



Book Review: An Islamic Perspective on Governance

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Governance has become a central concept in contemporary discourse regarding economic development, political stability, and social welfare. This concept encompasses various dimensions, ranging from corporate governance and economic governance to public governance, which involves mechanisms where political and administrative authorities are used to manage a country's resources. This article presents a synthesis of the book *An Islamic Perspective on Governance* written by Zafar Iqbal and Mervyn K. Lewis. This book fills a gap in the literature by presenting a systematic analysis of governance issues from an Islamic economic perspective, a viewpoint often overlooked in Western discourse. The authors explore classical and contemporary Islamic sources to build a governance framework, which is then compared with Western perspectives. The focus of the study includes theories of justice, taxation, budget deficits, accountability, and corruption. This article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic principles can be applied in modern governance, while simultaneously offering a critique of conventional approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

Governance has become a key concept in the analysis of economic and political issues, especially in developing countries. However, discussions regarding governance are often dominated by Western perspectives, ignoring the contributions of Islamic thought. The book *An Islamic Perspective on Governance* arrives to address this gap by offering an in-depth analysis of governance from an Islamic point of view. The authors explore how Islamic principles can be applied in public, economic, and corporate governance, and compare them with conventional approaches.

Governance has become a central concept in contemporary discourse regarding economic development, political stability, and social welfare. This concept encompasses various dimensions, ranging from corporate governance and economic governance to public governance, which involves mechanisms where political and administrative authorities are used to manage a country's resources. In the context of developing countries, achieving *good governance* is often considered a crucial prerequisite for sustainable growth, poverty alleviation, and social stability.

However, the dominant discourse on governance to date has been heavily colored by Western perspectives and theoretical frameworks, rooted in liberal, secular, and positivist traditions. International institutions such as the World Bank and the OECD have promoted governance models that emphasize transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and market efficiency. While the importance of these values is universally recognized, the "one size fits all" approach often overlooks the historical, cultural, and normative contexts underlying societies outside the Western tradition.

In Islam, governance (al-ḥukm / al-siyāsah al-shar'īyah) is viewed as a trust (amānah) bestowed by Allah, aimed at ensuring justice ('adl), public welfare (maṣlaḥah), and moral accountability. Authority is not absolute; it is bounded by Shariah principles and ethical responsibility (Rusydia & Firmansyah, 2017). Islamic governance is grounded in the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, which affirms that ultimate sovereignty belongs to Allah alone. Human authority is therefore **delegated and accountable**, preventing absolutism and legitimizing resistance to tyranny (Chapra, 2000; Auda, 2008). Islamic governance integrates moral and economic objectives by prohibiting exploitation (*ribā*, *gharar*, *ẓulm*) and promoting redistributive instruments such as *zakaat*, *waqf*, and *ṣadaqah*. Economic governance is thus oriented toward **social justice and inclusive development**, not

merely growth (Chapra, 2000; Iqbal & Mirakhor, 2011). Islamic governance does not prescribe a rigid political system but provides **normative principles and ethical objectives** adaptable to various institutional forms, including democracy, constitutionalism, and modern public administration (El-Affendi, 2011).

This is where the contribution of the book "*An Islamic Perspective on Governance*" by Zafar Iqbal and Mervyn K. Lewis becomes crucial. This book emerges to fill a significant academic void: the lack of systematic studies examining governance issues through the lens of Islamic economics and political philosophy. In reality, many countries with Muslim-majority populations face severe governance challenges, such as endemic corruption, democratic deficits, and economic inequality. Conventional analysis often fails to understand the roots of these problems because it ignores the normative and institutional frameworks derived from the heritage of Islamic civilization.

The primary objectives of this book are threefold:

1. Building a Theoretical Framework: Developing a coherent Islamic perspective on governance by exploring authoritative Islamic sources (the Qur'an and Sunnah), as well as classical and modern intellectual heritage in the fields of law (*fiqh*), economics, and politics.

2. Comparative-Critical Analysis: Dissecting and comparing Islamic approaches with major Western theories in selected fields such as theories of justice, taxation, public finance, and corruption eradication. This comparison is not intended to demonstrate the superiority of one over the other, but to highlight intersections, differences, and potential complementarities.

3. Practical Recommendations: Going beyond purely normative discourse, this book aims to offer policy frameworks and reform agendas that can be implemented in contemporary Muslim countries, while adhering to core Islamic principles and responding to global political-economic realities.

4. The book focuses its analysis on four interconnected pillars of governance:

- a. Theory of Justice ('Adl): As the philosophical and moral foundation of the entire Islamic governance structure.
- b. Taxation System: As the main instrument of state finance and wealth redistribution.

- c. Budget Deficit Management and Government Financing: Highlighting Shari'ah limitations and alternatives in fiscal policy.
- d. Accountability and Corruption Eradication: Explaining the mechanisms of checks and balances in the Islamic system.

By combining the study of sacred texts, classical Islamic history (such as the *Baitul Mal* institution and practices during the era of the Rashidun Caliphs), and modern economic and political theory, this work attempts to bridge the gap between "the ideal-normative" and "the real-practical." Its significance lies in its ability to open a more equal inter-civilizational dialogue on governance issues, offering a value-based alternative perspective, and providing an intellectual footing for reforms in the Muslim world that are authentic and contextual.

Thus, the introduction of this book is not merely a preface, but an intellectual manifesto that challenges the hegemony of Western discourse while offering a path to formulate governance that is not only efficient and accountable, but also just, moral, and beneficial for all (*maslahah 'ammah*) in accordance with the Islamic vision.

JUSTICE AS THE CORE OF GOVERNANCE

Islam possesses a unique methodology rooted in *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) sourced from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Unlike conventional economics which separates normative and positive values, Islamic economics integrates moral and ethical values into its economic analysis. The concepts of *Tawhid* (the oneness of God) and *Khilafah* (human stewardship on earth) become the foundations of Islamic governance, emphasizing human accountability to God in all aspects of life, including economics and politics.

Justice (*'adl*) is a central principle in Islamic governance. The Qur'an and *Sunnah* emphasize the importance of justice in all social, economic, and political relationships. Justice in Islam covers not only fair distribution but also involves *ihsan* (benevolence/kindness) which transcends formal justice. The state, in the Islamic perspective, acts as a guarantor of justice through the application of *Shari'ah* and redistribution mechanisms such as *zakah*.

The classical Islamic taxation system is based on principles of justice and public welfare. *Zakah* (obligatory alms) is the primary instrument of wealth redistribution, supplemented by other taxes such as

keharaj (land tax) and *ji'zah* (tax for non-Muslims). The authors compare this system with Western taxation theories such as Equitable Taxation (ET), Optimal Taxation (OT), and Fiscal Exchange (FE), highlighting how Islamic principles can complement or even critique Western approaches.

Islam is very strict regarding government financing and forbids *riba* (interest/usury). Budget deficits are permitted only under certain conditions and must be financed through instruments compliant with *Shari'ah*, such as *sukuk* (Islamic bonds). The book discusses modern Islamic financial innovations, including *sukuk* structures, and evaluates them based on Islamic principles.

Accountability is a key element in Islamic governance, both in the public and corporate sectors. Mechanisms such as *shura* (consultation) and *hisbah* (market supervision/accountability) are designed to ensure transparency and accountability. Corruption is viewed as a form of injustice and must be eradicated through law enforcement and moral education.

Although the principles of Islamic governance have been clearly formulated, their implementation in Muslim countries faces many challenges, including incompatibility with the global economic system, administrative issues, and structural corruption. The authors offer a reform agenda to address these problems.

CONCLUSION

The book *An Islamic Perspective on Governance* makes an important contribution by integrating Islamic principles into modern governance discourse. The Islamic approach offers a holistic perspective that combines moral values, justice, and accountability, which can complement and critique conventional approaches. For effective implementation, institutional reform, capacity building in administration, and strong political commitment are required in Muslim countries.

An Islamic Perspective on Governance makes a significant contribution to contemporary governance studies by systematically integrating Islamic normative principles into modern governance discourse. The book demonstrates that the Islamic approach to governance offers a **holistic framework** that combines moral values, justice (*'adl*), accountability (*amanah*), and public welfare (*maslahah*), thereby both complementing and critically engaging with conventional governance paradigms (Chapra, 2000; Kamali, 2019).

By grounding governance in ethical responsibility and divine accountability, the Islamic perspective challenges value-neutral or purely procedural models of

governance dominant in mainstream political theory. It emphasizes that effective governance cannot be separated from moral integrity, social justice, and the rule of law (Auda, 2008). In this regard, the book provides an important conceptual bridge between classical Islamic political thought and contemporary governance frameworks, including good governance and institutional accountability models.

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