an opportunity for both institutions to share updates on ongoing work, discuss overlapping research areas, and exchange information about existing resources. Across all of its engagements in 2024, RPCS and its stakeholders affirmed the value of viewing one another as knowledge partners, working together, despite differing institutional focuses, to address common concerns and needs through research alignment, mutual sharing of priorities, and potential future collaboration.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Looking ahead to 2025, the programme will continue to steadily build its role as the research arm of the Singapore College of Islamic Studies (SCIS), contributing to MUIS's broader efforts to support the development of informed, reflective, and contextually grounded religious leadership and bodies of knowledge. Activities in 2024, across roundtable discussions, the Visiting International Fellowship, the annual Seminar, research workshops, stakeholder engagements, and publications, have provided valuable opportunities for researchers and participants, to deepen their understanding of the lived realities of Muslim communities in secular and plural societies, and to engage critically with evolving discourses in Islamic thought, ethics, and socioreligious life. RPCS has also strengthened its partnerships with local and regional knowledge institutions, positioning itself as an active participant in wider scholarly networks concerned with similar questions of how Muslim communities navigate the complexities of modernity, diversity, and public life. While much work remains, RPCS's efforts in 2024 have certainly laid a stronger foundation for its continued contribution to the development of SCIS, and to broader understandings of Muslim communities of success in today's world.

# COMING UP IN 2025

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND ENGAGEMENTS

As part of its ongoing efforts to deepen intellectual exchange and build strategic partnerships, the Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) will embark on several key initiatives in 2025. These activities aim to further institutional objectives, expand regional and international networks, and strengthen the research ecosystem aligned with RPCS's three thematic pillars: Governance, Society, and Science & Technology.

### REGIONAL STUDY TRIP TO INDONESIA

Following its inaugural study visit to Kuala Lumpur in July 2024, RPCS is planning its second regional study trip to Jakarta and Depok, Indonesia, in Q2 2025. This trip will include participation in the international conference "Decolonising Social Sciences and Humanities: Islamic and Non-Western Perspectives" organised by the Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII). The conference aligns closely with RPCS's Governance pillar and its interest in Muslim geopolitics and exploring diverse and plural knowledge systems. In addition to the conference, the RPCS team will engage in dialogue with leading Indonesian research institutions to explore collaborative opportunities in joint research, academic exchange, and co-organised forums.

### RPCS SYMPOSIUM

RPCS will convene a symposium in 2025 with the aim of reintroducing its aims and agenda to the wider Asatizah fraternity and relevant stakeholders. The event will present the RPCS research agenda, the SCIS-RPCS approach, and showcase key outputs from the first three cycles of the RPCS Fellowship Programme. It will also serve to announce upcoming fellowship opportunities and engage with emerging scholars and researchers in Singapore's Islamic academic landscape.

### RPCS TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

As part of RPCS's training plan to strengthen the research competencies of our research fellows and contribute to the broader development of the SCIS, a series of curated workshops with local and international academics will be conducted on selected themes. These workshops will focus on key areas such as social science research, digital humanities, and the intellectual Islamic heritage in Singapore, aiming to equip participants with relevant methodological tools and interdisciplinary insights to advance their scholarly work.

# COMING UP IN 2025

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

To generate critical discourse and gather expert insights, RPCS will continue to organise a series of roundtable discussions centred around its three research pillars. These sessions will convene scholars, researchers, and practitioners to engage in focused dialogue on emerging themes related to Muslim communities in secular and advanced contexts.

## BOOK CLUB SESSIONS

RPCS will continue its Book Club series as a platform for reflective reading and discussion of key texts relevant to Islamic thought, social sciences, and contemporary issues. These sessions aim to foster a culture of critical engagement among Asatizah, students, and wider community stakeholders.



# HOW TO BE A SMART SOCIAL RESEARCH CONSUMER: WHAT TO NOTE AFTER SURVEY DATA COLLECTION

*Attended by:*

*Sheikh Mohd Farouq, Associate Research Fellow*

*Ustazah Siti Raudhah, Junior Fellow*

*Ustazah Hannani Rehan, Junior Fellow*

*Tuesday, 18 February 2025*

## I. SUMMARY OF EVENT

On 18 February 2025, the RPCS team attended the “How To Be A Smart Social Research Consumer” workshop, organised by RySense Academy. The session focused on what to look out for after survey data collection and introduced procedures and safeguards to ensure survey data reliability and credibility. As researchers, this is essential to ensure the integrity and reliability of research findings. Participants were guided through different stages of post-field survey quality control, specifically telephone validation, dataset checks, and the identification of interviewer misbehavior through audit techniques. Through case-based discussions and frameworks, the workshop demonstrated best practices for detecting errors, assessing data authenticity, and evaluating vendor performance.

## II. TAKEAWAYS AND REFLECTIONS

**1. Data Validation Processes:** The workshop highlighted the importance of validation processes as more than just a checkbox exercise post data collection; it is a crucial follow-up step in maintaining data credibility. We explored different modes of validation, including telephone validation, messaging, live recordings, and onsite validation, and learnt that each method comes with its own trade-offs in terms of reach, cost, resources and depth of data. Telephone validation, for example, is efficient and convenient but can face low response rates and difficulty verifying respondents who choose not to share contact details.

**2. Data Validation Processes:** The workshop highlighted the importance of validation processes as more than just a checkbox exercise post data collection; it is a crucial follow-up step in maintaining data credibility. We explored different modes of validation, including telephone validation, messaging, live recordings, and onsite validation, and learnt that each method comes with its own trade-offs in terms of reach, cost, resources and depth of data. Telephone validation, for example, is efficient and convenient but can face low response rates and difficulty verifying respondents who choose not to share contact details.

**3. Identifying “red flags” in Data:** Rather than simply accepting data at face value, spotting red flags in data is an essential skill for any researcher. We were introduced to audit techniques to detect potential flaws in data. This includes analysing open-ended responses for poor-probing from the interviewer, scanning timestamps and responses for unrealistic patterns, reviewing timestamps or lengths of interviews (LOI), and identifying poorly coded open-ended codes as indicators of rushed or fraudulent data collection. These techniques were especially eye-opening, as they help shift our role as data consumers from passive recipients to active and critical evaluators.

## III. CONCLUSION

As active consumers of research data, we found the workshop both relevant and practical. It provided us with a strong foundation for interpreting, commissioning and managing survey research. It emphasised the idea that good quality data requires not just sound methodology but also active oversight, especially in large-scale public sector projects. Without proper quality control, even the most well-intentioned research can misrepresent the realities of a community, leading to ineffective policy recommendation. This workshop has equipped us with the language, tools, and mindset to be a more discerning and responsible consumer of survey data. Ultimately, ensuring data quality post-survey is not just about producing better research, it is about ensuring the knowledge we produce serves the community in the most meaningful and effective way possible.

# RPCS ENGAGEMENTS

## MEETING WITH AMBAR KHAWAJA

*Monday, 24 February 2025*




The RPCS hosted Ambar Khawaja, a master's student from The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), for a lunch talk to discuss her ongoing research, '(De)centralized Authority in a Centralized State: MUIS and Public Service Delivery in Singapore.' In her research, she examines how a contemporary state balances centralized governance with devolved authority, and its impact on public administration and service delivery. Ambar selected Singapore as her case study due to its unique model where a centralized bureaucracy coexists with devolved religious administration. Specifically, her research focuses on MUIS as a statutory body managing Muslim affairs within Singapore's secular and multi-religious context. Broadly, the study explores three key areas:

- 1. MUIS's governance model within Singapore's centralised framework*
- 2. The impact of devolved authority on public service delivery to the Muslim community*
- 3. The identification of best practices and policy recommendations*

According to Ambar, her initial interactions and readings strongly suggest that MUIS's effective public service delivery stems from two key factors: legal empowerment through AMLA and strong government trust, reflecting the state's positive approach towards religion. Following the lunch talk, Ambar will contribute a commentary to RPCS that will provide further reflections on her fieldwork and broader insights from her dissertation, aligning with the governance research pillar. The session facilitated valuable discussions that are key to advancing the governance pillar by fostering potential areas for future knowledge exchange and collaboration.





## THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS (RPCS)

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is developed as part of Muis' efforts in advancing religious thought leadership for the future. The programme seeks to develop contextualised bodies of knowledge on socio-religious issues that are typical for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focuses on developing new understanding, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges through its research and publications.

The RPCS aims to bring together local scholars and senior practitioners to study current and future issues in the socio-religious life of the Singapore Muslim community. Through RPCS seminars, workshops and roundtable discussions, it serve as platforms to nurture the right intellectual ecology and environment to facilitate the growth and development of its own group of religious leaders, scholars and thinkers who are seen as authentic and credible to guide the local Muslim community.

Aside from conducting research, the RPCS also aims to develop future thought leaders through its fellowship programmes and research training workshops to familiarise with the evolving religious discourse and analysis of issues relevant to the theme of Muslim Communities of Success. Its research agenda encompasses three broad areas:



### GOVERNANCE

Islam, Secularism & Diversity

**Study and develop new understanding on the relationship between religion and secularism, identify models of successful citizenship and contribution, and formulate a robust and credible framework of successful living drawn from Islamic traditions, history and experiences.**



### SOCIETY

Family & Social Cohesion

**Identify ways of supporting and strengthening the family institution and review laws as society evolves so that they remain resilient amidst these challenges, and how religions can be an effective resource in enriching further the common space and common good in any pluralistic society.**



### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Biomedical ethics, new food technologies, digital technologies and ethics, crypto-currencies

**Develop Islamic thought and ethics to provide new guidance on issues such as new food technologies, digital and financial technologies, environmental challenges and others.**

*If you are interested in the topics and discussions covered in our RPCS Roundtable Discussions, do keep a look out on our website and related platforms for upcoming sessions. We look forward to providing a safe space for collaborative learning and the building of new bodies of knowledge on the range of topics covered. Please visit*

**[www.muis.gov.sg/education/RPCS](http://www.muis.gov.sg/education/RPCS).**



RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY  
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