



SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS IN ISLAMIC STUDIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF SHARIA VALUES

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Abstract

This study examines the social and political dimensions of Islam by analyzing the relevance of Sharia values within both historical and contemporary socio-political contexts, with particular attention to Southeast Asia. The research addresses two central questions: how have Islamic principles historically shaped governance, leadership ethics, and civic participation, and in what ways do these principles continue to influence contemporary political systems in Muslim-majority societies. Employing a qualitative, literature-based approach, the study explores key Islamic concepts such as shura (consultation), social justice, and public accountability, tracing their historical foundations while assessing their adaptation within modern democratic and constitutional frameworks. The findings demonstrate that Islam functions not only as a theological system but also as a dynamic socio-political and moral framework that informs ethical governance and civic engagement in the present era. By distinguishing clearly between historical precedents and contemporary applications, this study contributes to the broader literature on Islam and politics by highlighting the adaptive capacity of Sharia values in responding to modern governance challenges, including pluralism, accountability, and social justice.

Keywords: Islam; Politics; Social Justice.

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis keterkaitan antara Islam, sosial, dan politik dalam konteks sejarah dan kontemporer, dengan fokus pada bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam membentuk sistem pemerintahan, etika kepemimpinan, serta partisipasi masyarakat. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi literatur, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penerapan prinsip-prinsip Islam seperti syura (musyawarah), keadilan sosial, dan tanggung jawab publik dalam sistem politik modern, khususnya di kawasan Asia Tenggara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Islam tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sistem teologis, tetapi juga sebagai kekuatan sosial-politik yang mendorong tata kelola yang adil, akuntabel, dan partisipatif. Meskipun tantangan seperti korupsi, radikalisasi, dan ketimpangan sosial masih menjadi hambatan, nilai-nilai Islam tetap relevan dalam mendorong reformasi, memperkuat partisipasi publik, dan membangun pemerintahan yang beretika. Dengan demikian, Islam dapat dipahami sebagai landasan normatif dan moral bagi pembentukan tatanan sosial-politik yang inklusif dan berkeadilan.

Kata Kunci: Islam; Politik; Keadilan Sosial.

INTRODUCTION

The study of social and political dimensions in Islam holds increasing significance in the modern era, particularly amid globalization and rapid societal transformation. Understanding how Islamic teachings interact with social and political structures has become a central issue in both academic and policy discussions. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), the global Muslim population reached approximately 1.8 billion, positioning Islam as one of the largest religions in the world.¹ With such a vast demographic presence, the contribution and influence of Muslim communities on global sociopolitical dynamics cannot be disregarded.

Islam, as a comprehensive system of life, extends beyond spiritual guidance to encompass moral, social, and political directives. Central to this is the principle of justice (*al-'adl*), which underpins not only personal behavior but also collective governance. The Qur'anic injunction in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:8) commands believers to act justly, serving as a moral foundation for social cohesion and political accountability. Within modern societies, this principle has been institutionalized in various forms, influencing governance models, public policy, and community organization across Muslim-majority countries. Thus, examining how Islamic principles of justice and ethical leadership are contextualized in contemporary politics is essential for understanding Islam's relevance to modern governance.

Historically, the interrelation between Islam, society, and politics has shaped the sociopolitical fabric of many regions, particularly in Southeast Asia. In countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, Islam functions as a core value system that informs social norms and political identity. Democratic practices within these nations often reflect Islamic

¹Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050* (Pew Research Center, 2021).

values emphasizing consultation (*shura*), justice, and community participation.² Furthermore, Islamic economic systems, including zakat, waqf, and Islamic banking, have contributed to sustainable development and social equity.³ This dynamic relationship between Islamic ethics, social welfare, and political participation underscores the integrative role of Islam in shaping societal progress.

While global discussions on Islam and politics often focus on the Middle East and North Africa, Southeast Asia represents a distinct and underexplored sociopolitical context. As home to the world's largest Muslim population, the region exhibits unique patterns of interaction between Islamic values, democratic governance, and plural social structures. Unlike regions marked by prolonged conflict or theocratic experiments, Southeast Asian Muslim societies—particularly Indonesia and Malaysia—demonstrate how Islamic principles are negotiated within constitutional frameworks, electoral politics, and multicultural settings. This regional specificity underscores the importance of examining Islam's socio-political role beyond dominant Middle Eastern-centric narratives.

From a historical perspective, the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia was characterized by intricate social and political interactions facilitated through trade, education, and Sufi networks.⁴ These networks not only disseminated religious teachings but also fostered political alliances and cultural exchange, establishing Islam as both a unifying and adaptive force. In contemporary contexts, such interactions manifest in diverse political expressions among Muslim communities—ranging from moderate civic engagement to calls for stricter religious governance.⁵ However, the rise of radicalism and digital religiosity poses new challenges, as online platforms become arenas for ideological dissemination and social mobilization.⁶ These developments highlight the need to analyze how digital transformations are reshaping Islamic social and political discourse.

The theological and jurisprudential dimensions of Islam provide a rich framework for understanding its social and political implications. Sharia, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, regulates both personal and public life, ensuring moral conduct and justice in

²Vitria Susanti et al., "The Role of Democracy in Reinforcing Sustainable Development and SDGs Achievements: Evidence From 3 Muslim Countries in Southeast Asia," *Kne Social Sciences*, ahead of print, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v8i16.14038>.

³Mohammed A. Ledhem, "Does Sukuk Financing Boost Economic Growth? Empirical Evidence From Southeast Asia," *Psu Research Review* 6, no. 3 (2020): 141–57, <https://doi.org/10.1108/prr-09-2020-0028>; Mohammed A. Ledhem and Mohammed Mékidiche, "Islamic Finance and Economic Growth Nexus: An Empirical Evidence From Southeast Asia Using Dynamic Panel One-Step System GMM Analysis," *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 12, no. 8 (2021): 1165–80, <https://doi.org/10.1108/jiabr-03-2021-0107>.

⁴Nurbaiti Nurbaiti, Mundzier Suparta, and Muhammad Azwar, "Islamic Education and Islamization Channels in Malay Peninsula in 7th-8th Centuries AD," *Buletin Al-Turas* 26, no. 2 (2020): 303–16, <https://doi.org/10.15408/bat.v26i2.15989>; Nuraisah Nuraisah et al., "Modern Islamic Civilization in South and Southeast Asia," *International Journal of Educational Narratives* 1, no. 5 (2023): 211–30, <https://doi.org/10.55849/ijen.v1i5.338>.

⁵Martin Sláma and James B. Hoesterey, "Ambivalence, Discontent, and Divides in Southeast Asia's Islamic Digital Realms: An Introduction," *Cyberorient* 15, no. 1 (2021): 5–32, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cyo2.5>.

⁶Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "The Governor, the Cow-Head, and the Thrashing Pillows: Negotiated 'Restrictive Islam' in Early Twenty-First Century Southeast Asia?," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 353, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040353>; Suci E. Maria and Abraham Z. Zulhazmi, "Dynamics of Da'wah in Southeast Asia in the Digital Era," *Qaulan Journal of Islamic Communication* 4, no. 2 (2023): 114–33, <https://doi.org/10.21154/qaulan.v4i2.7266>.

governance. For instance, during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Islamic scholars emphasized compliance with health policies consistent with Sharia principles to safeguard public welfare.⁷ Jurisprudential diversity across Islamic schools, such as the Hanafi and Shafi'i traditions, further illustrates Islam's adaptability to local contexts.⁸ These variations contribute to the evolving landscape of Islamic governance, balancing universal moral principles with region-specific sociopolitical realities.

Another essential dimension involves the interplay between religion and state, social justice, and ethical leadership within Islamic societies. In Indonesia, this relationship has historically oscillated between secularist and integrative models.⁹ Leaders such as Soekarno emphasized secular nationalism, while Abdurrahman Wahid advanced a symbiotic model that harmonized religious and state functions. Ethical leadership in governance and education is deeply influenced by Islamic values promoting justice, accountability, and compassion.¹⁰ These principles reinforce social equity and enhance trust between state institutions and the public, demonstrating how Islamic ethics can strengthen democratic governance and inclusive development.¹¹

While existing studies on Islam and politics have extensively examined issues of governance, democracy, and political ethics—often through either normative theological frameworks or country-specific institutional analyses—there remains a lack of integrative studies that systematically connect historical Islamic principles with their contemporary socio-political applications. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore how Islamic teachings are interpreted and practiced within social and political contexts.

Drawing on qualitative inquiry, which focuses on the meanings individuals construct within their social environments,¹² this study emphasizes the interpretive dimensions of Islamic socio-political thought. By synthesizing insights from historical scholarship and contemporary debates, rather than engaging solely in institutional or legal analysis, this research offers a distinctive contribution to the literature by demonstrating how Sharia values function as a dynamic moral and normative framework shaping ethical governance, social justice, and political participation in the modern world.

⁷Yan Mardian et al., "Sharia (Islamic Law) Perspectives of COVID-19 Vaccines," *Frontiers in Tropical Diseases* 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fitd.2021.788188>.

⁸Suud S. Karimullah and Arif Sugitanata, "The Hanafi School of Islamic Jurisprudence Literature: A Historical Account," *Journal of Islamic History and Manuscript* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.24090/jihm.v2i1.7788>; Siti S. Sulaiman et al., "Teaching Malaysian Islamic Legal System: A Reflection of Current Development in the Shariah Legal Practice," *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (Mjssh)* 7, no. 12 (2022): e001954, <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v7i12.1954>.

⁹Setinawati et al., "The Framework of Religious Moderation: A Socio-Theological Study on the Role of Religion and Culture from Indonesia's Perspective," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 11 (2025): 101271, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101271>.

¹⁰Richa A. Munthe et al., "The Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership, Business Environment, Digital Literacy, and Religiosity on Msme Performance: The Mediating Role of Innovative Behavior in Pekanbaru," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i8.4717>.

¹¹Savran Billahi, "Demokrasi, Islam, Dan Etika Publik: Memahami Politik Kewargaan Di Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 32, no. 1 (2025): 161–74, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v32i1.46244>.

¹²David Seamon and Harneet K. Gill, "Qualitative Approaches to Environment–Behavior Research: Understanding Environmental and Place Experiences, Meanings, and Actions," in *Research Methods for Environmental Psychology*, 1st ed., ed. Robert Gifford (Wiley, 2016), 115–35, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119162124.ch7>.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the interconnection between social and political dimensions within the context of Islam. The qualitative method was chosen because it enables a deep understanding of how Muslim societies interpret and apply Islamic teachings in their sociopolitical life. As Klenke emphasize, qualitative research focuses on the meanings individuals construct through their social interactions, making it well-suited to investigate phenomena that are embedded in cultural, religious, and historical contexts.¹³ Through this approach, the study seeks to capture the dynamic interpretations of Islamic principles and their manifestations in social structures and political practices.

The primary method of data collection used in this research is literature study, which involves reviewing a wide range of scholarly works, including books, journal articles, reports, and official documents. According to Usman et al, a literature review provides the necessary theoretical and historical foundation to comprehend the studied phenomena comprehensively.¹⁴ In this research, the literature study enables the collection of diverse perspectives from prominent scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Amina Wadud, who have made significant contributions to discussions on Islam, gender, and politics. By synthesizing various theoretical viewpoints, the researcher constructs a robust analytical framework that situates Islamic thought within the broader discourse of social and political transformation.

To ensure analytical rigor and relevance, the literature reviewed in this study was selected based on clear inclusion criteria. Sources were drawn primarily from peer-reviewed academic journals, scholarly books, and reputable institutional reports focusing on Islam, social theory, and political studies. Priority was given to works that explicitly address Islamic governance, social justice, civic participation, and Sharia interpretation, with particular attention to studies relevant to Southeast Asia. Both classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary academic debates were included to enable a balanced historical and contextual analysis, while non-academic or polemical sources were excluded to maintain scholarly reliability.

For data analysis, this study adopts thematic and narrative analysis to interpret and organize findings derived from the reviewed literature. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Al-Shuqariat et al, allows the researcher to identify and categorize recurring themes related to Islamic social justice, gender dynamics, governance, and the tension between tradition and modernity.¹⁵ Complementing this, narrative analysis—drawing from Akhtar—examines how individual and collective experiences are articulated through stories and discourses in Islamic sociopolitical contexts.¹⁶ The combination of these two analytical techniques

¹³Karin Klenke, *Qualitative Research in the Study of Leadership* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1108/9781785606502>.

¹⁴Ali Ciskey Usman, Maha Al-Hendawi, and Sefa Bulut, *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Narrative Literature Review*, International Network for the Advancement of Medicine, Psychology, and Public Health, July 24, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.12804998>.

¹⁵Hussein Raja Al-Shuqairat, Abd-Al Razzak Mahmoud Al-Maani, and Mohanad Nayef Aldajah, "Islamic Historiography and Modernity: A Systematic Literature Review on the Evolution of Muslim Societies in the Postcolonial Era," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 15, no. 1 (April 2025): 240–60, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.151.14>.

¹⁶Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, *Deconstructing Narrative Structure: A Literary Analysis of Storytelling Techniques*, 1, no. 1 (2023), <https://saus.com.pk/sjsllp/index.php/sjsllp/article/view/3>.

enables a comprehensive exploration of both the structural patterns and the interpretive meanings underlying Islamic social and political practices, thereby producing insights that are both empirically grounded and conceptually rich.

To enhance methodological rigor, the analysis followed a systematic process of iterative reading and thematic categorization. Key concepts and arguments were first identified across the selected sources and then grouped into recurring themes related to governance, ethical leadership, social justice, and political participation. These themes were continuously compared across diverse scholarly perspectives to ensure consistency and conceptual coherence. Narrative analysis was used to contextualize these themes within broader historical and contemporary discourses, allowing for the identification of convergences and divergences in interpretation. By triangulating insights from multiple scholars and schools of thought, the study mitigates interpretive bias and ensures that the findings reflect a broad spectrum of academic perspectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

A. Islamic Governance and Historical Foundations

Islamic political governance has historically been articulated through the concept of the Caliphate (*khilāfah*), a system in which authority is vested in a caliph who is responsible for implementing Islamic law (*sharī'ah*), safeguarding justice, and protecting the welfare of the Muslim community. Al-Mawardi, in *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah*, frames the caliphate as both a religious and political office tasked with preserving religion and managing worldly affairs in accordance with divine law. This model emerged directly from the leadership structure established by the Prophet Muhammad, and was institutionalized under the Rightly Guided Caliphs, later evolving through various dynastic forms. The historical continuity of this model across more than a millennium indicates that governance in Islam has never been understood as purely spiritual, but as an integrated socio-political project.¹⁷

In contemporary Muslim societies, governance is no longer conducted under a single unified caliphate, yet the normative ideal of just leadership remains an influential reference. Many contemporary Muslim-majority states acknowledge *sharī'ah* as a moral framework while adopting constitutional, parliamentary, or hybrid political systems. Surveys indicate that a majority of Muslims across several regions continue to express support for the application of Islamic legal and ethical principles in governance, while also endorsing procedural elements associated with modern governance such as elections and representative councils. A Pew Research Center report notes that approximately 65% of respondents in Muslim-majority societies favor the incorporation of Islamic law into public governance structures.¹⁸

The case of Turkey illustrates this tension and adaptation. Historically, Turkey was the seat of the Ottoman Caliphate until its formal abolition in the early twentieth century. In its modern form, however, Turkey operates as an electoral democracy that institutionalizes competitive elections, party pluralism, and constitutional governance. This shift demonstrates how Muslim societies can retain Islamic ethical discourse while adopting procedural democratic mechanisms and engaging with global political norms. The Turkish

¹⁷Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah* (n.d.).

¹⁸Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050*.

experience, alongside developments in Southeast Asia, shows that Islamic political thought is not static but negotiates between scriptural ideals and contemporary realities.¹⁹

Table 1. Historical–Normative Features of Islamic Governance vs. Contemporary Practice.

Dimension	Classical Caliphate Model	Contemporary Muslim-Majority States	Implications for Islamic Principles
Source of authority	Divine law (<i>sharī'ah</i>) interpreted by qualified leadership	Constitutional law with selective reference to Islamic norms	Normative authority of <i>sharī'ah</i> is partially institutionalized; in some contexts reduced to symbolic or moral reference
Leader's role	Caliph as guardian of faith and public welfare	President / prime minister accountable to electorate	Positive shift toward accountability, but potential weakening of religious moral oversight
Mechanism of legitimacy	Allegiance (<i>bay'ah</i>) based on moral qualification	Popular elections and parliamentary representation	Democratic legitimacy enhances participation, yet ethical criteria rooted in Islam may become secondary
Stated priority	Protection of religion and justice	Public welfare, development, national stability	Alignment with Islamic objectives (<i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i>), though risk of instrumentalizing religion for political goals
Public expectation	Unity of <i>ummah</i> under single leadership	Plural political institutions within nation-states	Positive accommodation of pluralism, but fragmentation of religious authority

Table 1 illustrates that the transition from classical Islamic governance to contemporary political systems involves both constructive adaptation and normative tension. While democratic mechanisms and constitutional accountability represent positive developments aligned with Islamic ethical goals such as justice and public welfare, the selective and procedural incorporation of *sharī'ah* also risks obscuring its role as a comprehensive moral framework. In some cases, Islamic principles are maintained substantively, while in others they are reduced to symbolic references, reflecting a broader tension between ethical continuity and institutional transformation.²⁰

¹⁹Susanti et al., "The Role of Democracy in Reinforcing Sustainable Development and SDGs Achievements: Evidence From 3 Muslim Countries in Southeast Asia"; Istiqomah Istiqomah et al., "Islam and Politics: A Latent Class Analysis of Indonesian Muslims Based on Political Attitudes and Psychological Determinants," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 10, no. 2 (2022): 501–17, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.7303>.

²⁰Al-Mawardi, *Al-Ahkam as-Sultaniyyah*; Susanti et al., "The Role of Democracy in Reinforcing Sustainable Development and SDGs Achievements: Evidence From 3 Muslim Countries in Southeast Asia."

B. Integration of Islamic Values into Modern Political Systems

The interaction between Islamic political ideals and modern democratic structures produces both convergence and friction. Modern democratic systems emphasize popular sovereignty, protection of civil liberties, separation of powers, and human rights. By contrast, classical formulations of Islamic governance position sovereignty as belonging ultimately to God, with human rulers acting as trustees of divine law. Despite this doctrinal difference, several Muslim-majority countries have developed constitutional mechanisms that incorporate consultative decision-making, electoral legitimacy, and public accountability while maintaining Islamic ethical reference points. This hybridization is visible in Indonesia, where democratic procedures are formally upheld while Islamic values inform public debate and policy formation.²¹

Indonesia provides an especially instructive case. With roughly 87% of its population identifying as Muslim, Islamic moral discourse inevitably informs public expectations of leadership and governance.²² Islamic political parties and civil society organizations seek to influence legislation on issues such as education, social welfare, and morality, yet they operate within a pluralistic constitutional democracy that guarantees religious freedom and political competition. This creates a negotiated space in which Islamic aspiration and democratic pluralism must continually be balanced.

Scholars such as Azyumardi Azra argue that this negotiated model is neither purely secular nor theocratic, but symbiotic: religion and the state interact, challenge, and refine one another within constitutional limits. Such a model aspires to realize social justice, ethical leadership, and public participation without collapsing into authoritarianism justified in religious terms.²³ This is broadly aligned with developments in Southeast Asia more generally, where Islam functions as a normative foundation for social conduct, economic responsibility, and political participation, rather than as a rigid blueprint for an exclusive religious state.²⁴

Table 2. Islamic Values, Majority Dynamics, and Democratic Practice in Indonesia,

Indicator	Observation	Democratic Implications and Normative Tensions
Religious composition	~87% Muslim population	Numerical majority does not constitute a homogeneous Islamic outlook; religious interpretations and political preferences vary significantly
Electoral participation	~81% voter turnout (2019)	High participation reflects democratic engagement, but electoral choices are shaped by diverse socio-political interests rather than unified Islamic norms

²¹Robert W. Hefner, *Islam and Citizenship in Indonesia: Democracy and the Quest for an Inclusive Public Ethics*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032629155>.

²²Badan Pusat Statistik, *Statistik Pemilihan 2019* (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020).

²³Elias Omondi Opongo, "Populist Authoritarianism and Catholic Political Ethics: A Framework for a Moral Review," *Religions* 15, no. 6 (May 2024): 660, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060660>.

²⁴Istiqomah et al., "Islam and Politics: A Latent Class Analysis of Indonesian Muslims Based on Political Attitudes and Psychological Determinants."

Party system	Multiparty democracy including Islamic-oriented parties	Islamic parties compete with secular and nationalist parties, indicating fragmentation of religious-political authority
Policy influence of Islamic actors	Strong in morality, education, and social welfare agendas	Selective incorporation of Islamic values; some Qur'anic and Prophetic principles are institutionalized, others are negotiated or diluted
Constitutional framework	Pancasila and constitutional pluralism	Democratic pluralism limits majoritarian domination, but also constrains the formal implementation of comprehensive Islamic law

Table 2 demonstrates that democratic practice in Indonesia cannot be understood simply as majoritarian dominance based on religious demography. Although Muslims constitute a numerical majority, this majority is internally diverse and encompasses varying interpretations of Islamic teachings, political priorities, and ethical orientations. Democratic processes thus reflect negotiation among multiple value systems, including but not limited to Qur'anic and Prophetic principles. While some Islamic values—such as social justice and public welfare—are accommodated within policy discourse, others undergo reinterpretation or partial displacement due to pluralistic constitutional constraints and competing political interests. This illustrates that the relationship between democracy and Islamic values is characterized by internal diversity and normative tension rather than uniform religious majoritarianism.

C. Participation, Deliberation, and Political Ethics in Islam

A core mechanism linking Islam and democratic practice is the principle of consultation (*shūrā*). The Qur'ān praises those “whose affairs are [decided] by mutual consultation among them” (Qur'an 42:38), suggesting that legitimate authority is not arbitrary but dialogical. *Shūrā* historically operated in early Muslim governance, where leaders such as 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb sought counsel from companions and constituents prior to major decisions. This consultative ethic implies a reciprocal relationship between leaders and the governed, emphasizing moral accountability and public welfare over absolute personal rule.

In contemporary settings, *shūrā* can be observed in participatory governance practices, parliamentary deliberation, and civic engagement. Empirical studies note that societies which institutionalize consultative norms—whether through councils, assemblies, or structured stakeholder dialogue—tend to experience higher public trust and a stronger sense of shared ownership over policy outcomes. For instance, World Values Survey data (2019) indicates that post-uprising Tunisia experienced increased citizen engagement and perceived political efficacy when consultative mechanisms and inclusive dialogue were embedded in governance processes. This aligns with Islamic ethical expectations that rulers act as stewards rather than proprietors of power.

Beyond formal institutions, civic participation in Muslim societies is also expressed through mass mobilization, social movements, and rights-based activism. High levels of electoral participation in Indonesia's 2019 general election, with turnout reported at approximately 81%, reflect not only procedural democracy but also a culturally embedded sense of communal responsibility (KPU, 2019). Yet participation is not without constraint.

Human Rights Watch (2021) documents that in a number of Muslim-majority states, restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association continue to narrow the political space available to citizens, particularly critics of the ruling elite. This suggests that while Islamic ethics endorse moral responsibility and public counsel, the political realization of these ideals remains uneven across contexts.

Table 3. Indicators of Civic Participation and Consultative Governance.

Measure	Example / Value
Scriptural foundation of consultation	Qur'an 42:38 on mutual consultation
Voter turnout (Indonesia, 2019)	~81% participation rate (KPU, 2019)
Public demand for ethical governance	Strong expectation of justice and accountability rooted in Islamic ethics (Quraish Shihab)
Civil society engagement	Islamic organizations and social movements influencing policy debates
Rights constraints (selected states)	Documented limits on speech/assembly affecting opposition actors (Human Rights Watch, 2021)

Table 3 shows that Islamic political ethics, particularly the mandate of *shūrā* and accountability, conceptually support participatory governance. Empirical indicators such as high voter turnout and active Islamic civil society suggest that many Muslim communities internalize political engagement as a moral duty. However, uneven protection of civic freedoms indicates that structural and legal barriers can inhibit the full realization of these values, revealing a gap between normative commitments and institutional practice.

D. Contemporary Sociopolitical Challenges in Muslim Societies

Current sociopolitical challenges in Muslim-majority contexts include radicalization, conflict, forced displacement, and systemic corruption. Extremist movements that claim religious legitimacy have produced extensive human suffering and reputational harm to Islam on the global stage. The Global Terrorism Index reports that groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda have been responsible for large-scale violence and instability in several regions with significant Muslim populations (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021). Prolonged conflicts, such as in Syria, have resulted in mass displacement; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recorded millions of refugees and internally displaced persons as a direct consequence of ongoing violence.

Corruption and abuse of power constitute an equally pressing internal challenge. Transparency International consistently ranks a number of Muslim-majority countries in lower tiers of the Corruption Perceptions Index, indicating persistent deficits in integrity, transparency, and institutional accountability (Transparency International, 2020). High-profile scandals—such as large-scale embezzlement of state-linked funds—undermine public trust, weaken service delivery, and erode the moral authority of political leadership. These structural weaknesses can, in turn, fuel disillusionment and create openings for extremist narratives that portray existing governments as illegitimate or irredeemably corrupt.

Despite these challenges, there are also documented efforts toward reform, deradicalization, and ethical governance. RAND Corporation (2020) highlights that community-based countering violent extremism (CVE) programs—those that combine

education, rehabilitation, and reintegration—tend to perform better than purely repressive security responses. Likewise, anti-corruption initiatives that rest on transparency, civic oversight, and public participation are associated with better developmental outcomes and higher institutional credibility. The World Bank has linked governance reforms, fiscal accountability, and inclusive economic policy to improved perceptions of legitimacy and reduced corruption risk (World Bank, 2021). These findings suggest that solutions to contemporary crises are most effective when moral principles from Islamic ethics—justice, accountability, protection of the vulnerable—are embedded in institutional practice.

Table 4. Key Contemporary Challenges, Reform Responses, and the Role of Islamic Economic Instruments.

Challenge	Documented Impact / Indicator	Reform Direction / Response
Violent extremism	Thousands of deaths; regional destabilization (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021)	Community-based deradicalization, education, and social reintegration programs
Armed conflict and displacement	Millions displaced in protracted conflicts (UNHCR, n.d.)	Humanitarian protection, reconstruction, and inclusive social welfare policies
Corruption and state capture	Low CPI scores in several Muslim-majority states (Transparency International, 2020)	Legal enforcement, fiscal transparency, public accountability mechanisms
Constraints on civic freedom	Restrictions on speech and assembly (Human Rights Watch, 2021)	Legal reforms protecting participation and institutional checks on power

In addition to political and security-related challenges, economic inequality remains a structural issue affecting social stability in many Muslim societies. Islamic economic principles offer normative and practical instruments to address these challenges, particularly through mechanisms such as zakat, waqf, and Islamic financial systems. When institutionalized effectively, these instruments function not merely as charitable practices but as redistributive mechanisms aligned with the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, namely the protection of wealth, dignity, and social welfare. The inclusion of Islamic economic instruments within reform agendas demonstrates that Islamic values can contribute substantively to contemporary governance challenges beyond the political sphere.

Collectively, these findings respond directly to the research questions by demonstrating how Islamic principles have historically informed governance structures while continuing to shape contemporary political practices through adaptive and hybrid models. The illustrative cases of Turkey and Southeast Asia do not function as exhaustive empirical studies, but as analytically grounded examples that highlight broader patterns identified in the literature regarding the negotiation between Islamic ethics, democratic procedures, and modern state institutions.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Islam functions simultaneously as a religious doctrine, a moral framework for society, and a political reference that informs expectations of leadership, justice, and welfare. In Southeast Asia in particular, Islamic norms have

historically interacted with trade, education, and Sufi networks to shape local political cultures, embedding Islam not as an imposed legal code but as a lived social ethic.²⁵ In contemporary Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, this moral foundation translates into expectations that governance should be ethical, socially responsible, and accountable to the community. Thus, Islam's sociopolitical role cannot be reduced to theological symbolism; it actively structures how communities perceive legitimate authority, fairness, and belonging.

The principle of consultation (*shūrā*) and the obligation of leaders to pursue justice show substantial conceptual overlap with democratic norms such as deliberation, transparency, and accountability.²⁶ The high levels of electoral participation and civic engagement in certain Muslim-majority democracies suggest that many Muslims regard political participation not merely as a civil right but as an ethical duty tied to communal welfare.²⁷ At the same time, persistent constraints on free expression and public assembly in other contexts demonstrate that the ethical aspirations of Islamic political thought are not always matched by institutional practice. This tension underscores that the compatibility of Islam and democracy is not solely a doctrinal question but also a question of political opportunity structures and state capacity.

Despite the areas of convergence between Islamic ethical principles and democratic norms, significant tensions and unresolved challenges remain in their practical alignment. Concepts such as popular sovereignty, individual rights, and legal equality—central to liberal democratic theory—do not always align seamlessly with classical interpretations of Islamic authority that emphasize divine sovereignty and moral regulation of public life. In institutional practice, this tension is evident when democratic majoritarianism is used to justify policies that marginalize minority rights, or when religious legitimacy is selectively invoked to reinforce political authority without corresponding mechanisms of accountability. Moreover, the translation of Islamic ethical ideals—such as justice (*ʿadl*), consultation (*shūrā*), and public welfare—into formal institutions often encounters structural obstacles, including weak rule of law, politicization of religion, and entrenched patronage networks. These limitations suggest that the compatibility between Islamic values and democratic governance is contingent not only on normative interpretation but also on institutional capacity and political context.

Another key insight concerns the evolving jurisprudential landscape. Islamic law is neither monolithic nor historically frozen. Contemporary jurists and scholars reinterpret *sharīʿah* through mechanisms such as *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) to address modern realities including public health crises, women's leadership, and economic justice.²⁸ The

²⁵Nurbaiti, Suparta, and Azwar, "Islamic Education and Islamization Channels in Malay Peninsula in 7th-8th Centuries AD"; Nuraisah et al., "Modern Islamic Civilization in South and Southeast Asia."

²⁶Susanti et al., "The Role of Democracy in Reinforcing Sustainable Development and SDGs Achievements: Evidence From 3 Muslim Countries in Southeast Asia"; Istiqomah et al., "Islam and Politics: A Latent Class Analysis of Indonesian Muslims Based on Political Attitudes and Psychological Determinants."

²⁷M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* (n.d.).

²⁸Mardian et al., "Sharia (Islamic Law) Perspectives of COVID-19 Vaccines"; Masoumeh R. Goudarzi, "Advancing Women's Social and Political Rights Through a Reinterpretation of Islamic Law: Ayatollah Jannaati's View of Female Political Authority in Shiite Islam," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12351>; Mochamad Nurcholis and Iffatin Nur, "Women Leaders in the Perspective of Indonesian Regulations and Progressive Fiqh," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 5, no. 11 (2023): 35–47, <https://doi.org/10.32996/jhsss.2023.5.11.5>.

coexistence of civil and Islamic legal systems in places like Malaysia illustrates how *sharī'ah* can operate alongside constitutional structures to address both individual rights and collective welfare.²⁹ This adaptive capacity challenges the reductionist narrative that Islamic governance is inherently inflexible or incompatible with modern statecraft.

At the same time, the results highlight areas of acute strain. Radicalization, protracted conflict, and mass displacement continue to destabilize communities, providing justification for securitized governance and, in some cases, enabling authoritarian consolidation. Corruption further degrades institutional legitimacy and weakens public trust, which can create fertile ground for extremist recruitment narratives that portray existing governments as morally bankrupt. These conditions illustrate that sociopolitical crises in Muslim societies are not driven solely by religious ideology; they are also the product of socioeconomic inequality, governance failure, and contested legitimacy.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that Islamic ethical resources are being mobilized toward constructive reform. Efforts to frame social justice, gender equity, anti-corruption, and participatory governance as Islamic imperatives—not merely liberal or Western imports—are reshaping public discourse in parts of the Muslim world.³⁰ CVE strategies that engage communities rather than rely exclusively on repression, anti-corruption campaigns that invoke moral accountability, and rights-based activism that draws on Islamic teachings all point to an emerging paradigm: Islam as a driver of civic resilience and institutional reform. In this sense, the relationship between Islam, society, and politics should be understood as dynamic and dialectical—characterized by contestation, adaptation, and continuing negotiation—rather than as a fixed binary between “religion” and “modernity.” Acknowledging these limitations does not negate the ethical potential of Islamic values in public life; rather, it highlights the complexity of translating moral ideals into sustainable institutional arrangements within diverse and plural political environments.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islam operates not only as a theological system but also as an ethical, social, and political framework that actively shapes governance, public participation, and demands for justice in contemporary Muslim societies. Historical Islamic concepts such as the caliphate, *shūrā* (consultation), and the moral duty of leadership continue to influence expectations of legitimacy, accountability, and welfare. In contexts such as Indonesia and Southeast Asia more broadly, Islamic values have been integrated into democratic processes, civic participation, social finance, and ethical leadership without necessitating a theocratic state. This shows that Islamic political thought is adaptable: it can coexist with constitutional governance, pluralism, and modern state institutions while maintaining its normative emphasis on justice, social responsibility, and communal well-being.

At the same time, the study also highlights persistent structural challenges that complicate the realization of these ideals. Issues such as corruption, radicalization, suppression of civic freedoms, and protracted conflict undermine both public trust and institutional stability in a number of Muslim-majority societies. These pressures reveal that

²⁹Sulaiman et al., “Teaching Malaysian Islamic Legal System: A Reflection of Current Development in the Shariah Legal Practice.”

³⁰Munthe et al., “The Impact of Entrepreneurial Leadership, Business Environment, Digital Literacy, and Religiosity on Msm Performance: The Mediating Role of Innovative Behavior in Pekanbaru”; Billahi, “Demokrasi, Islam, dan Etika Publik: Memahami Politik Kewargaan di Indonesia.”

the tension between Islamic political ethics and political reality is not primarily doctrinal, but often rooted in unequal power structures, governance failures, and socioeconomic instability. However, emerging reform efforts—such as community-based deradicalization initiatives, anti-corruption campaigns grounded in moral accountability, and the framing of gender equity and social justice as Islamic imperatives—indicate that Islamic values are also being mobilized as a force for resilience and constructive transformation. In this sense, Islam remains a living socio-political resource that can guide ethical governance and contribute to more just, participatory, and humane public life. Future studies are encouraged to pursue comparative research across Muslim-majority societies and to examine more closely the institutional mechanisms through which Islamic ethical principles are operationalized in governance and reform processes.

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