

## Islamic Political Thought and The Crisis of Global Governance: Towards a Non-Western Theory of Order

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### Abstract

Contemporary global politics is increasingly marked by rising geopolitical tensions, fragile institutions, deepening inequality, and declining trust in international systems. Traditional Western models of governance, rooted in sovereignty and liberal internationalism, often fall short in responding to these challenges. This paper rethinks the global order through Islamic political thought, offering insights toward a more inclusive and resilient future. Islamic concepts provide distinctive perspectives on order, justice, and collective responsibility that move beyond the nation-state. Tawhid emphasizes the unity of God and the interconnectedness of creation, grounding universal ethics and accountability. Khilafah/Istikhlaf frames humanity as stewards entrusted with protecting the earth and safeguarding future generations. Maslaha (public interest) and Maqasid al-Shari'ah (higher objectives of Islamic law) operate as flexible tools to promote welfare. Shura (consultative governance) strengthens dialogue and legitimacy across borders, while the Ummah (moral community) inspires transnational solidarity. At the heart of these principles, Adl (justice) remains the foundation of any fair and legitimate system. This study employs a qualitative approach based on secondary literature, drawing from classical texts and contemporary scholarship. Findings reveal that Islamic ideas reframe sovereignty as responsibility, root legitimacy in justice, and offer ethical tools to address structural weaknesses in global governance. Far from advocating theocracy, the paper highlights Islamic thought as a resource for building a pluralistic global order and strengthening dialogue across civilizations.

Keywords: Islamic Political Thought, Global Governance, Justice (Adl), Transnational Solidarity

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### INTRODUCTION

Today's world feels increasingly unstable. Global organizations are struggling to handle major challenges such as ongoing wars, the mass displacement of people, and humanitarian crises involving starvation and even genocide. From the long-running conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe to new atrocities in parts of Africa and Asia, the scale of human suffering is staggering. These realities raise urgent questions about whether the current international system has the moral standing or the capability to respond effectively. The post-World War II liberal order was once praised for creating stability and encouraging cooperation among nations. But as multiple crises grow more complex and interconnected, many now wonder if this system is still able to meet the demands of our time or whether it is failing the very people it was meant to protect.

Postcolonial IR theorists such as Amitav Acharya and B. Sriram argue that Western frameworks in IR often marginalize non-Western intellectual traditions, underscoring the need to decolonize the field (Acharya, 2014; Sriram, 2013). This paper focuses on one such sidelined tradition: Islamic political thought. Concepts such as Shura (mutual consultation), Ummah (a global moral community), Adl (justice), and Khilafah (human stewardship) developed in classical Islamic

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scholarship and discussed by contemporary scholars like Wael Hallaq and Khaled Abou El Fadl offer distinct perspectives on governance and authority (Hallaq, 2009; Abou El Fadl, 2004). Far from relics of the past, these ideas continue to inform how many Muslims globally conceive of leadership and legitimacy.

Importantly, this is not a call to establish a religious or theocratic system. Instead, it is an appeal for intellectual openness and a recognition of the ethical and political insights that Islamic thought can contribute to contemporary global governance debates. Adopting a qualitative, conceptual approach grounded in both classical texts and current scholarship, this paper argues that engaging critically and respectfully with Islamic political philosophy can expand IR's analytical horizons. Following the arguments of scholars such as S. Sayyid and Amina Wadud, this engagement encourages moving beyond familiar paradigms to build a more inclusive and morally grounded vision of world order (Sayyid, 2002; Wadud, 2006). The paper begins with a review of the existing literature on global governance and its limitations, then explores how Islamic political concepts address today's global challenges. Finally, it reflects on the potential of a pluralistic and ethical approach to international order in practice. The objective of this paper is to examine how Islamic political thought can contribute to reimagining global governance by offering ethical and inclusive alternatives to Western-centric theories.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The study is within the wider scholarly debates on Islamic political thought, modern governance, and the evolving global order. It draws from both classical and contemporary sources to explore how Islamic principles interact with, challenge, and potentially enhance prevailing Western-centric models. The works reviewed cover philosophical critiques, ethical foundations, adaptable legal concepts, and decolonial approaches, creating a conceptual base for understanding the structural and moral challenges in global governance.

### **Islamic Political Philosophy and the Modern State**

The link between Islamic political thought and the modern state has been a subject of deep discussion among scholars. Wael B. Hallaq (2013) points out that the principles of today's state systems often clash with Islamic ethical traditions. In the past, Islamic governance strongly emphasized moral responsibility and leaders being accountable to the people, values that modern politics sometimes neglects. Back in 1925, Ali Abdel Razek stirred debate by arguing that Islam does not require a single, fixed political model like the caliphate. This opened the door for the idea that Muslim societies could embrace secular governance while staying true to moral teachings. Meanwhile, Talal Asad (2003) questions the idea of secularism as an unbiased or universal system, suggesting that it is shaped by Western historical and cultural contexts. His work encourages us to rethink how religion and power interact, especially beyond Eurocentric political frameworks.

### **Ethics, Justice, and Political Authority**

In Islamic thought, ruling is not just about laws and procedures; it's about upholding deep moral values. Two key ideas are Tawhid (belief in the oneness of God) and Adl (justice), which demand that leaders put fairness at the heart of their decisions. S. Parvez Manzoor, in *The Crisis of Muslim History* (1987), argues that real governance in Islam must be justice-

driven, with justice serving as the foundation of legitimate authority. Rashid Rida, in *Al-Khilafah aw al-Imamah al-'Uzma* (1922), envisioned a system that preserves unity, incorporates community consultation (*shura*), and protects justice while adapting to the modern world. Noah Feldman, in *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (2008), observes that Islamic law historically made rulers more accountable than many governments today. Collectively, these scholars present political leadership as a trust (*amanah*) from both the people and God, requiring rulers to govern with fairness, honesty, and responsibility.

### **Islamic Legal Frameworks for Inclusive Governance**

Islamic legal ideas can be flexible and work well in today's world. Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2008) explains how concepts like Shura (consultation), Maslaha (public welfare), and Maqasid al-Shari'ah (the goals of Islamic law) can be used as living, adaptable tools to make governance fair, ethical, and inclusive. Andrew F. March (2009) links the traditional Islamic focus on moral accountability with modern political thought, showing that these values fit well in diverse societies, without demanding a religious state. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll (2001) point out that Islamic history already values practices like consultation and community involvement, which align closely with democratic ideas. These scholars show that Islamic legal principles can guide political systems that are participatory, transparent, and morally grounded, while still meeting the needs of the modern era.

### **Decolonizing International Relations and Global Governance**

Many scholars have questioned why global governance is so heavily shaped by Western ideas. Hamid Dabashi (2011) calls for "intellectual decolonization," meaning we should take Islamic and other non-Western traditions seriously when thinking about politics. Amitav Acharya (2014) and B. Sriram (2013) stress that International Relations should include perspectives from across the world, not just the West. S. Sayyid (2002) and Amina Wadud (2006) promote openness and diversity, showing how Islamic political thought can help widen global debates. Interestingly, these views share some ground with realist thinkers like John J. Mearsheimer (2001) and Hedley Bull (1977), who say that the current liberal world order often fails, especially in dealing with problems in the Global South.

Taken together, these writers suggest that Islamic political philosophy provides strong moral, legal, and philosophical tools that could fix weaknesses in today's global governance. Their work challenges Western dominance in political theory and calls for a fairer, more inclusive, and more diverse world order.

### **In light of the literature, this study poses some important questions.**

1. How does Islamic political thought point out the flaws and limits, both ethical and structural, of today's nation-states and the liberal global system?
2. How could key values like Tawhid (oneness of God), Adl (justice), and Khilafah (moral stewardship) offer different ways of understanding sovereignty, legitimacy, and fairness in world politics?

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3. In what ways might Islamic legal ideas such as *Shura* (consultation), *Maslaha* (public interest), and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) be applied to solve today's global problems without creating a theocratic state?
  4. How can Islamic political philosophy help "decolonize" International Relations theory, adding voices and perspectives that would make global governance more open, fair, and inclusive?

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach grounded in secondary data analysis. The study draws primarily on scholarly literature, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and critical essays related to Islamic political theory, governance, and the modern state. The purpose was to explore how key Islamic concepts such as ethics, justice, consultation (*shura*), and public welfare (*maslaha*) have been interpreted and debated in both classical and contemporary contexts. Rather than generating new empirical data, this study synthesizes existing thought from prominent scholars such as Wael B. Hallaq, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, Talal Asad, and others. These sources were selected for their intellectual depth and relevance to the evolving relationship between Islamic values and modern governance frameworks.

The literature was carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes, conceptual frameworks, and philosophical tensions, particularly how Islamic principles might support or challenge the structures of the modern nation-state. Comparative analysis was used to highlight points of convergence and divergence among various authors, especially across historical and ideological lines. Given the nature of the topic, the methodology also includes a critical and interpretive lens. This allows for deeper engagement with texts that do not merely describe political systems but question their moral and spiritual foundations. Sources were gathered using academic databases, digital libraries, and university repositories, ensuring credibility and scholarly rigor. By relying solely on secondary data, the research remains theoretical and reflective, aiming to contribute to broader conversations on how Islamic political thought can inform ethical governance in the contemporary world.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In today's world, where many people are losing trust in traditional systems of government, Islamic political thought offers ideas that are both deeply moral and carefully structured. While it doesn't give a ready-made plan for running the world, it does provide a new way to question common assumptions about power, fairness, and political authority. This discussion addresses four core questions: how Islamic political philosophy critiques the structural and ethical limits of modern governance; how principles such as *Tawhid*, *Adl*, and *Khilafah* reshape sovereignty and legitimacy; how *Shura*, *Maslaha*, and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* can be applied without necessitating a theocracy; and how Islamic thought contributes to decolonizing International Relations (IR) theory.

### **Shura**

*Shura* is an Islamic concept that centers on the idea of mutual consultation, genuine moral responsibility, and group decision-making. It first took shape in how Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community handled political and social matters. But *Shura*

isn't just a thing of the past; it still matters for how we can govern today. As Mohammad Hashim Kamali explains, Shura goes far beyond just following rules or ticking off formal steps in a process. It's really about building a culture where leaders are ethically engaged with those they serve, making participation real and keeping leaders accountable for their actions. Rather than concentrating power in the hands of a few or making participation just for show, Shura demands that leaders have a real moral obligation to listen to the community, carefully consider their needs, and then respond honestly and effectively.

This principle brings a unique perspective to the global level as well. Imagine if international organizations and governments worldwide used Shura as a guiding value, which would shift them away from cutthroat competition and power struggles, and toward fair, open conversation and joint decision-making. According to Esposito and Voll, Shura can help reshape international politics so that legitimacy comes not just from authority, but from actually caring about inclusion and the well-being of everyone involved. Shura offers something increasingly rare in politics today: a principle that blends ethical responsibility with true community involvement. It encourages leaders from local officials to global diplomats to approach their roles with sincerity, humility, and a sense of shared purpose. When applied in modern settings, it promises more authentic participation, stronger accountability, and a style of governance driven by moral values rather than just procedures or power.

### **Khilafah**

Khilafah is often wrongly portrayed as a strict or authoritarian political system. In reality, it is far better understood as a moral and spiritual duty given by God to all human beings. In the Qur'anic vision, people are described as khulafa stewards or caretakers entrusted with protecting the Earth and ensuring that justice, fairness, and compassion guide human actions (Hallaq, 2013). This is very different from the way modern sovereignty is usually defined, where the focus is on power, control, or defending borders. In the Islamic understanding, leadership under Khilafah is not about domination or personal gain; it is a trust (amanah). This means that power should be exercised with humility, selflessness, and a deep sense of responsibility to God and the people. Leaders are accountable not only for their decisions but also for how those decisions impact the well-being of the community and the environment.

When applied to today's world and global governance, the idea of Khilafah pushes leaders to think beyond their national interests. It encourages them to act according to values that serve all humanity, not just a select group. As S. Parvez Manzoor (1990) points out, true legitimacy in leadership should come from moral excellence, public welfare, and ethical responsibility. This challenges the common international practice of pursuing dominance or strategic advantage; instead, it promotes stewardship, caring for people and the planet with sincerity and fairness. Khilafah calls for a shift from politics driven by competition and control toward governance rooted in moral purpose, service, and accountability. It offers a vision where authority is not a privilege but a sacred duty, where justice is the measure of success, and where leaders are guided by values that unite rather than divide humanity.

### **Ummah**

The concept of Ummah in Islamic tradition refers to a global community of believers, united not by geography or nationality, but by shared ethical and spiritual values. Unlike the standard nation-state model, which often ties identity to borders and citizenship, the Ummah positions collective identity around principles of justice, compassion, and human dignity

(Esposito & Voll, 2001). In a world where nationalism and power struggles frequently divide people, the Ummah offers a different vision. It invites individuals and communities to be bound together by respect and concern for one another, regardless of where they are from. Historically, this idea has shown great strength. Scholars like Rashid Rida (1997) noted how the Ummah was once a powerful force that united Muslims across regions, and he believed it could be revived today to inspire ethical cooperation and collective purpose, not just strategic alliances or political deals. The focus is on building community through shared responsibility, support, and moral action.

Viewed from a decolonial lens, Ummah challenges the common Western assumption that political identity and authority must be tied to the framework of nation-states born out of the Westphalian model. Instead, it promotes a transnational sense of belonging—where people are connected by ethics, empathy, and a sense of global stewardship rather than just legal boundaries. This approach shifts the conversation about global governance; instead of being limited by government borders, it asks us to think about creating a world order based on values and caring relationships. The idea of Ummah encourages us to imagine a more compassionate and inclusive way of living together, making room for unity built on moral values rather than just laws and borders. It suggests that a better kind of global cooperation is possible, one shaped by dignity, justice, and a true sense of community.

### **Adl**

In Islamic political thought, Adl or justice is much more than simply following legal rules. It represents a complete moral vision that shapes how societies should be governed, how leaders should act, and how communities should be built. Justice, in this view, is not just about fairness in courts; it is about ensuring dignity for every person and safeguarding the rights of those who are most vulnerable. As scholars like Wael Hallaq (2013) and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2008) explain, the legitimacy of any authority depends on its commitment to protecting people, promoting fairness, and upholding human dignity. This understanding of Adl challenges approaches to governance that focus only on ticking procedural boxes or meeting technical requirements. It argues that real justice must go beyond formal processes; leaders should be judged by the substance of their actions, not just by whether they follow official procedures. A system can be legal yet deeply unjust if it fails to protect the weak, reduce inequality, or treat all people with respect.

On a global level, the principle of Adl provides a framework for rethinking how international institutions operate. It asks us to measure organizations like the United Nations or the International Monetary Fund not only by how efficient or organized they are, but by whether they act with moral credibility. For example, do these institutions genuinely work for the benefit of all countries, or do they mainly serve the interests of a few powerful states? By applying Adl to international relations, Islamic thought offers a lens that places ethical responsibility at the heart of global governance. It pushes for a world order where fairness, compassion, and accountability matter just as much, if not more than, technical performance or political strength.

### ***Maqasid al-Shari'ah and Maslaha***

Maqasid al-Shari'ah (the higher objectives of Islamic law) and Maslaha (public interest) provide governance models that are both morally grounded and adaptable to changing needs. These principles offer a way of making laws and policies that are guided by ethics while remaining flexible enough to address new challenges. As Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2008) explains, the Maqasid focus on five universal aims: protecting life, nurturing intellect,

safeguarding faith, preserving property, and strengthening family. These are values that apply to all people, regardless of culture or religion, making them a solid moral foundation for policymaking.

Andrew F. March (2009) points out that these principles are especially valuable in situations where there is no direct historical or legal precedent. Their adaptability allows leaders to respond to modern problems without being trapped in overly rigid interpretations of the law. Maslaha ensures that decisions serve the greater good, while Maqasid provides the ethical vision to guide those decisions. In terms of global governance, these concepts can inspire a people-focused approach, one that looks beyond narrow national interests to consider the well-being of humanity as a whole. For example, tackling climate change, reducing inequality, addressing mass displacement, or protecting human rights would all fall under their moral scope. Instead of pursuing short-term political gains, leaders would be guided by long-term ethical responsibilities.

Importantly, Maqasid and Maslaha do not demand abandoning pluralism or diversity of thought. They encourage cooperation across cultures and legal systems while resisting rigid legalism that ignores changing needs. By combining universal moral objectives with public interest, they offer a framework for governance that is principled, inclusive, and able to meet the complex challenges of our interconnected world.

### **Critique of Global Governance**

The global governance system faces not just practical problems but also a deeper crisis of moral legitimacy. Scholars like Thomas Weiss (2016) and David Held and Kevin Young (2013) point out that major institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) often feel out of touch with the very communities they are supposed to serve. Power and decision-making tend to be concentrated in the hands of a few powerful countries, creating a clear imbalance. This concentration undermines the core ideas of equality and shared leadership (multilateralism) that these institutions claim to uphold. As a result, many people question whether these bodies truly represent a fair and inclusive global order.

Islamic political thought offers a meaningful alternative perspective on these challenges by focusing on different foundations for legitimacy. Instead of seeing power as control or dominance, it grounds legitimacy in concepts like justice (Adl), stewardship (Khilafah), and consultation (Shura). These principles emphasize leadership as a moral trust; leaders are responsible to the people and to ethical values rather than merely to maintain authority or pursue narrow interests. This viewpoint critiques not only the negative outcomes of the current global system but also its basic assumptions. Where the liberal international order often assumes that global politics is about competition among sovereign states seeking power, Islamic thought reframes it as a responsibility to serve the common good with fairness and accountability. It calls for global governance that listens to all voices, especially those marginalized or overlooked, and that operates through genuine consultation rather than top-down decisions.

By emphasizing justice and shared moral responsibility, Islamic political philosophy presents an alternative model where legitimacy is earned through ethical action and care for society, rather than through dominance or self-interest. This approach encourages a more balanced and inclusive global order, one where institutions truly serve humanity and international cooperation is based on respect, dignity, and collective well-being. In doing so, it challenges both the practical inefficiencies and the moral shortcomings of today's global

governance. This vision offers hope for a system that goes beyond existing power hierarchies to build a more just, responsible, and participatory form of global leadership.

### **Decolonizing International Relations**

Islamic political thought plays an important role in challenging the dominance of Western ideas in International Relations (IR) theory. Scholars like Hamid Dabashi (2011), Amitav Acharya (2014), and S. Sayyid (2002) argue that including Islamic perspectives is part of a broader effort called epistemic pluralism, opening up global governance theory to many different traditions beyond just the West. This helps break the idea that only Western liberalism can explain what makes a political order legitimate or how sovereignty and governance should work.

Key Islamic ideas like Tawhid (the unity of God), Ummah (the global community of believers), Shura (consultation and collective decision-making), and Adl (justice) offer deeply rooted alternatives to Western concepts. Instead of focusing on power and control, these principles emphasize moral responsibility, community, fairness, and shared leadership. By bringing these ideas into IR, Islamic political thought doesn't just present another way of looking at the world; it actively challenges and reshapes the knowledge systems that have historically been dominated by Western perspectives. This intervention is more than just showing there are different opinions; it is about questioning who gets to define what counts as real knowledge and legitimate politics. Islamic thought asks us to reconsider assumptions about sovereignty and governance that often ignore other ways of thinking about authority and justice. In doing so, it pushes for a global political theory that is a more inclusive one that respects the values and voices of diverse cultures and traditions.

Ultimately, Islamic political philosophy helps tear down the intellectual monopoly of Western models in IR and global governance. It opens up space for a more just and pluralistic global order where different ethical and political ideas coexist and contribute to shaping international rules and institutions. This makes international politics fairer and more representative of the world's true diversity. Rather than being seen as just an alternative, Islamic thought is a vital part of making global knowledge and power more balanced and inclusive for everyone.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has examined how Islamic political thought can contribute to reimagining global governance in a period marked by ethical deficits and structural imbalance. Drawing from the review of literature and discussion, it has been shown that principles such as *Adl* (justice), *Shura* (consultative governance), *Khilafah* (stewardship), *Ummah* (moral community), and adaptable frameworks like *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and *Maslaha* (public interest) provide a moral vocabulary that addresses gaps in the liberal international order. These concepts reframe core political values. *Khilafah* shifts sovereignty from control to stewardship; *Adl* links legitimacy to fairness; *Shura* calls for genuine consultation and accountability; *Ummah* envisions solidarity beyond borders; *Maqasid* and *Maslaha* offer flexibility in meeting public needs. Together, they provide ethical and practical insights without prescribing a theocratic model, answering the study's guiding questions on critique, alternative values, adaptable governance tools, and contributions to decolonizing International Relations theory.

The findings emphasize epistemic pluralism, the need for multiple intellectual traditions to inform global governance. In a field dominated by Western frameworks, Islamic political thought should be engaged as a living, evolving body of ideas, not reduced to historical nostalgia or cultural



tokenism. This engagement supports intellectual decolonization, broadening theoretical space to include non-Western contributions that challenge and enrich the existing order. While this research has been primarily conceptual, future work should test these principles in practice, through historical analysis, contemporary case studies, and comparisons with other traditions such as Confucianism, African communalism, and liberation theology. Moreover, translating values like *Shura* and *Adl* into participatory global decision-making models or justice-centered climate policies could bridge the gap between theory and institutional reform.

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